

DRAFT

## **Troubled Rivers: Power, Race and the Struggles over Zimbabwe's Waters**

*Bill Derman, Michigan State University and the Department of International Environment and Development Studies, the Norwegian University of the Life Sciences*

*May 23, 2008*

Paper to be presented at the workshop on Political Economies of Displacement in post-2000 Zimbabwe, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, June 9-11th 2008

## **Part I. Introduction:**

The control of water makes many claims upon our imagination. Water, to belabor the obvious, does not travel the way humans' want it to. It does not appear when it is needed and it is subject to only partially understood climatological patterns. It is a critical life-giving resource subject to multiple forms of displacement. While not as significant in the political economy of Zimbabwe the way land is, it has been subject to multiple contestations while a source of power and riches. Historically, Zimbabwean agriculture relied far more on rain fed cropping but over time, irrigated agriculture has increased in importance. The control of water through storing, moving, and pumping requires changes in social and political organization depending upon scale. And, of course leads to conflict and cooperation between upstream and downstream users of water intensified by race and gender. The most intense water conflicts historically have been among large-scale commercial farmers as they became increasingly reliant upon irrigation and large dams. These patterns of conflict may very well be repeated by those who have seized and kept intact large farms at the headwaters of Zimbabwe's rivers.<sup>1</sup> It is in the historic context of reducing the control Zimbabwe's waters while rationalizing its management that we can situate the emergence of water reform in the 1990s.

There was an originality and uniqueness to the water reform enterprise in the 1990s. Water management, water reform, irrigation, and the politics of water turns out to be a good site for examining continuities and discontinuities between colonial, postcolonial

---

<sup>1</sup> These conflicts among and between commercial farmers are poorly documented and researched with the exception of Jim Latham's work (2007) on the upper Manyame

and post fast-track Zimbabwe. In the ongoing emphasis upon land and agrarian issues water issues have been not given the importance that they deserve. It is no accident that the loss of irrigation on former commercial farms or resettled farms has resulted in widespread production losses and declines in yields. The collapse of water treatment facilities in Zimbabwe's cities has led to increases in illness and new difficulties for Zimbabwe's growing poor. Like land, the need for water reform and redistributing this essential resource had been made in the 1990s. There were significant and ongoing debates among and between government, a growing donor sector, the World Bank and water researchers who were involved in training the next generation of water managers. Moreover, researchers were grounded in the practice of water management, irrigation and agriculture mainly, however, in the communal or the older resettlement areas.<sup>2</sup> There was a sustained lack of interest in the irrigation practices on larger-scale commercial farms.<sup>3</sup>

In analyzing the interface of fast track land reform and water reform, it is significant that neither took the other into account. In terms of water, Zimbabwe had been in the process of some far-reaching water reforms during the 1990s involving the creation of new institutions to manage and protect water resources.<sup>4</sup> The water reform process

---

catchment.

<sup>2</sup> Pioneering this work were Drs. Manzungu, Senzanje, van der Zaag and Bolding among others.

<sup>3</sup> Angus Selby provides data on the dramatic increase of irrigation in Mashonaland Central Province (Tsatsi Marodzi Districts) from 12% of land cultivated in 1980 to 30% in 2000.

<sup>4</sup> There are multiple studies of this process from varied perspectives. Bevlyne Sithole's analysis of meetings in the Mazowe catchment emphasize the degree of uneven power relations and miscommunication. Stalgren summarizes the whole process while Hellum and Derman examine the interface of the new national laws with local law.

revolved around a highly innovative understanding and implementation of the Dublin Principles and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)<sup>5</sup> which had been the guiding international formulation promoted by the World Bank and bilateral development packages including the governments of Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Norway and Sweden. The outcome was a complicated new system involving contestations between communal area farmers, large scale commercial farmers, the old Department of Water, new stakeholder institutions and the newly created Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). The new water management system created new Catchment and Subcatchment Councils whose task was to co-manage water with ZINWA. Ironically it was based on the notion that commercial water users (overwhelmingly commercial farmers) would now pay for their water. These payments would permit the funding of ZINWA and the stakeholder institutions. It is clear that in an era of extreme hyperinflation, loss of professionals, resettlement, and all the other dimensions of the multiple crises affecting Zimbabwe, that the visions for the water sector have been modified beyond recognition.

## **Part II. A selected short history:<sup>6</sup>**

In presenting the first reading of the Water Bill Attorney General (now Minister of Justice) Patrick Chinamasa emphasized that:

---

<sup>5</sup> Stalgren 2006 and Derman 2005 argue that water reform was indeed altered by local actors and not determined by the World Bank and other donors. This is not to deny the substantial influence of the donors.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed considerations on the history of water reform and suggestions for its framework see Part IV of Manzungu, Senzanje and van der Zaag. Bolding provides rich material on the colonial introduction of irrigation. Derman, Hellum, Manzungu, et al examine how the water reform ignored communal area water users; Makadho, Matondi and Munyuki-Hungwe among others focus on the history of irrigation development

What the existing legislation has done is that the water is the President's water but the president then put legislation to give permission to people to exploit it and that is what is peculiarly known as the water right.<sup>7</sup>

Claiming that the water belongs to the President and then going on to assert that the water would be redistributed from its colonial origins, Chinamasa attempted to make the water act a piece of revolutionary legislation. Joyce Mujuru, then Minister of Rural Resources and Water Development in presenting the second reading of the Zimbabwean National Water Authority Act claimed that the ZINWA Act "...was in line with the new economic strategy of decentralisation, commercialisation and privatisation."<sup>8</sup>

The water reforms formalized in 1998 through two Acts rested on the continuation of the division of water into two categories, commercial and primary. Commercial water was water used for business purposes and primary water for livelihood ones. While this division retained an older Zimbabwean \Rhodesian one, the institutions for water management were changed through the influence of multilateral institutions, foreign governments, and water management interests within the Zimbabwean government. The old Department of Water was to be largely transformed into the Zimbabwe National Water Authority, a new government parastatal. Ironically, the slogan for these reforms was 'user pay' reflecting reliance upon the Dublin Principles simplified by water management experts in Zimbabwe. The comprehension of water issues in Zimbabwe, especially at the national level, reflected the dominance of larger-scale commercial agriculture. Ironically, the 'user pay' principle was opposed by the

---

<sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates. Vol 25, No. 26, 3 November 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates. Vol 23, No. 8, 15 September 1998.

Commercial Farmers' Union but they came to recognize that this was essential if they were to continue to enjoy Zimbabwe's waters at historic levels. Commercial irrigated agriculture utilized the lion's share of water as well as providing much of the necessary funding to maintain water management.<sup>9</sup> The growing crisis in how to fund water infrastructures, the inability of government to maintain its existent dams and fund new recommended ones combined with international emphasis upon integrated water resources management led to a focus upon a need for water reform.

While the early 1990s saw an intense effort by the World Bank and other international donors including the governments of Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands to press African governments to reform their water laws, policies and management strategies in Zimbabwe there were also national interests at work as well. Specifically the Rukuni Commission broached the clear need for new water laws and management policies linked to land tenure reform. The requirement to have equitable distribution between the commercial and communal farming sectors was emphasized along with expanding irrigation in light of the frequent droughts. In Zimbabwe, there were multiple national pressures to also have water reform. The hearts of water supply were large dams owned by government and medium to small dams owned by private interests either individual or groups of farmers. While government supplied water to cities, the purification and supply of water to homes and factories rested with municipal governments. The Rukuni Commission considered, in part, the land \ water interface and recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe develop a comprehensive water master plan and a national irrigation policy and strategy. Linking water and land reform however despite such clear and unambiguous recommendations did not occur.

---

<sup>9</sup> Historically commercial farmers had created local water user associations to self-regulate water use. Farmers taxed themselves to maintain them and hired personnel to measure water usage.

As part of the water reform a new institution was created, the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) which was to be a semi-commercial entity, freed from political interference to implement a cost-effective and supply driven water policy.<sup>10</sup> It was to be responsive to user concerns through the establishment of Catchment Councils and Subcatchment Councils and the decentralization of management functions. Two subcatchment councils were to pilot the new program but rather than assess the results the government formed catchment councils and ZINWA in a dramatic rush. As Catchment Councils struggled to establish themselves and to fund themselves under pressure from various donors fast track overtook these efforts. Water reform did not incorporate land reform and vice-versa. It is worth; however, a reflection to see if and how small scale farmers and other water users were to be incorporated into water reform. In short, whether or not any attention was given to other users other than large scale farmers and if so how? Zimbabwe has had a long and checkered history of supporting smaller-scale irrigation schemes whose difficulties were intensified by the water reforms.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the long history of informal irrigation usually by women in communal areas has been ignored. Their needs for more water invisible.

An elaborate process was created to solicit public and stakeholder input in the formulation of the new water policy. This process was implemented by a donor funded interdisciplinary specialist body called Water Resources Management Strategy Project known throughout as WRMS. It began functioning in 1995 and ended in 2001. The project's director, Simon Pazvakavambva, became Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Water Resources and Rural Development as it was then known when the

---

<sup>10</sup> It was an indication of how badly donors misread the nature of political rule in Zimbabwe that they thought there could be a politically independent water management agency.

Department of Irrigation was moved in. In the general flux of the day, WRMS working with the Department of Water Development was to set out the path for the management of water, how catchment planning was to be carried out, the setting up of catchment and subcatchment councils, etc. according to the two new acts.

To examine if and how the new water management system would work two experimental programs were begun. One, Dutch funded, was the Mupfure Catchment (to become incorporated into the Sanyati Catchment) and the Mazowe Catchment (later increased in size). These programs were underway when the national government decided to implement as rapidly as possible the whole program including the establishment of ZINWA, the transfer of employees to them, the downsizing of the DWD, the creation of Catchment Managers with staff, and the creation of Catchment and Subcatchment Councils. During this process, enterprising irrigation engineers, water specialists, and some commercial farmers saw this as a chance to influence water policy and management at the same time as growing investment in private dams and irrigation.

Changes like terminating the system of water rights in perpetuity and replaced by water permits allocated for a fixed number of years demanded knowledge of all current water rights holders. Little attention was paid to an inadequate and outdated recording system which would have to be redone. The data base for land and farm sales was not adequate and since water rights were attached to the land, who actually had water rights was often not known at the national level. Thus, the most detailed knowledge existed at the local level. The process of having a permit system replace the priority date system (first in time, first in line but also subject to negotiation, discussion and

---

11 The best account is in Bolding 2004.

compromise) could not be realized because no decision had been made on the land rights to which the water rights were attached. ZINWA became fully operational in January 2000 only 2 months before the farm occupations began. An enormous amount of planning, time and resources had gone into the transition and quite quickly, ZINWA lost its independence.

Bureaucratically, there was an enormous shift from management based upon political divisions to one based upon catchments and subcatchments (river basins and watersheds in American English). With the creation of ZINWA and the transfer of staff from the Department of Water to ZINWA or to the newly created positions of Catchment Managers and staff, there were deep dislocations and contestations. The vision for this process was a scientific rationale one in which the best way to implement water reform would triumph. However, insufficient attention and care was given to the political processes and economic resources that would have to support the change for it to work.

While many critiques have been made of deepening the market for water, Stalgren observed that subjecting water to the market, as was proposed in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) would deprive the government of control of one of the most vital instruments for the manifestation of its postcolonial project, control over the distribution of water. He suggested that naming water as an economic good in accordance with IWRM would place water outside the realm of the government and make the government virtually irrelevant as an actor in the management of water (2006: 105). This constituted the heart of the debate between growing independent catchment councils with ZINWA which increasingly represented political rather than professional interests. ZINWA cynically wanted the Catchment and Subcatchment Councils to serve

as tax collectors for it. The Councils would provide the information, labor and revenue to ZINWA. It was not surprising that there was unity among council members as they asked ZINWA what services were they paying for? In private, council members suggested that this was just another typical government scheme to fund government while providing nothing in return. The plan was seen for what it was and accounted for severe conflict between ZINWA's centralized approach with that of a real decentralized one. There is an ongoing debate about how to determine the price of water and who should pay. The Water Act mandates pricing water based upon a permit system for commercial users. While most rural water users are not affected by paying for water it does add additional complications to those who have received land either entire farms, subdivided farms for individuals or A1 farms. And, as Catchment Councils and ZINWA continue they seek new revenue sources. For example, one catchment council has been trying to charge livestock owners for the water drunk by their cattle with the rationale argument that these owners will seek to sell their cattle.

### ***Part III. Race, Pricing and Irrigation***

In my view, the water reform process demonstrated the deep cleavages at the heart of the ZANU-PF government. Water pricing, a permit system, environmental costs, dam building, what to do about communal areas which typically had few if any water rights remained unresolved. How to price water, key to the donor actors, led to arguments among and between participants in the water reform process. Desiring to have new black commercial water users required low prices, but to maintain ZINWA, now dependent upon the sale of water, there were pressures to increase the prices. Water and electricity pricing also had dramatic effects for small-scale irrigation schemes that were inadequately represented throughout these debates. It was left up to catchment

councils to suggest mechanisms by which new water users could receive subsidized water for up to ten years. There were proposals that were never implemented.

Stalgren interviewed Patrick Chinamasa in 2000 on issues of stakeholder participation. Stalgren interested in issues of power and devolution led Chinamasa to worry about who would be in control of catchment councils. Chinamasa asked:

*To what extent will we be in control? Will they be dominated by the already empowered?*

Stalgren asked who is the we? Chinamasa responded:

*Us the blacks. This is a black and white issue. We must discuss race at all times because this is a matter of race. (2006: 112-113)*

This reveals how power and control remained central in at least Chinamasa's thinking (although I think it reflects the leadership of ZANU-PF), the disguising of class issues through the use of race, and little or no concern about genuine stakeholder participation.

To amplify this point, the water reform through 2002 was to get new commercial farmers (i.e. black Zimbabweans) to apply and receive water permits for commercial use.<sup>12</sup> I attended the first such event in Eastern Mashonaland Province. It was a gala ceremony at the permit holder's farm (although he did not live on the farm) attended by Minister Mujuru, the Chairperson of Mazowe Catchment Council, the governor, etc. and officials from ZINWA and Catchment Council. The minister's speech was a 45 minute attack upon Mr. Tsvangirai (and his wife) and of course, the MDC. Little attention was paid to water that day. The public event was followed by a sumptuous

---

<sup>12</sup> Ironically the law required that before permits could be issued a Catchment Planning Plan had to be approved by ZINWA and the DWD. The preparation of such plans were enormous and never finalized. The data required for such an exercise did not exist for any catchment in Zimbabwe.

meal and a genuinely luxurious home where the farmer-businessman lived.<sup>13</sup> He did not live on his farm and it was only a small part of his business interests.

The issue of who would and would not benefit from water reform attracted much attention. If history is any guide for the present, I sat for lunch with the leadership of a Catchment Council in 1999. They discussed the likelihood of the water reform process, ZINWA and Catchment Councils, of providing any real development by which they meant economic growth for Zimbabwe's poor. They concluded that the process would not assist communal areas to raise their standard of living since government was incapable of providing the necessary resources to do this. They pointed to the reality of the large dams - those completed, under construction and being planned. The dams had been sited for political reasons while the waters were not being used to benefit small holders. Ironically only those who could purchase these waters would benefit from them. They pointed to the tension between the need for ZINWA to address the complexities of managing such large structures while the size and scale of the new dams would prohibit the participation or the use of these waters by most small holders. They pointed to the reality that most small farmers did want water but on a small-scale which would not interest ZINWA. They saw the water reform process as basically not against their interest (despite early opposition to the law and to the formation of catchment councils) but would do nothing for the poor.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> As an historical footnote no one had remembered to bring a camera to the event so I was designated the official photographer. I provided copies of my photos to the Catchment Manager and to WRMS.

<sup>14</sup> Field Notes

In the implementation of the new water policies there was an ongoing deep debate about how to determine the price of water. There was a subsidiary debate about how to know if the water use was for commercial purposes. The Water Act mandates pricing water based upon a permit system for commercial users. Among multiple debates, an argument ensued between ZINWA and Catchment Councils (here clearly taking the side of commercial farmers) that water should only be paid for if used, not for just for allocation.<sup>15</sup> All such payment systems relied upon measurement of water through measuring water levels of dams, flow meters and electricity use for pumps. Of course, estimates could also be made depending upon the crops grown. Catchment and subcatchment councils struggled over issues of how to price water for new users (black commercial farmers) either pre- or post fast track and while many farms continued to operate. Thus while most rural water users are not affected by paying for water precisely because they are not commercial users it does add additional complications to those who have received land either entire farms, subdivided farms for individuals or A1 farms. ZINWA needed the money to keep going but the resettled farmers were rarely in a position to continue paying for water much less for electricity, dam maintenance, etc. Issues of payment, permits and water management in general became important because, in general, no attention was paid to the irrigation infrastructure when expropriating commercial farms. Similarly not attention was given to what form resettlement could or should take to sustain irrigation (Manzungu 2005 , Zawe 2006, Derman and Gonese 2003). Fast track land reform undid what changes had been made through water reform that had begun in the mid-1990s.

---

<sup>15</sup> The farmers had no problem paying for water reserved for them behind government dams since presumably it could be given to others if they hadn't claimed it. Ironically, large scale farmers were able to purchase government dammed water which was, for the most part, unavailable except for those with the capacity to utilize large amounts of water and with

The degree to which water development for small scale irrigation was taking place it was primarily being accomplished by nongovernmental agencies or funded by donors. Neither the large scale farmers nor the government saw smaller scale water use as important in comparison to larger scale farming. In my observations, no one representing government in the Catchment Councils of Sanyati, Manyame or Mazowe suggested changes in policy toward smaller-scale users or domestic users. In addition, government investment in small scale irrigation projects declined significantly. By 2000 participation for government meant only that there were black Zimbabweans around the table not that there was any meaningful participation by diverse users' especially poorer farmers. More significantly the government did not put in place any program to address the real and numerous water problems of smaller-scale users.

*Water as Property:*

The foundation for contemporary water reform in Zimbabwe rests upon the long-standing divide between 'commercial' and primary water. Primary water while absolutely critical for agrarian producers and users was and is only a small percentage of actual water use. Water for irrigated agriculture consumed over 70% of Zimbabwe's available waters. Control over water (and rain) has been critical in state planning and development throughout the world.<sup>16</sup> There are typically three options for water ownership: water can be owned by the state, decentralized public bodies, or individuals and private bodies. The Water Acts of 1998 and 1976 has the state owning Zimbabwe's waters. The wrinkle in 1998 was the President was made owner of the water

---

irrigation systems.

<sup>16</sup> Wittfogel has been credited with linking political power with control of water for China. For the western U.S. Worster has provided a fine, nuanced history of the links between hydropower and political power. It seems to be time for such a work on South Africa although Turton has been working with the concept of hydropolitics.

presumably on behalf of the state. Under the Act all water is vested in the President and no person can claim private ownership of any water. In presenting the first reading of the new draft Water Bill, Attorney General (now Minister of Justice) Patrick Chinamasa emphasized that the water is the President's water. In defending the abolition of the concept of private water Chinamasa also asserted the common Zimbabwean understanding of water:

Water is a public resource. It is a gift from God. None of us here are rainmakers, and that includes commercial farmers. The rainmaker is God. He provides His people and that water forms part of the hydrological cycle. (Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates, p. 1562-63)

Both these statements are consistent with Zimbabwe's history as a centralized state while appearing to incorporate new water-management global policies (Derman et al 2001). It also illuminates the contradiction between God's gift and paying the state.

What land owners obtain is a right to use water. Water rights in Zimbabwe, unlike in South Africa and elsewhere, cannot be bought and sold. Thus, they are typically attached to the buying and selling of land. The disposition of water rights under fast track has not been legally clarified. In practice the former water rights have now been attached to the possessors' or permit holders' of the former commercial farmers. How and if water and land will be connected post fast track has yet to be determined. Like most questions of property rights, they will need to be rethought and implemented in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe.

#### ***Part IV: Water Reform and Land Reform***

During fast track, Manzungu 2007), Matondi (2007), Zawe (2006), Derman and Gonese (2003) and others underscore that there was no thought given as to how existing irrigation systems, dams, and water management systems would be maintained or subdivided to take into account commercial farm resettlement. This is not surprising if one accepts the purpose of fast track was not about agriculture. However, in its casual disregard of water resources, water management and water infrastructure it should give pause to those who contend that fast track was about land and agriculture. The argument however needs to be nuanced and linked more broadly to Zimbabwe's agricultural history. The sustained disregard of small scale farmers' interests is not new. Nor is the lack of concern or interest in water in maintaining the most important part of Zimbabwe's economy. Kay Muir-Leresche among many others argued that agricultural growth emphasizing smallholder production had the highest multiplier and equity impacts and should have been the path chosen by the government during the 1990s. And, there were supporting studies especially from the Zimbabwe Programme on Women, Extension, Sociology and Irrigation (better known as ZIMWESI) focusing intensively water for the smallholder sector.<sup>17</sup> According to Michael Jenrich of the emergency unit of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) the production of communal farmers is only one-third of what it was ten years ago.<sup>18</sup> This can be attributed to the loss of reliable seed supplies, fertilizer, transport and exports.

The use of fast track for rewarding political followers and the neglect of water have led to the decline of agricultural production in most sectors which would not have been the result of a well-planned and implemented land reform. However, it does not mean that

---

<sup>17</sup> There were many publications resulting from this series of studies. One key one is Manzungu, Senzanje and van der Zaag 1999.

<sup>18</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 15 May 2008.

visions greater reliance upon medium and small scale agriculture doesn't hold great promise for the future. It is not apparent to me how those currently tasked with water management are thinking about how and to whom water should be distributed, where the resources can be obtained to maintain dams and how to rehabilitate or rebuild irrigation systems. Given the collapse or near collapse of so many government institutions, water issues are quite distant.

There are, however, numerous reports of emergent water conflicts overwhelmingly between new large scale users. This time it is in part between larger scale farmers but often coming with a political or military position: conflicts between brigadier generals, provincial administrators, parliamentarians and governors, etc. Water which should have been available in sufficient quantities due to the decline in irrigated farming (especially on A1 farms) were subject to arbitrary and wasteful usage given the politicization of ZINWA and the lack of funding for water management, dam maintenance and associated infrastructure. Indeed, there is a deepening urban water crisis reflecting the now familiar dual pattern of incompetence and over-politicization.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to supplying water for irrigation, ZINWA took over municipal water systems in a desperate effort to get a revenue flow but also to reverse any possibilities of cities continuing to manage their own water. And, not unexpectedly, the broader crises affected water delivery systems lowering the quality and quantity of water to Harare.

---

<sup>19</sup> One can't help but think of the U.S. government's response to hurricane Katrina. Having rewarded political opportunists with control of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) it was supremely indifferent and incompetent in responding to what everyone could see on television.

Water reform epitomized the contradictions and inconsistencies within and between different laws and policies. How the new water institutions including ZINWA, catchment and sub-catchment councils and the Ministry itself responded to the situation on the ground gives rise to a whole range of questions concerning how the new laws supporting water reform were implemented or reconfigured. While initially providing a potential model for co-operation across races and classes in terms of improving access through better management the different actors within the water sector are, as Fast Track proceeds, repositioning themselves. This is, as we have seen, a complex process pitting a range of actors with overlapping and conflicting aims and identities and at least initially, unprepared for the withdrawal of white farmers and then the support of ZINWA to Catchment Councils.

In the Mashonaland, Catchment Councils continue but the organization and process are being challenged by war vets, local elites and customary authorities who oppose not only payment for water but the structures of water management introduced by the new act. In communal lands and A1 areas, customary law is reaffirming its position versus the user pay principle. In A2 and on commercial farms we can see the preliminary contours of a ZANU-PF negotiated law implying that many will pay while the most powerful will not. While designed to reorganize water management through following the water, it is politically not viable since new, expensive institutions cannot be sustained. In my view, the system will have to be redesigned to match with more politically achievable ones.

With land and water becoming part of a patronage system or a political rewards system for those who support the party and state the instruments of any government policy toward water and land are likely to be undermined by the powerful. Having created a

political environment of impunity it is hard to see how this government (or the next one) can re-institute a transparent, non-discriminatory and 'rule of law' based distribution and management system. However, as many analysts have pointed out the dynamics at national level are different than those at other levels. In my own work in Western Mashonaland we have observed how the idiom of water as a God-given common resource is used to enhance control over land and people by local chiefs. In short, it is designed to render impossible the work of Catchment and Subcatchment Councils. It does refract the contest between communal and commercial lands and more broadly the technocratic emphasis upon water management. Once again, the long histories of water management are neglected and unsupported by the state.

Even with ongoing land occupations there were intense debates over what model to use between key actors (DWD, WRMS, national government, donors) and how to define the most significant problems to be solved in the context of commercial agriculture's dominance over Zimbabwe's waters. These battles included party and non-party members who saw the importance of water and the depth of problems in the water sector. On the one hand the councils were talk-shops, on the other hand, they had to decide when and how to collect water fees, they had to decide if and how to register all water users and how to issue water permits. In our research we found that high ranking members of ZANU PF attempted to penetrate the new institutions of water management but initially were blocked by a coalition of water engineers, commercial farmers and WRMS. However, as the land occupations proceeded, donor funding withdrawn, it became difficult to keep these institutions from actually doing anything. In addition, ZINWA became far more politicized and subject to party control. With greater party control, the autonomy and debates that had characterized the period from 1994-2002 came to an end.

*After Fast Track:*

The future remains opaque and uncertain. Simplifying the picture for the period after 2002 with respect to water for agriculture most communal areas remain reliant upon wetlands cultivation.<sup>20</sup> These areas have tended to be managed by women and over time have become critical for food security. Small scale irrigation schemes have in general collapsed. It cannot be said really that they failed given the contexts in which they tried to operate. In addition, Agriculture, Technical and Extension Services reluctant to support unplanned resettlement were restructured in 2000 and five departments (no longer coordinated) were formed. Irrigation services according to Zawe suffered a huge blow (2006: 64). Small scale irrigation schemes continued only with great difficulty after 2000 due to the collapse of Agritex, the macroeconomic environment and failures in the water delivery systems. On the newly resettled areas, it was recognized by 2002 that most commercial farm irrigation systems were no longer functional. A1 and A2 farmers inherited in Zawe's choice words:

A cocktail of irrigation technologies, ranging from semi-portable systems to centre pivot and drip systems. Varying complications in organisation were encountered. Organisational variation ranged from single farm pumping units feeding straight into sprinkler laterals to complicated consortiums comprising networks that included lift pumps to canal systems, night storage dams and separate booster pump stations at individual farms. (2006: 67-68)

Most systems were vandalized, taken or sold by the outgoing farmers, criminals, war veterans and sometimes resettled farmers. It was at this point the government attempted the Winter Wheat Irrigation Rehabilitation Programme to address

---

<sup>20</sup> Sithole, Nemarwunde, Derman and Hellum have recently explored these systems.

dramatically falling wheat production. To fund this, the new smallholder irrigation projects were suspended and the money transferred. The wheat program did not succeed and complicated irrigation systems like the Ghost acre consortium drawing water from the Mazvikadei dam were abandoned. While Zawe focuses on Western Mashonaland these patterns appear to be nation-wide. Thus small scale irrigation and commercial farm irrigation were placed under intolerable pressures. Even were schemes worked, there was no longer authority in place to balance competing needs.

It has been one argument that land redistribution was the political tool used by ZANU PF to reconstitute its political base, block farmers and farm workers from supporting MDC, and to reward its own powerful followers without regard to what constituted a good and necessary land reform program including water. Irrigation had become central to the ongoing success of Zimbabwean agriculture even with other economic difficulties in the 1990s. There are multiple models for successful irrigation and there are new and available technologies for the most efficient use of water. These choices will have to be part of a newly reconstituted Department of Irrigation, far more responsive to small holders and to flexibility.

Participation in institutions in water management has lost the little meaning that it had. The engineers and technicians did not welcome real participation. The commercial farmers who ran the irrigations systems and dams have left the rural scene as have many of the farm workers who operated and maintained the system. Re-introducing a water pricing system based on user pay will most likely have to be scrapped for recreating a government department funded through general tax revenues. Water from God or water from the president won't work for IWRM or with having market forces

set the parameters. However, it appears to be an unworkable strategy for farmers as well!

#### ***PART V: CONCLUSIONS:***

Thus, in consonance with other reforms in southern Africa, water reform has been filled with contradictions not all of them negative. I found the debates, the openness and the willingness to engage to be refreshing and promising in comparison to the implementation of the Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project which I had been researching.<sup>21</sup> This highly contradictory and uneven process which began in the early 1990s has collapsed in the face of a highly politicized Zimbabwe National Water Authority, the forced removal of white commercial farmers, and the resettlement of commercial farms. The process of resettling commercial farms paid little or no attention to existing irrigation systems. It seems doubtful that most of these systems can or should be resurrected if and when water issues re-emerge. Blaming current hunger and agricultural declines upon drought while disregarding existent water and irrigation systems during resettlement and permitting their dismantlement is disturbingly consistent with ZANU-PF's disregard for the rural poor and indifference to infrastructure, in this case dams and irrigation works. It is as though the whole modernist project (pace James Scott and Emery Delmond Alvord) has been replaced by Nkrumah's "seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you" only this time replayed as tragedy; there has been no farce here.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> This had been the site of my earlier research Derman 1997.

<sup>22</sup> While in some situations the technicians have returned to reassert state control this has not been the general pattern. We however need far more case studies from the different areas to compare with that of Chaumba, Scoones and Wolmer (2004).

Water reform has died a premature death. Even if much of the reforms did not meet the water needs of Zimbabwe's small scale farmers it provided the logic for addressing profound water inequalities and perhaps institutions which might have been more responsive. Stalgren (2006), Sithole (2003), Mtisi and Nicole (2003) and others have been right to point out the tensions and contradictions embedded in the complex processes of the 1990s. However, they lacked suggestions for how to proceed and commented in my view, too critically on a process that had only just begun. Among others Anne Hellum and I (2005, 2007) also signalled the neglect of small scale farmers, women, and ignoring existing water management systems. In addition, there were highly competent scholar-practitioners like Bolding, Manzungu, and van der Zaag who were presenting significant alternatives for how to make water reform address the needs of small scale farmers and to stimulate greater water availability for them. Despite the existence of policy alternatives, and as was true in multiple arenas, these ideas went unutilized and then discarded. In the midst of land invasions, catchment and subcatchment councils attempted to avoid politics and continue focusing on water reform. In Zimbabwe, the construction of what could and could not be discussed under the notion of political can serve as an interesting counterpoint to Ferguson's 'antipolitics machine.' In Zimbabwe, land was defined as a political issue and therefore not to be discussed. Water, on the other hand, as a more 'technical' issue could be discussed and debated precisely because it was defined as 'not political.' The setting, a mixture of water engineers, catchment managers, ZINWA, commercial farmers, representatives of small scale commercial areas, chiefs, et. al. led to adherence to what could and could not be discussed at formal meetings.

The water reform of the 90s should not be re-attempted. Experimenting with 'natural' boundaries rather than utilizing effective political boundaries should also be stopped.

Any water reform should now privilege smaller scale users - domestic and agricultural. There will be a larger scale sector as well but given the current state of resettlement it will be greatly reduced. If this is the case, then new water reforms will need to be linked to ongoing land reform. These links would then have the potential to reorder priorities, to refocus on communal area needs. It remains the case that most Zimbabweans live in communal areas and may very well continue to do so. There will be a new and dramatic need to reconstruct water supply to cities. We could envision smaller-scale systems which would be more adaptable and more flexible, although not always than large dams. Large regions of Zimbabwe have sufficient water resources to greatly increase water availability for domestic and productive uses. More local strategies need to be adopted for coping with rain short years rather than investing in huge dams.

There are very different and competing knowledge frameworks for and about water. These are expressed in co-existing systems of water management. It is important to take these into account when rethinking systems of water management. In addition, if control of water is indeed decisive to centralization and increasing state power, one could argue against that model. In moving toward smaller scale agriculture but also with irrigation, smaller units of water management would be favored but with the appropriate safeguards to protect downstream users from upstream monopolization. In addition, as the recognition of an international human right to water grows in importance,<sup>23</sup> Zimbabwe could begin with a far more gendered and people centered approach to water and water management. It would be inappropriate to elaborate in great detail on what should and should not be done beyond these suggestions as to how

---

<sup>23</sup> See Hellum 2001, 2007, Derman and Hellum 2007 for elaborating on what a human rights based approach would mean. See also Hellum and Derman (2004) for human rights and land

to link land and water reform in new ways. We can all look forward to a time when such issues can be seriously addressed again.

---

reform.

## References:

- Bolding, Alex. 2004. *In Hot Water: A Study on Sociotechnical Intervention Models and Practices of Water Use*
- Bolding, Alex, Manzungu, Emmanuel, van der Zaag, Pieter. 1999. A Realistic Approach to Water Reform in Zimbabwe in *Water for Agriculture in Zimbabwe: Policy and Management Options for the Smallholder Sector* edited by Emmanuel Manzungu, Aidan Senzanje and Pieter van der Zaag. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.
- Chaumba, Joseph, Scoones, Ian and Wolmer, William. 2003. From Jambanja to Planning: The Reassertion of Technocracy in Land Reform in Southeastern Zimbabwe. *Geoforum* Volume 35, Issue 1, January 2004.
- Derman, Bill. 1997. How Green Was My Valley! Land Use and Economic Development in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe in *Research in Economic Anthropology* edited by Barry Isaac, Volume 18. Greenwich, Ct: Greenwood, pp. 331-380
- Derman Bill. 2005. The Incredible Heaviness of Water: Water Policy and Water Reform in the new Millennium in Southern Africa in *Globalization, Water and Health: Resource Management in Times of Scarcity* edited by Linda and Scott Whiteford. Sante Fe: School of American Research, pp. 209-230.
- Derman, B. and Gonese, F. 2003. Water Reform: Its Multiple Interfaces with Land Reform and Resettlement in M. Roth and F. Gonese (editors) *Delivering Land and Securing Livelihood: Post-Independence Land Reform and Resettlement in Zimbabwe*. Harare and Madison, WI: Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe and Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin. Pp.287-307.
- Derman, Bill and Anne Hellum. 2007. Livelihood rights perspective on water reform: Reflections on rural Zimbabwe (co-authored by Anne Hellum) *Land Use Policy* 24(4), in a special issue in Exploring New Understandings of Resource Tenure and Reform in the Context of Globalisation edited by T.A. Benjaminsen, B. Derman and E. Sjaastad, pp. 664-673.
- Derman, Bill, Anne Hellum, Emmanuel Manzungu, Pinimidzai Sithole and Rose Machiridza. 2007. Intersections of Law, Human Rights and Water Management in Zimbabwe: Implications for Rural Livelihood in *Community-Based Water Law and Water Resource Management Reform in Developing Countries Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture Series, Vol 5* Edited by B van Koppen, M Giordano, J Butterworth. Wallingford, U.K.: CABI Publications, Chapter 15.
- Dube, D. and Swatuk, L. 2002. Stakeholder Participation in the New Water Management Approach: A Case Study of the Save Catchment, Zimbabwe. *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* 27: 867-874.

- Ferguson, James. 1990. *The Anti-politics Machine : Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Cambridge and New York : Cambridge University Press.
- Fontein, Joost. 2006. Languages of land, water and '>tradition' around Lake Mutirikwi in southern Zimbabwe. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44:223-249.
- Hellum, Anne. 2001. Towards a Human Rights Based Development Approach: The Case of Women In the Water Reform Process in Zimbabwe. *Law, Social Justice and Global Development*. University of Warwick Online Journal. Available at <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2001-1/hellum.html>.
- Hellum, Anne. 2007. Human rights encountering gendered land and water uses. Family gardens and the right to water in Mhondoro communal land in *Human right, plural legalities and gendered realities: Paths are made by walking* edited by Anne Hellum, Julie Stewart, Shaheen Sardar Ali and Amy Tsanga. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Hellum, Anne. and Derman, Bill. 2005. Negotiating Water Rights in the Context of a New Political and Legal Landscape. In: F. von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, K and Griffiths, A. (ed.) *Mobile People, Mobile Law: Expanding Legal Relations in a Contracting World*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp.177-198.
- Hellum, Anne., and Derman, Bill. 2004. Land Reform and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe: Balancing Individual and Social Justice through an Integrated Human Rights Framework. *World Development* 32(10) pp. 1785-1805.
- Latham, Jim. 2007. *Nyika Vanhu: The Land is the People: An Examination of Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe's Communal Lands*. PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe
- Magadla, Dumisani. 2000. *Irrigating Lives: Development Interventions and Dynamics of Social Relationships in an Irrigation Project*. Wageningen
- Makadho, Johannes, Matondi, Prosper, and Munyuki-Hungwe, Mabel. 2006. Irrigation Development and Water Resource Management in *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution Revisited* edited by Mandivamba Rukuni, Patrick Tawonezvi and Carl Eicher with Mabel Munyuki-Hungwe and Prosper Matondi. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.
- Manzungu, Emmanuel. 2005. Status of Water and Irrigation Management in Mazowe and Shamva Districts, Mashonaland Central Province. Unpublished
- Manzungu, E. 2004. Water for All: Improving Water Resource Governance in Southern Africa. London: International Institute for Environment and Development Gate Keeper Series No. 113. Paper 20. Brighton: Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Research Paper Series.
- Manzungu, E. and van der Zaag, P. 1996. *The Practice of Smallholder Irrigation: Case Studies from Zimbabwe*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.

- Manzungu, Emmanuel, Senzanje, Aidan and Pieter van der Zaag. 1999. *Water for Agriculture in Zimbabwe: Policy and Management Options for the Smallholder Sector* Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.
- Matondi, P.2001. *The Struggle for Access to Land and Water Resources in Zimbabwe: The Case of Shamva District*. Doctoral thesis, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala.
- Matondi, P. 2005. Mazowe District Report Five Volumes, Unpublished.
- Mtisi, S. and Nicol, A. 2003. Caught in the Act: New Stakeholders, Decentralisation and Water Management Processes in Zimbabwe. Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Research
- Muir-Leresche, Kay. 1998. Agriculture and Macroeconomic Reforms in Zimbabwe: A Political-Economy Perspective. Washington, D.C.: Trade and Macroeconomics Division International Food Policy Research Institute Discussion Paper No. 29.
- Nemarundwe, Nontokozi. 2003. *Negotiating Resource Access: Institutional Arrangements For Woodlands And Water Use In Southern Zimbabwe*. Doctoral thesis, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala
- Ranger, Terence. 2004. Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 30, Number 2, June 2004 , pp. 215-234(20)
- Rukuni, Mandivamba. 1994. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems*. Volume Two: Technical Reports. Harare: Government Printers.
- Selby, Angus 2005. *Commercial Farmers and the State: Interest Group Politics and Land Reform in Zimbabwe*. PhD Thesis.
- Sithole, B. 1999. *Use and Access to Dambos in Communal Lands in Zimbabwe: Institutional Considerations*. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD at the Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.
- Sithole, Bevlyne. 2003. Participation and Stakeholder Dynamics in the Water Reform Process in Zimbabwe: The Case of the Mazoe Pilot Catchment Board. *African Studies Quarterly* 5, no.3 (Fall 2001): [online] URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v5/v5i3a2.htm>
- Stalgren, Patrik. 2006. *Worlds of Water: Worlds Apart*. Department of Political Science, Goteborg University, PhD.
- Turton, Andrew and R. Henwood, editors. 2002. *Hydropolitics in the Developing World: A Southern African Perspective* . Pretoria, South Africa: African Water Issues Research Unit, University of Pretoria
- Wittfogel, Karl. 1957. *Oriental Despotism; A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957.
- Worster, Donald. 1985. *Rivers of empire : water, aridity, and the growth of the American West* New York:

Pantheon Books.

Zawe, Conrad. 2006. *Reforms in Turbulent Times: A Study on the Theory and Practice of Three Irrigation Ma*

Zimbabwe Parliamentary Debates. Vol, 25, No. 26, Tuesday, 3rd November, 1998

Zimbabwe, Government. 1998a. Water Act, No. 31/1998. Harare.

Zimbabwe, Government 1998b. Zimbabwe National Water Authority Act, No. 11/1998.

Zimbabwe, Government. 2000a. Statutory Instrument 33. Water (Catchment Councils) Regulations.

Zimbabwe, Government. 2000b. Statutory Instrument 47 of 2000. Water (Subcatchment Councils) Regulations.

Zimbabwe, Government. 2000c. Towards Integrated Water Resources Management.

Harare: Government of Zimbabwe Printers. Zimbabwe, Government. 2003.

Report of the Presidential Land Review Committee under the Chairmanship of

Dr. Charles Utete, 2 Volumes. Harare: Government of Zimbabwe.