SHIFTING GROUNDS IN ZIMBABWE: CITIZENSHIP AND FARM WORKERS IN THE NEW POLITICS OF LAND

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In this paper, I situate current politics concerning farm workers and land within the broader history and debates over their citizenship in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe and, by extension, how the nation is imagined in this southern African country. I examine citizenship not in its legal meaning but in its moral sense. I look at how certain categories of citizens are considered more ‘virtuous’ than others within, and in spite of, the “rhetorical legitimacy of equality and the concept of citizenship as the basis of collective governance” inherent in the global spread of the state form since the nineteenth century (Wallerstein 2003: 673; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). A crucial ‘virtue’ in Zimbabwe in regards to citizenship has been a state-sanctioned right to use land.

The aim in this chapter is to provide insight into how farm workers have been constituted as less virtuous citizens in regards to the agrarian question, which in turn has informed how they have been affected by the ‘real world of politics’ (Bernstein 2004: 220) shaping land reform in Zimbabwe today. I sketch out the ways in which farm workers have been publicly configured within postcolonial Zimbabwe by discussing how the dominant representations of their particular ‘belonging’ to the land and the nation emerged in the colonial period. In so doing, I discuss a few of the constitutive arrangements in the colonial period and their “routinization, even institutionalization in practice and memory” (Kaplan and Kelly 2001: 152) that have helped to publicly locate farm workers within the nation in a way to make them less deserving than other (represented) communities in regards to access to land. I next touch on how this configuration has continued in the postcolonial period. I conclude with some questions concerning current strategies of advocacy.

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as a modest contribution to the larger debate about democracy and social justice in Zimbabwe and the region (see Cousins 2003).

**Land and Citizenship in Colonial Zimbabwe**

As many have noted, control over land and production on it became a crucial aim of the Southern Rhodesian administration and governments. Since the early 1900s, the agrarian question in the classical Marxist sense was played out as land expropriation, displacement of African farmers, and state subsidies in a variety of markets made European farms a crucial source of capital accumulation and a leading sector of the emerging national economy. In turn, government policies and practices actively undermined African farmers, most of whom were confined to agriculturally marginal and increasingly overpopulated native reserves that became, in practice and in colonial government intent, key sources of labour for whites in southern Africa. A so-called ‘dual’ colonial rural political economy emerged. It was comprised of comparatively productive white commercial farmers and generally less productive black petty commodity producers whose livelihoods were crucially linked to non-farming activities (e.g. Palmer 1977; Moyo 1995; Cousins, Weiner and Amin 1992). Such a political economy created vast inequities in access to land and means of production and was implicated in a particular concatenation of land, citizenship, and the nation (Worby 2001; Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003).

Europeans became ‘settlers’ of the new nation, citizens with an inherent right to purchase or receive land in the better agricultural areas. They also were able to create associations to represent themselves as a constituent community of the Rhodesian nation, as ‘settlers’ and productive citizens of the national economy based on their presumed virtuous attributes of race, culture, and civilisation in contrast to the ‘native subjects’ (e.g., Murray 1970; Rutherford 2001a). Such efforts became institutionalised in legislation and policies, routinised in narratives of academia, the media and development programmes, and etched into the landscape through the infrastructure of vast farms, plantations and ranches marked as ‘European’.

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2 There were certain qualifications such as access to capital and, for the government’s European land resettlement schemes, issues such as service in the war and appropriate ‘character’ (see Rutherford 2001a).