

White Farms, Black Farmers

By Sam Vaknin

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The Western press casts him in the role of an African Saddam Hussein. Neighboring leaders supported his policies but then succumbed to diplomacy and world opinion and, with a few notable exceptions, shunned him. The opposition in and its mouthpieces accuse him - justly - of brutal disregard for human, civil, and political rights and of undermining the rule of law.

All he wants, insists Comrade - his official party title - Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is to right an ancient wrong by returning land, expropriated by white settlers, to its rightful black owners. Most of the beneficiaries, being war veterans, happen to support his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF, and its profligate largesse:

"We must deliver the land unencumbered by impediments to its rightful owners. It is theirs by birth; it is theirs by natural and legal right. It is theirs by struggle. Indeed their(s) by legacy." - he thundered in a speech he made to the Central Committee of his party in March 2001 in response to mounting multi-annual pressures from war veteran associations.

It was Margaret Thatcher of Falklands fame who, after two decades of fierce fighting, capitulated to rebels, headed by Mugabe. The Iron Lady handed to them, in the Lancaster House agreement, an independent Zimbabwe - literally, "Great Stone House". The racist Rhodesia was no more. But the agreement enshrined the property rights of white farmers until 1990 and has, thus, sown the seeds of the current chaos.

Many nostalgic white settlers in Zimbabwe - mostly descendents of British invaders at the end of the 19th century - still believe in their cultural - if not genetic - superiority. Their forefathers bought indigenous land from commercial outfits supported by the British Crown. The blacks - their plots and livestock confiscated - were resettled in barren "communal areas", akin to Native-American reserves in the USA minus the gambling concessions.

Starting in 1893, successive uprisings were bloodily suppressed by the colonizers and the British government. A particularly virulent strain of apartheid was introduced. By 1914, notes Steve Lawton in "British Colonialism, Zimbabwe's Land Reform and Settler Resistance", 3 percent of the population controlled 75 percent of the land. The blacks were "harshly restricted to a mere 23 per cent of the worst land in designated Reserves.

There were only 28,000 white settlers to nearly one million Africans in Zimbabwe at this time."

Land ownership hasn't changed much since. The 1930 "Land Apportionment Act" perpetuated the glaring inequality. At independence, according to "Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution" edited by Mandivamba Rukuni and Carl Eicher and published in 1994 by the University of Zimbabwe Publications, 6000 white commercial farms occupied 45 percent of all agricultural land - compared to only 5 percent tilled by 8500 black farmers. Another 70,000 black families futilely cultivated the infertile remaining half of the soil.

As black population exploded, poverty and repression combined to give rise to anti-white guerilla movements. The rest is history. The first post-independence land reform and resettlement program lasted 17 years, until 1997. It targeted refugees, internally displaced people, and squatters and its aims were, as Petrunella Chaminuka, a researcher at SAPES Trust Agrarian Reform Programme in Zimbabwe, summarizes a 1990 government discussion paper in the "Workers' Weekly":

"To redress past grievances over land alienation, to alleviate population pressure in the communal areas and to achieve national stability and progress. The programme was designed to enhance smallholder food and cash crop production, achieve food self-sufficiency and improve equity in income distribution."

Land reform was an act of anti-colonialist, ideologically-motivated defiance. The first lots went to landless - and utterly unskilled - blacks. Surprisingly, theirs was a success story. They cultivated the land ably and production increased. Certified farmers and agronomists, though, had to wait their turn until the National Land Policy of 1990 which allowed for compulsory land purchases by the government. There was no master plan of resettlement and infrastructure deficiencies combined with plot fragmentation to render many new farms economically unviable.

As ready inventory dried up, the price of land soared. Droughts compounded this sorry state and by the late 1980's yields were down and squatting resurged. Unemployment forced people back into rural areas. Egged on by multilateral lenders, white farmers, and Western commercial interests, the government further exacerbated the situation by allocating enormous tracts of land to horticulture, ostrich farming, crocodile farming, ranching and tourism thus further depleting the anyhow meager stock of arable acreage.

International outcry against compulsory acquisitions or targeting of c. 1600 farms forced the Zimbabwean government and its donors to come up in 1997-9 with a second land reform and resettlement programme and the Inception Phase Framework Plan. Contrary to disinformation in the Western media, white farmers and NGO's were regularly consulted in the preparation of both documents.

In what proved to be a prophetic statement, the aptly named Barbara Kafka of the World Bank, quoted by IPS, gave this warning in the September 1998 donor conference:

"We are delighted that the government has called this conference as a key step in our working together to make sure that Zimbabwe reaps the results it deserves from its land

reform programme ... Nevertheless, we must not be naive. The downside risks are high. There is abundant international experience to show that poorly executed land reform can carry high social and economic costs ... For instance, a programme that does not respect property rights or does not provide sufficient support to new settlers, is underfunded or is excessively bureaucratic and costly, or simply results in large numbers of displaced farm workers, can have very negative outcomes in terms of investment, production, jobs and social stability."

This second phase broke down in mutual recriminations. The government made an election issue out of the much-heralded reform and the donors delivered far less than they promised. Acutely aware of this friction, white farmers declined to offer land for sale.

Even as lawless invasions of private property recommenced in earnest, the government initiated the Fast Track Land Reform Plan in mid-2000. It envisioned the purchase of between 5-8 million of hectares of agricultural land, the resettlement of the rural indigent, the provision of infrastructure, technical advice and inputs by both civil and military authorities and the involvement of all "stakeholders" - especially white commercial farmers - in an on-going dialog in the framework of the Zimbabwe Joint Resettlement Initiative.

But the Plan fast deteriorated into strong-arm, threat-laden, and litigious confiscation of white property. Following a setback in the polls - its proposed constitution was rejected - ZANU-PF aided and abetted in the disorderly - and, sometimes, lethal - requisitioning of farms by a mob of war veterans, mock veterans, petty criminals, the rural dispossessed, party hacks, and even middle class urbanites. Ironically, the very anarchic nature of the process deterred genuine and the long term settlers.

About 2000 farms were thus impounded by the end of last year. The government refused to compensate farmers for the land seized insisting that such reparations should be paid by Britain. It did, however, provide pitiful sums for infrastructure added to the land by the white settlers.

As pandemic corruption, lawlessness, and mismanagement brought the country to the brink of insolvency and famine, Mugabe tainted with anti-Western diatribe his merited crusade for reversing past injustices. He lashed at the IMF and the World bank, at Britain and the USA, at white farmers and foreign capital. Xenophobia - no less that patriotism - is the refuge of the scoundrel in Africa.

In 1997, Britain's New Labor government ceased funding the acquisition of land from white farmers. Donors demanded matching funds from destitute Zimbabwe. By 1999, the entire West - spearheaded by the IMF - disengaged. Zimbabwe was severed from the global financial system.

This was followed by sanctions threatened by the EU and partly imposed the USA and the Commonwealth. Sanctions were also urged by prescriptive think tanks, such as the International Crisis Group, and even by corporate and banking groups, such as Britain's Abbey National.

Yet, discarding land reform together with Mugabe would be unwise. The problems - some of which are ignored even by the Zimbabwean authorities - are real. A negligible white minority owns vast swathes of forcibly obtained prime arable land in a predominantly black country.

A comprehensive - and just - land reform would cater to farm hands as well. They are mostly black - about one fifth of the population, counting their dependants. They live in shantytown-like facilities on the farms with little access to potable water, sanitation, electricity, phones, or other amenities. They were not even entitled to resettlement until recently.

According to "Rural poverty: Commercial farm workers and Land Reform in Zimbabwe", a paper presented at the SARPAN conference on Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation in Southern Africa, in June 2001, only about one third of the most destitute black farm workforce have been imported as casual and seasonal workers from neighboring countries.

The rest, contrary to government propaganda, are indigenous. Yet, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the government, preoccupied with relieving growing tensions in the communal areas and rewarding its own supporters and cronies, refuses to incorporate farm hands fully in its Fast Track Resettlement Program. They are being accused of causing previous resettlement programs to fail.

The problems facing Zimbabwe's agricultural sector are reminiscent of the situation in Mozambique, Namibia, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, and South Africa. Namibia has already threatened to emulate Zimbabwe. Sam Nujoma, the country's president, rebuked the market mechanism as "too slow, cumbersome and very costly". An understandable statement coming from the head of a government which, according to Namibian news agency, NAMPA, turned down 151 farms last year for lack of funds.

"Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Constraints and Prospects", edited by T.A.S. Bowyer-Bower and Colin Stoneman, notes that development, growth, and poverty alleviation in the continent are directly linked to the ownership and cultivation of land - often the sole means of production. That no regional approach to this pressing issue has arisen attests to the quality of the self-centred, thuggish, and venal African leadership.

Politically-motivated land reform will lead to the emergence of the next generations of the deprived and the discriminated against. Resettlement has to be both fair and seen to be fair. It has to be based on unambiguous criteria and transparent and even-handed procedures. It has to be backed by sufficient agricultural inputs and machinery, financial and technical assistance, access to markets, and basic infrastructure.

The proximity of services and institutions - from schools to courts - is critical. Above all, land reform has to look after people displaced in the process - commercial farmers and their workers - and thus enjoy near universal support or acquiescence. Legal title and tenure have to be established and recorded to allow the new settlers to obtain credits and invest in buildings, machinery, and infrastructure.

Alas, as both Human Rights Watch and the UNDP concluded in their detailed reports,

none of these requirements is observed in Zimbabwe. Hence the recurrent failures and the blood-spattered chaos they have produced. Is Mugabe to blame? Surely. Is he the prime mover of this debacle? Not by a long shot. He merely encapsulates and leverages pernicious social forces in his country and in the continent. Until the root problems of Africa are tackled with courage and integrity Mugabe and his type of "reform" will prevail.

Sam Vaknin (<http://samvak.tripod.com>) is the author of Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited and After the Rain - How the West Lost the East. He served as a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, and eBookWeb , and Bellaonline, and as a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent. He is the the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory and Suite101.

Using Black and White Film

By Kelly Paal

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It's hard to find sometimes but it's making a resurgence, black and white film. If you've never used this film now is the time to try it out. Here are some tips to using b&w film and what you can expect from the results.

1. Forget color. This is the hardest thing to do and the number one reason that you will not get good results with b&w film.
2. Look for contrast. Once you can ignore color look for contrast. You will want your image to have a bit more contrast than you would normally want in a color image.
3. Consider shooting situations that are more formal. Black and white film gives such a wonderful timelessness to an image and it's perfect for formal situations.
4. Keep your photos simple. Black and white film simplifies so don't fight it. Keep the images simple by keeping close to your subject or place your subject against a simple back drop.
5. Babies and pets look great on b&w film. Place the pet or baby on a white background and you'll be stunned at the beautiful results.

Black and white film creates a timeless simple look. It's wonderful for portraits and formal events. After shooting a few rolls of b&w you'll notice that you start to pay attention to composition of your image more, since you don't have to worry about color. If you're just learned photography try using b&w film for awhile it will help you teach yourself good composition. Think of light and dark, black and white, and good composition and you'll find that b&w film could be a whole new hobby for you.

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Kelly Paal is a Freelance Nature and Landscape Photographer, exhibiting nationally and internationally. Recently she started her own business Kelly Paal Photography (www.kellypaalphotography.com). She has an educational background in photography, business, and commercial art. She enjoys applying graphic design and photography principles to her web design.

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