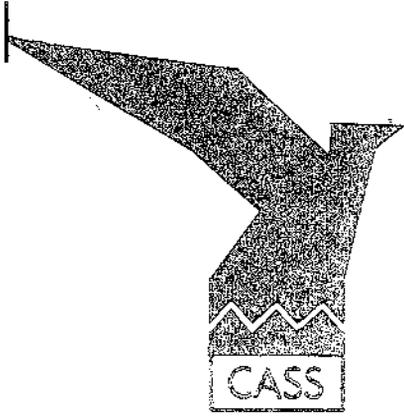


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**PROPERTY AND POWER  
IN ZIMBABWE'S COMMUNAL LANDS:  
Implications for Agrarian Reform  
in the 1990'S**

By

**Ben Cousins  
Reprinted July 1993**

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Paper presented at a conference on  
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## ABSTRACT

*An understanding of the social relations of production and exchange in the communal farming sector is critical to assessments of options for agrarian reform. Recent survey research has indicated that this sector is deeply differentiated, but few in-depth analyses exist of the political economy of rural production or of processes of differentiation. Differentiation is here viewed from the perspective of a reproduction/accumulation problematic, and access to land is identified as a critical constraint on a small layer of would-be rural accumulators. Access is constrained by the current version of "communal tenure", understood as a structure of property relations overdetermined by local and non-local political processes. The "new institutionalist economics" view of property regimes as bundles of rights and duties, together with the results of recent historical research on land tenure in Zimbabwe, helps us understand "communal tenure" as historically variable rules of access and control subject to power plays by interested groups of actors. Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of property in non-capitalist and capitalist societies help us to situate these power plays in the context of the political economy of capitalist development in Zimbabwe. This perspective is illustrated using case study material from Mondoro Communal Land. Agrarian reform policy needs to recognize the two-edged nature of "communal tenure". In the absence of decisive interventions the ambiguities inherent in the current property regime will increasingly be manipulated by elites and emergent rural accumulators to their own advantage. The crisis of reproduction for the rural majority will continue to deepen. But the potential also exists for a democratic and egalitarian communal property regime, within the framework of expanded access to the national land base. Discourses of "differentiation" and "democracy" need to complement the currently dominant discourses of "community" and "development", informing the practices of both rural producers and state and non-government bodies.*

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## 1. THE "BLACK BOX" SYNDROME: THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE

The background to the gathering debate on agrarian reform is the mixed blessing of the "peasant miracle" of post-independence Zimbabwe - mixed because, as most now acknowledge, high levels of marketed production have been achieved only by a minority of Communal Land producers. Advocates of greatly expanded resettlement argue that the high yields achieved by some small farmers (particularly those on good quality land) are evidence that the key constraint to agricultural development by black farmers in the past has been access to resources, not the small farm production system itself (Werner 1988, who does not go on to argue, however, that resettlement should take only the "small farm" i.e. Model A form). Critics, on the other hand, maintain that most producers in the Communal Lands are unable to achieve high levels of production due to the backward nature of communal tenure, the small parcels of land available under this system, and the inevitable problems of land degradation which appear. Alternatively, that the majority of households are "subsistence-oriented" peasants not interested in engaging in production for the market (de Jong 1983). In this view, held by many agricultural extension staff, a massive redistribution of commercial land to peasant farmers will simply extend this system of production, at best delaying a major social and economic crisis, at worst bringing about a catastrophic decline in agricultural production.

Central to the debate on the land question, then, is the nature of the production system in the Communal Lands, where the vast majority of Zimbabwe's rural population lives. At issue is not whether some producers operating within the system can achieve high levels of productivity (clearly some can), but why only those and not others? What are the determinants of the present pattern of production and consumption? Is degradation an inevitable consequence of the production system? What is the significance of the prevailing tenure arrangements for these issues? These questions and the difficulty we have in providing clear-cut answers to them are an indication that the social relations of Communal Land production have to date remained a "black box" for both analysts and policy makers.

Although neglected by social scientists in the past, a great deal of research on aspects of agricultural production in the Communal Lands has taken place since 1980, and an impressive array of statistical data has been accumulated. Surveys have revealed a pervasive pattern of inequality in income, output, ownership of the means of production and various indices of standard of living such as health, educational level, etc (Jackson et al 1987, Davies and Sanders 1987). Some researchers have explored aspects of social structure such as lineage and gender relations (Scoones and Wilson 1988; Pankhurst 1987), migrant labour and the role of remittances (Bonnievie 1987; Weiner and Harris 1989), and emerging forms of wage labour (Adams 1987). Others have investigated the effects of interventions such as extension training or the formation of farmer groups (Chipika 1987; Bratton 1987; Truscott 1985). Variations in the production system across agro-ecological zones has been well documented by the Farming Systems Research Unit (FSRU 1985).

However, while perhaps it would be unfair to say that these studies present us with nothing but a description of the rural economy, it is clear from a survey of the published literature that no theoretical framework offering a coherent explanation of the underlying dynamics at work has yet been put forward. This is not to say that recent research does not contain valuable insights. The "black box" of the social relations of production and exchange in the Communal Lands has begun to be unpacked, and some of the essential elements have been laid bare. Still missing, though, is an account which puts those insights together, and allows us to understand the dynamic processes which underlie the complex pattern of social, economic and ecological differentiation. Furthermore, what

Is needed is a theory of how these processes are structured at the local level and through being embedded in wider social, political and economic systems. The problematic nature of conventional class analysis when applied to African rural economies (Leys 1986) must be confronted. The much neglected politics of rural production is a dimension which needs to be included in the analysis. Such an account could then inform interventions at the levels of policy formulation, programme design, and political organisation in the countryside.

This paper focuses on the political economy of the Communal Lands, with a primary emphasis on **two** interrelated issues: (a) the structure and processes of economic differentiation (b) property relations as a structural constraint and as a site of struggle.

## 2. RESEARCH ON DIFFERENTIATION

A brief summary of the salient aspects of recent research on Communal land differentiation is given here, as background to the discussion which follows.

Case studies from the region document a more complex relationship between labour migration and agricultural production than was portrayed in the influential "labour reserve" model of the 1970's (Arrighi 1970, Amin 1972). These point to the relative wealth of many labour-exporting households and highlight the possibility that a portion of wage remittances is being used as agricultural capital (First, 1983; Spiegel, 1981; Bush et al 1986; Weiner and Harris, 1989).

The historical deterioration of Malawi agriculture is certainly linked to the establishment of a migrant labour economy, but in the contemporary context off-farm income is increasingly needed to secure the basic survival ("reproduction") of many rural households. But at the same time access to natural resources, off-farm capital and agricultural capital is very uneven, and so the assumption of homogeneity must be abandoned. This uneven distribution has been well documented for land (Central Statistical Office 1984), livestock (Chipika 1988) and off-farm income (Truscott 1983). Differentiation within the rural population might be explicable in part as a consequence of a reaction against the establishment of the labour reserve system by elements of that population, and by their relative success in securing an independent base for agricultural commodity production.

Coudere and Marijse (1988) interviewed 200 households in the Mtoko Communal Land in Natural regions HI and IV) in July 1985. They found that the richest 20 percent of households earned 50 percent of total income. Inequalities were greatest in villages closer to town and wage income earners tended to be the wealthiest members of the community. Widows with little or no wage remittances were the poorest. Access to land was the most important variable explaining differences in aggregate agricultural production, accounting, in statistical terms, for half of all the variation.

During the same agricultural season Jackson et al (1987) interviewed 600 households in all five Natural Regions. The wealthiest 10 percent of the population earned 43 percent of total income and controlled 40 to 60 percent of the marketed produce. The poorest 50 percent accounted for only 10 percent of all crop income. There is a link between wage remittances and agricultural production as (p66) "farm incomes in households with remittances [were] 1.33 times higher (in contribution to per capita income) than in households not currently receiving any remittances."

Bonnevie (1987) interviewed 72 households in Mangochi Communal Land (Natural Region IIb) in 1983, a severe drought year. As a result of the drought, in this normally high potential area only 17

percent of total income was earned on the farm. Fifty seven percent of total income came from wage remittances. Migrant-headed households harvested a total of 41 bags compared to 35 for non-migrant households. According to Bonnevie households with migrants holding "permanent" jobs (p 133) "tend to combine this position with extended agricultural activities, and this expansion depends crucially on the use of hired labour".

During the first half of 1984 Weiner and Harris interviewed 417 households in all five Natural Regions. They found that households with access to wage income tended to sell more crops and hire more labour. Households with wage-earners had mean incomes twice as large as those without. No relationship was found, however, between access to land and wage income (Weiner and Harris 1989).

In a 1986/87 survey of 78 households in Mutirikwi Communal Land (in Natural Region IV), Adams (1987) investigated patterns of local wage labour. The methodological approach adopted by Adams did not involve a sample survey but instead focused on only those households either hiring in or hiring out local wage labour, and this precludes generalisation about the extent of these practices. Nevertheless, her conclusions shed light on a generally under-researched aspect of Communal Land production. She concludes that households which hire labour are generally the wealthiest and that (p24) "the majority of female-headed households hiring labour are partly supported by an absentee husband". Adams clearly identifies the predominance of casual work in the rural labour market. Casual labourers are generally from low income households with limited access to land and cattle; 75 percent of households which owned no cattle were headed by casual workers. Adams concludes (p32) that "it is clear that in Mutirikwi access to non-agricultural means of production or to a salaried job are important elements in economic differentiation".

### Summary

What generalisations can be made on the basis of the research summarised here?

- (i) The research documents a pattern of uneven development, both socially and spatially, with highly unequal access by Communal Land households to productive resources. A group of households which regularly produces surpluses for sale appears to be emerging, particularly in highveld (Natural Region II) locations.
- (ii) Households which export skilled and permanent labour tend to be the wealthiest. These households often produce and market more crops and have greater access to agricultural capital. They also hire more labour for agricultural and domestic tasks.
- (iii) Some households appear to be using remittances from off-farm employment for investment in production.
- (iv) The rural labour market is dominated by casual labour and piecework rather than by proletarianisation. Casual workers tend to come from households with smaller than average holdings of land and little or no cattle.
- (v) Access to land, ownership of cattle and high levels of agricultural production are all highly correlated. Cattle ownership is highly skewed, and land holdings are also unequal although to a lesser degree. Male lineage elites and former migrants to skilled employment who invested part of their earnings in cattle are probably the groups with greatest access to agricultural means of production.

- (vi) Absolute landless is rare in the Communal Lands. Even households who engage in a good deal of local casual labour generally have access to land, although they may lack the resources to produce much from that land. The "communal tenure" system still appears to offer access to the basic resource of land to a majority of households, albeit often as small plots on soils of poor quality. The precise extent of landlessness is difficult to measure and is likely to be more visible in the growing urban population than in the Communal Lands themselves.

What needs to be emphasised is the strong linkages between agricultural production and remittance income that recent research has revealed. Thus any theorisation of the social relations of production and exchange must explicate this linkage and not attempt to analyse agriculture as a separate and self-sufficient sphere. The "labour reserve" model is still relevant, but we need to drop the assumptions of homogeneity that usually accompany it and make differentiation more central.

The continuing importance of networks of kinship and "communal tenure" property relations indicate that the relations of production are not of the classical capitalist type. The differences between this "ideal type" and the social relations actually found, which the "articulation of modes of production" perspective (Meillasoux 1972; Wolpe 1985) attempts to theorise, need to be accounted for, even if we do not accept the perspective itself.

### 3. REPRODUCTION, ACCUMULATION AND REMITTANCES

At the centre of the radical political economy perspective is the question of reproduction. A major difference between all non-capitalist modes of production and capitalism lies in the distinction between simple reproduction, in which producing units engage in both production and (usually limited) exchange primarily in order to recreate themselves as producers, and expanded reproduction, in which surplus production is invested back into the production process itself, thus transforming the production unit rather than merely recreating it. The logic of expanded reproduction, or capital accumulation, is what underlies the dynamic and transformative power of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>1</sup>

This crucial distinction does not imply that non-capitalist societies produce no surplus, do not engage in trade or have no markets of any kind. Rather, it makes central the relation of the surplus or the traded product to the way that production is organised over time. Only in the capitalist mode is the continual reinvestment of surplus to transform the conditions under which commodities are produced, (and this only in order that more or cheaper commodities can be produced for exchange), the primary organising principle of the entire economic system. Thus it is that production under capitalism is directed almost entirely to the creation of exchange values, whereas in non-capitalist societies use values predominate, even when markets and fairly developed circuits of trade exist.

Simple or petty commodity production is a case in which reproduction of the producing unit cannot

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<sup>1</sup> "Simple" and "expanded" reproduction are being used here in a different sense to that of Marx in Volume II of *Capital*, where both terms refer to capitalist reproduction. Rather, the distinction marks the emergence of a unique "logic" of production in capitalism (see the discussion by Giddens 1981, p 117-125).

take place outside of commodity circuits, but in which the logic of expanded reproduction is constrained by the fact that the labour process is based on unpaid household labour alone. "Self exploitation" places limits on the extent to which a surplus can be generated and invested back into production. Only the capitalist enterprise proper, premised on the separation of direct producers from the means of production, i.e. a class of wage labourers, produces the volume of surplus required for this distinctive economic logic to fully unfold,

A growing and influential body of literature designates contemporary "peasants" as petty commodity producers (PCP), constituted by the contradictory combination of capital and labour within the same household (Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985; Scott 1986). Is there a logic of simple reproduction at work in this type of enterprise, (since, structurally, there is not the same necessity to make a profit as in capitalist enterprises proper, as Friedmann (1978) suggests)? Or is the question misdirected, since it appears to make the decision to produce a surplus or not, a subjective factor, central to the definition of a structural relation (as Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985, and Bernstein 1986, assert)?

The latter argument is more persuasive in the end. It implies that the latent logic of PCP is that of expanded reproduction, and that accumulation of a limited kind can occur on the basis of exploitative relations within the household (eg of women or children). Ultimately the combination of capital and labour in the same household is held to be contradictory in its effects i.e. neither simple nor expanded reproduction necessarily dominates. The extent to which either predominates is a contingent outcome of such factors as conditions of competition or political struggles over access to resources.<sup>2</sup>

If we take up the question of the manifest inequalities found in the Communal Lands and refract it through the prism of this reproduction/accumulation problematic, an interesting typology emerges:

- (A) households able to reproduce themselves from household agricultural production alone (plus possibly some non-agricultural production eg. craftwork, beer)
- (B) households able to reproduce themselves only from a combination of agricultural production and wage labour
- (C) households unable to reproduce themselves without external assistance from other households (usually within the same kinship network) or from the state (usually in the form of drought relief)
- (D) households beginning to invest in the agricultural means of production, to hire wage labour, and to engage in expanded reproduction. Sources of surplus for investment may include the proceeds from agricultural sales, profits from trading or other business enterprises, or savings from wage or salaried employment.

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<sup>2</sup>"IN terms of the enterprise as a **whole**, and its fortunes (reproduction, **decomposition, transformation**), its **distinctive** combination of class places can help explain the **contradictions** petty commodity producers often confront between reproducing themselves as labour (daily and generational reproduction) and capital (**maintenance, replacement, and** possibly expansion of the means of **production**). Reducing levels of consumption (and increasing or limiting numbers of children according to specific circumstances), in order to **maintain**, replace or expand the means of production (i.e. **accumulation**) is an expression of this contradiction" (Bernstein 1986, p25).

It should be emphasised that these "types" of household are defined in terms of distinctive structural relations rather than measures of wealth or income. Thus a range of incomes could be found within the same structural type. It is not implied that households cannot shift between types over time, or indeed within a generational cycle, although the extent to which this occurs is a matter for empirical investigation.

Data gathered in survey research (see references in section 2 above) reveal a great degree of variability in factors which establish or influence the conditions of existence of these "types" or categories of household:

- by historical period (as in the expansion of marketed production in the early colonial period or after independence);
- by the prevalence of drought and famine (as in the 1982-85 period when category C was greatly swelled);
- by agroecological zone;
- by location relative to urban areas;
- by gender of household head;
- by age of household head.

In general, however, the available data suggest that in the ten years following Independence:

- (i) conditions for petty agricultural commodity production improved, particularly in the better endowed regions in the north of the country, and in these the number of households corresponding broadly to category A has probably increased; most of these, however, have been unable to do more than maintain themselves, albeit at slightly improved levels of welfare;
- (ii) real formal sector wages rose immediately after Independence but have subsequently fallen, and the number of jobs has remained static in a period when the number of job seekers has risen year by year. Remittances have remained critical to many rural households, particularly those in the more drought-prone regions. Type B households are therefore still an important proportion of the total in fee CLs;
- (iii) drought entails a "reproduction squeeze" for all rural households, but in some areas a growing population is stretching the resource base to the limit. Combined with the limited availability of wage labour employment opportunities this means that the number of households corresponding to type C has probably increased;
- (iv) the increase in the number of "accumulating" households (type D) is very limited. While it is true that some of the "salaried" (those with salaried jobs) are investing part of their total income in equipment, crop inputs and cattle and employing a certain amount of wage labour, the numbers engaging in expanded reproduction in the full sense are small.

The reproduction/accumulation problematic allows us to define differentiation in structural terms, and an understanding of the contradictory nature of petty commodity production, taken together with changing conditions for wage labour in capitalist labour markets, moves us closer to underlying

processes. But before we attempt to characterise these different strata in class terms we must note that the Communal Lands as a whole, in comparison to the commercial farming sector, continue to suffer from relatively poorly developed services and infrastructure; that the great majority are still located on poor soils in drought-prone regions not well suited to crop production; and that population densities (despite resettlement) are high with a concomitant pressure on the resource base. The structural disadvantages imposed by settler colonialist policies on Communal Land producers have not been significantly overcome. Thus all the strata share certain circumstances, and the question of class character may also be posed thus: do the structurally defined differences between "types" of households represent internal divisions within a broad class of "peasants", or "worker-peasants" ? Given the larger context - a class structure dominated by international capital, a relatively powerful national bourgeoisie (including a significant fraction in large scale agriculture), and an ambitious petit-bourgeoisie in control of the state (Mandaza 1896; Sibanda 1988) - are the internal divisions within the Communal Land population embryonic class divisions only?

Another way to approach this question is to ask: given the manifest inequalities in ownership of means of production, and the importance of wage labour as a source of income to so many households, why are the number of accumulating households so small? What are the constraints on differentiation and **class formation**?

Approaching this issue at a superficial level, is it land, labour, capital, markets or technology which is in short supply for would-be accumulators? Capital, in the form of credit from the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC), or savings from relatively high levels of salaried income, does not appear to be a limiting factor in post-independence Zimbabwe. (Kinship obligations, for example to pay school fees of poorer relatives, should be recognised as a possible drain on salaried income, however). The high cost and limited availability of tractor technology may be a constraint, but those producers who do own tractors seem to derive more income from hiring them out to draught-poor households than from using them in their own production. The improvement of marketing infrastructure since 1980 and the relatively high prices paid by the Grain and Cotton Marketing Boards have meant that access to markets is probably not a major constraint, (although this may vary between locations). The high rates of unemployment nationally and the continuing reliance of many rural households on wage labour income indicate that there is no shortage of potential labourers. The most important constraint is probably land. (Account should be taken of agro-ecological factors here: climatic, soil and hydrological conditions make a strategy of intensification, à la the Kenyan Highlands, inherently problematic in most Communal Lands.)

Why, then, is land in limited supply? To answer this question the land tenure system in the Communal Lands i.e. the contemporary form of "communal tenure", will have to be described and analysed. Note that in doing so one is considering a central dimension of the "material conditions of existence" of all categories of households in the CLs. The question here is: are property relations a structural constraint on class differentiation processes, and if so, how does one account for their continued existence?

#### **4. ANALYSING PROPERTY RELATIONS IN THE COMMUNAL LANDS**

In beginning an analysis of property relations in the Communal Lands I have drawn on very different bodies of work: (a) the "new institutionalist economics" which has arisen as a critique of the neo-classical view of property (b) recent historical research on tenure in the Communal Lands (c) Marx's writings on property relations in pre-capitalist economic formations (d) modern anthropological work

on African land tenure, and (e) Marxist and neo-Marxist views on the distinctive nature of private property in capitalist societies.

This may appear to be a somewhat unlikely combination of approaches, but the difficulties in understanding the changing nature of property relations in the Communal Lands need to be appreciated. Relatively little anthropological research in the colonial era dealt with issues of land tenure, and what analysis there was (eg. the work of Holleman) has been subject to a number of critiques in recent years; empirical work has shown the changing and time-bound nature of tenure arrangements (see for example Scoones and Wilson 1989, Cheater 1989, Ranger 1988). But these critiques are themselves problematic in their conceptions of property and tenure, and proceed without making their analytic frameworks explicit. In addition, while they convincingly demonstrate the political nature of the changing tenure system, they fail to analyse property relations as one component of "the social relations of production and exchange". The centrality of property relations means that our analyses must take into account a wide range of theories and perspectives, and be sensitive to the wider implications for the political economy as a whole.

#### **4.1 The New Institutional Economics and "Communal Tenure"**

The "new institutional economics" view of property, although rather abstract in its treatment of political economy, does provide a potentially useful conceptual framework for the analysis of institutional rules within different kinds of property regimes.

The following is a highly condensed summary of some of the key ideas of this approach;

- (i) Property institutions are sets of rules that define the rights of individuals with respect to each other in their use of objects. Corresponding to one person's rights is another person's duty not to interfere with that right.
- (ii) The ability to act without the permission of a second party creates a liberty, or privilege, where the second party has no rights. Some property rules create a "structure of privilege" and its correlate, no rights or exposure.
- (iii) Right-duty and privilege-exposure are opposites that are implied in any definitions of property rights under any system (Bromley 1989)
- (iv) "Institutions and property-right definitions are integrally linked to income distribution because institutions determine who has what rights with respect to the income flows generated by resource use" (Barrows and Roth 1989, p21).
- (v) Power-plays over income and wealth distribution take place which include the "manipulation of property and privilege rules for distributional effects, and manipulative capacity is a partial function of the status quo power structure" (Samuels 1974, p21).
- (vi) "The law is an instrument with which to skew distributional results, by manipulating transactional systems to change the structure of power" (Samuels 1974, p 21).

Samuels has an interesting perspective which emphasises the political side of property relations. He criticises Coase and others within the neo-classical school for their "neglect of the driving force of income and wealth distribution in economic activity", and the manipulation of property and liability rules for distributional effects.

The institutional perspective has allowed Bromley and others to identify three broad types of property regime: state, private and common property, each distinguished by a particular configuration of rights and duties. A non-property regime is also possible, named by Bromley as "open access" because in this situation there are no legally or socially sanctioned rules defining individual or group rights or duties. "There are no property rights in this regime, there is only possession" (Bromley and Cernea 1989, p8).

It is apparent that although these general types of property regime can be distinguished, they exist along a continuum of institutional arrangements. Not all kinds of common property (or private or state property) arrangements are identical; within the broad category a great deal of variation can occur. Disaggregating property regimes also allows analyses of specific configurations of rights and duties. Furthermore, specific social formations usually contain a mix of these general types, articulated together in relatively stable, and sometimes unstable, combinations.

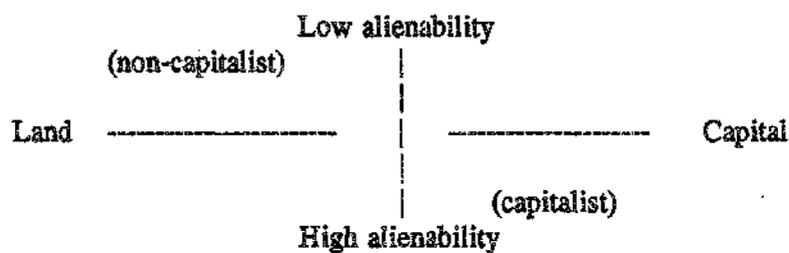
What accounts for the variations, and for the relative stability or instability? No doubt a number of factors are relevant, including ecological, technological, historical and cultural specifics, but the institutionalist perspective allows us to focus on the important dimension of politics. If power-plays over the distribution of benefits are a feature of all property regimes, then the outcome will depend on the degree of success attained by the actors involved. Change and redefinition of property rules will occur as the result of struggles between contending parties whose interests are at odds. Thus the gradual decline of common property systems in Europe and their almost complete replacement by a private property regime, (the enclosure movement), can be understood not so much as a rational change from a less "efficient" or productive tenure system, but as the outcome of a bitter, centuries-long struggle between peasant farmers and landlords, which caused "a massive redistribution of income from farmers to land owners" (Allen 1982, p937).

#### 4.2 Property and Class

Marxism is a version of political economy which makes struggle over access to and control over productive resources central to its analysis. For Marx the enclosure movement represented an expropriation of peasant producers; "written in letters of blood and fire", it was integral to the class formation process which resulted in the distinctive class system of modern capitalism. What makes it distinctive is not the predominance of private property, or the existence of markets, but the way that production is founded on the capitalist wage-labour contract. The capitalist class has acquired its dominant position by virtue of the economic power yielded by the ownership of private property, and by the dependence of the propertyless wage labourer upon those who have access to capital.

Giddens (1981, p113-114), suggests that Marx underestimated the distinctive nature of private property in capitalism as against non-capitalist societies. Giddens proposes that property forms should be analysed, firstly, in terms of variations in the "normative rights of control of material resources" (variations in the level and type of alienability of resources), which is consistent with the new institutionalist view discussed above, and secondly, in terms of the fact that "property has a content, property is something". In non-capitalist societies the main form of property is land; in capitalism the main forms of private property are factories, offices, machinery etc.

This yields the following diagrammatic representation of the major contrast between capitalist and non-capitalist property:



Non-capitalist societies (Giddens calls them "class-divided societies") tend to be characterised by the elements in the top left segment of the diagram, capitalist property by those in the lower right.

In this view it is not private property as such which makes capitalism unique; it is the class system within which private property is located, premised on the separation of the majority of workers from the land, that is, from productive resources in the form of property. Giddens summarises:

*Capitalism is distinctively a 'class society': the capital /wage-labour relation is predicated upon the dissolution of the ties between nature, community and the individual characteristic of other societal forms. From the side of wage-labour, this involves the eradication of 'the relation to the earth - land and soil - as natural conditions of production', and concomitantly of the 'real community' within which such production is ordered. [Giddens is here quoting Marx in the Grundrisse 1973, p497.] From the side of capital, what is involved is the commodification of property (the full alienability of property) and its circulation through the medium of money. These two processes suppose a 'period of the dissolution of the earlier modes of production' [Grundrisse, p506]. (Giddens 1981, p 81),*

Thus the class characteristics of mature capitalism give the institutions of private property a new political and economic significance. (In terms of the new institutionalist economics, they are a vital aspect of the "power structure" of mature capitalist societies.) How then are we to understand property regimes in non-capitalist societies, those is some kind of "transition" towards capitalism, or those which combine capitalist and non-capitalist social relations in various ways?

#### 43 Recent Historical Research on "Communal Tenure"

Recent work by Scoones and Wilson (1989), Cheater (1989) and Ranger (1985; 1988) have pointed to the discrepancy between commonly held views on the nature of the "communal" tenure system in the Communal Lands, and actual practice in the past and today. They point out that "traditional tenure" is largely a colonial, construction, (now accepted by post-independence policy makers), invented because it was useful to the shapers of the labour reserve system. Although these writers differ somewhat in their emphases, they are in broad agreement with regard to these aspects of "communal tenure" in the colonial period:

- (i) self-selection of lands rather than chiefly allocation, in the early colonial period at least
- (ii) inequality in land holdings as against the common presumption of an inherent egalitarianism

- (iii) individual proprietorship and cultivation of arable lands rather than collective use
- (iv) the emergence of individual entrepreneurship from within this system, as against a supposedly inherent subsistence orientation
- (v) the relative security of individual holdings.

According to Ranger these were the characteristics of the tenure system in the early years of the century after the colonial state had effectively deposed the despotic chiefdoms which ruled in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Scoones and Wilson suggest that the dominant farming system in the nineteenth century was not shifting cultivation but intensive, continuous cultivation of vlei areas, under the direct control of warlord chiefs. Social control over commoners was directly political in character, and exerted through blocking their access to labour, rather than through land allocation. "Given these realities it seems likely that chiefly control over land allocation evolved in the colonial era as a substitute for direct political power" (Scoones and Wilson 1989, p83).

All three authors link the construction of a myth of "traditional tenure" to the exercise of political power, at the level of the central state and also, at a local level, by chiefs and headmen. This is true in both the colonial and post-independence periods.

Thus in the "centralisation" schemes of the 1930s and 1940s, which resulted in major relocations of settlement and cultivation within the reserves, the Native Commissioners reallocated the large scale ploughing entrepreneurs much smaller plots than the ones they were actually using. According to Ranger (1985, p 70), these early petty commodity producers had made use of the rule that community members could bring into cultivation as much land as they were able to put to use, but were cut down to size by the colonial authorities in the name of "traditional agriculture".

Similarly, the Land Husbandry Act of 1951 was used to effect a generalised equalisation of holdings, and the notion of "tradition" was used to justify these actions. One Native Commissioner wrote in 1944 that "the thought of creating a capitalist native class is too appalling to contemplate" (cited in Ranger 1988, p4). Ranger concludes that "fee egalitarianism of Zimbabwean communal tenure owed nothing to its intrinsic dynamism and everything to interventions from outside it" (Ranger 1988, p7). The reason for these interventions must be sought in the fear generated in white settler farmers by the thought of competition from black agricultural entrepreneurs, and the potentially destabilising effects of landlessness in the reserves in the context of urban and industrial growth which could accommodate only a finite proportion of the rural population as workers. This factor led eventually to the demise of the fee Land Husbandry Act. It was abandoned in 1964 because its land use planning formulae proved impracticable, because it contradictorily enhanced the landlessness that it was partly designed to prevent, and because of mounting rural resistance (Passmore 1972, p31).

Scoones and Wilson point out that the actual patterns of land access during the colonial period do not support the model of chiefly allocation of land. "What actually existed was an on-going struggle to control land access between different categories of chiefs, commoner lineages, individual farmers, and the state. The fortunes of each group have clearly varied through time and by area" (Scoones and Wilson 1989, p83).

In the post-independence era the Communal Land Act of 1982 vested the power of land allocation in 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". The central state has retained its powers to intervene and reallocate land according to the dictates of land use planning, which is seen by state technocrats as essential to the conservation and management of the natural resource base. Grazing

schemes are a central component of such land use planning. These redefinitions of "communal tenure", far from clarifying what is meant by "customary rights", have served only to complicate matters further. Struggles around land allocation practices have continued, as Scoones and Wilson, Ranger and Cheater all go to some lengths to describe, with District Councils, Village Development Committees, chiefs and kraalheads all vying for authority, and instances of "squatting" and "private" transactions undercutting the very notion of an allocating authority.

Thus a great deal of ambiguity remains as to exactly what is the existing system of property rights, Greater clarity on these issues now requires not only the de-construction of "tradition", but a detailing of the range of actual practices carried out in the name of "communal tenure". The formal and informal rules, institutions and practices which together constitute the de facto tenure system need to be made much more explicit by a comparison of practices in different locales and at different times; we need to bring ambiguities (and the possibility of multiple and overlapping rights - see. Berry 1989) more clearly into focus.

#### 4.4 Marx and modern anthropology on non-capitalist property

Marx's views on pre-capitalist modes of production are a useful starting point for the kind of analysis being proposed. They show an awareness of the range of variation possible within "communal property" (Hobsbawm 1964). What makes all the different forms distinctively "communal" in character is, firstly, that the individual producer "relates to the objective conditions of his labour as to his property...", and secondly, that the individual "relate to others in the local community as co-proprietors, as so many incarnations of the common property, or as independent proprietors like himself, independent private proprietors. These mean that "...membership of the commune remains the presupposition for the appropriation of land and soil, but, as a member of the commune, the individual is a private proprietor. He relates to his private property as land and as soil, but at the same time as commune member" (Marx 1973, p47-91). Thus even in the "Germanic" form where the household, rather than the village commune, is the focus of social life and production, the links between individual, community and land remain strongly established

Marx's views here are highly schematic,, partly because of the paucity of relevant anthropological material available to Marx, and partly, perhaps,, because he was more concerned with delineating what is distinctive about capitalism as a system of production than theorising precapitalist forms in all their diversity (Meillasoux 1972). Nevertheless, the distinctions he introduces remain relevant. Giddens has pointed out (see section 4.2 above) that what distinguishes property relations under capitalism is firstly, the concentration of capital in forms other than land, and secondly, the high degree of alienability of property. The major mechanism of alienability is of, course, the market, which presupposes a high degree of commodisation of property, including land. Capitalism is also a new kind of class society in that the capital/wage-labour relation is based on the separation of the mass of producers from the means of production, and thus on the dissolution of the relationships which bound together the individual and the community in a close relation to land resources.

Marx's analysis is undoubtedly oversimplified, and the wealth of anthropological detail gathered since his time allows a more nuanced view of "communal tenure". Thus Bruce (1986, p4-5) distinguishes between different uses of the term "communal" in the African context: common exploitation and management; rights of access to a commons; and variable degrees of group control over land allocation and use. He suggests that tenure systems can be analysed in a vertical dimension (with a focus on social hierarchy); a lateral dimension (different tenures for various land uses, also secondary tenures); an historical dimension; and a personal dimension (from the farmer's viewpoint). These point to a range of possible variations within broadly similar sets of arrangements.

The extent to which Marx's "crude" analysis continues to be of relevance is interesting. Bruce agrees that the most common limitation on individual land use in Africa is a limitation of the right to sell, although he qualifies this by pointing out that a wide variety of other kinds of transactions in land take place (eg. sharecropping and loans). Sales, understood as "perpetual transfer", are viewed as "an attempt to transfer more than the individual holds; his or her rights are transient while that of the group is perpetual. The land should be alienated by the group, if at all. In particular, transfers to non-members of the group controlling the land may be prohibited, because *membership in the group and ownership of land are inseparable.*" (Bruce 1986, p5. emphasis added).

Bruce points out that "an undervaluation of individual and family interests in land is a common consequence of the characterisation of indigenous tenure as communal", echoing Marx's comments on the place of individual (private) property within a "communal" system.

Sara Berry's writings (1988, 1989) on contemporary African land tenure show that it is a mistake to assume that unified, internally consistent and well defined systems of rules and practices exist. Her analyses of multiple, overlapping and sometimes mutually contradictory sets of rights of access and control are important in that they demonstrate the politicisation of tenure, and the extent to which social relations shape strategies of agricultural production and investment, and thus patterns of rural differentiation. In Africa access to resources has been largely based on social identity, which continues to shape the pattern of land holding even where (as in Kenya) large scale registration of individual titles and the spread of land sales has occurred. One result of this is that

*If access to the means of production is predicated on social identity, then the definition, of property rights hinges on the demarcation of social boundaries, and exploitation operates through the subordination of some people within access-defining groups, rather than on the complete exclusion of people from ownership of the means of production (Berry 1988, p63).*

The demarcation of boundaries raises the question of just what is meant by the slippery notion of "community" (Cousins 1989) or indeed "family", "kin", or "tribe". This can give rise to "prolonged and inconclusive struggles over the meaning of transactions and social categories" and "struggles over meaning may ... act to reinforce or redefine the rules themselves"; thus "people may invest in meanings as well as in means of production -and struggles over meaning are as much part of the process of resource allocation as are struggles over surplus or the labor process" (Berry 1988, p66).

#### 4.5 Current transactions in land and "communal tenure"

In the current version of "communal tenure" in Zimbabwe access to land is gained primarily by an individual claiming membership rights in a "community", in practice a "village" under the authority (officially) of a Village Development Committee (VEDCO) or (unofficially) a sabhuku or kraalhead. ("Village" may refer to quite different social groups, since the VEDCO is primarily an administrative unit, of recent creation, while the sabhuku's village is an older, more enduring residential grouping based on the meshing of a colonial administrative unit with a group of homesteads under the authority of a ruling lineage. See Holleman 1969; Scoones and Wilson 1989.)

In theory land rights are *held* only by males, not females, but in practice widows and divorcees often retain the holdings they had access to through their husbands. Community membership allows inheritance of a father's land, and entitles a married man to a land allocation within his village of origin. Outsiders may also gain access to land by petitioning the allocating authority, pleading need. This may be accompanied by the payment of a "gift", a practice which according to Holleman (1952)

was widespread in the 1940s and 1950s, and survives in some areas today. A household leaving a village, perhaps to a frontier zone of new settlement such as northern Gokwe or the Zambesi Valley, may negotiate the "sale" of buildings and other "improvements" on their homestead site to an outsider, who then in practice also takes over the arable land of the departing household. Cash payments of the order of several hundred dollars have been reported. These negotiations appear to involve the granting of permission by kraalheads, in the role of "land allocating authority".

Does this mean that a market in land is emerging within the Communal Lands? If so, it is not yet the kind of market in which freehold titles are traded as commodities. At present these kinds of transactions take the form of a negotiated entry into the collectivity of the "community" or the "village", which brings with it the property rights and obligations held by other members of that collectivity. Newcomers, by virtue of their membership, gain right of access not only to the arable lands under their individual control, but also to the resources of the commons: grazing land (critical for the operation of most Communal Land farming systems), woodland, thatching grass, water, and building materials. They also become subject to demands for cash and labour contributions should community projects such as woodlots, community gardens, and grazing schemes be undertaken. They will be expected to observe chisi days (when no agricultural work is permitted), the agreed rules on the start of herding after crops have been planted, and should pay compensation to crop owners should animal damage take place after that date.

In short, an extremely limited form of commodification of land is emerging, and individualised property rights are still hedged in by a wide-ranging set of social obligations in which the interests of the group are powerfully articulated. Individual proprietorship is embedded in a larger "communal" tenure system in which rules governing access to and use of the commons are still important. Kraalheads (sabhuku) retain a great deal of authority, particularly with regard to land allocation and land-toed disputes, and this is one way in which support for "communal control" is expressed. This is not to say that tensions do not exist in the attempt to enforce these rules, or that they contain no ambiguities or inconsistencies.

However, Marx's distinctions between capitalist private property and other "communal" forms of property relations are still relevant, as Giddens insists. Within the broad parameters of "communal tenure" new rules (mostly informal, sometimes of necessity covert) are evolving. These redefine the relationship between individual proprietorship and community control, but "communal tenure" continues to be clearly distinct from private property regimes in which market-transactions are the major mechanism through which changes in access to and control over land take place.

#### 4.6 Grazing Schemes and Common Property

Grazing schemes have been widely promoted in the Communal Lands since independence as a means of addressing a perceived resource conservation problem (overstocking, overgrazing and degradation of communal grazing land) and as the basis for programmes aimed at improving livestock production in general (Cousins 1987; GFA 1987). These schemes are designed as common property management regimes i.e. they are premised on a particular property relation in which "potential resource users who are not members of a group of co-equal owners are excluded" (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975, p715).

In Zimbabwe these "groups of co-equal owners" are usually termed "communities", and this is taken to refer to groups of households who share the use of the same grazing area. In practice this means kraals or clusters of kraals which sometimes coincide with the recently demarcated Village Development Committees (VTDCOs) but often do not (Cousins 1989, p345). The difficulty of

assigning clear use rights to grazing (and other common pool resources) to distinct and well defined user groups in the Communal Lands is explained by Scoones and Wilson (1989, p108):

*Existing land rights involve a diffuse pattern of overlapping rights, including those of land spirits, chiefs, ward heeds, village heads, local patrilineage heads and individual homesteads. Rights at any one level never fully exclude rights at another level.*

The fencing off of grazing areas in paddocks (and the exclusion of non-group members which this makes possible) is an innovation within the land tenure system, and one which has given rise to innumerable boundary conflicts (Cousins 1987, 1988). That elected committees should manage grazing on behalf of the whole community and enforce agreed rates through formal sets of by-laws is an institutional innovation which is potentially problematic; it assumes that the committees will wield sufficient authority and attain the necessary degree of local legitimacy to be effective decision making bodies. This outcome is by no means assured, and it is not yet clear whether these committees (sometimes coincident with VIDCOs) are becoming fledgling organs of representative democracy (as intended by government, at least at the level of ideology); vehicles for the continued dominance of "traditional" leaders such as kraalheads; the site of fierce factional struggles between competing village lineages; the political expression of class differentiation; or simply empty vessels stranded on the shore of development rhetoric.

In some cases grazing schemes may be the focus for an emerging definition of "community" centred on resource management; in others the schemes provoke major external and internal conflicts and lead to a decline in the potential for group cohesion (Cousins 1988; 1989). It is clear that political processes are central in both instances.

## 5. PROPERTY AND POWER IN MUPFURA GRAZING SCHEME<sup>3</sup>

### 5.1 Background and origins

Mupfura Grazing Scheme is in Mondoro Communal Lands, which is 50 to 80 kilometers south of Harare and straddles the boundary of Natural Regions II and III. Rainfall is relatively reliable and normally adequate for crop production, but soils are generally sandy and poor in nutrients. The major crop is maize, but substantial quantities of groundnuts are also grown. The scheme includes 140 households from five kraals or "villages", which have a long history of cooperation and intermarriage. Four of the kraals fall within the same VEDCO.

The grazing scheme has its origins in the "centralisation" policy pursued by the colonial regime in the 1930's and 1940's, which relocated homesteads and arable lands in lines, (generally along toplands rather than in the vleis where cultivation had previously been concentrated), and designated large blocks of grazing land. This is how Frederick Maramba, a local schoolteacher and chairman of the Grazing Scheme Committee, describes the scheme's history:

*In 1936 we were told by the government to come and live here at Mupfura, in the 'lines', and to use the grazing area by the Nyundo River. We had to cut down the matamba forest to make our fields. There were many wild animals living there. As*

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<sup>3</sup> Names of places and people have been changed.

*the number of families grew a second 'line' was started, and the area between the lines was reserved for winter grazing. The people in the second line' used the area by the Nyakandowe River for grazing their animals'. There are five villages within the scheme: Maramba, Chapanza, MUZA, Mangezi, and Chinemhiri. Our forefathers lived together as one people and formed a committee from the sabhukus (kraalheods) to look after the grazing areas.*

The total grazing land available in Mupfura is approximately 1200 hectares, and total cattle holdings in 1988 were about 800 head, or 500 Livestock Units. This gives an average stocking rate of 2.5 ha. per Livestock Unit. This is well within the rate recommended by Agritex, and makes Mupfura unusual among Communal Land grazing schemes, which are mostly stocked at between 2 and 4 times the recommended rate (Cousins 1987).

## 5.2 "Room for dancing on!"

The grazing area is only partially fenced. Provincial conservation competitions were won by Mupfura in 1985 and 1986 on the basis of the tall grass (which is not grazed in the summer) found in the central grazing area between the two lines of settlement. Prizes included rolls of barbed wire; these were used to construct lines of fencing between the lines of settlement and the summer grazing areas to the east and west. In 1987 Mupfura won first prize in the Parade/PG National Conservation Competition. President Mugabe visited the scheme, and Keith Harvey of the Natural Resources Board donated a pure Mashona bull for breeding purposes. The young bull was named "Harvey", and was put into the care of Lazarus Chapanza, of the grazing scheme committee.

Lazarus Chapanza, who is also acting sabhuku of Chapanza village, describes how the scheme evolved:

*We started by looking after our grass, as our forefathers had taught us. With our prize money we have started to make paddocks. But we have other problems too, and the Canadian Embassy helped us with the cement to build the bridge-dam, which means buses can travel that road to the business centre now. Our next idea was to plant gum trees because we have shortages of wood for cooking and of poles for building. So we started a nursery at the school, where the government has installed a borehole, and planted out 8000 seedlings along our new fence lines. We tried to plant areas of stargrass and pasture legumes but the lack of rain has prevented success.*

*Our next project was pen fattening beasts for sale to the Cold Storage Commission. Four beasts were fattened, with the help of Agritex who donated some concentrate, and we made a profit. Eleven beasts were fattened the second time, and now we are fattening seven animals. The pen has been constructed using fencing we won in the competition.*

*The next community project will be fruit orchards, one for each village. The first one has been made by Mr Maramba, with some assistance from the Forestry Commission, to set an example to the rest of the people, and we in Chapanza village have started ploughing our orchard. "*

Frederick Maramba takes up the story:

*Our idea is to have fenced paddocks in the grazing areas nearby the rivers, then rows of gum trees, then smaller paddocks closer to our fields where we plant special grasses and fruit orchards, then our fields and homes. In the centre will be the central grazing area which we will use in winter, if only we can get water there. This central area still has some small buck, mene (duiker), which we prevent people from hunting. We want **to protect** all these **natural** resources, even the fish in the dam. We will only allow people to fish or to hunt if there are enough fish or animals. This was the **dream** of our fathers.*

*We know you have to practise conservation, **but** it is hard for people in the community. You cannot win them over in one step; you must show them that these projects can succeed. Most people don't argue with **those** doing the planning, but there is always a minority who **speak ill** of a project just because it is a good idea. But we know that if we look after our trees and grasses, then we will have room for dancing on!*

At this point several questions arise. Who is the "we" to which Mr Maramba refers? Is Mupfura really the ideal community project it appears to be? Who are the minority who "speak ill of the project", and what are their reasons for doing so?

### 53 Blurring the boundaries

In mid-1988 fourteen people (of whom eight are members of the Grazing Scheme committee) formed the "Mupfura Grazing Scheme Co-operative" with Frederick Maramba as chairman. The joining fee was \$32. A credit facility was opened with Windmill Fertilizer Company using part of the profits from the second pen fattening exercise, and 9 tonnes of fertilizer were bought at a bulk discount and sold at a mark up of \$2.00/bag. The nearest alternative supplier is ten kilometers away, and many farmers came from Mupfura and neighbouring villages to purchase their season's inputs. By the end of the year over 25 tonnes of fertilizer and over 50 bags of hybrid maize seed had been delivered and resold, and the co-op had shown a profit of over \$2000.

George MUZA, research assistant and Mupfura resident commented:

*Gum plantations were the first project of the Mupfura people. They soon realised that it takes a long time before you get money from a plantation and so they shifted the idea to cattle fattening.... the eleven beasts were sold and the money was used to buy fertilizer. That's how the idea of the fertilizer came into being.*

With the help of the headmaster of fee school a typed constitution for the cooperative was drafted, so that the co-op could be registered with the Ministry of Community Development, Women's Affairs and Co-operative Development. The name of the co-operative is "Mupfura Grazing Scheme". Clauses on membership deal only with the composition of the committee and one clause states that "all members elected to sit on the committee shall be members of the co-operative (Scheme) at the time of the election". This is profoundly ambiguous. In reply to my question the chairman stated that all those residing in the area are members. But Chakanetsa Mungate, from Chinembiri kraal, reported that when he wanted to join the co-op he was told that they had enough members. Other members of the co-op confirmed in interviews that membership is currently restricted to the fourteen founding individuals.

Most people agree that the pen fattening project, which makes use of fencing materials won in the

conservation competitions, is open to anyone who can afford to buy and fatten a beast. But in practice only a few households have participated, and most of these are members of either the Grazing Scheme committee or the cooperative. With few exceptions they have been the owners of herds of ten or more cattle.

Thus the lines of demarcation between the grazing scheme, (by definition for the benefit of all), the pen fattening project (open to anyone but in practice largely restricted to the larger herd owners), and the cooperative, (a private business initiative), have been blurred, and perhaps deliberately so,

#### 5.4 Grazing managements **rhetoric and** reality

In Mupfura the "open grasslands" bordering the two streams are designated summer grazing areas, and **the** "central grazing area" is said to be a winter reserve. It is also a source of thatch and a refuge for a small number of mene (duiker), hares and possibly other species of wildlife. In theory livestock *graze* the central area in the dry season, in addition to feeding on crop residues eaten in the fields or collected and brought to the cattle kraals.

**The** rationale provided by the Grazing Scheme Committee for the two (incomplete) lines of fencing on the east and the west of the scheme is 'that these fences prevent animals straying from the summer grazing into the central area during the wet season, and reduce the need for herding. The problem of stray animals from the neighbouring kraal of Daganda damaging Mapfura farmers' crops is also said to be reduced.

#### **However:**

- (i) in the course of the 1988/89 summer numerous herds were observed to be using the central grazing area;
- (ii) in the winter of 1989 herds were put out onto the central area in the early morning by their owners, but clearly found the dried, mature grasses unpalatable; they grazed the "open grasslands" and the stream banks for most of the day. This may also have been because of better access to water;
- (iii) for most of 1988 and 1989 the two lines of fencing were in a poor state of repair; in places they had completely collapsed, and several, gateways appear never to have had gates in place;
- (iv) many fields are fenced by their owners; along the eastern and western boundaries of the "lines" these fences form an almost continuous barrier to livestock movement. Corridors between fields allow access to the central grazing area. The lines of fencing appear to have been largely superfluous to their stated function.

Why this glaring discrepancy between rhetoric and practice? Is it simply a case of the "tragedy of the **commons**", or an example of poor technical planning? Or, since the practical function of these fences is clearly so limited, do they play the primarily symbolic role of helping to materialise the slippery action of "community"? It would appear that these lines of barbed wire are a part of a discourse rafter than a grazing scheme.

### 5.5 "Most people do not argue with those doing the planning"

The current focus of **the** Mupfura committee's energies is a borehole/windmill project and **the** construction of three grazing paddocks adjacent to **the** borehole site in **the** central grazing area. These are located closest to **the** Maramba and Chapanza **kraals**.

The Committee's success in securing a grant from the Beit Trust for **the** borehole and windmill has encouraged the District Administrator to donate 40 bundles of barbed wire, plus gates, tying wire and droppers to the grazing scheme. The committee is using its own funds to buy fencing standards. However, securing **the** active commitment of all Mupfura households *has* been problematic, and the project has also led to open expressions of disagreement within the "community".

On 21st July 1989 four Informants from Chinembiri village, including sabhuku Tapfumanei Chinembiri, expressed their disillusionment with the way that "community wire" had been used. **The** boundary wire won in **the** conservation competitions did not extend as far as their village and they felt **that the** neglect might well continue. "The borehole is in Mr Mairamba's village and the paddock is in his village as well; pen fattening is in Chapanza\*s village".

ON **the** 1st August work on **the** fencing of **the** new paddocks began. Twelve men reported for work and all villages were represented except Mangezi and Chinembiri. During the day a note arrived from the Chinembiri youth. "We have our own football team but no ball We are prepared to do any fencing work in return for a ball." George Muza, research assistant reported:

*All the people who were there had to think about it over and over again, and they decided not to reply to the letter..... But many people were complaining about those who were not coming to work People in Chinemhiri were saying thai when the loan comes it will only be available to the people in the pen fattening project. They said that if the committee proclaimed that the money was to be used for the benefit of the whole community they would be prepared to join in. But it is still a stone unturned to me, since people who are attending the erecting of the fence we not members of the pen fattening project. Truly speaking the money should be for everybody and not be confined to a few individuals.*

Some people, then, are prepared to argue with "those doing the planning". But who plans, who argues and why? **What** is the origin and meaning of the dominant discourse of "community", and what practices is it making possible?

### 5.6 Differentiation within Mupfura

A survey of 120 **households** carried out in September 1988 revealed that cattle ownership and crop income are highly skewed and are associated in a statistically significant relationship. Thirty three percent of **households** own no cattle at all, another forty three percent own less than ten cattle, and twenty four percent own more than ten. Table 2 shows the relationship between maize sides and cattle **ownership**.

**Table 1. Cattle ownership by maize sales (n=120, missing cases=0)**

	Maize sales in bags			
	0 bags	1-12 bags	> 12 bags	
<b>Cattle ownership</b>				
0 cattle	31	7	1	(39)
1-9 cattle	25	17	10	(52)
10> cattle	5	6	18	(29)
	61	30	29	(120)

(X = 40.33, probability = 0.0000)

Strong ties of kinship within Mupfura ameliorate the effects of stocklessness. Of the sixty households using a source of draught power other than their own cattle, seventy percent borrowed draught animals from relatives without immediate payment of any kind.

The relationship between cattle ownership and the presence of currently employed wage or salaried workers in households is not statistically significant. (A more detailed analysis of type of employment, however, might show up important relationships; this has yet to be carried out). A total of forty four (or thirty seven percent) of households are currently receiving remittances from a household member in employment.

The Grazing Scheme Committee is composed of the sabhuku from each of the five kraals within Mupfara, or his representative if he is too old or infirm (as is the case for Maramba, Chapanza, and Muza kraals), together with other "leaders" from the community. Of the total of ten Committee members, seven own ten or more cattle and the three others own between two and nine cattle. The fourteen members of the cooperative are with few exceptions owners of ten or more cattle. Thus the leadership of the scheme is dominated by fee cattle-wealthy and the members of ruling lineages. These men tend to employ what permanent wage labour is to be found within Mupfara; usually these workers are young men from poorer households within Mupfara or neighbouring kraals.

The largest maize grower in the community is the Chairman of the scheme, Mr Maramba, who in 1987/88 planted 12 acres of maize and harvested 80 bags, 68 of which were sold to the GMB. Although yields were low (1500 kg per hectare) his crop realised a gross income of over \$1000. By contrast, another important member of the committee, Lazarus Chapanza, planted only 4 acres of maize, but obtained much higher yields and harvested 50 bags. He sold 22 bags to the GMB for a gross income of \$390, and kept 20 bags as feed for the cattle fattening exercise.

High yields on the sandy soils of Mondoro are dependent on heavy applications of fertilizer, which reduce the net income from maize growing. Any attempt on the part of these "wealthy farmers" to increase crop income is constrained by a number of factors: soil quality, the unavailability of fallow land which has regained fertility through rest, and the overall land shortage which means that expansion of arable would be at the expense of grazing land. In the case of Mupfara, the last of these is perhaps less problematic than in more crowded communities, but nevertheless is something that

cannot be ignored, particularly in the light of the importance which the "commons" has now assumed in Mupfura in the eyes of extension staff, donors, and the residents of the community itself.

### 5.7 The dancers and the tune

The recent history of the grazing scheme suggests that the wealthier farming households are **attempting** to begin the process of accumulation through a diversification of enterprises. Woodlots, fruit orchards, pen fattening, vegetable gardening, and fertilizer-based maize production are the most common of these, with one or two households investing in pig or poultry production. The "co-operative" has moved into the realm of commerce, buying and reselling seed, fertilizer, and, in 1990, cement. The grazing scheme thus serves two functions: the recent installation of a borehole in the central grazing area and the construction of paddocks may improve the utilisation of the grazing resource and lead to higher productivity for livestock; secondly, and more significantly, the scheme has achieved a high profile as a "resource management community" par excellence. Resources have flowed into the community from the outside (from government and non-government bodies). Some of these resource flows have benefitted everyone, as in the case of the bridge-dam, but others have led to benefits for the wealthy only, as with fencing being used for pen-fattening.

The articulation of local development needs and plans by the Mupfura leadership has taken the form of emphasising "community" and "common property", and this has been remarkably successful in securing material support from powerful outsiders for projects which in practice are mostly dominated by that leadership themselves. But the projects must be seen to be of benefit to a wider group within the community or the leadership runs the risk of losing support and legitimacy.

Let us return to Mr. Maramba's eloquent statement of the Mupfura vision, and the question: "which is the 'we' that will have room to dance on?" The answer is perhaps that:

*the community at large are the dancers, and the question should be rephrased as "who then plays the tune to which the dancers dance?"*

While we can conclude that Mr. Maramba and his orchestra of committee members are first rate musicians indeed, and to date have largely succeeded in leading the community in a fine jig, the tune *they* are playing is not one of their own compositions.

The major theme in this tune is that of common property, and whether or not it continues to be played is of crucial importance for the fate of the land question in post-independence Zimbabwe.

## 6. PROPERTY AND POWER: IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRARIAN REFORM

### 6.1. Struggles over property rights

"Communal tenure", then, is a historically variable form of communal property which in the Communal Lands of Zimbabwe currently includes both individual proprietorship over arable land and homestead site, and common property with respect to grazing, woodland, water and other resources. The institutional structure of rights and duties, privilege and exposure within this property regime has changed over time in response to the power plays of various actors in the pre-colonial, colonial and **post-colonial** eras, and struggles to instal or resist a structure of unequal political and economic

power.

At present the government of Zimbabwe is reviewing its agrarian reform policy, including the legal status of "communal tenure". As in the past, various interest groups are engaged in power plays around the definition and redefinition of property rights. The chiefs, for example, are agitating for a return of their powers of land allocation, while the leadership of the National Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (NFAZ) (which supposedly represents the interests of Communal Land farmers) is pushing for freehold title and the effective abandonment of communal property. Yet government sponsored symposia on land reform have come out in favour of a form of "communal leasehold" tenure, "democratisation" of land allocation and collective resource management by means of elected village committees, and restrictions on the rights of those in urban employment or who do not cultivate the land allocated to them (Republic of Zimbabwe 1987).

## 6.2 Discourses of "community" and "development"

Development planning for the Communal Lands by both government and non-government agencies is articulated in terms of a discourse of "community development" and "popular participation". Implied is a homogeneity of interest, and little consideration is given to the manifest inequalities within the rural population.

In the Communal Lands the notion of a "common interest" is also dominant in the discourse of the people. Discourses are not purely linguistic realities, however; they are also materialised as practices and institutions. One way in which the discourse of "community" is materialised is in the communal property regime which, by and large, still guarantees the majority access to land. Even though the system, does not always provide "enough" land for everyone, access to this productive resource, in an individualised form for arable holdings and in the communal form for grazing, water supplies and woodland, is critical to the survival (self reproduction) strategies of most rural or rurally-based households.

Households attempting to engage in accumulation may try to gain access to larger tracts of land by migrating to land frontiers (eg. Northern Gokwe and the Zambesi Valley) where tsetse fly is being eradicated by government spraying programmes. However, there they face the obstacle of government land use planning, which makes equal and therefore restrictive allocations of land.

Another possible strategy is the covert purchase of the land rights of households without adequate means of production to work the land. This is likely to be resisted by many members of rural communities, because it will undermine rules of access which are crucial to the survival of both present and future generations. One way in which the tension between "commodification" of land rights and community control is being expressed at present is the insistence by the community that transactions involving land rights are ratified and approved by kraalheads, who retain the broad support of community members as land allocating authorities.

One other possible avenue for would-be accumulators is to gain access to land (and to some extent, capital) through "community development" projects. Projects are perceived as legitimate by external agencies, who provide funding and support services, as well as by other members of the community. Irrigation projects, woodlots, tree nurseries, fruit orchards, community gardens and grazing schemes may all allow the wealthy a degree of access to some of the land held as common property.

However, in the political context of rural Zimbabwe, in which the land question played an important role in mobilising popular support for a herd-fought guerilla war not very long ago, these projects

must achieve a certain political legitimacy to be at all viable. "Common interests" have to be perceived to have some kind of material reality; real benefits must appear to flow to most members of the "community". Projects which are thinly veiled accumulation ventures for the rich run the danger of collapse as first popular, and then official support is withdrawn. (For a discussion of a grazing scheme where this has taken place see the case of Zinyoro Grazing Scheme in Cousins 1988),

The recent history of Mupfura Grazing Scheme can be interpreted in this way: a strategy of private accumulation is being pursued by the community leadership, who are also by and large the cattle-wealthy, partly through an attempted manipulation of the discourse of "community". The ambiguities that this gives rise to, however, create their own problems. The leadership has to deliver real benefits to the members if it is to continue to receive support; it must be seen to act in the "common interest" as well as in the individual interests of the wealthy who comprise it. Thus the leadership's strategy is constrained by the discourse it is attempting to draw from and fashion to its own use; it is a double-edged sword.

### 63 Discourses of "differentiation" **and** "democracy"

The two-edged nature of "communal tenure" and the importance of local political struggles in determining its significance for differentiation processes needs to be recognised in agrarian reform debate. Discourses of "development" are central to the practice of this politics, and need to be deconstructed if these struggles are to be understood.

On the basis of current practices a number of possible developments can be identified. In the absence of decisive interventions the ambiguities inherent in the current property regime may be increasingly manipulated by elites and emergent rural accumulators to their own advantage. The commons could be increasingly exploited by households with larger herds, while arable land becomes more and more "privatised" by means of loaning arrangements, exchange of use rights for cash or payments in kind, and outright sale of right of access. The ideological element in "communal tenure" may come to predominate while the reality is that of growing commoditisation. State policies aimed at assisting the relatively wealthy rural elite, (e.g. support for beef production and higher rates of offtake), may contribute to this outcome. If so, the crisis of reproduction for the rural majority will deepen. The embryonic class divisions in the countryside will widen, and the ranks of the effectively landless and unemployed in towns and cities will swell

This scenario assumes that the rural majority who are not in a position to attempt a strategy of expanded reproduction, and whose continued access to arable and grazing land is critical for their survival, succumb to the manipulations of the elite. But when direct confrontations are not possible the "weak" have a range of weapons at their disposal, for resisting the power plays of the "strong", (Scott 1986). Thus another possible outcome is that the struggle over the meaning of "communal tenure" is not decisively resolved in favour of the rural elite, but instead reflects, no doubt unevenly, an uneasy stalemate. The extent to which the ruling party and the state continue to articulate an ideology of populism, and give this ideology material expression through policies and rural development programmes which reach beyond the shallow layer of would-be accumulators, may well be critical.

There is a third scenario which needs to be explored. The potential also exists for a democratic and egalitarian communal property regime, within the framework of increased access to the national land base through greatly expanded resettlement programmes. Communal tenure is a form of social ownership of resources which allows for a great deal of individual decision making in the production process. It may thus be compatible with a strategy of socialist development which emphasises worker

control, parametric planning and the regulation of the market rather than state ownership and a centrally planned economy (Erwin 1990).

Democratising the tenure system requires that the ambiguities inherent in the current version be confronted and that rules be evolved which clearly define such aspects as group identity, mechanisms for achieving group memberships institutional forms, and rights and duties in respect of access, use, disposal, and inheritance. Cliffe (1988) has suggested that democratically controlled village committees may be the most appropriate institutions for controlling land. Clearly the imposition of any system from above which leaves local power structures in place is unlikely to be effective. The analysis of "communal tenure" presented here demonstrates that these forms can be filled with a variety of contents, that de jure rules are one thing and de facto practices another. Democratisation can only be effective if it involves a mobilisation of a potentially active citizenry. Since local communities would be actively engaged in redefining the tenure system, a range of local variations is a likely outcome.

This kind of local political process would also need to take into account the present structure of inequality in resource ownership and the probable opposition of the wealthy to any notion of equality in resource distribution. An understanding of emergent class differences would be required. Discourses of "differentiation" and "democracy" would need to complement the currently dominant discourses of "community" and "development" and inform the practices of both rural producers and state and non-government bodies,

What are the prospects for this third scenario in Zimbabwe in the 1990's? Given the current moves by the government towards a one party state and the repression of dissent combined with trade liberalisation and structural adjustment (market Stalinism?), an agrarian reform programme involving a major redistribution of commercial farm land together with mass mobilisation in the countryside appears unlikely to say the least. While there are some signs of popular discontent with the slow pace of resettlement in the 1980's, and continued instances of squatting demonstrate that land hunger is a serious problem, no large-scale rural protest movements against current government policies have emerged. It may well be that "discourses of democracy and differentiation" will only be articulated in the countryside when introduced into this locale from another site of struggle, the urban workplace. The crucial link may be the first part of that hybrid term, "worker-peasant".

In the meantime, "communal tenure" is likely to continue to be a site of subterranean struggles between embryonic rural classes, neighbouring villages and lineage factions in the Communal Lands.

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