

Religion, Land and HIV/Aids

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Abstract

This paper explores the issue of 'Religion, Land HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe'. Zimbabwe's politics of the land has appropriated religious themes in political discourse but also marginalized several groups such as women, children, and farm workers and rendered them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In particular Operation *Murambatsvina* that swept across the country and demolished homes and informal business structures displaced several people and rendered them homeless. This has sparked humanitarian crisis that calls for international intervention. The paper will seek to capitalize upon a growing interest on issues such as how religion matters to marginalized communities and how culture enables the process of self-empowerment among marginalized communities. Such paper will explore the intricate connection between indigenous religion, land, HIV/AIDS and some such related issues of human rights, morality and gender, using an interdisciplinary approach. The paper seeks to argue that the land reform policy not only undermined human rights and gender principles of equality, but also exposed new settlers and populace to fatal diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

In this paper we explore new dimensions and nuances of the land reform by putting religion, land and HIV/AIDS at centre stage. The religious dimension so far is not clearly articulate yet indigenous religion has played a significant role during the liberation struggles and post independent Africa. Previous scholars have not paid attention to the religious factor. The land reform has also been viewed in the context of moral and human rights discourse. Critics have raised concerns about the imbalance of resettled people versus un-resettled 'landless' ones. Most of the studies have not adequately articulated issues of gender and class pertaining to the beneficiaries and the unsuccessful applicants. Above all the politics of land in Zimbabwe appears to have created marginal classes that have been rendered homeless and exposed to HIV/AIDS. The government has been criticised that they unleashed the programme not to achieve a legitimate goal but to achieve political interests.

So far nothing has been produced on indigenous religion, land and HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. This paper therefore intends to fill this gap. Whilst previous contributions in social and political sciences are acknowledged, literature is yet to appear on the effects of the Fast Track land reform program in Zimbabwe. The environmental health impact on resettled new farmers and displaced farm workers and their facilities of sanitation and hygiene need examination. Lack of systematic studies on the relationship between religion, land and HIV/AIDS creates a vacuum in Zimbabwe's historiography that calls for exploration.

The paper adopts an eclectic approach that include anthropology, sociology, phenomenology and historical. It is based primarily on research material sourced through archives, library and empirical field research.

The paper first provides the religious context of the land issue. Then it discusses the political factors that account for land reform and its correlated programmes such as Operation *Murambatsvina*. Then it deals with the effect of land reform on marginalized people such as farm workers, women and children and their vulnerability to HIV and AIDS infection.

Religion and Land

Traditional African religious life is directly linked to the land of its progenitors. Land, spirits and people have always been intricately connected. From time immemorial land belongs to the ancestors. Land provides the connection between the people and their ancestors and ancestors play an important role within the every day life of the African. The spirits of the people give the people guidance and peace of mind. Agricultural produce was attributed to the power and influence of spirits.

The land has special significance to the African. According to J. Mbiti (1990);

Africans are particularly tied to the land....the land provides them with the roots of existence, as well as binding them mystically to their departed. People walk on the graves of their forefathers, and it is feared that anything separating them from these ties will bring disaster to family and community life. To remove Africans by force from their land is an act of such great injustice that no foreigner can fathom it. Even when people voluntarily leave their homes in the countryside and go to live or work in the cities, there is a fundamental severing of ties which cannot be repaired and which often creates psychological problems with which urban life cannot as yet cope (Mbiti 1990: 26).

For Gundani, land is the medium that connects the African victim to the departed ancestors whose bones lay in the tombs off their reach, by white settler farmer (Gundani ? : 136) This entails sacred graves, springs and aquifer were lost, thus, the land issue ceased to be just a matter of spatial loss associated with the resultant economic loss. At the core of the matter was the spiritual dispossession of despoliation of the African sense of being (Gundani ? : 137).

Political Context

In February 2000 the, Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF government faced a legitimacy crisis after losing a plebiscite for a new constitution which had a clause obliging Britain as the former colonial power to compensate for compulsory land acquisition. Soon after the referendum, there were large-scale invasions of mostly white owned farms spear headed by war veterans with the backing of the government.

The official announcement of the Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme was made by the Vice President Joseph Musika on 15th July 2005. This programme was meant to resettle people within the shortest possible time as well as legitimising the previous seizures of farms.

The government came up with two resettlement models under the fast Track programme. The A1 model was meant for the generality of the landless people with a villagised and self-contained set up. The A2 model was aimed at creating small-scale black indigenous commercial farmers. In order to request land, applicants had to fill in forms.

The fast Track land question has provoked intense debate in both scholarly and non-scholarly for a both locally and internationally. The critical issues hotly contested are land ownership and gender debates over the distribution of the primary resources of wealth that include land, mines, forestry and heavy industry. The Zimbabwean government has articulated primacy of the land question in the war of liberation. The Fast Track Land programme has been declared an integral part of the Third *Chimurenga*. To this extent the government has argued that real liberation can only be attained with the ownership of the land. But the nagging question is; Have both men and women been liberated by the Third *Chimurenga*. It appears one group that has been more liberated than the others. Infact the main beneficiaries are the male group. As someone observed, “*Ivhu rakabatwa navarume chete. Vakadzi tofa zvedu tichidya nhoko dzezvironda*”. (The land is held only by men and women suffer in abject poverty). (Private interview 12/04/04) Our findings show that there are gender disparities in terms of land redistribution.

Plight of Farm Workers

Economic

Zimbabwe's commercial farm workers experienced serious problems as result of land reform. Scholars tend to agree that historically the farm workers have been marginalised. In the process they have also been exposed to health hazards such as HIV and AIDS. Despite the fact that the government's Land Policy Document of 1999 recognises the right of farm workers to land both in terms of residential and resettlement, the farm workers have not been considered in similar manner that the document purports. Five years after Mugabe's controversial land reform policy, Zimbabwe's 300 000 farm workers are struggling to make ends meet. According to Sachikonye, the farm workers complain that they have been disadvantaged by the 'fast track' land reform policy. “What has happened is that two thirds of the original numbers have lost their entitlements to their jobs and are living from hand to mouth.” “There doesn't appear to be a programme to address this insecurity, this deterioration in their conditions”.¹

Once renowned as the 'bread basket of Africa' Zimbabwe's decline in agricultural production emanating from the land reform has also badly affected the conditions of welfare conditions of farm workers. Apart from loss of jobs, they have also lost their homes. “They have lost their only lost their source of livelihood”.² The workers have also lost their basic services and amenities. Although some claim to be getting better pay under the new black farmers, they lost many benefits such as food and medical aid that

¹ “Zimbabwe's Land Reform Omits Workers”, Online <http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials>

² South African Migration Project (SAMP)-Queens University, Online <http://www.queensu.ca/samp>, 28/3/2006.

they used to get under their white masters. The former white farmers used to “subsidise food, offer lunch and drinks, but all that is history now”.³

Farm workers also accuse their new black employers for using intimidation, hunger and other methods to exploit them in ‘slave labour’ conditions. As a result relations between the farm workers and new settlers have been strained, and often 'antagonistic'. According to Refugees International, many of the farm workers are 'internally trapped' rather than 'internally displaced'.⁴

Zimbabwe's farm workers also suffer from worse conditions under the new black farmers than under the old farmers. They receive minimum wages that fall far below the poverty datum line. Workers endure “low wages, poor housing and quasi-feudal and paternalistic relationships between land owners and farm labourers”.⁵ In these conditions they have been forced to adopt a 'nomadic' style of life, moving from one farm to another in search of casual work. “They live in shacks on the outskirts of property. People are suffering, some don't get salaries on time.”⁶ Also their severance packages they had received from their commercial landowners were dwindling. Left with no borrowing facilities as they used to obtain under the white farmers, a lot now resort to 'gold panning'.

Farm workers have also had serious lack of good sanitary conditions. Shortages of boreholes and exposed to many diseases. In a Southern African Report, Rutherford succinctly depicts the farm workers complaints of gloomy conditions that they endure at the farms under the leadership of black farmers;

The government must really force these farmers. This is very crucial, otherwise they don't want to give protective clothes. From next month on we'll have a big problem of mosquitoes, flies and disease spreading. We get good water from the boreholes, but there's no tap in the compound, not even one. The money we are being paid is not enough. Look at the housing. We are really badly treated. We are people and we are the producers...(Rutherford 1996).

Such is the deploring conditions of neglect faced by nearly two million farm workers that include men women and children at the farms.

Political

Political participation of farm workers has been stifled by farm invasions. There are various reports of incidents of intimidation and violence that have been reported from the farms. On Monday 24th April 2004, BBC News reported cases of Zimbabwe farm workers being targeted. The most gruesome incident is said to have taken place in Wedza, 120km in the South East of Harare where a gang of 150 war veterans, often supported by government, reportedly attacked farm labourers and set alight farm

³ Ibid.

⁴ Refugees International, 'Zimbabwe 2004-Internally Trapped Farm Workers, Online <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/photo/detail/3031/?PHPSESSID=5ce00f9>, 20/3/2006.

⁵ 'Zimbabwe land Reform Omits Farm Workers' Online <http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/landreformsa/Zimbabwe.asap>, 20/3/2006

⁶ South African Migration Project (SAMP)-Queens University, Online <http://www.queensu.ca/samp>, 28/3/2006.

workers buildings. Some farm workers were beaten and one black farm worker was “doused by paraffin”. The foreman at the farm was taken captive in handcuffs. Crops grown on white owned farms such as tobacco were burnt in the flagrant inferno. Tobacco storage barns with a storage capacity of 110 tonnes was set alight, and cattle and sheep allegedly killed. The intimidation and violence was widely attributed to war veterans who accused the farm workers of supporting the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Their objective was to destroy the support base of the opposition ahead of the ensuing parliamentary election in the country (BBC News 20/03/06).

Several incidents of violence have been reported on the farms, despite some concessions by white farmers. In Macheke, in the north of Harare, a farm manager and two women are reported as trapped in a farmhouse (BBC News 20/03/06). In Acturus, some black farm workers were beaten by group of war veterans and their supporters. As someone reported, “The assailants- armed with sticks, whips and rocks-rampaged through the farm settlement, kicking down doors, smashing windows and burning down about 30 houses as dismayed workers looked on” (BBC News 20/03/06). There are also other reports of violence against white farmers and black farm workers in Marondera in the east of Harare and other parts of the country. As one victim reports, “there were a lot of attacks of farm workers in their compounds last night” (BBC News 20/03/06). In the same incident, the body of a foreman was found missing. At Coronation Farm, Marondera, the farm workers squatter camp was burnt down to ashes on suspicion of harbouring political opponents (Sithole 2004: 29). According to the March issue of *Budiriro Mumapurazi*, the village chairman of Chikeya farm in Zvimba refused to offer land to ex-farm workers at Bhuri Farm because they were accused of working with opposition political parties (Sithole 2004: 29).

On political dispensation, the farm workers were identified with their white commercial employers. During the liberation war, they were suspected of 'selling out' like their white masters. According to Daneel guerrilla fighters died from food poisoning at the farms during the war (Daneel 1999: 5). The farm workers were also were also prejudiced by their employers when it came to elections and they never participated at political rallies nor supported black freedom campaigns. As such they did not recognise the legitimacy of the ruling ZANU-PF government. On that basis, the land reform would sideline them.

The white farmers too have also been accused of supporting the opposition. And in the light of this violence on the farms some white farmers abandoned their property, despite some peace concession that were made to allow them to return to their plots, such as by War Veterans leader, Chenjerai Hunzvi; “Your security on the farms is given and it is not given not only by me, but by the President” (Daneel 1999: 5). So this turn of events therefore left the farm workers exposed to intimidation and violence on the farms. They also succumbed to incurable diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Operation *Murambatsvina*

On 19th May 2005, a major uproar hit Zimbabwe. With little or no warning and without reference to the normal procedures of the law, the Zimbabwe government embarked on an operation to clean its cities, codenamed Operation *Murambatsvina* (Drive Out Rubbish) or Operation Restore Order. It started off in Harare but rapidly evolved into a

nation wide demolition and eviction campaign that was carried out by the police and the army (Harold-Bary 2005: 3). Some people called it *Tsunami* because of its speed and ferocity. The government set out to conduct mass evictions, throwing a large number of populace out into the streets, and then demolishing the structures that had sheltered them. Houses that people had lived in for years were demolished without notice. Flea markets and public markets that had flourished for decades and which provided a living for millions of people were shut down, street vendors rounded up and arrested, and their goods were confiscated and destroyed. Many young businesses were closed down. Informal businesses such as those found at Mupedzanhamo and Matapi in Harare, whose productivity and value to the nation was quite pronounced, were razed to the ground. Many people were left unemployed and homeless, without a means to support themselves, while hundreds of children dropped out of school (Private interview, Mbare Musika, 3/06/05)

The operation was first and foremost carried out to reverse the rural to urban migration. The government maintained that, “the Operation was a crackdown on black market trading and other criminal activities” (The Herald 8/06/05). According to S. Makwavarara, the Acting Mayor, “the council and the police had launched the campaign in a bid to turn around the capital which had deteriorated to unacceptable levels” (Wemter 2005: 6). Further the authorities said the Operation was meant to, “Ensure the enforcement of bylaws and halting all forms of illegal activities and violation of bylaws through vending, traffic control, illegal structures, touting and prostitution” (Wemter 2005: 6).

From official circles, the Operation was meant to be a general overhaul of the cities in a bid to promote health conditions for Zimbabwean citizens. The arguments used for demolition of houses were that they were illegal structures posing health hazards. For that very reason some people welcomed the campaign especially in its initial stages. A Harare resident expressed a sigh of relief; “*Mbavha dzanga dzanyanya. Regai zviende kumusha pamwe tingafema mweya mutsva*” (There were too many thieves. Its good riddance people are relieved) (Private interview, Mbare Musika 3/06/05). Also the Operation was welcome in as much as it brought solution to the home crisis that had gripped Zimbabwe through construction of new houses for the people under the substitute Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* scheme.

Yet from another perspective, the Operation was viewed politically. It is argued the government sought to hit back at members of the opposition parties particularly the MDC that had won the controversial March 31 polls (Private interview, 3/06/05). But a close look at the situation shows otherwise. Even some people from the ruling ZANU-PF party were also affected in the blitz.

Zimbabwe's controversial Operation *Murambatsvina*, impacted negatively on the farm workers. Under this exercise, the government destroyed 'unlicensed' structures, homes and market vendors in urban areas rendered thousands of people homeless. Among these people affected were more than 15 000 migrant farm workers from Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique (IWPR 27/03/06).⁷ Whilst most immigrants from Zambia and Malawi were recruited for labour force by the Rhodesian government to work in the farms and mines, those from Mozambique were refugees who fled from civil war in 1975. After

⁷ IWPR 'Zimbabwe: Clearance Victims Left in Limbo', Online http://www.iwpr.net/?p=acr&s=f&o=253542&apc_state=heniacr200507, 27/3/2006.

the land reform, most of these migrants had moved to 'squatter camps' and shacks such as Porta Farm in Norton, some 40km out of Harare. Originally Porta Camp had been established to accommodate people moved from Mbare, Zimbabwe's oldest high density suburb, the numbers had increased by workers displaced from commercial farms in 2000 on. So when Porta farm was demolished under the 'clean up' exercise, it meant that the migrants farm workers whose homes were also destroyed in the exercise, ended up with nowhere to go. Ironically Porta Farm had been established by government ahead of Queen Elizabeth's visit for Heads of Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) meeting in Harare in 1991(IWPR 27/03/06).

In this mayhem the Zimbabwe government seemed to have shown little concern about the welfare of the people. Most farm workers had their huts demolished since they were accused of sympathising with white farmers to sabotage the land reform. According to the Institute for War and Peace Reports, some farm workers lamented, "The government says we must go back to the rural areas but I don't have one".

I left Malawi in 1941 and I have never gone back. I have never been in touch with my relatives there... I would rather they killed me here as they once threatened earlier. Where do I take all my children? I have never been to Malawi and they insist I should go where I originally came....Zimbabwe has become my home (Private interview, 4/08/05).

But the government of Zimbabwe had its own point of view. However great the suffering caused by Operation *Murambatsvina*, the government argued that it was done to avert an even greater suffering. It had been carried out, according to its architects, to further the greater good of the town dwellers. It was argued, for instance that the huge crowds that thronged the city centre to ply their informal trade were in fact a centre for criminal activity, and that if they were eliminated, crime in the town would go down significantly.

Whatever the reasons, the Operation has been a subject of criticism. The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe expressed concern on the manner in which the operation was conducted as "provocative, offensive and unsympathetic to the feelings of the people" (ZCBC 2005: 1)

Independent sources estimate that about seven hundred thousand people in the cities across the county lost their homes, their sources of livelihood or both. According to Harold-Barry, the operation "indirectly affected a further two million four hundred thousand people in varying degrees"(Harold-Bary 2005: 3). Hundreds of thousands of women, men and children were made homeless without access to food, water or healthcare.

Such predicament by farm workers and victims of the 'clean up exercise' generated appeals for humanitarian assistance that led to the United Nations send a special envoy, Anna Kajamulo Tibaijuka to assess the impact of the clean up campaign. However it is outside the purview of this paper to provide substantial detail about this campaign.

But in her report based on fact finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation *Murambatsvina*, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, the United Nations

envoy, indicated that the operation directly affected more than 700 000 people, leaving them homeless and even without the means to earn a living (Tibaijuka 2005: 14). She also described how the people affected by operation *Murambatsvina* were carted off to “hell camps” where the suffering was intolerable. The gains of the operation would have to be quite significant to justify such a great amount of collective suffering.

The government of Zimbabwe, in response to the Tibaijuka report, prepared its own response in which it justified the action, citing such criminal activities as the hoarding of essential consumer commodities, illegal forex exchange, prostitution and so on.

The land reform has not only affected migrant farm workers, its adverse effects were also felt by women, children and some minority local groups. Although it is not the main focus of this paper, it is interesting to throw some insights into this issue since they share similar experiences. We hope this will broaden our understanding of the plight of marginalised classes in the land reform programme. At this point we discuss briefly the case of women, children and some minority groups affected by the land reform in Zimbabwe.

Women, Children and Minority Groups

The problems that flared at the farms have not spared them. Roy Bennet, an opposition MP for Chimanimani exposed incidents of violent attacks on children 'as young as eight years old' who have fallen victim to the farm problems. In 2004 women and children were assaulted, women abducted and beaten at Charleswood farm. There are also reports incidents of shootings and killings at Charleswood (Sokwanele 20/3/06).

Most women at the farms used to be employed as contract workers on a seasonal basis, were often dismissed and without benefits. According to United Nations IRIN report, “up to 50% of farm workers stayed on the farms even after losing their jobs, resulting in a rise of squatter camps”.⁸ Some resorted to survival techniques of 'piecework' but obtained 'irregular' incomes. And with closure of farm schools, child labour became the obvious outcome.

Zimbabwe's aboriginal San have also raised alarm and are appealing for humanitarian assistance. Estimated at 1 200 the San inhabit Matabeleland North and live in abject poverty. According to ZWNEWS, although they have abandoned their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle and embraced modern farming methods, most do not have adequate land or resources to sustain them. Apart from food shortages, the San are faced with 'grinding poverty'. People from Mgodimasili village lack farming inputs and so have been relegated to 'permanent beggars.' One San explained their predicament; “At one point Christian Care [a humanitarian NGO] gave us cattle...but they died due to drought, otherwise we could be farming large pieces of land, like our neighbours from the Kalanga and the Ndebele tribal groups (ZWNEWS 17/03/06).

On the whole, the plight of the farm workers and other marginalised groups has seriously affected Zimbabwe's humanitarian record. This also bears on catalogue of problems caused by the land reform that we turn to discuss at this point.

⁸ 'Zimbabwe land Reform Omits Farm Workers' Online
<http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/landreformsa/Zimbabwe.asap>, 20/3/2006

Problems

The land issue has created serious problems. The first and most important is that the land policy has caused serious agricultural decline. The purported redistribution has seen forced transfer of land from few white farmers minority into hands of few black elites thereby stifling equitable distribution of land. Rather than focusing on production, the beneficiaries seem to have multiple interests and pay minimal attention to farming. As someone observes, multiple farm owners, the 'chefs' under utilise land, "The so called new farmers are not putting land to full and efficient use. To a larger extent land was taken from those who used it efficiently for farming purposes and given to those of privileged status who hold it for sentimental reasons or when time permits, to use as brai sports" (Magaisa 2/12/06). Whilst the elite expropriate land, they fail to make fruitful use of it. As the analyst laments, "The man of high rank, his wife, his son, his daughter, his grandchildren, his nephew, his aunt, his distant cousin and his wives, sons and daughters have each got a decent farm...and they are doing nothing on it (Magaisa 2/12/06).

Second, the incumbent government has crippled agriculture as business venture as run by the white predecessors. Normally farms operate commercial agriculture with viable capital and property rights. An economist argues, "A good market for land permitted a market price and collateral value to be established, and the transferability of ownership rights through the market" (Robertson 17/03/2006). But land reform decimated the system and without these asserts productive agriculture is rendered futile. Financial institutions have also lost confidence to offer security for bank loans in a system that disregards security of tenure and property. These supported investment process that allowed farmers to turn land into 'productive' and 'sustainable' farms. But as it stands, 'today's farmers are seriously 'disabled' and effectively 'disempowered (Robertson 17/03/2006).

Also land invasion effectively damaged infrastructure and agricultural equipment such as machinery, tractors, combine harvesters. Black farmers have been harm strung by lack of adequate commercial farming skills and shortages of inputs like fertiliser and seed. Research out put has also been severely curtailed. Much more obsessed by political motives than economic factors, the land reform has practically negated the commercial value of land.

Eric Bloch, a political economic critique, notes, Zimbabwe's economy has lost its backbone as result of land reform. Whilst agriculture has been the mainstay of Zimbabwe economy, land reform had practically 'decimated' agriculture and wiped out most of its contribution to economy. This he emphasises, has not only devastating repercussions upon farmers, farm workers and their families but disastrous consequences for the economy as a whole (Bloch 3/02/06).

Third, land reform lexicon uses the rhetoric of the revolution. Church Bishops take exception the use of war idioms like 'Third *Chimurenga*', for land reform, a position flatly denied by Mugabe. Critics point out that such state of affairs "happens when a liberation movement goes from State House and fails to adjust from an essentially military-command paradigm to a democratic one" (Associated Press 18/05/04).

Fourth, the land reform is also sharply criticised as a method to retain power through patriotism. It served as a tool to destroy a block of voters whom the government could not control, the farm workers. So the political imperative overrode the economic imperative (Zimbabwe Independent (10/03/06).

Fifth, critics accuse Mugabe of plunging Zimbabwe, once a promising African nation renowned as the 'Bread basket of Africa' to the 'Basket case of Africa' (Zim Daily 6/03/06) through severe political and economic crisis in the past six years with a raft of controversial policies. Critics point to Mugabe's policies, especially the land invasion and seizure from white commercial farmers to landless blacks for worsening the economic problems. With inflation receding to 'three-digit level', 800% and now sliding towards 'four digits, 1000%', the highest worldwide level, Zimbabwe has become the world's fastest shrinking economy outside a war situation. However in an interview on ZTV in Feb, Mugabe hinted that he was considering stepping down as land distribution that he had so much wanted to see had been addressed (Zim Daily 26/3/2006).

Fifth, natural weather conditions have also terribly affected land reform policy. Without paying too much emphasis on the natural order, inadequate rain and natural disasters which have characterised Southern Africa and a greater of post independent Zimbabwe, has had a detrimental effect on production

In a survey conducted in Harare in 2005 by the Mass Public Opinion Institution on behalf of Afro Barometer, an international organisation, statistics indicate that out of 2000 urban and rural people consulted 52% attribute Zimbabwe's economic decline to Mugabe whilst 4% blame MDC and their Western allies.⁹ But as debate on land reform rages on political analysts, without absolving the Zimbabwe government, implicate IMF as complicit to Zimbabwe's hyperinflation (Hornes 3/07/06) by conniving with the West.

The Problem of HIV and AIDS

The land reform, with its deprivation of descent living for majority of landless people, also accerbated the problem of HIV and AIDS. AIDS poses a serious health problem in Zimbabwe in particular and the world in general. At present there is no known cure or vaccine for the disease. By the early 1990s, it was estimated that eight to twelve percent of pregnant women in Zimbabwe were infected with the AIDS virus (Zimbabwe Health and Demographic Survey 1995: 141). In 2002 UNAIDS reported that the scale of the AIDS crisis now outstrips even the worst-case scenario of a decade ago. HIV/AIDS marks a severe development crisis in Sub Saharan Africa where 70% of the world's 42 million infected people live. Seven countries in Southern Africa that include Zimbabwe have adult infection levels exceeding 20% and in Zimbabwe one in every 3 adults is infected.

Evaluation

The paper has not only provided a mere historical narration of events. It has managed to situate the land issue in its *Sitz im leben* of African traditional religion by discussion of the traditional spirit world. In trying to achieve this, the paper has looked at the place of

⁹ Zimbabweans Blame Mugabe for Economic Mess, Survey Shows' Online <http://www.zimonline.c.za/headdetail.aspx?ID=11657>, 2/23/2006.

land in the Shona establishment. It has argued that in the Shona context land is not a commodity that can be privatized. There is a dualism in the Shona way of conceptualisation of reality. There is dual division of space between sacred and profane. There is clear identity between the Shona and the land. As such land reclamation was not simply reclamation of geographical space rather, in tandem a reclamation of all that land stands for in the Shona establishment.

Operation *Murambatsvina*

To all who were affected, and to the rest of the world, it seemed that the government of Zimbabwe had been grabbed by a singular madness, a frenzy for destructiveness that could only be accounted for in terms of ill will and evil intention towards its poor subjects. The action was roundly condemned as cruel and unethical.

By raising arguments in support of the operation, the government of Zimbabwe appealed to the utilitarian theory, a school of thought that argues that the morality of an action can only be judged by the amount of happiness or sorrow it produces. W.H. Shaw (1999) explains utilitarianism as an ethical theory that judges good and bad simply in terms of the general welfare. Here for an action to be considered good it should produce more happiness than sorrow and bad if the suffering it produces surpasses the amount of happiness that it generates. Thus utilitarianism provides us with a simple litmus test on which to measure such a widely condemned operation whose perpetrators insist that it was done for the general good.

What it means is that if any justification is to be found at all for Operation *Murambatsvina*, such justification would be on the utilitarian principle. It is this theory that enables us to judge the morality of the exercise, as it tends to demand the proof of moral goodness in the actual outcome of the action in question. Perhaps the government of Zimbabwe has failed to find moral justification for this action even under the utilitarian principle, the one measurement it chose to measure its own moral standing.

Farm Workers

The government's land reform has created serious problems for farm workers. It seems the government exercise adopts a partisan policy that determines who should and who should not obtain land. Political affiliation appears to have taken centre stage. Whilst it benefited a number of landless blacks, especially the elite class, it also nurtured problems for marginalised people. Farm workers belong to this class that has been alienated by the land reform.

Conclusion

The Farm Track land question has bred the problem of land ownership and triggered gender sensitivity debates in the distribution of the nation's precious resources, the land. Discrepancies have arisen in the distribution of the land. The pattern favours men at the expense of women. Also the farm workers have been treated as 'second class' citizens and not accorded fair distribution of land. Both disadvantaged groups are dispossessed both materially and emotionally and have been left vulnerable to HIV and AIDS infection.

As we see from the discussion above, it has become clear that an equitable and fair land distribution is a factual imperative. It is in fact that Zimbabwe's agro-based economy survived on commercial agriculture by white farmers that earned the country the 'Bread basket of Africa'. Zimbabwe's migrant farm workers contributed to the production of crops on the large scale. Originally recruited from Malawi and Zambia to supplement labour force in the turning up of the Rhodesian economy, the farm labourers formed a formidable force in agricultural production. However land reform with all its intent and purposes, to address land imbalances, has caused serious agricultural decline. The reform exercise has marginalised farm workers and left them badly exposed to HIV and AIDS. Facing the same fate are women, children and minority groups in Zimbabwe. This calls for a formulation of policies that advocate equal distribution of resources irrespective of one's origins, sex, age, ethnicity or political affiliation.

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