

RE-EMERGENCE OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OVER LAND IN DANDE, NORTHERN ZIMBABWE

Marja Spierenburg¹
Free University
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

I INTRODUCTION

The Communal Areas are a heritage of the Rhodesian white minority regime, which divided the country in 'European Areas' and 'Tribal Trust Lands'. After Independence the new government promised the return of the stolen lands to the African farmers and developed plans for an ambitious resettlement programme. The first post-Independence development plan presented envisaged the resettlement of 162, 000 families onto former European Land before 1986. By 1991 about 48,000 families had been resettled (Palmer 1990; Blanckenburg 1994, 30). Though quite an achievement, it was far less than the target set. During the first years after independence government had been able to acquire a substantial amount of land from farmers who had abandoned their farms during the war or who wanted to leave the country just after the war, uncertain of the new government's intentions. However, after a number of relatively stable years far less land became available for sale (Palmer 1990, 169-70). The first decade after independence confiscation seemed no option. The rights of property owners had been guaranteed for ten years under the Lancaster House Agreement, and despite its Marxist orientation, the new government was keen to assuage the worries of international and local investors.²

In 1992, after the Lancaster House Agreement had expired, a Land Acquisition Act was adopted that facilitated the expropriation of land by the state. The Act allowed government to confiscate land, even when it is fully utilised, at a "fair price" instead of ruling market prices - as had been specified in the Lancaster House Agreement. Nevertheless, not much happened in the period between 1992 and 1997, only about hundred farms were designated for redistribution in this period.

The year 1997 was marked by severe protests from war veterans demanding compensation for their efforts during the Struggle for Independence in the form of pensions and land for resettlement. In November that same year a list of 1471 large scale commercial farms designated for resettlement was published in the Government Gazette. This was criticised by the commercial farmers lobby, the private sector and the donor community who claimed that it was not clear how the government would

¹ This paper is a slightly adapted version of an article that will appear in: Staffan Darnolf and Liisa Laakso (Eds.) Zimbabwe, Twenty Years of Independence. The Politics of Indigenisation. London, Palgrave (MacMillan). I wish to thank Jesse Ribot, Amanda Hammar, Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Liisa Laakso and Staffan Darnolf for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the paper. The only person, however, responsible for conclusions drawn and mistakes made is me.

² In 1988 Government even reduced its land acquisition budget with nearly two thirds (Moyo 1995, 116).

use the designated farms and that the plan would seriously undermine the commercial farming sector and confidence of investors. Partly in response to this criticism the government organised a donor conference in September 1998 at which a draft policy entitled “Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase II” was presented (Hammar 1998, 21). During the conference the government agreed with the other parties - donors, commercial farmers and representatives of the private sector - that the land reform programme should start with an Inception phase during which 118 farms would be used for resettlement. The donor community promised 17 million Z\$ to assist acquiring farms. Yet, in 1998 acquisition orders for over 800 farms were signed by the Minister for Lands and Agriculture. Around the same time several senior government leaders stated that more farms would be confiscated and that owners would receive compensation only for farm improvements, not for the land itself. However, again practice differed from rhetoric and in reality only a part of the designated farms were confiscated and fair market value compensation for the land was paid.

Twenty years after independence the land issue flared up again. In the run-up to the general elections in June 2000 a new Constitution was drafted. Apart from further strengthening the position of the ruling party, ZANU-PF and the sitting President, the proposed Constitution was also marked by far-reaching possibilities to confiscate land for resettlement, obliging the former colonial government to pay for the land while the government of Zimbabwe would only pay for land improvements. The Draft Constitution was the subject of a referendum in February and was rejected: Government spokespersons argued because of the radical land reform proposals, the opposition claimed despite these proposals. The rejection was followed by a spate of farm invasions, led by the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, which had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the government. The invasions were accompanied by a lot of violence against members of the opposition. Despite this violence the opposition won 58 of the 120 contested seats in Parliament. The farm invasions³ and the violence intensified in the run-up to the Presidential election in May 2002 and continue even today.

Although the struggle for redistribution of land between the Large Scale Commercial Farming Sector and the Communal Areas dominates the political scene, land reforms in the Communal Areas themselves are at least as significant for the ordinary Zimbabwean farmers. These areas make up 42 per cent of all land in Zimbabwe and harbour 57 per cent of Zimbabwe’s population (Moyo *et al.* 1991, 58; Weiner *et al.* 1991, 147). They thus remain economically as well as politically important. Plans for the Communal Areas may seem to have been far less radical than the plans for land distribution, after all the dual property regime and the principle of communal tenure have been maintained so far. Yet, they have been numerous, often contradictory and have had great impact on the lives of people who inhabit them. Most policy contradictions revolve around three key issues that are intrinsically related: 1) ideas concerning the viability of the principle of communal tenure itself; 2) the form of local government: “traditional” versus “modern” local government structures; and 3) how much control should be devolved to local government structures: decentralisation versus central government control.

³ The former Governor of Matabeleland, Welshman Mabhena, has the honour of being the most prominent black commercial farmer to have his farm invaded, early July 2000, after the elections had taken place.

Despite recent renewed calls for land redistribution, during the first 20 years of Independence there had been a gradual shift in attention away from resettlement onto European Lands to what is referred to as “internal resettlement”. The viability of communal land tenureship was questioned and calls were made to implement land use reforms that would render land use in the Communal Areas more efficient so that they could “carry” the large populations they were still harbouring. These reforms were also an attempt to reorient the settled social practices and social identities of rural people away from traditional forms of authority towards forms of political authority consistent with a modern nation state (Hammar 1998, 12). It is true that in the early days of independence “traditional”⁴ leadership was left out when a new local government structure was introduced, but over the years chiefs and headmen have gained influence again. Policy concerning traditional leadership has not been consistent over the last twenty years, as was the case with decentralisation policies. Attempts to decentralise decision-making powers to newly established elected local government structures were hindered by contradictions between and within legislations facilitating the re-imposition of central control.

In 1988/9 and between 1992 and 1995 I have conducted research in Dande, in the Zambezi valley in the north of the country.⁵ This period was characterised by increasing tendencies to re-assert central control over land use patterns and resource use. Dande was one of the areas subjected to internal resettlement and land reforms.

To understand the post-Independence government's policies concerning land use patterns, local government and traditional authorities in Dande, it is useful to present an overview of land tenure policies under the Rhodesian state, since many of the contradictions in today's policies have their roots there.

II LAND TENURE AND ALLOCATION POLICIES UNDER THE RHODESIAN STATE

Management of land in the Rhodesian state was characterised by a dual property regime. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 divided Rhodesia in European Areas and Tribal Trust Lands. Land in the European areas was held under private property tenure. The tenure system that was encouraged by the Rhodesian state in the Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) was essentially “communal”, although in effect the state had taken over ownership of the TTLs (Ranger 1985; Murombedzi 1990). A ‘decentralised’ system of local authorities became institutionalised from chiefs to headmen to kraalheads who were to manage the land on behalf of the population in the TTLs.

Cheater (1990), Murombedzi (1990) and Ranger (1993) argue that the term “communal” to describe the tenure system practised by African farmers before colonial interventions was not only inappropriate but also the result of an

⁴ Traditional between inverted commas is to recognise the fact that the position and authority of chiefs, village headmen and spirit mediums has been and continues to be influenced by many aspects and is not and has never been static or unchanging.

⁵ Fieldwork was made possible by the support of the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO). I thank the Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, for granting me the status of Research Associate during my stay in Zimbabwe. In the Netherlands I was affiliated to the Amsterdam School of Social Science Research.

ideologisation of the land issue by colonial authorities (and subsequently by post-colonial authorities as well).

Several myths form the basis of the notion of communal tenure. Firstly, it is based on the idea that chiefs and headmen were guardians of the land and that no individual ownership of land existed. This implied that land had no exchange value and therefore was not subjected to market forces (Cheater 1990; see also Mamdani 1996, 17). Nevertheless, Cheater (*ibid.*) found historical evidence of forms of tenure that resemble private ownership as well as land sales and exchanges. A second myth is that communal tenure represented an egalitarian form of land use. Ranger (1985; 1993) however, states that in fact it was the colonial state through its attempts to prevent the emergence of peasant entrepreneurs in the TTLs that diminished existing disparities in land holdings and other productive resources. A third assumption was that communal tenure was mainly geared towards subsistence farming, while the existence of peasant entrepreneurs as described by Ranger again indicates otherwise (*ibid.*).

The 1950s saw a – albeit temporary – break with the ideology of communal tenure and indirect rule through chiefs and kraalheads. As more and more land was alienated from the African population, the TTLs became increasingly overpopulated and the soils rapidly deteriorated. Since a total collapse of agriculture would have had harmful effects on the Rhodesian economy, the government introduced the Native Land Husbandry Act in 1951 (Ranger 1985; Drinkwater 1991). Through it government sought to confer individual tenure rights to specific parcels of grazing or arable land presuming that individual tenure would lead to more efficient land use. The right to allocate land in the TTLs was taken away from chiefs and kraalheads. Due to a great deal of opposition and resentment among the population of the TTLs the implementation of the Act failed.

Following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, a “community” approach to the development in the Tribal Trust Lands marked a return to the ideology of communal tenure. This approach relied heavily on the co-operation of the chiefs, headmen and kraalheads who had their rights to allocate land restored (Thomas 1992; Zimbabwe Government 1994). The underlying motive for this reversal of authority can be seen as an attempt to replace African nationalism with “tribal government” which would be more controllable and act as a buffer against grass-roots opposition (Ranger 1985). Government was also seeking to keep costs low by administering through the traditional institutions, including customary law (Thomas 1992). Though colonial administrators maintained that traditional election procedures were followed in nominating chiefs, a number of chiefly dynasties were affected by government interference. Government could veto any candidate for the chiefship in favour of a co-operative candidate, and the status of a chieftaincy could be lowered or raised (Bourdillon 1987,119).

There is a debate concerning the effects this development had on the legitimacy of chiefs and headmen. Quite a number of authors argue that the policy of indirect rule seriously damaged their legitimacy, that any co-operation with the Rhodesian government was interpreted as collaboration (see e.g. Garbett 1966; Ranger 1982; Lan 1985; Thomas 1992). Lan even claims that many of the functions formerly performed by chiefs and headmen were transferred by their subjects to the spirit mediums, including the allocation of land. Bourdillon (1987) and Alexander (1995) argue that the role of chiefs and headmen in the pre-independence period, especially during the war, has been oversimplified and misunderstood by many authors. Firstly, not all collaboration served solely the interests of the chiefs, there

were many instances where they may have felt compelled to comply with government's policy out of fear to lose the government's support for infrastructural developments and development projects (Bourdillon 1987,119). Furthermore, they claim that there were also many chiefs and headmen who supported the freedom fighters, assumed party positions and co-operated with the guerrillas, citing several examples from Masvingo and Chimanimani Districts.

III POST-INDEPENDENCE LAND POLICIES IN THE COMMUNAL AREAS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The observation made by Ranger (1983b, 106) that the Zimbabwean state "simultaneously claims to be the heir of African tradition and of colonial modernity, the custodian of proletarian ceremonial (the invented May Day parades), of national glory and of rural customs" applies very well to the state's relation with traditional authorities as well as to land use and allocation policies in the Communal Areas, which have been fraught with ambiguities.

The land property regime became officially "de-racialised", but not, as Mamdani (1996) would call it, "de-tribalised", the dual property regime continued. During the first 20 years of Independence the former European Areas were left largely untouched and were renamed Large Scale Commercial Farming Areas. For the majority of Zimbabwean farmers access to land remained dependent on their membership of a group, as inhabitants of chiefdom. The Tribal Trust Lands were renamed Communal Lands.

The Communal Lands Act of 1982 stated that authority over land in Communal Areas is vested in the President who holds all Communal Lands in trust for the people. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development became responsible for administering Communal Land through the District Councils (Thomas 1992; Zimbabwe Government 1994, 22). The act stated that Councils shall "...have regard to customary law relating to the use and allocation of land" (*ibid.*, 23). The installation of District Councils in the Communal Lands so soon after independence and before a new administrative structure had been officially introduced had caused quite some resentment among local residents (Alexander 1995, 181). Till then, local administration had been in the hands of either the former support committees that had helped the ZANU-related ZANLA-forces during the war (Lan 1985, 209, 210) or local branches of the ZANU party, sometimes in co-operation with traditional leadership, sometimes in competition with them (Alexander 1995, 181). The establishment of District Councils indicated an attempt to re-establish a powerful state bureaucracy in the rural areas, mostly by the Ministry of Lands and the Ministry of Local Government. Decisions concerning development policy and land reform were taken at the national level, and the channelling of state resources to rural areas was controlled by the ministries, with little sensitivity to bottom up demands, as noted by Alexander (*ibid.*, 183). Continuities from the past were evident and the presidential directive, which allowed the appointment of Africans into any section of the public service if the president on the advice of the prime minister deemed it necessary in order to redress past imbalances, did not bring a change to the prevalent modernising and authoritarian ideology of the civil servants (*ibid.*, 180; see also Drinkwater 1991). In 1984 the Prime Minister issued a Directive which outlined the institutional framework for development in Zimbabwe which completely excluded chiefs and headmen. Democratically elected Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) were

to be the basic planning unit in this new system of local government. Each VIDCO represented about 100 households. The VIDCO was to submit its development plans on an annual basis to the WARD Development Committee (WADCO), which represented about 600 households. The WADCO would co-ordinate the plans from all VIDCOs under its jurisdiction. It would then submit the ward plan to the District Development Committee (DDC). The DDC would then incorporate the ward plans into an integrated district plan for approval by the District Council. The DC comprised all Ward Councillors, who were the chairpersons of the WADCOs. In the DC the Ward councillors were assisted by a District Administrator (DA), who also served as the Chief Executive Officer⁶, who was appointed by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. The DDC, which was to develop the district development plan, was composed entirely of district heads of central government ministries and departments, together with representatives of the state security organisations and was chaired by the DA. It was, therefore, a committee of central government. Once the DC approved the district plan, it was to be submitted to the Provincial Development Committee (Murombedzi 1992; Thomas 1992).

The Prime Minister's Directive officially constituted an attempt to decentralise government and promote community participation in developing development policies. But in practice, DCs tended to be dominated by the governmental officials serving on them. Furthermore, the fact that development plans had to be submitted to the District Development Committee before being submitted to the District Council did not help either (Thomas 1992,10). However, many Councils lacked both the expertise necessary to formulate development plans and the resources to implement them. DCs were almost entirely dependent on grants and on resources and expertise of sectoral ministries (Alexander 1995, 183). Plans to train VIDCOs and WADCOs in administrative skills proved over-ambitious because of a lack of sufficient financial and human resources (Thomas 1992,12). Where training was provided the emphasis was on implementing central government policies rather than training VIDCOs and WADCOs to develop their own development policies.⁷

Though the operation and recognition of VIDCOs and WADCOs differ from area to area, there have been complaints about the lack of local support and participation within these structures.⁸ Alexander (1995, 183) argues that the alleged weakness of VIDCOs and WADCOs can be attributed to the arbitrary nature of the units. VIDCOs and WADCOs were not built on previous communities and affiliations but simply on the figure of 100 and 600 households (see also Zimbabwe Government 1994, 25). However, in some instances local amendments have been made, figures were reduced or enlarged to create some overlap with existing communities⁹.

⁶ Though there are cases in which the two functions are executed by two different people.

⁷ A Ward Councillor in the area where I conducted my research showed me the training material he received and the notes he took during the training he received in 1994.

⁸ In 1989 the Minister of Local Government Rural and Urban Development made the following statement: "What is however disturbing is that in some areas there is an unacceptable level of participation in the planning process by residents at the village and ward levels. Reports reaching my ministry suggest that people are not sufficiently involved or active in the village and ward development committees." (MLGRUD 1989, quoted in Murombedzi 1989,22).

⁹ Quite a number of VIDCOs and WADCOs in Dande did not contain the specified number of households, but were delineated in such a way that they overlapped more or less with existing villages or neighbourhoods.

Apart from the lack of decentralisation of authority and resources to VIDCOs and WADCOs, there were also problems with their representation. The Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems concluded: “In practice, VIDCOs have no *modus operandi* allowing regular elections or other recognisable characteristics of democratic governance. Some, if not most, have had only one election since 1984. There was evidence of autocracy and manipulation” (Zimbabwe Government 1994, 24). Derman and Murombedzi discuss the domination of ZANU(PF) in local government institutions in the Zambezi Valley: “The provincial governors and district administrators are political appointees and well-placed in the party. It is an unspoken assumption that to be on the District Council one has to be a member of ZANU(PF)” (1994, 122).¹⁰

While after independence “communal tenure” had been maintained in the Communal Areas, at the same time this form of tenure was considered inefficient. Plans to introduce land reforms in the Communal Areas further undermined local control over land issues. These plans re-surfaced in response to a period of serious droughts, which lasted from 1982 until 1984, and problems experienced with the acquisition of land from the large-scale commercial farming areas for resettlement. The assumption underlying the land reforms was that improvement of efficiency and intensification of land use could alleviate the pressures existing in most Communal Areas in Zimbabwe and would reduce the demand for land in the former European Areas. Many authors have pointed out the similarities between the land reforms and the Rhodesian Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951, among them Drinkwater (1991), Alexander (1995) and McGregor (1995).

The reforms were officially introduced in the first Five Year Development Plan of 1986. But in fact they had already been prepared when the Communal Land Amendment Act passed in 1985 (Thomas 1992, 15).¹¹ The amendments facilitated the intention of the government to introduce the demarcation of arable and grazing lands, and areas for rural housing construction. In contrast with the Prime Minister’s 1984 Directive, which appeared to seek to promote “grass-roots” development, the Communal Land Amendment Act authorised the non-elected governmental officials of the DDCs to prepare and adopt development plans of their own volition¹² (Thomas 1992, 15). No mention was made of consultation with local people, other than the fact that when a plan had been prepared and approved by the council, a copy should be sent to the chairman of every VIDCO of council affected by the plan (Section 4 (5), *ibid.*, 15) who is given 30 days to consult local inhabitants and report back any objections to the plan to council, together *with the identity of the objectors* (Section 4 (6), *ibid.*, 15, emphasis by Thomas).

In the end the Ministry of Local Government Rural and Urban Development took direct control over land allocation in those Communal Areas that were subjected to internal land reforms. In these areas land allocation was done by its Department for Rural Development, and not by the District Councils (Zimbabwe Government, 1999).

¹⁰ In one district in the Zambezi Valley it was more than an unspoken assumption. In Nyaminyami, before the 1988 unification of ZANU and ZAPU, ward councillors who were elected but were members of the ZAPU were not permitted to serve on the council (Derman & Murombedzi 1994, 122).

¹¹ The reforms are also mentioned in a draft presented in 1985 of a new Communal Lands Development Plan (Zimbabwe Government, 1985c)

¹² Communal Land Amendment Act section 4(1), cited in Thomas 1992, 15.

In 1988 the Rural District Councils (RDC) Act was adopted, though it was implemented only in 1993. In theory, this Act provided a deepening of the decentralisation process, but in practice it firmly established the state's authority at the local level (Hammar 1998, 25, 26) The Act aimed at establishing a single type of rural local authority through amalgamating two previously separate types of councils; the District Councils that served the Communal Lands, and the Rural Councils that served the Large Commercial Farming Areas. The RDCs were empowered by the Act as the land allocation and land conservation authority (*ibid.*, Roe 1992). The act supposed a considerable devolution of power and resources to elected local authorities. Nevertheless, as has been the case with the District Councils, the RDCs were far from autonomous in relation to the centre – neither in terms of resources nor in terms of decision-making powers – and served in fact to reassert the power of the central state over the rural areas.

In the second half of the 1990s, however, the objectives of decentralisation changed. As part of the economic structural adjustment programme the Government undertook a reform of the public sector. Decentralisation and devolution were supposed to help reduce the role of the public sector as well as reduce the costs of government operations. More and more ministries started to decentralise funds and responsibilities to the local level. To better co-ordinate these efforts, a Committee of Ministers on Decentralisation was set up. Lack of local resources and capacities, the latter especially among the elected RDC Councillors, had been identified as the main obstacles for decentralisation. In response a nationwide RDC Capacity Building Programme was launched in 1996, with financial support from a number of European countries as well as the World Bank. Training and the deployment of resource persons were to foster institutional and human resource development. Furthermore each RDC received a considerable development grant to develop projects and activities that could serve as test cases for newly developed skills, accountability and local democracy (Zimbabwe Government 1999b). This programme was to continue in the year 2000, but with recent changes in Government and the political upheavals that continued after the general elections in 2000 and the Presidential elections in 2002, its future is unclear.

Meanwhile, significant changes in the position of “traditional leadership” took place. Though the 1984 directive excluded chiefs and headmen from the new institutional framework – they could only participate if elected in either VIDCOs or WADCOs – and though attacked by technical planning ministries as anachronisms that stood in the way of progress, there were also voices in the new government defending them. Immediately after independence, former employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs lobbied for a continuing role for chiefs and headmen on the grounds that their exclusion from local government could lead to confusion, even anarchy in the communal areas (Alexander 1995,186). In many districts chiefs were soon to be invited as *ex officio* members to the meetings of the District Council. Already in 1982 a Chiefs and Headmen Act was passed which recognised the institution of the chief, stating their right to a government stipend well in excess of that of ward councillors (Alexander 1995, 182, 187). The act did not, however, recognise the institution of the headmen, nor did it provide for a restoration of the chiefs' power over land allocation or court matters (Zimbabwe Government 1994, 25). Since independence the courts presided over by chiefs and headmen had been transformed into community courts, operating under the Ministry of Justice. In 1992 civil jurisdiction was restored to chiefs on all matters except land issues (Zimbabwe Government 1994, 26).

Despite increasing recognition of chiefs, legislation continued to limit their role significantly. In practice, however, both chiefs and headmen continue to play an important role in matters relating to land. The Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems concluded: "Inhabitants of Communal Areas however, still refer most land matters and requests to traditional leaders" (1994, 24).

Alexander cites two reasons for the re-emergence of traditional leadership. Once the war ended "[b]acked by a strong pressure for a return to 'normality' after the trauma of war, traditional leaders – and male elders in general – reasserted their power" (1995, 179). Another factor constitutes what she refers to as the authoritarian and modernising ethic of the development bureaucracies. Especially the land reforms introduced in some of the communal areas and plans to introduce them eventually in all communal areas contributed to an increasing local respect for chiefs and headmen (*ibid.*, 187). In the light of these developments and due to the structures in which they operate, VIDCOs and WADCOs became perceived as instruments of local administration, essentially implementation units for plans that continue to be developed in a 'top-down' fashion (Thomas 1992, 12). Alexander argues that by formulating an agenda based on a popular revival of 'tradition', traditional leaders were able to draw on a constituency that found itself threatened by the new agricultural policies. The traditional leaders certainly did not reject all aspects of 'modernisation', but reacted to the authoritarian implementation policies and the further loss of local control over land. Traditional leaders invoked a version of the past in a bid to challenge the authority of the state and local development bodies. Spirit mediums played a supportive ideological role by providing a critique of the new land reform policies (Alexander 1995, 187; see also Spierenburg 1995 and 2000).

With all the contradicting acts and legislation, the situation with respect to land tenureship became increasingly unclear. In reaction to this, the government established a Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems. On the basis of extensive interviews and discussions the commission concluded that all local government institutions, from DCs to VIDCOs, claimed authority to deal with land issues (Zimbabwe Government 1994, 23). The commission added the fact that in practice chiefs and headmen were found to have illegally reassumed their former role in land allocation. The commission concluded that "[t]his profusion of overlapping and incongruent local organisational structures, each with its own boundaries and drawing on different sources of legitimacy, has thus created weak and disparate local institutions." (*ibid.*, 26). In its recommendations to the government the Commission advised to restore the role and powers of both chiefs and headmen in matters of land: "While traditional leaders are clearly not mentioned in the land laws, the requirement in the law that land administration is done with regard to customary law in itself implies some role of traditional leaders, given their status as executors of customary law." (*ibid.*, 24). The problem is, however, that there exists a great deal of differentiation in the Communal Areas. Though the re-emergence of traditional leadership seems to be widespread, not everybody may feel that local chiefs and headmen represent their interests.

In September 1998, the Government of Zimbabwe organised a donor conference during which a draft policy concerning land reforms was presented, entitled "Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase II". According to Hammar (1998, 21) this policy attempts to reconcile earlier contradictions concerning the role of traditional authorities in land allocation, but with limited success. The draft policy proposes to use local plans and involve chiefs, headmen, traditional assemblies, the

Rural District Council and the District Administrator without any articulation of how this would work in practice (*ibid.*, 21). A new Act concerning traditional leadership that was presented early 2000 did not provide much clarity on this either. The Act proposes the establishments of village and ward assemblies constituting all adult village and ward inhabitants. The assemblies are to be chaired by chiefs and headmen.¹³ VIDCOs will become “sub-committees” of the village assemblies and will be chaired by the village headmen as well. However, the position of the WADCOs vis-à-vis traditional leadership is less clear. WADCOs will continue to be chaired by the Ward Councillors, who will still represent the Wards in the RDCs (Zimbabwe Government 1999). The draft policy presented at the donor conference in 1998 also proposed the establishment at the national level of a part-executive, part-advisory land board. Furthermore, it brought up the issue of a reorganisation of the Communal Lands again (*ibid.*, 24). Hammar concludes that the draft policy “retain[s] sufficient, and by-now familiar ambiguity with respect to land authority in Communal Lands [...] to allow the state to play its cards in many possible ways” (*ibid.*, 21).

IV THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAND USE POLICIES IN DANDE: THE MID ZAMBEZI RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

My research concerned the introduction of the Mid Zambezi Rural Development Project, a pilot project for the internal land reforms in the Communal Areas proposed by the government. The project was introduced in 1987 and project activities continued until 1995. This was a period in which contradictions between and within land use policies, decentralisation and the relations between the official local government structures and traditional authorities reigned. In 1993 the amalgamation of Rural Councils and District Councils took place, but its effect took some time to be felt in Dande. The first period of the amalgamation was especially devoted to solving problems like the liquidation of the assets of the former Rural Councils. The Rural District Council Capacity Building Programme, which constituted a more genuine attempt at decentralisation, had not yet started either.

Dande Communal Land

Dande Communal Land is situated in northern Zimbabwe, in the Zambezi Valley. In the north Dande borders on Zambia and Mozambique. In the south the boundary is formed by the Escarpment, in the west by the Angwa river and in the east by the Msengezi river (see also Lan 1985, 15). Dande falls under the jurisdiction of Guruve (Rural) District.

Conditions for agriculture in Dande are not all that favourable. The climate is hostile, summers are hot and rainfall is unreliable. Close to the escarpment the soils are quite fertile, but further to the north the quality of the soils deteriorates (ADF 1986). The majority of residents depend upon smallholder agriculture for a living,

¹³ The office of village headman will be officially re-instated. Village headmen will be supposed to collect the development levies for the RDC and in return will be able to keep a certain percentage of the levies for themselves as salaries.

though often supplemented by income derived from temporary jobs in the major cities of Zimbabwe or on large-scale commercial farms on the Plateau. The most important cash crops grown in Dande are cotton and maize; the latter is also used for household consumption.

Despite the difficult circumstances for agriculture, the area has attracted many immigrants. Especially between 1983 and 1985 the number of immigrants increased dramatically. In some villages in Dande recent immigrants constitute almost half of the population (see also Derman 1993). The majority of immigrants originate from the overpopulated Communal Lands surrounding Masvingo, although many came through commercial farms on the Plateau where they were temporarily employed. A minority of the immigrants – about thirteen percent – is made up of people who, prior to migration, worked and lived on large-scale commercial farms on the Plateau. Most of these people are of Mozambican, Malawian or Zambian origin but have lived all their working lives in Zimbabwe and have lost nearly all contact with their home area.

During the war for independence many guerrilla fighters entered the country from Zambia and Mozambique, through Dande. The importance of the area for the struggle for independence committed the post-independence Government to develop it (Derman 1995, 14). Both Government and donors assumed that virtually any development activity would be welcome.

The Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project

The Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project (MZRDP) was officially introduced in 1987, covering virtually all of Dande except the area west of Manyame river. Its aim was to bring development to the area by rationalising land use patterns and improving infrastructure and services. It was one of the pilot projects for the internal land reforms. It was believed that with more efficient land use there would be room to bring in 3,000 households from Communal Areas elsewhere in Zimbabwe that were experiencing acute land shortages. These were to be placed in 130 newly created villages (ADF 1986).

The MZRDP was primarily funded by the African Development Fund. The actual implementation of the project was the responsibility of the Department of Rural Development (DERUDE, a department of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural and Urban Development of the Government of Zimbabwe) and Agritex (the national agricultural extension service).

Land was to be (re)distributed, with all households receiving new fields in a new or a reorganised village. In addition to the land reforms, the MZRDP was to provide improvements in infrastructure and services, i.e. construction and upgrading of roads, building of schools and clinics and the construction of water points (ADF 1986).

Originally, the project was scheduled for completion in 1992. However, owing to technical and organisational problems, but perhaps even more important, to increasing resistance by the local population, the project remained far behind schedule. In 1992 project funding was extended for another three years. In 1995 DERUDE ended its activities in Dande.

Most of the infrastructural development has been completed, with the (important) exception of the construction of water points. Access to health care and education facilities has improved and the upgrading and construction of roads has

rendered the area less inaccessible. The resettlement/villagisation exercise, however, has not at all been completed.

Though officially the District Council was responsible for the allocation of land in the area, this responsibility was taken over by DERUDE when the MZRDP was introduced to Dande. During the first stage of the project the DC was completely ignored. This probably led to a mistake that generated a lot of resistance later on: the gross underestimation of the number of households already living in the project area. Based on the 1982 census, the Project Appraisal (ADF 1986) stated that approximately 19,000 people were already residing in the project area prior to the implementation of the MZRDP. In 1985 Guruve DC had census data available listing 24,000 people living in the project area (Derman 1995,15). However, even these figures were outdated by the time the MZRDP was implemented, as spontaneous immigration continued after 1985. When the MZRDP management finally discovered that many more people were living in the area than the project catered for, only the goal of moving new settlers to the area was abandoned. All those already present were supposed to conform to the new land use patterns. The project thus became an internal resettlement or villagisation project.

Land was to be (re)distributed, with households receiving twelve acres of arable land and a one-acre residential stand in a reorganised village. Households would not obtain a permanent title deed for the land, but be given temporary user rights (ADF 1986). Without any consultation of local government structures, Agritex conducted the designation of arable fields, residential stands and grazing areas on the basis of aerial photographs and analysis of vegetation. Existing settlement patterns were not taken into account. Once the maps were designed, teams of Agritex officials moved into the project area and started demarcating fields and stands with metal pegs. When it came to allocating the fields and stands, at first the local authorities were bypassed again. DERUDE appointed a project manager and support staff, and a number of Resettlement Officers who were responsible for the actual allocation. Allocation of residential stands and arable plots was done on the basis of a set of criteria similar to those employed for selecting farmers for resettlement projects on former European land. To qualify, one had to have Zimbabwean nationality, have no other source of income than farming and be a married male. Allegedly on the basis of customary law, women were excluded¹⁴.

In the first Wards where the MZRDP was implemented it soon became clear to the population that the project would have disastrous consequences, including rendering a lot of people landless. DC councillors, who received many complaints, also about the allocation procedures, demanded to be involved in the process. Getting people to comply with project regulations turned out to be rather difficult, and as problems increased project management decided to implicate the DC. This led to

¹⁴ Alexander argues that while government attempted to put women on an equal footing, the re-emergence of traditional leadership, including spirit mediums, put a stop to this development (187). In Dande, with respect to land allocation at least, the opposite appears to happen. While government excluded women in the MZRDP project, allegedly based on traditional criteria, headmen and spirit mediums argued strongly in favour of women – at least widows of all ages and divorcees – obtaining land in their own rights. Indeed, many of the women left out by the project had been allocated their own land by headmen prior to the implementation of the MZRDP.

It should be noted, however, that the criterion relating to sources of income was never seriously applied. Several Resettlement Officers as well as the Project Manager obtained twelve-acre plots and residential stands in the project area, and they certainly had sources of income other than from farming.

some changes in the allocation criteria. District Council demanded that in order to qualify for land in the project area farmers would have to be registered at Guruve District. This was to prevent recent immigrants from obtaining land at the expense of those who consider themselves autochthonous (from here on referred to as long-term residents). District Council also decided that immigrants who had arrived after 1985 should not qualify. Furthermore, certain provisions for women were demanded. Project management gave in to the demands, with the important proviso that women could only obtain land – be it not more than two and a half acres – if they were widowed and had minor dependants.

The process of moving farmers to their new fields proved to be a tremendously difficult task. In some cases whole villages had to be moved according to the project plan. Transport was not provided for, nor did the project budget allow for financial compensation for houses or other immovable property that had to be left behind.¹⁵

When already existing villages were being re-organised, the procedure was as follows. Once fields and residential stands were demarcated, lists were compiled of those applying for plots, employing the official criteria. At first the lists were compiled by the Resettlement Officers, later this task was handed over to the VIDCO secretaries and Ward Councillors. The lists were then handed over to the Resettlement Officers, who did the actual allocation of plots and stands. Those who were not able to obtain land in their original village were told to apply in one of the new villages, or in the less densely settled areas in the north. When existing villages were re-organised, the newly demarcated fields were sometimes already partly under cultivation. In such cases the twelve-acre plots were allocated to the person who was cultivating most acres within the boundaries of the new plot, provided this person met the criteria for resettlement.

The project created immense land-insecurity. As already stated above, project planners had seriously underestimated the number of households already residing in the project area. Instead of bringing new families to Dande, the MZRDP now threatened to evict a large number of those already present when the project was introduced. Derman (1993) estimates that about a third of the present population, i.e. about 3,800 households, would be rendered officially landless if the project is ever to be completed. Where these new landless would have to go to is absolutely unclear. The imminent landlessness has resulted in a scramble for twelve-acre plots and increasing conflicts over land within the project area.

The designation of “arables”, residential stands and grazing areas did not conform to existing settlement patterns. Local farmers determine the quality of the soils on the basis of vegetation, in a similar way to the Agritex experts – though of course without aerial photographs. However, in choosing where to settle and cultivate they also take into account other factors, e.g. the availability of water as well as the presence of wildlife.

Most residents of Dande had settled along the banks of the many rivers which flow from the Escarpment into the Zambezi river. The rivers provide water for drinking and the fertile riverbanks are very valuable resources, crucial for survival in

¹⁵ There had been plans to provide selected farmers with loans for constructing new houses, but these never materialised. Some assistance was provided, though. On each new twelve-acre plot, one acre was stumped and ploughed by project personnel, and seed and fertiliser packages for one acre were distributed.

an area where rainfall is highly irregular and unpredictable. Researchers from WWF have concluded that without riverine cultivation there will be no food security in the area (see Lynam *et al.* 1996). However, through the MZRDP Agritex wanted to enforce the old ban on riverine cultivation and move people away from the rivers.¹⁶ By doing so people would not only be deprived of their most valuable resource for agriculture, but also of their main source of potable water. The MZRDP was supposed to solve this problem by constructing waterpoints. Yet this part of the project was seriously behind schedule – not to mention the fact that the boreholes that had been drilled often broke down and were hardly ever repaired or maintained.

The MZRDP has resulted in massive deforestation (see also Derman 1995). Whole villages have been moved, new fields had to be cleared while old fields were abandoned. The same applies when people had to change the location of their fields in the re-organised villages. Furthermore, competition between humans and wildlife has increased as quite a number of farmers have been moved by the MZRDP into areas hitherto occupied by wildlife.

Before the introduction of the MZRDP, chiefs and headmen, despite the new legislation, mainly dealt with land matters in the area. Headmen did the actual allocation of plots, reporting their decisions to the chiefs. Chiefs occasionally also allocated land, and decided upon the location of new villages. Contrary to Lan (1985) I have not come across spirit mediums allocating land, but the chiefs consulted them when locations for new villages were decided upon. The headmen had already before independence allocated most long-term residents land.

The majority of immigrants also obtained land from village headmen, though after independence many also sought permission from the VIDCOs and Ward Councillors. Often headmen approached spirit mediums to ask permission on behalf of immigrants to settle in their villages.

The relations between traditional authorities on the one hand and VIDCOs and WADCOs differed from village to village. In many cases, headmen co-operated with VIDCOs and WADCOs. Traditional leaders themselves were rarely elected in the VIDCOs and WADCOs, but sometimes their close relatives were elected. There are villages, however, where some tension and competition exists between headmen and VIDCOs. Where immigrants formed the majority of the village population, they could dominate the VIDCOs. In such cases, immigrants, who felt the headmen do not adequately represent them, approached only the VIDCOs with their requests. Long-term residents who felt excluded from local government strove for the re-assertion of traditional leadership. The existence of two structures of authority increased possibilities for “shopping”; depending on their background and position people approached one or the other and indeed, as the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Tenure Systems concluded, the representatives of both structures felt they had the right to deal with land matters.

The local authorities that had been dealing with land matters had not been implicated neither in the planning nor in the early stages of the implementation of the

¹⁶ This is based on the assumption that riverine cultivation leads to siltation and erosion. However, Scoones and Cousins (1991) demonstrate that the technical evidence on which the continuation of the ban is based contains many inaccuracies and that the practice is far less damaging than is often assumed (see also Dambo Research Unit, Loughborough University, 1987). When research demonstrated the profitability of maize production on wetlands, this resulted in a legalization of wetlands cultivation in the European areas in the 1960s (see Murombedzi, 1991). Farmers in the Communal Areas, on the other hand, remain bound to the old legislation.

MZRDP. But when it became clear that without them the implementation would certainly fail, they were given a small role in the project: the DC was given some influence over the selection criteria; and VIDCOs and Ward Councillors were mobilised to register land applications for land. All this in the hope they could obtain compliance with the selection criteria, which the Resettlement Officers had been unable to obtain.

Both traditional authorities and local government institutions have tried to get some grip on the situation and redress some of the problems arising from the MZRDP in their own ways. The VIDCO secretaries compiling lists of people requesting twelve-acre plots did not always apply the official selection criteria, e.g. by registering divorcees as widows. Furthermore, some VIDCO secretaries and Ward Councillors were known to discourage certain people from registering by giving them false information concerning the selection criteria. For example, many immigrants of Mozambican origin were told not to bother registering for a plot because even if they had Zimbabwean citizenship and were officially registered at Guruve District, they would not qualify on the basis of their foreign origins.

In villages where resettlement had officially been completed, i.e. where all arable plots and residential stands had been distributed and allocated, it was not uncommon to find many people living in the village who had not been allocated land there. In some cases, people who were rendered landless by the project obtained permission from village headmen to settle in the grazing areas. In other cases they “borrowed” land from people who had not (yet) cleared all of their twelve acres. People who had access to riverine fields prior to the implementation of the project often still cultivated their “mudimba”. This, however, is increasingly causing conflicts with farmers who own cattle but no streambank fields, and want to graze their livestock in those riverine areas now designated as communal grazing areas.

Conflicts and Resistance against the Mid Zambezi Rural Development Project

The MZRDP created a lot of tensions and conflicts. The struggles for control over land took place at two levels: there were conflicts between the residents of the project area and project management over the implementation of the project, and fights amongst those subjected to the project over who would have the right to land under the project in case implementation could not be stopped.

The second level involved conflicts between long-term residents and recent immigrants, but also in some cases between traditional authorities and members of local government structures. The conflicts were related to the fact that the land reforms did not follow local land use patterns. As the number of immigrants expanded, it became increasingly difficult for them to gain access to riverine fields other than through borrowing or renting. The fields allocated by chiefs and headmen to the more recent newcomers were therefore generally situated further away from the riverbanks. When existing villages were reorganised, immigrants stood a better chance obtaining fields since they were often already farming in the upland areas demarcated by Agritex. Long-term residents had most of their fields near the rivers and hardly ever had demarcation pegs in their fields. Many immigrants had changed their registration certificate and obtained district citizenship in time to qualify for a twelve-acre plot. Conflicts arose over the definition of “immigrants” and “long-term residents”.

Once Agritex had demarcated twelve-acre plots in a certain area, this was often followed by a scramble for land within the new boundaries. Long-term residents

suddenly claimed large parts of the newly demarcated fields, stating that long ago the chiefs had allocated land to them for future use. They transferred all their labour to the new plots, clearing as many acres as possible in order to stand a better chance of obtaining the land from the Resettlement Officers.

In those areas where immigrants dominated the VIDCOs tensions between these institutions and headmen – who had no official role in the project - increased over the question which households qualified for plots.

Many Councillors have used DC meetings to vent the grievances of the population of Dande with respect to the MZRDP. Yet, the government officials serving on the DC were somewhat ambivalent about the project. On the one hand they agreed with the official line that land in the Communal Areas was used inefficiently and that land reforms were necessary. But over time they became aware of the problems created by the MZRDP and the difficulties to implement it. It was due to their insistence that the selection criteria were somewhat adapted.

Project management seriously underestimated the problems involved in moving large numbers of people, especially when this had to be done against their will. Project regulations were difficult to enforce in such a large area, particularly when local-level institutions were not co-operating.

As resistance to the MZRDP increased, project management decided upon a change of strategy that entailed the involvement of the hitherto ignored traditional leadership. In one of the Wards where resistance had been quite strong it decided to approach the chief. The idea behind the new strategy was that once the support of traditional leadership was obtained, its subjects would follow and implementation of the project would be facilitated. However, things did not work out the way project management had envisaged. The chief who may have felt caught between his subjects and his employer, the state, referred the case to another “traditional authority, the medium of a royal ancestral spirit.” Here we see a transferral of authority over land to a spirit medium as predicted by Lan (1985) when a chief’s position vis-à-vis his subjects and the state becomes difficult, but this time the transfer was effected by the chief.

In 1992 chief Matsiwo was approached by a delegation of the project staff. He was asked to give permission for the implementation of the resettlement exercise in Matsiwo A ward¹⁷. At first, the chief refused any co-operation with project staff on the grounds that a large part of his chiefdom had already been subjected to the implementation of the project without his prior consultation. He advised the project manager to approach the spirit medium of the area, the medium of royal ancestor (*Mhondoro*) Chidyamauyu. The chief argued that the *Mhondoro*¹⁸ are the real owners

¹⁷ The chiefdom of Matsiwo includes several other wards as well.

¹⁸ *Mhondoro* are the spirits of royal ancestors, the great rulers of the past. All present-day chiefs of Dande claim descentance from one of the *Mhondoro*. The spirits are believed to continue looking after the territories they once ruled when they were still alive, by providing rain and soil fertility. In Dande, these areas have relatively clear boundaries, which are known by most inhabitants; they are termed “spirit provinces” by Garbett (1969; 1977). The land and all other natural resources in a spirit province ultimately belong to the *Mhondoro* of that province. The *Mhondoro* are thought to communicate with the living through a medium (see also Lan 1985).

Individuals in cases of sickness and misfortune can consult the spirit mediums of the *Mhondoro*. More commonly, however, village elders in the event of droughts or other natural disasters consult them. The explanation of climatological mishaps offers scope for *Mhondoro* mediums to voice social comment. Mediums and spirits are believed to be completely separate: a medium cannot be held responsible for what the spirit utters when taking possession of the medium’s body. However, as I have argued

of the land in Dande and therefore they were the only ones who could give permission for resettlement.

The project manager persuaded the chief to visit the medium of Chidyamauyu on behalf of DERUDE. The medium, however, refused to deal with the chief and ordered him to tell the project manager to come and talk to spirit about the MZRDP himself. After some hesitation, the project manager decided to do so, but he still wanted the chief to accompany him. The chief and project manager were told that the spirit of Chidyamauyu had forbidden the implementation of the MZRDP in Matsiwo A Ward. By March 1993 the project manager decided he would not accept the verdict of Chidyamauyu and tried to negotiate with the medium. After mediation by the chief, another meeting was organised with the medium, the village headmen. About 50 villagers turned up for the meeting as well. During the meeting the medium was possessed. He asked the chief why he had called the spirit of Chidyamauyu. The chief answered that he might be the leader of the people, but that the *Mhondoro* was the owner of the land. When the project manager and the resettlement officer asked whether they could get permission to start the demarcation exercise, both the chief and the spirit medium told the village headmen to discuss the matter in a separate meeting. The village headmen withdrew from the meeting and discussed the matter among them. When they returned about half an hour later, they told the project manager and the resettlement officer that they did not want the resettlement project introduced in their area.

Faced with all village headmen and the spirit medium opposing the project and in the presence of the medium and the project manager, the chief also publicly objected to the project. However, the project manager refused a second time to accept the pronouncement of the spirit and started to organise meetings in the different villages in Matsiwo A Ward to promote the MZRDP. At these meetings the chief could be heard advocating the project.

The project manager sent the chief to the medium one more time. The chief returned highly upset. He claimed that he had suddenly felt sick during the meeting and had lost consciousness. He was revived again by the spirit medium who warned the chief never again to bring up the issue of the MZRDP.

The medium had joined the ZANLA guerrilla forces during the war for independence. When the medium continued to reject the MZRDP, some government officials appeared on the scene and promised that the government would reward him handsomely for his assistance during the war. Contrary to local expectations¹⁹ the medium of Chidyamauyu did receive quite a herd of cattle and MZRDP staff built a house for him. The project management tried to make it look as if the medium had been bribed into accepting the project. Most people in the area then withdrew their support from the medium and rumours started to circulate that he had been abandoned by his spirit and was speaking with his own voice. These rumours continued until the medium publicly denounced the project again.

elsewhere (Spierenburg 1995; 2000), there is room for adherents to influence the pronouncements of *Mhondoro* mediums. Mediums who do not take public opinion into account run the risk of being accused of speaking with their own voice instead of the spirit's, thus being frauds (see also Bourdillon 1979).

¹⁹ This was long before 1997 when war veterans staged several demonstrations to demand compensations for their sacrifices made during the war. During the period of this case study many veterans complained that even those who were physically handicapped or suffered from mental problems due to the war did not receive any assistance from the government.

The propaganda meetings that had been organised by the project management did have some effect though. There, as well as in more informal contact with project staff, hints were dropped suggesting that if the people of Matsiwo A Ward continued to refuse the MZRDP, their area would never see the improvement of services nor infrastructure. Some people actually believed this and decided that even if the project was creating a lot of conflicts, it would be better to give up resistance against it otherwise the area would never see any government sponsored development. The spokesman for this group was a young man who was a member of the Apostolic Church who later was to stand candidate for the post of Ward Councillor. The issue of the project and its supposedly developmental aspects may have exacerbated an already existing opposition between elders and youth. The proponents of the project emphasized their affiliation with Christian (mainly Independent) churches, rejecting “the old people’s backward traditions”. The old Ward Councillor had chosen the side of the opponents of the MZRDP and had publicly denounced the project. When in 1994 Ward Councillor elections took place, he lost his support from the ZANU(PF) district branch, which decided to back the new candidate who was pro-MZRDP. The pro-MZRDP candidate won.

The new Ward Councillor tried to persuade the management of the MZRDP several times to continue with the implementation of the project, despite the directives of the spirit medium. The management issued statements that the re-distribution of land would finally take place, but nothing happened. Apart from the organisational problems of moving large numbers of people, most of them against their will, fear on the part of the project staff may have played a role. Quite a number of them were afraid that if they continued with their work the *Mhondoro* would punish them with illnesses, accidents and bad luck.

In 1995 project staff were withdrawn from Dande and DERUDE ended its activities. The remaining tasks were transferred to the District Development Fund. What would happen to the now officially illegal settlers was not clear. The project staff had referred the problem to the RDC, but neither the government officials nor the Ward Councillors serving in the DC so far have dared to deal with this problem.

V CONCLUSION

The case of the MZRDP shows at once the disastrous consequences of a far-reaching re-centralisation policy, as well as the difficulties of enforcing such a policy. Due to the complicated logistics of the project it could not be implemented without the help of local government structures. Yet, it also became clear how difficult it was to obtain this co-operation in the face of resistance by a major part of the population. Even the strategy of enlisting the help of traditional authorities did not help. Relations between chiefs and their subjects were misunderstood, the “conversion” of a chief is not automatically followed by that of his subjects. Caught between his subjects and the state the chief referred the case of the project to a *Mhondoro* spirit medium as the representative of the real owners of the land. Spirit mediums are not included in any legislation on local government or traditional authorities.²⁰ The involvement of the medium had unforeseen consequences for the project. *Mhondoro* have a strong

²⁰ Their rights and duties are laid down in the Traditional Medical Practitioners Act of 1981, which attempts to assign them a medical role instead of a political one.

ideological relation to the land. Mediums do not directly control access to land or land use patterns, but they offer possibilities for local communities to discuss land related issues (see Spierenburg 2000) and if their pronouncements reflect local public opinion these can become very important.

The swings between a recourse to traditional authorities and attempts to establish a modern local government structure, which have taken place since the Rhodesian period, resulted in complications and confusion about who is responsible for the allocation of land and other resources. A simple return of authority over land to traditional leaders is no longer an option. Some groups may not feel they are represented by these local government structures. Over time they have built their own “constituencies”. I agree with Alexander (1995) that most problems with local government structures stem from a lack of true decentralisation. If cries for a return to “tradition” are heard, these can be interpreted as serious demands for local control over land and other natural resources.

The new proposals for Village and Ward Assemblies propose a mix of “traditional” leadership and elected local government structures without a clear definition of the relation between the two. This is bound to create similar problems as described in this article. Furthermore, the assemblies will only be effective if substantive decision-making powers and resources are decentralised to these bodies. The RDC Capacity Building Programme seemed to be a serious step in the direction of real decentralisation. However, given recent developments in Zimbabwe the prospects of increasing local control seems rather gloomy.

REFERENCES

- ADF, African Development Fund (1986) *Appraisal Report for the Mid-Zambezi Valley Rural Development Project*, African Development Fund: Agricultural and Rural Development Department.
- Alexander, Jocelyn (1995) Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold: Processes of Post-War Political Change in Zimbabwe's Rural Areas, in: N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (eds.) *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War: Volume Two*, Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications (London: James Currey; Portsmouth: Heinemann), 175-191.
- Blanckenburg, Peter Von (1994) *Large Scale Commercial Farmers and Land Reform in Africa. The case of Zimbabwe*. Aldershot (etc.): Avebury.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C. (1979) Religion and authority in a Korekore community, *Africa*, Vol 49, 172-181.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C. (1987) *The Shona Peoples. An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion*. Revised edition. Gweru (Zimbabwe): Mambo Press.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C. (1987b) Guns and Rain: Taking Structural Analysis too far? Review article. *Africa*, Vol. 20, 263-74.
- CASS/WWF/Zimtrust Coordinating committee (1989) *Wildlife Utilization in Zimbabwe's Communal Lands Collaborative Programme Activities*, Unpubl. Report.
- Cheater, A.P. (1990) The Ideology of 'Communal' Land Tenure in Zimbabwe: Mythogenesis Enacted? *Africa*, 60, 188-207.
- Dambo Research Unit Loughborough University, U.K. (1987) *Utilisation of Dambos in Rural Development, a discussion paper*, Unpubl. report, University of Zimbabwe.
- Derman, W. (1993) *Recreating Common Property Management: Government Projects and Land Use Policy in the Mid-Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe*, Unpubl. paper, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, Harare.
- Derman, W. (1995) *Changing Land-Use in the Eastern Zambezi Valley: Socio-Economic Considerations*, Report submitted to World Wide Fund for Nature-Zimbabwe and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe.
- Derman, W. and J. Murombedzi (1994) Democracy, Development, and Human Rights in Zimbabwe, A Contradictory Terrain, *African Rural and Urban Studies*, Vol 1, 119-43.
- Drinkwater, Michael (1991) *The State and Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas*, Basingstoke/London: MacMillan
- Dzingirai, Vupenyu, (1995) *Take back your CAMPFIRE*, Unpubl. paper, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, Harare.
- Garbett, K. (1969) Spirit Mediums as Mediators in Valley Korekore Society, in: Beattie, J. & Middleton, J. (eds.), *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 104-127.
- Garbett, K. (1977) Disparate Regional Cults and a Unitary Field in Zimbabwe, in: R. Werbner (ed.) *Regional Cults*, London: Academic Press, 55-92.

- Hammar, Amanda (1998) *Speaking with Space: Displacements and Claims in the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe*, paper presented at *CODESRIA General Assembly*, Dakar (Senegal) 14-18 December
- Hasler, Richard (1996) *Agriculture, Foraging and Wildlife Resource Use in Africa, Cultural and Political Dynamics in the Zambezi Valley*, London/New York: Kegan Paul.
- Hill, K.A. (1994) Politicians, Farmers, and Ecologists. Commercial wildlife ranging and the politics of land in Zimbabwe. *JAAS* xxix,
- Lan, David (1985) *Guns and Rain, Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Lynam, T.J.P., J. Chitsike, M. Howard, P. Hodza, M.A. Khumalo, W. Standa Gunda (1996) *Assessing the Contributions of Renewable Resources to the Livelihoods of Communal Area Households in the Zambezi Valley of Zimbabwe*, Paper presented at the 'Pan African Symposium on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Community Participation', 24-27 June 1996, Harare, Zimbabwe.
- Mamdani, Mahmood (1996) *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, London: James Currey.
- Martin, R.B. (1986) *Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources, Working Document no.1/86, revised version*, Harare: Branch of Terrestrial Ecology, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management.
- McGregor, JoAnn (1995) Introduction. *Environment and History*, Vol 1, 253-56.
- Metcalf, S. (1993) *Rural Development and Biodiversity: Prospects for Wildlife Habitat on Communal Lands in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley*, Paper produced for the Southern African Wildlife Management Association Symposium on 'Biodiversity in Practice', Port Elizabeth, 29 June-1 July 1993.
- Moyo, Sam (1995) *The Land Question in Zimbabwe*, Harare: SAPES Books.
- Moyo, Sam, Peter Robinson, Yemi Katerere, Stuart Stevenson and Davison Gumbo (1991). *Zimbabwe's Environmental Dilemma: balancing resource inequities*, Harare: ZERO.
- Murombedzi, J. (1990) *The Need for Appropriate Local Level Common Property Resource Management Institutions in Communal Tenure Regimes*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe.
- Murombedzi, J. (1991) *Wetlands Conservation under Common Property Management Regimes in Zimbabwe*, Centre for Applied Social Sciences (University of Zimbabwe) NRM Occasional Papers, Harare.
- Murombedzi, J.C. (1992) *Decentralization or Recentralization? Implementing CAMPFIRE in the Omay Communal Lands of te Nyaminyami District*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe.
- Murphree, M.W., Murombedzi, J. & Hawks, R. (1989) *Survey of In-migration to Portions of the Kariba, Guruve and Kanyati Districts*, Unpubl. report, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe.
- Nabane, Nontokozo (1994) *A Gender Sensitive Analysis of a Community Based Wildlife Utilization Initiative in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences (University of Zimbabwe), NRM Occasional Papers Series.
- Nabane, Nontokozo; Vupenyu Dzingirai, and Elias Madzudzo (1996) *Membership in Common Property Regimes, A Case Study of Guruve, Binga, Tsholotsho and Bulilimamangwe CAMPFIRE Programmes*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences (University of Zimbabwe), NRM Occasional Papers Series.

- Olthof, Wim (1995) Wildlife Resources and Local Development: Experiences from Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE Programme, in: J.P.M. van den Breemer, C.A. Drijver and L.B. Venema (eds.), *Local Resource Management in Africa*, New York: Wiley, 111-128.
- Palmer, R. (1990). Land Reform in Zimbabwe, 1980-1990. *African Affairs*, 89, 163-81.
- Ranger, Terence O. (1982) *Survival, revival and disaster: Shona traditional elites under colonialism*, Paper presented to the Round Table on Elites and Colonisation, Paris.
- Ranger, Terence O. (1985) *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Ranger, T.O. (1993) The Communal Areas of Zimbabwe, in: Basset, T.J. and D.E. Crummey (eds.) *Land in African Agrarian Systems*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Ranger, T.O. 1993b The Invention of Tradition Revisited. In: Terrence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (Eds.) *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa, Essays in honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene*, London: Macmillan., 62-111.
- Roe, Emmory (1992) *Report on the amalgamation of district councils and rural councils*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe, Centre for Applied Social Sciences, CASS Occasional Paper Series - NRM.
- Scoones, I. and Cousins, B. (1991) *Contested Terrains: The Struggle For Control over Dambo Resources in Zimbabwe*, London: Drylands Programme, IIED.
- Spierenburg, Marja (1995) *The Role of the Mhondoro Cult in the Struggle for Control over Land in Dande (Northern Zimbabwe): Social Commentaries and the Influence of Adherents*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences (University of Zimbabwe), NRM Occasional Papers Series.
- Spierenburg, Marja (2000) Social Commentaries and the Influence of Adherents: The Role of the Mhondoro Cult in the Struggle over Land in Dande (northern Zimbabwe), in: R. Van Dijk., R. Reis & M. Spierenburg (eds.) *The Quest for Fruition through Ngoma, Political Aspects of Healing in Southern Africa*. London: JamesCurrey, Athens: Ohio University Press, 76-98.
- Thomas, Stephen J. (1992) *The Legacy of Dualism and Decision-making: The Prospects for Local Institutional Development in CAMPFIRE*, Harare: Centre for Applied Social Sciences / Branch of Terrestrial Ecology, Department of National Parks and Wildlife.
- Weiner, D., S. Moyo, B. Munslow and P. O'Keefe (1991) Land use and agricultural productivity in Zimbabwe, in: N.D. Mutizwa-Mangiza and A.H.J. Helmsing (eds.) *Rural Development and Planning in Zimbabwe*, Aldershot: Avesbury.
- Zimbabwe Government (1984) *Structure of Village Development Committees, Ward Development Committees and Extension Services*, Harare Government Printer.
- Zimbabwe Government (1985) Ministry of Land, Resettlement and Rural Development, *Communal Lands Development Plan, A 15 Year Development Strategy, First draft*, Harare: Government Printer.
- Zimbabwe Government (1985b) Ministry of Land, Resettlement and Rural Development, *Resettlement and Rural Development, Intensive Resettlement Policies and Procedures, Revised Version*, Harare: Government Printer.
- Zimbabwe Government (1985c) Ministry of Lands Resettlement and Rural Development. *Communal Lands Development Plan. A 15 year development strategy. First draft*. Harare: Government Printer

Zimbabwe Government (1994) Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Tenure Systems, under the Chairmanship of Professor Mandivamba Rukuni, Volume One: Main Report, Harare: Government Printer.

Zimbabwe Government (1999) Ministry of Local Government and National Housing, *Discussion Paper on the Vision of Local Government in Zimbabwe*, draft January 1999.

Zimbabwe Government (1999b) Ministry of Local Government and National Housing, Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programme, Fourth Six Monthly Programme Review Report 1st January to 30th September 1999, Draft November 1999.