The economic history of land tenure in Zimbabwe[1]

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Abstract
The conventional wisdom is that the white settlers who descended on Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, just over a century ago appropriated all or most of the best land, and that the indigenous majority was confined to inferior land across the country. This paper shows that the view is largely incorrect. In fact most of the land appropriated by the settlers was in the alleged inferior land categories (III, IV, and V), and Africans retained their customary ownership of most of the land they had actually been occupying at the time the settlers arrived.

However, for reasons that will be explained, the majority was never able fully to utilize its endowment, and never equaled the production levels attained by the white farmers from a similar aggregate holding. This enhanced the perception of an inequitable land distribution. Zimbabwe's land problem after 1980 is not that so much remained in white ownership (in fact as many as one third of white farms at independence had been transferred to black ownership by 2000) but that both all the old tribal areas and most of the new black-owned farms remained unproductive. The paper concludes by offering some lessons for South Africa and Australia with their similar land ownership history and structure.

The conventional wisdom is that the white settlers who descended on Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, just over a century ago, appropriated all or most of the best land, and that the indigenous majority was confined to inferior land across the country.[2] This paper does not defend that land seizure, but it shows that the view is only partially correct.

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[1] This paper was read at the Conference of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, held at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, Australian National University, 31st January 2008. The author acknowledges useful discussions and comments from Scott MacWilliam and Alastair McKenzie but they are not responsible for any remaining errors.

[2] For example the World Bank's Deininger *et al*. (2004) state that "in 1980 "about 15 million acres of predominantly good quality land was occupied by about 6,100 families of European descent, and 16.4 million hectares of less fertile land was occupied by a little less than 800,000 indigenous families". This echoed the equally false claim by Kinsey (1999:177). They also fail to mention that by 1971 as many as 300,000 African families were *de facto* permanently domiciled on the white farms, or that about 500,000 families were domiciled in the "white" towns and cities (Curtin 1973:661), where by 1963 they were able to buy or lease houses in designated townships. They also offered no source for their misleading assessment of the comparative land quality, see my Table 2 for the facts.

The history of land settlement in S. Rhodesia is a little more complex than the conventional wisdom. First, the prime motivation of those in the Pioneer Column (and its sponsor Cecil John Rhodes) of just under 200 hundred would–be settlers that arrived in what is now Harare in 1890, was in fact gold, not farmland. Secondly, when the gold proved elusive and farming seemed a better option, an Ndebele uprising in what is now Bulawayo in 1893, the Shona Rebellion of early 1896, and the second Matabele war later in 1896, made it clear that there were limits to the amount of land that could be "seized" (over and above the restrictions in the Charter of Rhodes' BSA Company). It is often overlooked that the British government was never directly in charge of the administration of what is now Zimbabwe, as that had in effect been outsourced to the Chartered Company from 1890 to 1923, and from 1923 to 1979 the white settlers had full internal self-government, with the British government retaining control only over external relations (Palley, 1966).

So the Company and the settlers naturally took the line of least resistance and occupied mostly the less populated areas. For a district-by-district account of how the land was "apportioned" between settlers and the original occupiers, see Palmer (1977, Appendix I). It was a messy business – but far removed from what was happening in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. There was a nearly endless process of negotiation between the administration, which had genuine concerns to avoid creation of a wholly landless indigenous population, and the ever-importunate settlers.

The outcome was the evolution of land apportionment shown in Table 1 and Fig.1, such that by 1970 the country had in effect been equally divided up into black and white areas, inequitably on a per capita basis, of course, but rather different from South Africa where the area wholly assigned to Africans was never more than 13 per cent, as against Rhodesia's 49 per cent. Arguably game reserves and forests benefited all equally. African suburbs in the towns are absent from these statistics, as they deem all towns to be 100 per cent white occupied.[3]

[3] In 1971 there were 779,000 African wage earners in the "non-African" areas, of whom 301,000 were engaged in the agriculture and forestry sector (the corresponding numbers of non-African employees were 108,100 and 4,490) – see Curtin (1973:661).

Fig.1 Land Apportionment in Zimbabwe 1970

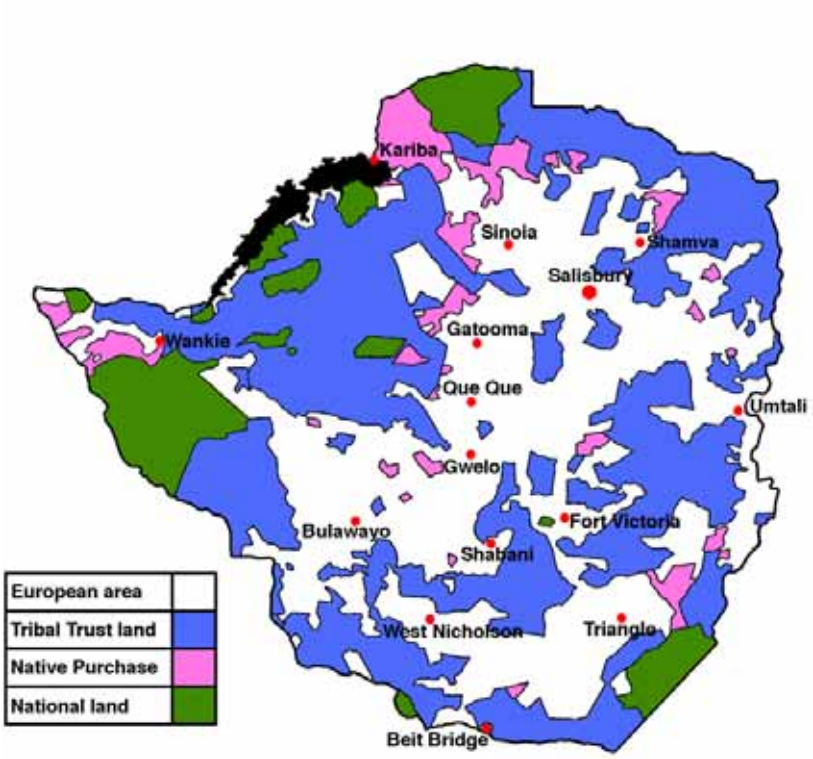

Table 1
Land Apportionment 1900-1970
Millions of acres

	1900	1930	1959	1970	1970 by %
European	15.80	49.15	48.06	44.90	46.17
Reserves	24.90	21.60	21.02	39.90	41.02
NPAs		7.46	8.05	3.70	3.80
Wankie GR			4.00	4.00	4.11
Forest		0.59	3.19	3.19	3.28
Undetermined	56.56	18.46	12.94	1.57	1.61
Total	97.26	97.26	97.26	97.26	100
- total African %	25.60	29.88	29.89	44.83	44.83

Sources: Yudelman 1964; Palmer 1977

The data in Table 2 reveal a more nuanced outcome. While 87 per cent of Africans' total land holding was in the less favoured zones III, IV, and V, with their more uncertain rainfall and variable soils, no less than 72 per cent of the whites' land was in the same areas. Moreover some of the biggest alienated holdings (many of them owned by ranching companies) were in Zone V, most of which was in the west of the country, namely Matabeleland. Clearly more than two-thirds of the settlers' landholdings were in the drought-prone Zones III-V, contrary to the received view of all previous discussions of land in Zimbabwe, especially those in Palmer (1977) and the World Bank study (Deininger *et al.* 2004).

Non-Africans certainly owned most of Zone I with its excellent red soils and abundant rainfall, but that Zone accounted for only just over one per cent of the country's total land area. Fortuitously the very small areas of thick red loamy soils that dominate Zone I had been largely uninhabited because hoe-based farming could not work these heavy soils, which need the ox-drawn ploughs that the Shona had yet to devise as of 1890. However, plainly on a per capita basis Zimbabwe's land allocation was "inequitable", yet, ironically, the Mugabe Government's own data show that in 1995 there was less African poverty in the large-scale commercial farming sector than in the communal.

Table 2
Land ownership in Zimbabwe
by climatic and soil zones
(square miles)

					Cumulative % by Zone	
Zones	**African**	**non-African**	**Total**	**Zonal %**	**African**	**Non-African**
1	30	1,710	1,740	1.13	100.00	100.00
2a	2,400	11,130	13,530	8.81	99.95	98.04
2b	3,240	6,639	9,879	6.43	96.34	85.28
2c	3,070	4,670	7,740	5.04	91.46	77.66
3	29,500	29,260	58,760	38.25	86.84	72.31
4a	4,970	11,000	15,970	10.39	42.44	38.76
4b	11,040	12,070	23,110	15.04	34.95	26.14
5	12,180	10,730	22,910	14.91	18.34	12.30
All Zones	66,430	87,209	153,639	100		

Key
Zone 1 Suitable for afforstation, fruit and intensive animal production
Zone 2a Suitable for intensive farming
Zone 2b Suitable for intensive farming but subject to drought
Zone 2c Limited intensive farming
Zone 3 Suitable for fodder & drought resistant crops but subject to drought
Zone 4a Uncertain but suitable for some fodder & drought resistant crops
Zone 4b Unsuitable for grain but possible to grow fodder crops
Zone 5 Suitable only for extensive cattle ranching
Source Yudelman 1964, p.77

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Table 3: Poverty by Land Type in 1995

Sectional Classification	Very Poor(%)	Poor(%)	Non-Poor(%)
Communal Lands	71	13	17
Large Scale Commercial farms	35	22	43
Small Scale commercial Farms	57	13	30
Urban Areas	21	18	60

Source: Central Statistical Office 1998.

Another of the stylized facts about Zimbabwe's land history that is misleading is that it was white *individuals* who owned the rather small total of 6,100 farms held under freehold title by 1980. In fact from the earliest days the BSA Company had difficulty getting enough individuals to buy farms, so that by 1899 more than half of the alienated land of some 16 million acres (6.3 mn hectares, and 16 per cent of the total land area of about 100 million acres) was owned by companies and syndicates – that basic pattern persisted until 2000, with the largest holdings throughout the country still owned by various multinational companies, notably the cattle ranches of Matabeleland, the sugar estates at Triangle and Chiredzi, and the forest, tea, and coffee plantations of Manicaland. For example, of 1,471 farms identified for take-over in 1998, company ownership accounted for 59 per cent by number and 72 per cent of the 3.99 million hectares (Moyo 2000: 17).

Companies have no skin colour that I am aware of, but are just as easily expropriated as individual farmers! To President Mugabe's government of course it matters not a jot whether it was an individual or a company that had seized black land in the 1890s – and with his unique blend of racism and Marxism both ideologies vindicate expropriation of all modern enterprise formats, with banks and mines next on the list.[4]

Moreover when white settlement created markets for whatever small surplus the Shona could produce, population growth resulting from the dramatic improvement in health services (before 1890 there were none) soon eroded it in a classic Malthusian trap.[5] Poulton *et al.* (2007) note that only 5% of cattle bought by the Cold Storage Commission in the 1990s was from the smallholder sector.

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[4] For a Marxist analysis of Rhodesia's economy, see Arrighi (1974) - as so often he got it wrong, it was not the African proletariat (employees of the white farmers and miners *et al.*) who rose up in the 1970s, but the un-proletarianized (unemployed) peasantry. While all are now worse off, the employed proletariat has lost most.

[5] Within weeks of the arrival of the first settlers in 1890, two English nurses, Rose Blennerhasset and Lucy Sleeman, of their own volition walked from Beira in Mozambique to what is now Mutare in Zimbabwe and established the country's first hospital, in Penhalonga. They soon treated all without fear or favour and established cordial relations with the traditional authorities, including King M'tasa (putative ancestor of President Mugabe's likeliest successor, Didymus Mutasa, on record as now seeking expulsion of all whites) (Blennerhassett and Sleeman, 1969). Do not expect to find this citation in any publication emanating from the World Bank or IDS!

The indigenous majority did not make as good use of its nearly equal total allocation as compared with white farmers using much the same land types. The disproportion in production from white- and black-occupied farmland created and over time enhanced the perception of an inequitable land distribution. That perception is vividly illustrated in the Google Earth photo in Fig.3 of the Chitonga farming area in West Mashonaland during the early expropriations up to 2005 (from Craig Richardson, 2006b) and the later view in Fig.4 (taken by Pamela Swadling for this paper from Google Earth) of the situation in 2007 by when that process was complete.

Clearly the topography of the adjoining black and white farmlands is very similar, and they share the same rivers, but the visual impression in Fig.3 of starkly discrepant relative productivity is very striking. The ability of the white farmers with their land title to raise the significant capital needed to build the many large dams in their area is very evident, relative to their absence in the communal area. Dams and the associated irrigation enable farmers of any colour to create rainfall security even in a Zone III area like Chitonga. But Fig. 4 shows that the reversion of the white areas to effective untitled or communal ownership by 2008 led to the drying up of the dams and an evident widespread abandonment of cultivation (partly because of the cessation of irrigation).

It might be thought that the coming of "freedom" in 1980 would have brought an end to the previous largely race-based land allocation, but it did not. While white-owned farmland became available for purchase by all Zimbabweans, white or black, and the British government provided £50 million to finance purchases of white farms by black Zimbabweans, no Zimbabweans, black or white, were legally enabled to purchase farms in the former Tribal Trust Lands, where the pre-historic (i.e. pre-white settlement) customary land tenure system remained in full force.

After 2000 both whites and blacks were prevented from acquiring land title in nearly all the country – and since the constitutional amendments of 2002, no white can own or occupy farmland anywhere at all, and even the blacks are excluded from all titled ownership (as in Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China). Although blacks in former white farmlands do have some occupation rights, these are removable in favour of the cleptocracy – and have already often been so removed, for example by cabinet ministers like Didymus Mutasa and Stan Mudenge[6]. Another minister, Nathan Shamuyarira, was implicated in the forcible takeover of Ben Freeth's Mount Carmel mango farm at Chegutu in Mashonaland West [7]. None of these demean themselves by undertaking any farming, but enjoy weekend retreats in the charming residences of the expelled farmers. For earlier cases, see Todd (2007).

Thus the real problem with land after 1980 is not that so much remained in white ownership as that while all the old tribal areas remained unproductive, most of the 71,000 new black-owned farms created in the land (3.5 million hectares) bought from some 2,000 white farmers using the British government's grant, soon lapsed into the same state, partly because of their small average size, and partly because none of the

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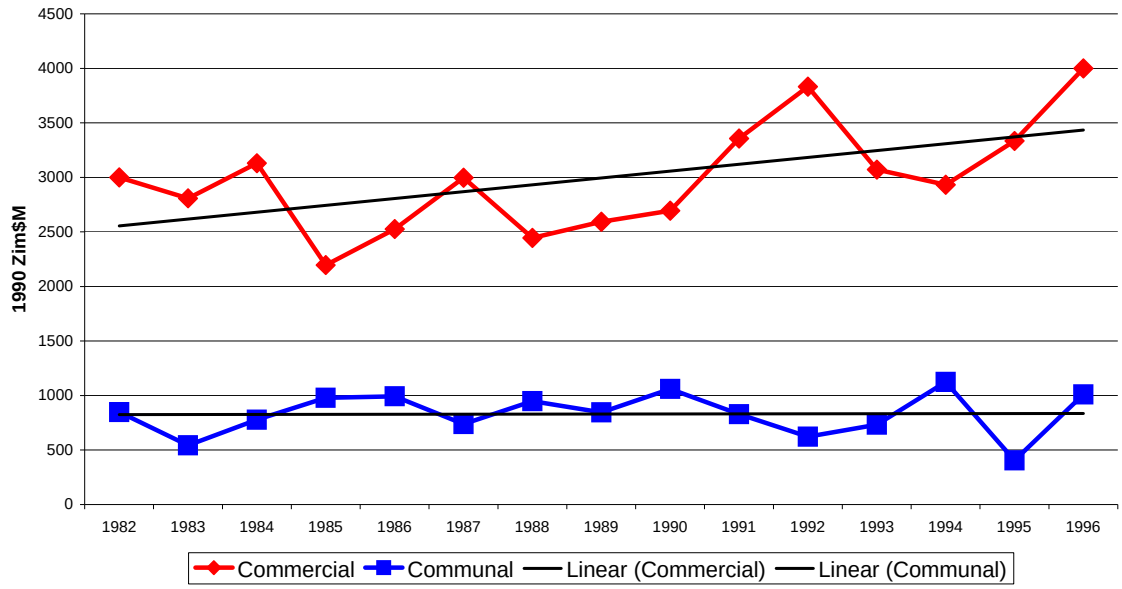
[6] See report by Godfrey Mutimba "Mutasa orders war veterans off farm" (in favour of Stan Mudenge), www.zimbabwesituation.com, 2 July 2006. The farm in question was Chikore, in Masvingo (formerly Fort Victoria); Mudenge even appropriated the veterans' crops.

[7] Report by Violet Gonda, www.zimbabwesituation.com, 14 February 2007.

resettled households obtained documented title (Kinsey 1999). The outcome even before the farm invasions of 2000 is evident in Fig.2, showing no growth in communal output, despite the inclusion of the output of the 70,000 new settlers on over 3 million hectares of formerly white land, while despite losing those 3 million hectares the commercial sector showed considerable growth between 1982 and 1996.

The inability of Zimbabwe's own leading analyst of the "land reform" programme to assess or understand such data is striking. Instead, Moyo claims economic efficiency would be promoted "through reducing the size of land holdings…" (2000:7), and that it is a "myth" that "freehold tenure and existing private land markets are effective and absolutely superior to other forms of tenure such as leasehold and customary (so-called communal) tenure (2000:7)[8]. He concludes "that the dominant fear that state-led land reform will bring economic collapse is unfounded" (2000:5). If Zimbabwe's economy is not now (February 2008) in a collapsed state, what would be such a state, with inflation at 26,000 per cent a year and rising, and Z$4 billion (at the 2000 denomination) now needed to buy one US dollar? Such hyper-inflation results from the deficiency of supply relative to the availability of nominal demand.

Fig.2 Trends in commercial and communal (including resettled farmers) output Zimbabwe 1982-1996



Source: Poulton et al., 2002, Table 9

A World Bank survey in 1997 of some of the settlement schemes that were established on formerly white owned farms confirms the indication in my Fig.4 as well as earlier findings, that on a per capita basis "land reform households are almost

[8] Secure and renewable leasehold title is as good in all respects as freehold – most farms in England were held on leases until the second half of the last century. The evidence in Fig. 4 was available to Moyo (2000) and shows the poor production outcomes of his preferred model even before the expropriations of 2000-2007.

as poor as communal households" (Deininger *et al*., 2004:1698).[9] These authors failed to notice that this finding contradicted their own claims (see my footnote 2 above) about the relative quality of the land in the "white" and the communal areas, for if the former was so high and the latter so poor, why was there so little difference in outcome - despite all the resources poured into the resettled farmers, but not those in the communal areas?

The resulting declining trend in crop production in the land reform areas was accelerated by the expropriation that began in 2000 and was completed by 2007, of virtually all the remaining 4,500 white farms. Those who were allocated the expropriated farms received no titles, and that effectively removed the total farm sector from the purview of the banking sector.

Fig.3 The Chitonga area of Mashonaland West, c.2004

Source: Craig Richardson, 2006b.

It is evident from Fig.3 that the communal and commercial farmland areas share the same topography and the same river system. The greenery of the commercial farms would appear to owe something to their many dams, evidently absent from the communal area, despite having the same rivers. The contrast between the two areas is

[9] Deininger's co-author Kinsey (1999) had originally claimed the resettled farmers' had much larger incomes than their peers in the villages from which the former had been drawn, but in both Hoogeveen and Kinsey (2001) and Deininger *et al.* (2004), Kinsey revises that finding because there was no significant *per capita* income difference between the comparator households. This resulted from correcting sampling bias in Kinsey (1999).

at odds with the belief of Griffin *et al.* (2002) that areas with greater population density and therefore greater availability of labour, as in the communal lands, would be more productive than those with a lesser population density, and with the similar belief of Kinsey (1999:176) that small-scale farms like those on the left in Fig.3 are likely to be more productive than the large farms on the right. Similarly it is evident from Fig.4 that by 2007, after the land invasions, there were fewer functioning dams in the former commercial or "white" farmland, and that many fields had become barren.

Fig.4 The same area of Mashonaland West, 2007/08

Source: Google Earth, accessed by Pamela Swadling, 29 January 2008.

Such considerations do not however weigh on academic defenders of Zimbabwe's post-2000 "land reform" programme, notably Chaumba et al. (2003a):

> This paper examines the land occupations and fast-track resettlement process in Chiredzi District in Zimbabwe's southeast lowveld and argues that their broad-brush representation as chaotic, violent, un-modern and unplanned obfuscates two overlapping phases underpinned by [the] same logic. Rather than constituting a descent into anarchy, the state bureaucracy has been able to enact a rapid return to 'technocratic type' – if, indeed, this ever went away. There has been a continuity of the project of modernity. It argues that the ostensible disorder and chaos of the farm invasions is really a different kind of order.

The paper proceeds to claim that the resettlement of what had been "a heavily forested cattle and game ranch" (Fair Range Ranch) was carried out in a well-planned manner. Chaumba *et al* see the admitted "collapse in the rule of law" in 2001 as merely "normalizing of the abnormal" (2003a:2). They add that

> All the illicit activities on these farms that rapidly became normalized (!) on Fair Range included closing farm roads; cutting down trees; poaching; cattle theft and mutilation; starting fires; attacking game guards; demanding meat and mealie meal from white farmers; looting property and sugar cane; ordering farmers, farm workers and neighbouring villagers to attend political rallies; defying police orders, and at one stage appropriating a police vehicle (2003a: 10).

After invoking Foucault of all people, these authors conclude that efforts by the government's agricultural services "to reintroduce some planning into this process mean that we are not seeing a descent into the 'Heart of Darkness' and an abandonment of the development project" (2003a: 17-18). However they offer no data either in this or their second paper (Chaumba *et al.* 2003b) to indicate that the occupation of Fair Range Ranch in 2000 had led to any production at all by 2003, let alone the "sustainable livelihoods" of their series title.

Fair Range ranch was not alone in being taken over in 2000:

> In the vicinity of Sangwe communal area in Chiredzi District almost without exception all the large-scale commercial farms were occupied. These were principally cattle and game ranches and included properties in the well-known Save Valley Conservancy and the Malilangwe Conservation Trust…the state-owned Nuanetsi Ranch and a portion of Gonarezhou National Park were also occupied, as was a smallholder irrigation scheme in Sangwe communal area itself. The Anglo-American and Tongaat-Hullet owned irrigated sugar estates at Hippo Valley and Triangle near Chiredzi were largely avoided. (2003b: 5). [10]

For a general view of the Chiredzi area including the sugar states and the nearby communal areas, see Fig.5 below (from Google Earth 2008). Ironically the verdant green Chiredzi sugar-estate (and the nearby Triangle estates) are both in "Natural region" Zone V, allegedly with poor soils and inadequate rainfall. In fact the Kyle Dam that was built near the then Fort Victoria to the north in the 1960s delivers water for irrigation of the sugar cane fields, an illustration of how the unusable Zone V to which allegedly African farmers were confined after 1900 (according to Palmer, 1977, and Kinsey 1999 *et al.)* can be made productive with the use of some investment in infrastructure. But for how much longer, when the preference of Chaumba *et al.* (2003) for reversion to small-scale dry-land agriculture is adopted?

[10] Chaumba, J., Scoones, I. and Wolmer, W. (2003b) 'New politics, New livelihoods: changes in the Zimbabwean lowveld since the farm occupations of 2000'. *Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Research Paper 3*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Fig. 5. The sugar estates at Chiredzi and neighbouring “resettled areas”, 2008.

Source: Google Earth (accessed by Pamela Swadling, 29 January 2008).[11]

Craig Richardson has extensively documented the consequences of Zimbabwe’s expropriation and the failure to issue negotiable title to the new settlers (most recently 2007a and b). They include by 2006 the loss of up to 70 per cent of the normal production level of crops like tobacco, wheat, soya, groundnuts, coffee, sugar, and sunflowers (2007a: 471). These figures give the lie to Moyo’s rejection (2000:14) of predictions by the Zimbabwe Tobacco Association in 1998 that tobacco sales would decline by at least 50 per cent because of “land transfers”. In fact, tobacco export sales in 2007 fell to 70,000 tonnes, from 230,000 tonnes in 2000, over 60 per cent, and areas under cultivation of all major commercial crops fell by at least half:

> The Daily Mirror of 8th February 2006 quoted research conducted by Chemplex Corporation, the fertiliser manufacturer, on agricultural productivity in Zimbabwe since 1999. Almost all statistics point toward sharp decline in hectarage and production. For example in respect of tobacco, the prime cash crop, hectarage declined from 86 000 in the 1999-2000 season to 46 000 in 2002-03 season and stands at 35000 this current season. This is less

[11] Note that the change in colour on the south-west (left hand side) is due to Google, that area is still part of the sugar estate; the resettled areas are on the north-west and north-east sides.

than half of the hectarage for the major foreign currency earner before the invasions leading to the land redistribution exercise (Magaisa 2006).

The outcome is the desperate food shortages from which all but Zimbabwean elites have suffered since 2000, with most in both urban and rural areas now dependent either on food aid or maize imported by the government from Malawi and Zambia.

Are there any lessons for South Africa and Australia with their similar land ownership history and structure?

We should recall the basis of "customary" land tenure that obtained in all of both South Africa and Zimbabwe before white settlement. The underlying principle according to Gluckman is that rights to land "are an incident of political and social status. By virtue of membership in the nation or tribe, every citizen was entitled to claim some land, from the king or chief, or from such political unit as exists in the absence of chiefly authority" (1965: 78). In South Africa that regime still broadly applies in the former Bantustans and is currently being consolidated in the Communal Lands Act of 2004. Revealing statements by President Mbeki and his deputy suggest they will ignore what Richardson (2006a) calls the "sobering lesson" of the Zimbabwe case. He cites President Mbeki's 2006 State of the Nation speech as expressing interest in revisiting the "willing-buyer, willing-seller" principle for land redistribution, and the government is now beginning to expropriate farmland at state-determined prices. Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka agreed that the pace of land reform should be accelerated: "That's why we may need the skills of Zimbabwe to help us" (quoted in Richardson 2006a).

The Communal Land Rights Act (CLRA) in 2004 had already paved the way for terminating the individualized land rights that had been emerging in the former Bantustans. Ironically this new legislation seems almost to mirror the Mabo Native Title arrangements in Australia's Northern Territory. Just as in the NT, the CLRA transfers formal title of communal land from the state to a community, which must register its rules before it can be recognized as a "juristic personality" legally capable of owning land. Individual members are issued with a Deed of Communal Land Right, which can be upgraded to freehold title if the community agrees.

The Minister must make a determination on whether or not 'old order rights' (i.e. communal or individual land rights derived from past laws and practices, including 'customary law and usage') should be converted into 'new order rights', and must determine the nature and extent of such rights. New order rights can be registered in the name of a 'community' or a person, but where title is transferred to a 'community' the individual new order rights are not equivalent to (individual) title.[12]

This is all very fine, and no doubt the Gluckman school of social anthropologists would endorse South Africa's new Communal Lands Act, just as the Mabo Act was largely inspired by that school. But none of the standard texts on the economic history of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Australia makes much of the abysmally low levels of production and productivity in the large areas, even in South Africa, where this customary regime holds sway. Regrettably, communalists like those of the Institute of

[12] I owe these details to Ben Cousins (2007).

Development Studies in Brighton and elsewhere have carried the day in all three countries, having also captured donors like the World Bank, Britain's Department for International Development, and Australia's AusAid that are all too often opposed to individual land title in countries of the South Pacific like Papua New Guinea (e.g. reply by an AusAid adviser (Fingleton 2007) to Curtin & Lea 2006).

A corrective that deserves to be read daily to all staff of those agencies is the paper by John Sender and Deborah Johnston (2004), with its instructive title "Searching for a Weapon of Mass Production in rural Africa: unconvincing arguments for Land Reform". They take apart the fallacious argument of the IDS-Sussex school led by Keith Griffin (2002), and endorsed by Zimbabwe's Sam Moyo (2000) that

> Given that labour is abundant (and hence has a low opportunity cost) and land and capital are scarce (and hence have relatively high opportunity costs), small farmers have a higher total productivity than large and hence utilize resources more effectively.

Sender and Johnston cite data from Zimbabwe, before the land invasions that Griffin tacitly supports, which totally refute his theory, since "large scale commercial farms achieve the highest yields everywhere in Zimbabwe" (Deininger and Binswanger, (1992) *pace* Deininger *et al* 2004). Sender and Johnston also provide similar data from South Africa. Their analysis of land redistribution programmes in South Africa shows "not only that the poorest did not acquire land, but also that they suffered declines in rural wage earning opportunities that are crucial for their survival".

My Table 4 showing the comparative productivity of untitled and titled small-scale farms in Zambia provides confirmation of the large difference title makes to farm productivity and household income. Of course, in the world of luminaries like Griffin (2002) and Chaumba *et al.* (2003), it would be better if all Zambian households "enjoyed" the same level of income of the households barely subsisting on their undocumented farms (U$159 p.a.), rather than that all should aspire to the 4 times larger incomes (US$671) available to those with full title.

Table 4
Land titling and output
Zambia 2001

	No doc Cust. Land	No doc State land	HHH Reli Holds Lease	HHH reli Hold title	HHH Holds Lease	HHH Holds title
Median farm size, ha.	4	7	5.75	5	20	41.5
Area cult., median 2000-2	2.4	3.8	4	3.6	4.5	5.8
% using fertilizer	41	61	55	56	71	66
Credit use - median, Kwa	-	20,000	115,000	166,500	353,349	200,000
Crop value per hectare, K	222,300	292,671	200,225	323,309	333,217	388,479
- in US$ (approx)	66.20	87.16	59.63	96.28	99.23	115.69
Household income, US$	158.88	331.19	238.51	346.61	446.54	670.99

Source: Robert Smith 2004

The data in Table 4 are from a study area near the sugar estates of Mazabuka. The general view of the area in my Fig.6 shows both the sugar estate and the adjoining small-scale farms that contrast vividly with the barren environs of the Chiredzi sugar estate (Fig. 5).

Fig.6 Sugar estate and farms, Mazabuka, Zambia, 2007

Source: Google Earth (accessed by Pamela Swadling, 29 January 2008)

Native Title in Australia

Ross Garnaut's recent Lee lecture (2007) noted the huge productive potential of northern Australia – but most of that very large area of well watered and fertile soils is off limits to all white Australians with their capital and expertise (the present government is reinstating the permit system which denies access to all non-black Australians other than public servants and approved journalists). The Mabo Native Title Act may be a beautiful piece of legal artifice, but creating communal title across most of northern Australia cannot be said to have unleashed a massive surge in agricultural output and investment, despite rainfall and soils that graziers and wheat farmers in south-eastern Australia cannot imagine in their wildest dreams.

As Table 5 shows, Australia's Northern Territory where the Mabo Act largely holds sway has the lowest level of agricultural and livestock productivity of any of Australia's states and territories (there is virtually no agriculture in the Australian Capital Territory, so the data in the penultimate column in effect refer only to the NT). For example, while the NT livestock herd is about 6 per cent of the national total, the total value of its livestock sales (including livestock products) is less than one per cent of the national total.

Table 5
Agricultural Output of Australia's States and Territories
1998-1999

	NSW	Victoria	Queensland	S Australia	W Australia	Tasmania	NT & ACT	Australia
Crop sales, $m	3,819.1	1,978.5	3,190.8	1,840.2	2,471.2	236.1	28.4	13,564.3
Livestock sales, Sm	1,869.2	962.8	2,144.9	482.8	659.8	154.8	99.1	6,373.4
Livestock products, $m	1,208.8	2,006.8	577.2	385.7	616.9	189.6	1.5	4,986.5
Value added, $m	3,342.8	2,492.5	2,898.4	1,488.4	1,557.9	321.6	79.8	12,181.4
Net Capex, $m	700.0	481.9	610.8	324.1	425.1	38.9	-7.70	2,573.1
Area of crops, '000 ha	6,173.0	2,749.0	3,014.0	3,648.0	7,597.0	76.0	7.0	23,264.0
Cattle, '000	6,291.0	4,125.0	10,748.0	1,183.0	1,931.0	724.0	1,567.0	26,578.0

Source: ABS, Yearbook 2001.

Conclusion

I have shown that the general belief that the whites who settled in Zimbabwe after 1890 appropriated all the best potential agricultural land and left only the worst to the indigenes is without foundation. In fact, over 70 per cent of white owned land was in the same allegedly less productive – in terms of soils and rainfall – areas as 82 per cent of the land occupied by the blacks. The much greater output of white-owned than of black-owned farms in the often identical low potential areas (Fig.2 above) clearly owed everything to the combination of greater human capital of the former with their greater access to capital due to "the hidden architecture" of secure title.[13]

This paper has not sought to defend the process whereby a small alien minority acquired exclusive access to nearly half of Zimbabwe's total land area. But then the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 was also a land grab. The Zimbabwe Constitution of 1980 seemed to hold out a future for both its black and white citizens, and provided for a process of land acquisition by blacks from white on a willing seller, willing buyer basis. Over 70,000 black farmers were settled on former white farms in the 1980s, but received no title. The "fast-tracking" of that process by outright expropriation as permitted in legislation in 1992 led not only to expulsion of virtually all whites from farm land but to complete replacement of freehold and leasehold title by the undocumented customary model.

Apologists for this process like Moyo (2000) and Chaumba et al. (2003) appear ignorant of the trend in most countries including China for gradual increases in average farm size, because of the economic advantages of economies of scale. Zimbabwe has reinstated the subsistence production that prevailed across the whole country in 1890. This is already demonstrably unsustainable for a country half of whose population had become urbanized by the 1990s.

Finally, this paper's findings show once again the stark choice between equality of outcome, at the low level that obtains wherever there is only communal or customary land title, as now in Zimbabwe, South Africa's former Bantustans, and Australia's Northern Territory, and the higher and faster growing incomes for all that secure title permits, even if at the cost of some degree of relative inequality.

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[13] Richardson 2006a.

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