

## The Politics of States and Chiefs in Zimbabwe

Jocelyn Alexander, University of Oxford

Chiefs in Africa are as varied as African states, in part because their fates are so often intimately linked. When I first set out to try to understand the history of rural state-making in Zimbabwe, I struggled to find any single model of chieftaincy in either the archives or oral histories. Chiefs were very different as individuals. There were decrepit, drunken and illiterate chiefs; young, educated nationalists; home bodies and well travelled labour migrants; Christians and spirit mediums; cattle barons and failing farmers; nurses and teachers. Their relation to the state was founded and performed in diverse ways and their routes to office were rooted in different claims to authority - bureaucratic, political and spiritual. Some chiefs ruled over long-standing communities while others managed a hodge-podge of evictees and migrants with no common identity, products of the turbulent 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some chiefs became outspoken opponents of the Rhodesian state, making common cause with nationalism. A small number made their way to the guerrilla camps in Zambia and Mozambique. Others went on state-sponsored tours of empire, robed in invented costumes and embodying newly created institutions and constituencies.

Chieftaincy seemed an extraordinarily flexible institution, never wholly of the state or the customary but nonetheless always bound by them. This is not far off the description of the intercalary or Janus-faced customary figure of classic anthropological accounts. There are good reasons why that is a perennial image in the literature: even if there was little that bound chiefs as individuals together, they nonetheless shared the task of making authority and they had to interact with both state institutions and their constituencies in doing so. Too often, however, more recent analyses have cast chieftaincy more rigidly, and vapidly, as a neutral pivot caught between easily identifiable opposing demands, an empty vessel filled exclusively by variations on the customary, or simply a repressive tool of a monolithic state. The fluid and promiscuous possibilities of the 'intercalary' and of custom are missed in debates over the progressive or regressive charge of chieftaincy, whether one viewed 'custom' in negative terms as constituting an ethnic block to citizenship (Mamdani 1996) or in a positive light as the cultural foundation of community, compatible with a donor-driven vision of decentralized democracy (see Obarrio 2010; Alexander 1997; Oomen, 2005). The always contradictory and changing interests and demands of state institutions are likewise occluded in these accounts.

Neither chiefs nor state institutions operate only within a customary register. Chiefs' politics have ranged far beyond traditional appeals as they mediated the desires of their constituencies – nationalists, migrant labourers, Christians, and

farmers among them. State actors have often cast chiefs as customary first and foremost, but they have also called upon them to implement technocratic edicts or enforce partisan loyalties. These demands create contradictions, reflections of the heterogeneous claims to authority of state institutions themselves, which leave space for chiefs to imagine their own political projects and relations to the state in varied ways. They cannot be reduced to Mamdani's 'decentralized despots', clad in faux-tribal garb, just as they cannot be captured by the notion of inclusive and culturally authentic community representatives.

Chiefs combine a prickly and plastic politics with a perennial appeal to states – and a desire to be afforded recognition by them. They require careful unpicking not least because the stakes of office are high: chieftaincy has very often played a central role in shaping the spheres of property relations and citizenship. In this, the binaries that have so often been used to describe chiefs – they are the traditional, ethnic, or informal mirror of the modern, civic or formal – have provided a powerful means of constructing (as well as dismissing) their authority. But to say so is not to go far enough. The work done by inscribing these binaries, their shifting content and relation to the actual practices of states and chiefs, need to be explored in order to make sense of the persistent urge to 'return' powers to chiefs across radically different times and regimes and the consequences of doing so.<sup>1</sup> While the act of 'return' is often authorized as a step back in time, tapping into something ancient and resilient, at its core are struggles over resources, rights and institution-making that are very much of the present.<sup>2</sup>

To explore the politics of states and chiefs, I focus on chieftaincy in the tumultuous times of settler-ruled Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe, from the 1960s to the 2000s. I cover the period up to 2000 with broad brushstrokes and focus in more depth on the extraordinary upheavals in rural state-making after that year as it has been explored in a recent literature. Across this period, there were three dominant, though not exclusive, bases on which assertions of rural authority were constructed, and in which chieftaincy played divergent roles: custom, technocracy, and nationalism. In each of these, assertions of authority encompassed particular claims to rights and resources, almost always in tension with other claims; in each, local struggles shaped ambitious state-making projects that sought both domination and legitimacy, and that did so through the construction of institutions that were ideologically and functionally heterogeneous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In emphasising the practices of states I build on a recent strand of anthropological scholarship that focuses on the 'actual functioning' of the state apparatus (see Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014) as well as longstanding historical approaches to studying the colonial state that insist on its heterogeneity.

<sup>2</sup> There are a great many insightful works in this area. For a variety of approaches, see Berry (1993, 2000); Comaroff (2001); Hellweg (2004); Kyed (2013); Leach (2004); Lund (2006); Obarrio (2014) and Oomen (2005).

<sup>3</sup> I develop the historical case in detail in *The Unsettled Land* (2006). For further considerations of the relationship between chiefs, state, law and rural politics (among other things), see Alexander, McGregor and Ranger (2000), Maxwell (1999), Mazarire (2008), Moore (2005), Munro (1998), Ranger (1999) and Tshuma (1997).

### **Chiefs in Rhodesia: Remaking and Returning Power**

The 1960s was a turbulent time for chieftaincy in Rhodesia and makes a fitting starting point for detailing the varied roles states and chiefs imagined and played prior to independence. As in much of British colonial Africa, the post-World War II period heralded a concerted effort at state-planned 'modernization'. Famously characterized as the 'second colonial occupation', it drew on an empire-wide set of ideas that emphasised technical solutions and required state intervention in an expanding set of fields, from welfare to the environment to production (Low and Lonsdale 1976; Cooper 1996). The Southern Rhodesian (soon to be Rhodesian) settler state was particularly ambitious in this regard: it was exceptionally centralized, bureaucratic, and capable in comparison to any of its neighbours bar South Africa. In the name of modernization, it had developed a powerful set of expert bureaucracies in the 1940s and 1950s, their authority founded in scientific knowledge (Drinkwater 1991). These institutions swept aside the suddenly backward-seeming rural rule of the Native Affairs Department with its vague claims to customary expertise and reliance on hands-on methods of 'knowing the native'. As the state's ambitions and institutions changed, so too did the role of chieftaincy within it and so also the possibilities of chiefly politics.

Southern Rhodesia's modernist ambitions were most dramatically expressed in the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951. The Act mirrored post-war interventions in other colonies, and it echoed earlier visions of a re-ordered rural world rooted in missionary aesthetics and ideas, expounded most notably in Rhodesia by the ebullient American missionary and agriculturalist E. D. Alvord (McGregor 1991; Drinkwater 1991). The Land Husbandry Act set out to realize a vision of development in which African men would be transformed from rural 'tribesmen' and temporary urban migrants – both cast as backward, inefficient, and morally suspect – into full-time, modern workers and farmers. These men would head nuclear families and embody a newly disciplined productivity alongside reformed gender relations and citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Political stability and economic growth would seamlessly follow. There was scant room for custom in this project but there was plenty of room for chiefs and the hierarchy of headmen and village heads beneath them: they were to implement rural modernity at the behest of the small army of expert extension workers who overran the 'reserves'. Much to the consternation of Native Commissioners, these new experts set about determining who had a right to land, demarcated fields and conservation works, cut cattle numbers, and demanded people settle in straight lines, all with scant reference to custom or customary authority. Chiefs' authority was to be replaced by individual rights to the land, monitored by the expert state. Chieftaincy itself was to be 'rationalised' so as to make bureaucratic sense of the chaos caused by land alienation and eviction: demotions and wholesale deletions were planned, regardless of the niceties of custom.

The result of attempting to implement this vision of modernity was neither stability nor growth but a rural revolt in concert with a rapid expansion of

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<sup>4</sup> A bald-faced expression of this vision can be found in Government of Southern Rhodesia (1955). Also see the seminal report of the Godlonton Commission (Government of Southern Rhodesia 1944). On the tensions in colonial promises of modernity, see Comaroff (2002).

African nationalism. This revolt drew on the anger of the many migrant workers who entered the ranks of the 'landless unemployed' – those whose claims to land in the reserves were denied under the Act and who at the same time failed to find urban employment in a contracting market. It built on outrage over a post-war wave of evictions from 'white' farms that affected tens of thousands. And it drew on widespread resistance to what rapidly turned into coercive interventions in people's lives and production in the reserves, measures that required labour-intensive conservation works and reduced field sizes and cattle numbers, outraging the poor and the wealthy alike – as well as no small number of chiefs (e.g., see Machingaidze 1991; Maxwell 1999; Ranger 1985). These constituencies remade nationalism in a confrontational and popular mode that shook the state's confidence in its developmental project. The official response was to meet nationalism with repression and to court chiefs with an elaboration and authorization of custom.

In this context, the Native Affairs Department and its claims to customary expertise made a comeback against its overweening technocratic brethren. It constructed a narrative that saved everyone's blushes: the Land Husbandry Act had provoked resistance for no more complicated reason than that Africans were not ready to become modern citizens (no matter the highly circumscribed offer). The route to restoring political stability lay in rule by 'tribal authorities', a move that insisted on the essential cultural difference of Africans and gave it institutional form. Native Commissioners touted the failure to recognise this essential difference as the great error of otherwise well meaning technical experts who had, as a result, been unable to build rural authority. The 1960s saw a concerted programme of courting chiefs, establishing more prestigious institutions for them from district to national level so that they might represent Africans in place of the nationalists, and offering them a 'return' of powers over the land and law – in effect remaking property relations and the delineations of citizenship once more.

This was not a smooth transition. State institutions were far from of one mind and chiefs had their own agendas, based on particular histories of eviction, migrant worker demands, political allegiance and interpretations of custom, as well as their own interests in wealth and office. A battle among bureaucracies ensued, fought out in the medium of expert commissions. Most importantly, against the demands made in the name of custom by Native Affairs, the agrarian experts did not want chiefs to have unfettered powers over land allocation while the law department was horrified by the lack of proper legal procedure, records, and the like in the mooted chiefs' courts. The offer of a 'return' to customary authority was in the end much qualified. The response of chiefs further complicated the matter. While some embraced their new powers and perks, others adopted a nationalist rhetoric to challenge the inadequacy of a 'return' of customary powers over the land without the return of the 'lost lands' themselves, i.e. their historic lands now alienated to white settlers. In those reserves where the Land Husbandry Act had been implemented, chiefs held that it had created such confusion and conflict over tenure that they could not reassert customary authority. The individual land rights of the Land Husbandry Act were jealously guarded while those labour migrants who had been denied

land under the Act continued to insist on the validity of their claims. Chiefs could not satisfy both, and the state's new customary regime offered no solution. Some chiefs also denounced what they saw as the pathetically limited offer of judicial powers, hedged in as they were by the exclusion of certain categories of crime, limits on punishments, and possibility of appeal to Magistrate's courts, concessions demanded by the law department in defence of Africans' legal rights (see Karekwaivanane 2012).

As many chiefs grasped all too well, much of what they were being asked to do in the name of custom was to enforce the same set of punitive restrictions on land use as the technocrats of the Land Husbandry Act had envisioned while also standing as a justification for the denial of nationalist demands for a return of alienated land and for a rights-based citizenship. Versions of the latter had long been debated in nationalist circles, but they were now on display in the newly independent countries to the north of Rhodesia and so far more difficult to dismiss. None of this deterred the Native Affairs Department from developing a belief that where chiefs failed to exercise authority as intended it was because they were not 'properly' customary, a view that led to the production of hundreds of voluminous 'delineation reports' on chiefs and headmen and which would embroil Native Commissioners in labyrinthine efforts to discover 'real' traditional authorities over the next decade. Such projects were echoed in neighbouring South Africa where the Department of Ethnological Affairs' experts produced 'blue books' on 'tribes' as a basis for legitimating rule. The Rhodesian version relied less on ethnographic expertise and more on amateur investigation by administrators in search of a useable hierarchy.

The district of Chimanimani, situated on the Mozambican border, offers an apposite example of the ways in which chiefs used official attempts to build authority on the back of custom for their own ends.<sup>5</sup> As elsewhere, the delineation teams of the early 1960s found Chimanimani's chiefs suspicious of land allocation powers and vehement proponents of a return of alienated land. Everywhere, the teams struggled to find the bounded, homogenous communities that chiefs were supposed to rule: chiefly followers were dispersed on white-owned farms and over the Mozambican border, beyond the ordering capacities of custom. In addition, the state's embrace proved problem: the official promotion of one of Chimanimani's chiefs to a prestigious new post at national level had the worrying effect of undermining his authority locally. Chimanimani's Native (later District) Commissioner spent much of the 1960s and '70s attempting to solve these and other problems through seeking out 'authentic' traditional authorities. Vast files were produced on every recognised chieftaincy, reaching all the way down an imagined hierarchy to 'village' level (see Ranger 2001:42-45).

In the case of the Mutambara chiefs, the incumbent, one Dindikwa Mutambara, used his newly granted powers to obstruct administrative and agricultural policy. The frustrated District Commissioner moved to depose him, claiming with

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<sup>5</sup> See Alexander (2006:93-98) for Chimanimani. Also see, for example, Maxwell (1999), Ranger (1982), and Moore (2005).

the collusion of two of his brothers and a spirit medium that his installation had been flawed in customary terms. Dindikwa at first defended himself in the language of custom, mobilizing his own spiritual experts and kin, and then openly allied himself with the nationalist cause, a move that pleased a popular constituency unhappy with state taxes and agricultural controls. When the District Commissioner finally managed to depose Dindikwa for 'not following proper custom' the brother appointed in his place promptly took up a stance of non-cooperation while his younger brother, Samuel, used networks he had built as a Methodist evangelist to recruit students for the guerrilla struggle, work that landed him in a nationalist-filled detention centre in 1974. The result of all this effort was state paralysis born of a failure to remake custom as the basis of rural power.

By the time of Samuel's detention, the Native Affairs Department (now Internal Affairs) was at any rate fast becoming a militarised arm of the state in the face of an expanding guerrilla war mounted from across Rhodesia's borders. As the 1970s progressed, chiefs faced an existential crisis. In this era, to serve the state, as chiefs did in many guerrillas' eyes, was to be a sellout and to be a sellout was a capital crime. Armed young men and nationalist party committees began to displace chiefs' authority in the rural areas, along with the rest of the Rhodesian state's civilian representatives, from extension workers and dip tank attendants to school teachers. They instituted new regimes of justice and mobilization that focused on the production and enforcement of political loyalty. Many chiefs were killed (by both guerrillas and security forces), reduced to living behind barbed wire, or forced to flee to the towns. Their fate echoed that of chiefs elsewhere in the region at moments of political rupture: Oomen (2005:130) records how, in Sekhukhune's rural revolt of 1986, chiefs were 'burnt, chased away, or killed'. Chiefs' politics in South Africa nonetheless remained highly varied, as they did elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> In Zimbabwe, some chiefs joined the nationalists, winding up in nationalist party committees, in the guerrilla camps in Mozambique and Zambia, or, as with Samuel Mutambara, in detention.

During the war, chiefs often lost the capacity to function as intercalary figures, much as was the case elsewhere in the region in periods of violent revolt. The war years did not, however, end chiefs' desire for state recognition or close debates among nationalists or within the Rhodesian state over chiefly authority. Rhodesian attempts to use the legitimating power of custom continued throughout the war and guerrillas of different ideological stripes were more or less sympathetic to chiefs and mediums: their demands for the return of ancestral lands echoed those of chiefs; other guerrillas based their claims to land and political change in democratic or Marxist principles.<sup>7</sup> However, a powerful element in Zimbabwean nationalism remained deeply distrustful of chieftaincy

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<sup>6</sup> See for example the accounts of Suttner (2003:185) on South Africa and Nyamnjoh (2003) on Botswana.

<sup>7</sup> For a range of interpretations of the shifting views of ZANU's guerrillas on chiefs and spirit mediums in eastern Zimbabwe and in the Mozambican camps, see Maxwell (1999), Lan (1985), and McLaughlin (1991). On ZAPU's guerrillas in Matabeleland, see Alexander et al (2000); on views on chiefs among detained nationalists, see Alexander (2011).

as an insufficiently modern and progressive form of rule, over and above the problem of its entanglement with the Rhodesian state (Ranger 2001: 45-47).

### **Building Rural Authority in Independent Zimbabwe**

At independence in 1980, state attempts to build rural authority played out in new but not unfamiliar ways. ZANU(PF) won Zimbabwe's first elections and faced a daunting task of state-making in the country's war-ravaged rural areas.<sup>8</sup> There were huge challenges due to the widespread displacement of people and destruction of infrastructure. There were also great difficulties due to the fact that rural institutions of rule ranged from the moribund councils to the often deeply distrusted official chiefs, to the fiercely independent 'structures' of ZANU(PF)'s own rural committees and, far worse from ZANU(PF)'s point of view, those of its only real political rival, the nationalist party ZAPU. In this context, the customary seemed at first to lose out but in the end there would be a 'return' – or 'returns' – to chiefs once again, as new battles over land and citizenship were ignited.

In its first few years in power, ZANU(PF) sought to, first, centralise control over the rural party structures and mute their demands, not least for the 'lost lands' and political authority and, second, create new institutions of rural rule on a 'modern' model – both goals that reflected powerful strands of nationalism. ZAPU was militarily crushed and then absorbed into ZANU(PF) under the Unity Accord of 1987.<sup>9</sup> ZANU(PF)'s rural committees were more gently marginalized and coopted. Their demands were contained through the institution of an elected hierarchy of village development committees (vidcos) and district councils, alongside elected presiding officers in rural courts. The vidcos were based on the rational-seeming unit of 100 households. Land and judicial powers were transferred from traditional leaders to the councils and presiding officers, though recognized chiefs kept their state salaries. ZANU(PF)'s new ministers glossed this as nationalist respect for African culture. Such recognition did not, however, extend to spirit mediums or to chiefs who had been deposed owing to land alienation or nationalist sympathies.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Local Government, successor to the Native Affairs Department, made it clear that the administrative understanding of traditional authority would remain unchanged. Political loyalty and settler injustices held no sway. The delineation reports and the voluminous files they had spawned still formed the basis for laborious – and once again often unresolved – efforts to establish claims to chiefly office. Chiefly aspirants did not take all this with equanimity: some launched court cases contesting their exclusion from titles; many exercised the powers they claimed despite lacking state recognition.<sup>11</sup> Everywhere, achieving state recognition was an important goal for chiefs.

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<sup>8</sup> ZANU(PF) is the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front), known as ZANU before 1980. ZANU was formed in 1963 as a breakaway from ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union. Both parties formed guerrilla armies and contested Zimbabwe's first elections.

<sup>9</sup> On the repression of ZAPU see Alexander et al (2000) and Alexander (2006) for accounts specifically of the effects of the 1980s' violence on rural authority.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Fontein (2007), Dande and Mujere (2014:2-3), and Alexander (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Mazarire has begun to explore the extensive use of courts and lawyers by disgruntled chiefs in the 1980s. Pers comm., 1 April 2015. Chiefs' capacity to undermine state efforts to

In the 1980s, a vision of nationalism as modernizing development held sway. It encompassed state-delivered redistribution and an end to racial discrimination alongside a large dose of familiar technocracy. The experts who had – in part – been pushed aside in the 1960s returned to centre stage. They proposed for the former reserves, now known as communal areas, something very like the Land Husbandry Act (and in fact they drew directly on the plans left behind by their Rhodesian predecessors), but called it land use planning. They also instituted direct state rule in the new resettlement areas, i.e. the formerly ‘white’ large-scale farms acquired by the state and redistributed to black smallholders. On the resettlement schemes, official authority took the shape of the resettlement officer, unmediated in theory at least by traditional authorities or indeed any form of elected representation. Claims to land based on historical restitution, ancestral traditions, or local versions of democratic process – the varied constituents of popular nationalism – had no place in this state vision.

The new government cast this modernist vision against a traditional world imagined and condemned as backward, unproductive and undemocratic. These were the familiar binaries by which rural rule had so often been constructed and authorized, claiming control over property and delineating the rights of citizens in the process. As in the past, however, such discursive divides fell apart in practice. Often it was traditional leaders, though not necessarily those identified via the delineation reports, who were elected onto the new model *vidcos* and as presiding officers in the re-made courts. This outcome underlined a different idea of the requirements of justice and representation than that of the 100-household *vidco* or magistrate-trained presiding officer. Where traditional leaders were entirely excluded, there was often paralysing conflict as the authority-making power of elections *tout court* was vigorously challenged.

The content of the state’s categories and intentions was confounded in other ways too. When traditional leaders objected to technocratic land use plans they did not do so only due to their affront to custom but also because they threatened livelihoods: they might require people to move and rebuild homes, or prevent cultivation of fertile wetlands, for example. As importantly, they flew in the face of rural nationalism. Opposition to settling in lines and building contour ridges, measures coercively enforced by Rhodesian governments and reintroduced in the 1980s, had stood at the heart of decades of rural protest. Similarly, when chiefs railed against the rule of resettlement officers on redistributed land they did so because it was their land to govern, customarily speaking, but also because rural nationalism had called for historical restitution, a demand the new government pointedly refused. Chiefs also found a popular constituency for their ‘customary’ views on gender and generational relations, now challenged by progressive legislation granting women new rights, and they defended such views in official and unofficial courts. Both the nature of citizenship and the shape of rural development was heatedly contested in these

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constrain what they deemed to be their customary powers is dramatically illustrated in the South African case (Oomen 2005).

debates – though not in the form of the state’s imagined binaries – and acted as a source of instability for rural authorities.

There were great ructions over these and other matters in the 1980s. Nonetheless, party chairmen and many traditional authorities (categories that were not exclusive) were to a significant extent channeled into the new model vidcos, councils and courts. As in earlier eras, the state’s initiatives shaped the spaces in which chiefs could act. Once made part of these institutions, chiefs and others found that they had scant control over decision-making and resources, labouring rather as implementers of centrally made policy, again in an echo of previous decades. This proved tolerable for many so long as ZANU(PF) delivered schools, clinics, infrastructure and grain depots – the far from trivial benefits of government by a capable bureaucracy intent on development. None of this applied to the ZAPU-supporting regions of Matabeleland and the Midlands to anything like the same extent, however. In these regions, violent repression produced developmental neglect and the distinct claims of ZAPU’s nationalism remained influential. Rural institutions of rule had a tenuous grasp on authority as a result. But even in ZANU(PF) strongholds there were dissonant voices. A good many ZANU(PF) MPs and provincial governors (the powerful political appointees who oversaw the bureaucratic state in the provinces) sided against administrators and technocrats in order to back, in populist mode, rural versions of nationalism that called for decentralized power, land restitution, and recognition for local versions of custom. ZANU(PF) politicians did so because they wanted to win elections but they were also genuinely divided over what version of nationalism should hold sway. In the 1980s, politicians’ support for the large-scale ‘squatter’ occupations of formerly ‘white’ land against the authority of law and the aims of the official resettlement programme, was their most visible protest against the definition of nationalism as top-down, modernizing development.

In the late 1980s, the tensions in rural as well as urban areas found new voice as the violent demise of ZAPU opened up political space. This trend was greatly amplified in the 1990s when ZANU(PF)’s adoption of a structural adjustment programme undercut state bureaucrats’ ability to deliver on the material promises of modernizing development. In the rural areas, disaffection and conflict over resources – including land – spread, as did a language of rights that echoed nationalist claims but which had a new set of proponents among NGOs, civic associations, and trade unions, all increasingly hostile to ZANU(PF). In the mid and late 1990s, ZANU(PF)’s rule was threatened in unprecedented ways. Rural disaffection sat side by side with trade union strikes and war veteran protests (which were met with economically disastrous but politically productive state largesse). A powerful new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was launched on the backs of the unions and civics in 1999, and was rapidly followed by the shock of the ruling party’s constitutional referendum defeat in early 2000.

In the 1990s, ZANU(PF)’s response to rural disaffection had at first taken a page from its Rhodesian predecessors in diagnosing the problem as too much modernity: technocratic and democratic institutions could not gain a foothold in

a society where customary powers and allegiances still held such sway. It was an explanation that struggled to disguise the fact that, in the era of structural adjustment (much as in the 1960s), technocracy had become too expensive and unpopular while democracy had grown too fractious, opening space for opposition movements and angry condemnations of abuses of power and corruption. Moves were made once more to 'return' powers to chiefs. As in the 1960s, this process was deeply contested among state bureaucracies and delayed by the cogitations of expert commissions. The Land Tenure Commission of 1994, with its mixed bag of recommendations, is a case in point. Its report called for recognition of the 'traditional village' as the 'basic unit of social organisation'. This unit was to be represented by elected committees bearing traditional names, which would then be subjected to the discipline of surveys, mapping and fencing.<sup>12</sup> The Traditional Leaders Act, passed in 1998, promised chiefs a (limited) set of powers over land and in courts while the Ministry of Local Government elaborated a system under which ward and village 'assemblies' would be headed by chiefs and headmen (Ranger 2001:31-32). In this iteration, the 'return' to chiefs did not untether 'custom' from the long-standing and unpopular tasks of governance stipulated from on high – enforcing conservation rules, tax collection, reporting crime and the like – which flowed from the insertion of chiefs into a bureaucratic state. The implementation of these measures was, however, overtaken by a second, very different response from the ruling party to its rural political vulnerability. This would bring chiefs into a relationship not with a bureaucratic state but with a newly partisan set of institutions.

This second response followed from the ascent of a radical faction within ZANU(PF).<sup>13</sup> This group had been unable to over-ride those in the party and state who had imagined nationalism as modernizing development in the 1980s but it did far better in the face of the popular discontents and weakened state bureaucracy of the structural adjustment era of the 1990s. In the late 1990s, this shift began to tip the scales in favour of a longstanding strand of nationalist discourse that put fighting men and land, redistribution and race at the centre of claims to rule. It revived a war-time language of sell outs and enemies – threats to the revolution – alongside violent practices intended to discipline them. Dubbed the 'Third *Chimurenga*', thereby placing it as the successor to armed revolt against conquest and then the liberation struggle of the 1970s, it was at first most dramatically expressed in war veteran-led occupations of the large-scale farm sector, land often still in white hands. This was a messy process – and much contested within ZANU(PF) – but it would nonetheless lead on to a dramatic remaking of the state and chiefs' role in it.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Ranger (2001:48-49); Land Tenure Commission (1994).

<sup>13</sup> Few have subjected to scrutiny the battles within ZANU(PF) in the 1980s and 1990s and their repercussions for land inter alia. For a range of views, see Moyo (2001), Moyo and Yeros (2007), Helliker et al (2008), Selby (2006) and Sadomba (2011). Much of ZANU(PF)'s internal politics in this period and after remains opaque. See Tendi (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Some of the best work on this period as a whole is in Hammar et al (2003) and Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2009). For more recent work, see Alexander, McGregor and Tendi (2013).

In what follows, I focus on the remaking of rural authority on the vast swaths of land that were redistributed under ‘Fast Track resettlement’, as the land occupations came to be known. These spaces offered a particularly revealing view of the reshaping of the relationship between chiefs and the state in yet another moment of dramatic upheaval.

### **‘Fast Track’ Resettlement and Rural Authority in the 2000s**

It would be difficult to dispute that Fast Track resettlement transformed Zimbabwe after 2000. Over the next years, the vast majority of largely white-owned, large-scale farms was transferred to black households, mostly smallholders who (in theory) held land on the basis of a state-issued offer letter. This process has been described as ‘re-peasantisation’, though there was much differentiation within it. The scale and rapidity of change was stunning. According to Moyo (2011:942), the large-scale sector dropped from 4,956 farms on 8.7 million hectares in 2000 to 1,371 farms on just over a million hectares in 2010. The (black) small and medium scale sector (including the communal areas) jumped from about 1.13 million households on 21.4 million hectares to 1.35 million households, an increase of some 218,000, on over 30 million hectares. Within this, the medium scale sector grew by around 20,000 farms. In addition, some large-scale farms were taken over intact by black owners outside the official bounds of Fast Track.<sup>15</sup> That this transformation went hand in hand with a re-making of the political sphere is widely agreed. How to understand this process and its implications for chiefs and the state, has, however, been hotly disputed.

Let me start by briefly setting out two different approaches. An influential view propounded by leading leftist scholars of agrarian change cast Fast Track resettlement as economically costly and politically compromised by ZANU(PF)’s ‘oppressive, corrupt and desperate’ regime, but nonetheless as a ‘significant, *and* “objectively progressive” expression of a (new) agrarian question of labour’: the occupations addressed the reproductive struggles of the ‘worker-peasant’ and redressed the “unfinished business” of national democratic revolution’ by undoing the legacy of territorial segregation.<sup>16</sup> In this approach, the remaking of rural authority was evaluated in terms of its class politics. Sam Moyo noted the role that traditional leaders had played in the early days of the occupations – very much in keeping with previous decades – in expressing demands for land ‘on the basis of its sacred or cultural value in addition to its productive potential’. However, he identified a trend towards their displacement by ‘informal movements’ led by war veterans and urban workers with an ‘anti-colonial’ ideology based on ‘combining self-reliance with surplus production and sales’ (2001:326-327).

A few years later, Moyo, writing with Paris Yeros, found that the revolutionary momentum of this movement had been ‘interrupted’: the occupations had

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<sup>15</sup> All figures need to be treated with a large grain of salt and are complicated by the occupations, re-occupations and evictions of black and white farmers that have continued since 2010, though not on the scale of the first years of Fast Track.

<sup>16</sup> Bernstein (2003:220). For other key contributions, see Moyo (2001); Moyo and Yeros (2005); and Helliker et al (2008).

brought about no more than a ‘temporary suspension’ of the bureaucratic state (2007:108). The land occupiers had ultimately failed to ‘prepare the semi-proletariat organizationally against the reassertion of the black bourgeoisie’. ZANU(PF) leaders used the state to divide urban and rural workers, repressing urban trade unionists, allocating land to an urban petty-bourgeoisie and black elites, and allying with traditional authorities (see Moyo and Yeros 2005:192-3; 201). Chiefs’ land demands embodied patriarchal and ‘ethno-regional’ biases; their links to the state allowed personal accumulation on the model of a ‘lower tier “policy elite”’ (Moyo and Yeros 2007:110-111). Ultimately, in Moyo and Yeros’ account, chiefs constituted an obstacle to progressive class politics because they represented ‘social organization on the basis of kinship rather than economic interest’ and served to extend the bourgeois state’s power into the rural areas (2007:119).

Another strand of writing interpreted the remaking of rural authority through ‘moral geographies’ of identity and belonging (Dande and Mujere 2014:3), often taking a view from the state’s ‘margins’ and focusing on the political dynamics of particular chieftaincies.<sup>17</sup> This work rejected the notion of a homogenous constituency of traditional leaders amenable to state manipulation, seeing rather a cacophony of potentially subversive, historically and spiritually rooted claims that sought state recognition if not a remade state. For Joost Fontein, the post-2000 state was not unmade by the truncated struggles of the worker-peasant but through the resurgence of the ancestors. Focusing on war veterans and spirit mediums in southern Masvingo, an area of relatively recent evictions and return to ancestral lands under Fast Track, he found ‘profoundly alternative and radical imaginings of the way the postcolonial state should operate’. These were based in a shared historical narrative of cooperation between mediums and guerrillas during the liberation struggle and expressed in the performance of ceremonies linking the living and the dead through which a ‘moral conviviality’ was made (Fontein 2006:194; also see Lan 1985). The shared desire for a restitution of the land among traditional leaders, war veterans and some state officials offered a ‘re-opened access to the process of state-making, revitalising the possibility, at least for these particular groups of making the state towards their interests’, a project that had the ‘ongoing legacy of ancestrally-guided struggle’ at its heart (Fontein 2009:17-19).

Innocent Dande and Joseph Mujere’s work (2014) echoes Fontein’s in emphasizing the importance of ‘traditional’ readings of Fast Track in which a central role is played by chiefs’ historical and spiritual claims to land. Their case study of chiefs in Makoni District in the eastern Manicaland Province is, however, less about mediums and veterans acting in concert with chiefs, and more about the conflicts among chiefs’ claims and their efforts to use a variety of state institutions and ZANU(PF) leaders, deploying a wide range of strategies, to gain political advantage. Their point is that chiefs were not ‘stooges’ of the state or ruling party: they regularly challenged and circumvented both, primarily through drawing on histories of identity and belonging that presented exclusive

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<sup>17</sup> See the detailed rural studies of Fontein (2006, 2009), Mazarire (2008), and Mujere (2011). Fontein explicitly draws on a wider anthropological literature, especially Das and Poole (2004) and Hansen and Stepputat (2001), which seeks to explore the state through its margins.

kin and ethnic claims going back to pre-colonial days. As in Mazarire (2008) and Mujere's work (2011) in Masvingo, these contestations brought chiefs and their allies into intensive interactions with state institutions in which traditionalist claims held great sway, but were far from the only means by which claims for authority were made and did not evince any uniform or even easily identifiable political position.

These depictions of rural state-making are a far cry from Moyo and Yeros' concerns over the threat that an alliance between chiefs and a bourgeois state might pose to peasant-worker struggles. Both approaches find compelling stories of struggle rooted in histories of dispossession, but they offer very different interpretations of what sort of rural state was being created and the role of chieftaincy within it. It is useful to take a step back in order to ask in more detail how state institutions were remade after 2000. As we have seen, rural authority had for many decades been powerfully shaped by the central state and its shifting visions of agrarian development and citizenship. In this process, chiefs' politics and practices were highly variable and not limited to the sphere of custom. Though custom was always a part of their claim to authority and of state institutions' claims on them, the technocratic and nationalist also shaped both sides of this interaction. How did these processes shift in the midst of the dramatic transformation of the state's legitimating ideas and practices after 2000?

In part, the answer to this question flows from how one understands post-2000 politics. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the third *Chimurenga* was the championing of a particular version of liberation war-era nationalism from the very top of the ZANU(PF) government to the land occupiers. While there was much variation, a historically rooted set of practices and ideas formed the basis for new forms of authority which challenged a powerful array of long standing claims to legitimacy, such as those of the technocratic bureaucracies, administrative constructions of custom, and the rule of law, as well as the newer challenge of the MDC's politics. Over the 2000s, the bureaucratic state was not 'suspended' for a brief moment and then reanimated, as in Moyo and Yeros' account. Rather, it was transformed through a logic of partisan patronage and violence. To enable this process, ZANU(PF) created new institutions and agents such as the youth militia, and relied on veterans to enforce loyalty inside and outside state institutions.<sup>18</sup> Crucial for Fast Track resettlement were the newly created district and provincial land committees which, as we shall see, displaced and remade bureaucratic authority. ZANU(PF) also introduced new forms of governance exemplified by the 'operation', a means of implementing policy that evaded and destabilized the bureaucratic state.<sup>19</sup> These shifts blurred lines between the state and ZANU(PF) from top to bottom. They created new constituencies while alienating others, and they remained contested not only by the MDC but also by many of the bureaucratic state's cadres. These latter partook in the remaking of state institutions by participating in partisan practices and

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<sup>18</sup> Veterans played an autonomous role at times, but their capacity to sustain autonomy from ZANU(PF) was limited. See Sadomba (2011) and Kriger's critique (2013).

<sup>19</sup> See Alexander (2013:811-813) and literature discussed therein, contributions to Alexander et al (2013), and Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2009).

patronage networks even as they objected to them or hoped one day they would end, owing both to the high price of refusal (the threat of coercion or job loss) and to the need to survive – or indeed the desire to accumulate – amidst economic collapse.<sup>20</sup>

Though writers on Fast Track have acknowledged the role of partisan and violent politics they have less often taken into account the ways in which state institutions were remade.<sup>21</sup> The institutional context in which power was generated had changed; new actors were able to make new rules and new claims – amidst great uncertainty – as a result. Just as in the eras of technocratic dominance or the upheavals of the liberation struggle, this inevitably reshaped the space in which chiefs worked, and meant, as Martin Chanock (1991:63) noted for South Africa, that custom would to some extent ‘take on its content in application from the dominant political directions and discourses’.<sup>22</sup> Most accounts of the early years of the land occupations in Zimbabwe stressed their diverse motives and constituents,<sup>23</sup> but it is also clear that loyalty to ZANU(PF) rapidly became necessary, if not necessarily sufficient, to making and defending claims to land and authority on Fast Track farms. Customary leaders had no choice but to engage with the ‘dominant political directions and discourses’ of the third *Chimurenga*.

A vivid account of the early stages of the occupations in Chiredzi District illustrated these shifts in power (Chaumba et al 2003).<sup>24</sup> Chiefs are present in this account, but neither they nor custom stood at the centre of the remaking of the state. A host of other actors and claims to legitimacy came into play. On Fair Range Ranch, for example, veterans led an occupation in early 2000 in which they consulted chiefs about historical claims, the army supplied tents, and the police dismissed the white farm owner’s appeals to law (Chaumba et al 2003:589). In a nod to technocratic authority the occupiers pegged out 50 hectare plots but they rejected efforts to control their engagement in a host of illegal activities, from stock and wire theft, to fire setting and the blocking of roads. In 2001 the ranch owner was ordered out and state extension agents pegged plots. In this process, custom constituted an influential claim to land but more important were ‘political connections and a pro-ZANU(PF) reputation’

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<sup>20</sup> The best discussion of these processes within the agriculture-related ministries is Marongwe (2008); for fascinating studies on the early, partisan attacks on bureaucracy and meritocracy in Local Government, see McGregor (2002), Chaumba et al (2003:603-604), and Hammar (2003). For the longer term battles between civil servants who deemed themselves to be ‘professional’ and their partisan colleagues within the judiciary, see Verheul (2013), and for the prison service, see Alexander (2013).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. discussions of partisan and violent politics in Moyo and Yeros (2007:117), Fontein (2009), and the influential study by Scoones et al (2010). For critiques of the latter on this score, see Rutherford (2012), Hammar (2012), and Kriger (2013). For the broader debate among left scholars over the value and fate of economic and political rights under the third *Chimurenga*, see Hammar et al (2003), Moyo and Yeros (2005), Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004), Moore (2004), Helliker et al (2008), Bond and Manyanya (2003), and Sadomba (2011).

<sup>22</sup> Chanock is quoted in Oomen (2005:87). I draw on her wider insights here.

<sup>23</sup> See accounts in Matondi (2012:chapter 3), Marongwe (2003), Moyo (2001:323-4), Zamchiya (2013:1117), and Mujere (2011:1127).

<sup>24</sup> For regional variations, compare this case to the detailed accounts in Marongwe (2008) and Zamchiya (2012), which refer to areas of Mashonaland and Manicaland.

(Chaumba et al 2003:593). Governance on these farms was initially constructed on a remembered model of ZANU(PF)'s liberation war-era practices that was far more suited to a military view of authority than an alliance with the ancestors. Veterans stood at the heart of this politics: they 'deliberately echoed the language and symbols of the liberation war', its categories of enemies and sell-outs, its use of youth, and its night time meetings. Farms were a 'no go' area for the MDC. Access was 'strictly policed' and 'base camps' had a 'highly militarised organizational structure' through which roll calls, drills and meetings were time-tabled and punishments meted out (Chaumba et al 2003:589-597).

These authorities had the capacity to discipline and demand performances of loyalty. Identifying and excluding people associated with the MDC from Fast Track farms was possible because ZANU(PF) and veterans had rural committee structures on the farms and in communal areas that were able to perform surveillance and information gathering activities. They were also able to draw on traditional leaders and councillors, at times calling upon them to provide letters verifying occupiers' ZANU(PF) credentials.<sup>25</sup> As Zamchiya (2011:1117) emphasizes, the most important 'vehicle' for defending land claims was political allegiance: an explicit discourse from veterans on the farms and from senior ZANU(PF) politicians justified partisan land allocation. This discourse continued unabated through a multitude of political vicissitudes. A full ten years after the launch of Fast Track, a veteran in Chipinge District explained: 'Those who were supporting the MDC must go and get their land in Britain. The land is for sons of the soil not sell outs' (Zamchiya 2011:1114). In his study of Mazowe District, Matondi (2012:216) similarly found that, a decade in, Fast Track farmers 'assumed that everyone belonged to ZANU-PF, and expected everyone to conform to the dictates of the party'. This required ongoing demonstrations of loyalty to ZANU(PF) through for example attending national celebrations or donating money, food and labour.

How were these ideas about authority, belonging and land institutionalized and what role did chiefs play in the process? Authority on the farms at first most often took the form of war veteran-led 'committees of seven'. These usually incorporated traditional leaders alongside ZANU(PF) activists, youth and women representatives. They were paralleled by the creation of district and provincial land committees. These were state institutions but they were firmly under ZANU(PF)'s partisan control and they entrenched a rejection of technocratic and legal authority.<sup>26</sup> Chaired by District Administrators, themselves increasingly overtly partisan (where their credentials were suspect they were at times literally chased away by veterans), they were dominated by ZANU(PF) leaders and veterans and incorporated chiefs alongside officials from the security, agricultural and welfare arms of state. For Moyo and Yeros (2007:108-109) the land committees played the 'most influential' role in structuring the occupations,

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<sup>25</sup> A range of examples can be found in Chaumba et al (2003:597-598), Zamchiya (2011, 2013), HRW (2002), Alexander (2006), and Matondi (2012).

<sup>26</sup> The committees of seven and land committees have been written about by a range of authors, with some variation in emphasis. For detailed accounts, see Mujere (2011:1133), Zamchiya (2011:1103-1106; 2013:941), Murisa (2013:12-14), Marongwe (2003:187), Chaumba et al (2003:598), and Alexander (2006:188).

directing and monitoring line ministries, identifying beneficiaries and farms for acquisition, resolving disputes, and eventually introducing procedures and paperwork, even if their work was regularly disrupted by differently minded local veterans, more senior and powerful state and ZANU(PF) officials and on occasion technocrats (Matondi 2012:90).

This is the context in which traditional leaders made their 'return'. Unsurprisingly, a number of authors have portrayed traditional leaders as influential only insofar as they subordinated themselves to ZANU(PF)'s partisan project. Moyo and Yeros (2007:110) note chiefs' consistent lobbying for land restitution, but stress that 'their capacity to overcome the influence of [Land Committees'] other members is doubtful'. Matondi (2012:217-218) refers to chiefs as an 'appendage' of the District Land Committee in Mazowe: 'In many cases, their views, as representatives of the people, were overruled in the committees, thus rendering their social power worthless.' Chaumba et al depict chiefs as 'part of the state's attempt to extend its hegemony deeper into rural areas at a time of political discontent. Chiefs and headmen are back – but only on ZANU(PF)'s terms' (2003:599; also see Murisa 2013:10; Zamchiya 2011:1119). While veterans and ZANU(PF) leaders might well support ancestral claims to land, and engage chiefs in, for example, the identification of graves or sacred places, they only did so 'as long as they toe the party line', as veterans in Chiredzi stressed (Chaumba et al 2003:599). This subordination of chiefs' customary claims echoed a longstanding strand in ZANU(PF) nationalism and land policy that rejected particularist demands for restitution in favour of invoking land as 'a marker of sovereignty. Land reform is about returning the land stolen by whites to "the people"' (Chaumba et al 2003:595). Casting the righting of historical injustice as a state task left ZANU(PF) in a position to opt for other grounds for land distribution. This was not an unpopular position amongst the significant constituency of land occupiers and veterans who were, in chiefs' eyes, illegitimate interlopers, foreigners or 'strangers' on their land.<sup>27</sup>

In their interactions with the partisan state, chiefs' role was not of course limited to making claims to land. Over the 2000s, their roles in both the communal areas and the Fast Track farms expanded to encompass duties such as political mobilization, surveillance and punishment, notably during and after elections, and the partisan dispersal of state resources. The ambitious Chiefs' Council president, Fortune Charumbira, regularly asserted the necessity of all chiefs' allegiance to ZANU(PF).<sup>28</sup> Some traditional leaders took on partisan roles with genuine gusto; others acted out of fear of violence or of a loss of access to the expanding array of official perks offered chiefs, including improved salaries, vehicles, agricultural inputs, farms, and higher political office.<sup>29</sup> As Matondi

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<sup>27</sup> In his study area of Gutu, for example, Mujere (2011:1130-1131) found that most occupiers were not going 'home', i.e. they had no historical claim to the land, while veterans held that productive capacity, not custom, was the correct basis for claiming land. Also see Dande and Mujere (2014) and Mazarire (2008).

<sup>28</sup> See Fontein (2009: 29, fn 83) for some background on Charumbira.

<sup>29</sup> See Fontein (2006:198, fn 8); Chaumba et al (2003:599, fn 29); Moyo and Yeros (2007:110); and Murisa (2013:10). As many authors note, accusation of any association with the MDC could lead to loss of land, office and worse. E.g. see Chaumba et al (2003:602).

(2012:217) writes, chiefs became 'semi-politicians whereas, as traditional leaders, they were supposed to be apolitical'. There were significant material effects to these politics, as Phillan Zamchiya (2011, 2013) has shown in Chipinge. The partisan networks in which chiefs engaged played a decisive role not only in determining who got hold of land but who gained access to free and subsidized fuel, state tillage, seeds and fertilizer, all of which made a substantial difference to the fortunes of farmers.<sup>30</sup> The binding of chiefs to a state remade as partisan has taken on new forms as the threat posed by the MDC receded in the aftermath of the 2013 elections and the battle for dominance among factions within ZANU(PF) took centre stage. Following the ouster of the faction associated with former Vice President Joice Mujuru in December 2014, her supporters were expelled not only from the party itself but – reportedly – also from the ranks of traditional leaders who, having associated themselves with senior politicians, were deemed to be 'loyalists' in one camp or another.<sup>31</sup>

Amidst all this there remained a great uncertainty regarding the ultimate basis of rural authority. In the day-to-day administration of Fast Track land, authors reported diverse practices. In his study of Gutu, Mujere (2011: 1131-2, 1135-7) found that the committees of seven had been transformed into 'village committees' but remained dominated by veterans and ZANU(PF) 'activists' who had a 'complete disregard for the authority of traditional leaders'. Matondi's study (2012:218) of Mazowe found 'village heads' had been appointed by chiefs in some cases while in others people 'had chosen their own village heads, either someone in a position of political influence or a War Veteran'. Tendai Murisa's study (2013:13-14) in the districts surrounding Harare found that village headmen, who might be appointed by chiefs or elected, had taken up leadership roles on village committees otherwise made up of a mixed bag of elected members and veterans. These were referred to as 'vidcos', somewhat ironically in that they were dominated by leaders construed as 'traditional', and so a far cry from the intentions of the 100-household modernizing model of the 1980s' originals. In terms of their practice, however, they echoed their namesakes in that they 'mostly focused on ensuring that government directives on agrarian reform are implemented at a local level', enforcing for example prohibitions on tree cutting or sub-letting plots. For Murisa (2013:17), this use of traditional leaders marked their 'resuscitation' as 'a crucial cog of local government and control'.

A number of writers have identified a 'contradiction between a simultaneously reinvigorated and disempowered chieftaincy' (Chaumba et al 2003:600). However, the 'return' of powers to chiefs by the state has always been double-edged: the terms of return constrained customary authority – in this case in partisan mode – but the 'intercalary' nature of chieftaincy and the diverse agendas of chiefs meant that they could use their state-sanctioned position to contest the terms of office, and to play on the contradictions and divisions within

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<sup>30</sup> Others also document these practices as part of not just an elite form of partisan patronage politics but as part of the day-to-day politics of ordinary peoples' struggles to survive. See e.g. Mujere (2011:1132) and Chaumba et al (2003:597).

<sup>31</sup> 'Mnangagwa Faction Purges Traditional leaders', *The Zimbabwean*, 13 May 2015; 'Chombo Threatens Chiefs over Mliswa', *Newsday Zimbabwe*, 15 April 2015.

state and party. In some places chiefs emerged as outspoken critics of elite accumulation, notably where elites used their positions in the state and ZANU(PF) to ride rough shod over local land claims or to monopolise mining resources (e.g. Mkodzongwi forthcoming; Mawowa 2013; Moyo and Yeros 2007:110; Chaumba et al 2003:602). At times they played on the ruling party's promises to 'indigenise' mining wealth in an attempt to hold it to account. Chief Zimunya, speaking to an NGO audience in July 2015, complained bitterly over the exclusion of chiefs from the distribution of diamond riches supposedly gathered for their followers under the Marange-Zimunya Community Share Ownership Trust: 'We have no say over resources within our own communities, so tell me what is our role as chiefs?', Zimunya asked.<sup>32</sup> The successes that chiefs enjoyed in confrontations with state and party were uneven and often ephemeral, dependent on their alliances with politicians whose fortunes rose and fell, as well as civil servants, local institutions of government, churches, NGOs and diaspora groups. They appealed to the law and they mobilized followers in acts of disobedience and, as they long had, they constructed elaborate historical narratives legitimating customary claims to office and land. As a rich literature has documented, fifteen years into the third *Chimurenga* there is a vast array of ongoing conflicts among traditional authorities and between them and other authorities over position, powers, land claims, boundaries, belonging, custom itself and a host of other matters that continues to disrupt the state's construction of customary authority and its partisan – and bureaucratic – use.<sup>33</sup>

The long decade of ZANU(PF)'s third *chimurenga* left it with few challengers to its overall control but with many challenges to its authority from within and outside the state and party. Partisan and patronage relationships, rooted in a reimagined war-time nationalism rather than the developmental and modernizing promises of bureaucratic rule, stood at the heart of the rural state. These relationships had delivered a dramatic redistribution of the land and offered a means to discipline political loyalties through a redefinition of citizenship. The ZANU(PF) state had, however, lost much of its bureaucratic capacity and expertise (though the appeal of technocratic rule remained, and regularly resurfaced) while its partisan institutions had worrying tendencies to dissonance and autonomy – on the part of veterans and chiefs incorporated into the bottom rungs of the state, as well as elites seeking to defend or extend new modes of power and accumulation through the upper levels of state institutions.

### **Returning to the Desire to 'Return' Chiefly Powers**

This brings us back to a consideration of the durable nature of the relationship between rural state-making and chiefs. As Helene Kyed (2013) has recently argued, the boom in southern African states' uses of the customary has resulted in highly heterogeneous constellations of power with considerable room for negotiation. As we have seen in Zimbabwe, customary and technocratic ideas were mixed in institutional practice and their content was sufficiently malleable

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<sup>32</sup> Reported in 'Chiefs now powerless says Zimunya', *The Zimbabwean*, 17 July 2015. Also see especially Makodzongwe (forthcoming) on chiefs' claims with regard to Community Share Ownership Trusts and platinum mining.

<sup>33</sup> There are detailed accounts of such cases and their labyrinthine ups and downs in Mujere 2011, Dande and Mujere 2014, Mazarire 2008, and Ngulube 2015.

to be able to legitimate at one and the same time state intervention and resistance to it, while nationalism was a central arbiter before and after independence of the authority of both the customary and the technocratic. It is in grasping the interplay over time of these different claims to authority, their institutional expressions, and their practical politics that we begin to see more clearly the manifold and sometimes surprising possibilities of chiefs in their relationship to states. The 'return' of chiefs is a mirage, seemingly always sitting on the horizon. In fact, they never left. But their durability is not to do with staying the same: they have been as changeable and contradictory as state institutions themselves, always bound by the state's shifting demands and always rooted in versions of custom, but never wholly defined by either of them.

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