Conditional Belonging: Farm Workers and the Cultural Politics of Recognition in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Zimbabwean land politics and the study of rural interventions, including agrarian reform, more broadly, using the analytical framework of territorialized ‘modes of belonging’ and their ‘cultural politics of recognition’. Modes of belonging are the routinized discourses, social practices and institutional arrangements through which people make claims for resources and rights, the ways through which they become ‘incorporated’ in particular places. In these spatialized forms of power and authority, particular cultural politics of recognition operate; these are the cultural styles of interaction that become privileged as proper forms of decorum and morality informing dependencies and interdependencies. The author traces a hegemonic mode of belonging identified as ‘domestic government’, put in place on European farms in Zimbabwe’s colonial period, and shows how it was shaped by particular political and economic conjunctures in the first twenty years of Independence after 1980. Domestic government provided a conditional belonging for farm workers in terms of claims to limited resources on commercial farms while positioning them in a way that made them marginal citizens in the nation at large. This is the context for the behaviour of land-giving authorities which have actively discriminated against farm workers during the politicized and violent land redistribution processes that began in 2000. Most former farm workers are now seeking other forms of dependencies, typically more precarious and generating fewer resources and services than they had accessed on commercial farms, with their own particular cultural politics of recognition, often tied to demonstrating support to the ruling political party.

A ZANU (PF) ‘Baptism’

On the afternoon of 16 April 2000, two days before the twentieth anniversary of Zimbabwe’s independence from colonial rule, a group of young men from Harare was driven to a commercial tobacco and maize farm some 20 km east...
of the city. Once they arrived at what I will call Memphis farm, owned and operated by white Zimbabweans, the youths left the trucks and began beating the men and women working on the farm, chasing them into the surrounding fields and bushes. They also stole any goods they found in the dorm rooms, brick houses, and mud and pole huts in the farm workers’ compound, burnt the huts, and then proceeded to rob and trash the homes of the white farm owners and their son, who was helping to manage the farm. These youths were operating under the direction of war veterans, those who had fought for the guerrilla armies during the 1970s war against the white minority Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith. Some of these ‘war vets’ accompanied the youth from Harare; others had been camping on the farm since the previous month. As they put it at the time, they were ‘symbolically occupying’ the land, underscoring their demand for wide-scale redistribution of land from whites to blacks, to fulfill one of the promises of the 1970s’ armed struggle of redressing the racially skewed land holdings implemented shortly after the colony was formed in 1890.

The immediate cause for this attack on Memphis farm was revenge for an earlier incident. The senior foreman of the farm workers had been forcibly taken by some of the war veterans camping on the farm to their ‘base camp’ where he was physically assaulted; when some of the farm workers came to rescue him, they inflicted a beating on a few of the war vets. The attack of 16 April was in retaliation for this latter beating. However, the larger reason was that most of the farm workers on Memphis were visibly supporting the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change), the opposition party launched in September 1999. At that point, having successfully led the ‘No’ vote in the defeat of the ZANU (PF) — Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) — government’s draft constitution in a national referendum held on 12–13 February 2000, the MDC seemed poised to win the forthcoming parliamentary elections called for June. A neighbouring white farmer had hosted MDC rallies, which many Memphis farm workers had attended.

Memphis farm had a workforce of about sixty permanent workers plus a number of women casual workers. In 1999, the farmers estimated that there were about 500 people living in the farm compound. A few farm workers who fled the 16 April assault remained in the bushes for a week or so until the white farm owner deemed it safe enough to return to his farm. Others, particularly management workers like the foremen and clerk who were specifically targeted by the attackers, remained away for over a month.1

1. They stayed with friends or family on nearby commercial farms or in towns, or in their rural home or musha (in the chiShona language), in the Communal Areas, the post-colonial name for the colonial ‘Native Reserves’, or a ‘stand’ on a resettlement scheme — land that the Zimbabwean government had bought from white farmers after 1980 to provide to black farmers. However, many farm workers lacked access to a musha, particularly those who were born (or whose ancestors were born) outside of the country, which was quite common amongst Zimbabwean farm workers given the legacy of colonial migrant labour recruitment (see FCTZ, FEWSNET and ALB, 1999).
Interestingly, however, almost half of the workforce returned within a day or so and remained on the farm with the war vets who had assaulted them. In July 2000, amidst roofless houses, a few workers recollected this experience, often with some embarrassment and nervousness as war vets were still at their base camp. One observed, ‘the war vets kept us in their base. They killed some of the farmer’s cattle and stole some of his maize-meal and fed us. They told us “you are now baptized members of ZANU (PF)”. We remained there until the farmer returned and said come back to your homes [in the burnt-out compound] and try to live together’. As another put it, ‘we farm workers were scared. The war vets said “as you have nothing, we can give you food until your boss comes back”. They were using the food from the farm — *upfu* [maize-meal], meat, etc. When the boss came back, people returned to work and the boss gave us some soap, blankets, and helped to rebuild some of the houses’.

For anyone who has listened to international news since 2000, part of this scene has a ring of familiarity: war veterans and youths occupying white farms, with the blessing and assistance of President Robert Mugabe’s ZANU (PF) government, vandalizing property and terrorizing farmers and their workforce. But the fact that some of the farm workers returned to stay with and be fed by the war vets — who had chased them and burnt down their accommodation, often destroying the few possessions they had — is less familiar, and may be a little unsettling to many. It does not fit smoothly within the dominant narratives and analyses deployed to explain what has been happening on Zimbabwe’s (former) commercial farms since 2000. The explanatory forces of such narratives and analyses hinge on national and international entities and processes such as ‘the state’, ‘imperialism’, ‘hegemony’ and ‘regime’. But such explanations are destabilized at times by the actions of farm workers, leading some analysts to characterize these Africans as ‘misrecognizing’ their own interests, which are said to be aligned to some distinctive national, class, labour or racialized entity. I would argue that such characterizations indicate the limits of dominant explanatory frameworks for understanding the activities and power dynamics that have been operating on the (former) commercial farms, rather than some cognitive failure on the part of the farm workers.

Instead of assuming certain forms and pathways of recognition which farm workers need to follow in order to be acknowledged as legitimate social actors, if not offered sympathy or material support, it is more useful to analyse the particular ‘mode of belonging’ and its ‘cultural politics of recognition’ that have been operating on commercial farms before and after 2000, which have been tied to national and international scales of action and social projects and informed by particular political and economic conjunctures. By staying with the war veterans who had attacked them, those Memphis farm workers were submitting to a different mode of belonging, with particular forms of dependency, than the mode of belonging which they had fallen under with white farmers — a mode of belonging with different forms of recognition.
and, for the vast majority of (former) farm workers, one that has become even more insecure and precarious to their livelihoods. In short, I suggest that since 2000 there has been a transition in the forms of ‘conditional belonging’ for farm workers.

This article develops this analytical framework of ‘modes of belonging’ to examine the changing cultural politics shaping the livelihoods of farm workers and former farm workers on Zimbabwean commercial farms and former commercial farms. I first expand on the two dominant explanatory frameworks commonly deployed for analysing the events on Zimbabwean farms since 2000 before sketching out my own analytical strategy. To illustrate this strategy, I briefly trace a history of the mode of belonging I call ‘domestic government’ that became routinized on European farms in the colonial period and which continued to operate on commercial farms from Independence in 1980 until 2000. I then provide some brief examples of what has been happening since then, when alternative territorializing projects largely displaced the dominant mode of belonging and its cultural politics of recognition, leading to great uncertainty and desperate livelihoods for most of the Zimbabweans living on the (former) commercial farms, including (former) farm workers.

EXPLAINING FARM WORKERS AND ZIMBABWEAN LAND CONFLICTS

Zimbabwe’s politicized land conflicts have been subjected to much academic analysis, which has conventionally fallen into two competing interpretations. The perspective put forward largely by the ZANU (PF) government and its supporters views the land occupations as an example of the return of the land to indigenous peoples. For them, it redresses the racialized unequal land distribution inherited from the colonial period which saw the best agricultural lands reserved for exclusive ownership by those classified as Europeans, while Africans living on this land were dumped into administratively delineated Native Reserves. This perspective typically lauds the land occupations of 2000 and what the ZANU (PF) government began calling the ‘fast-track land resettlement programme’ as it gazetted ten million hectares, almost all of the white-owned commercial farms, for redistribution to black settlers after its narrow victory in the June 2000 parliamentary election — an election that many international and domestic observers deemed to be not free and fair given the violence, intimidation and other questionable practices (see Dorman, 2005). Those holding this perspective have explicitly or implicitly justified the violence against farm workers, white farmers, and the MDC on the alleged grounds that these groups were supporting the unequal land distribution and that they had material and ideological support from ‘imperialist forces’, notably the British and US governments. For exponents of this approach, the forcible land transfer from mainly white Zimbabweans to black Zimbabweans is ultimately what matters.
The essay of Moyo and Yeros (2005) typifies this approach. Others have critically engaged with their substantive argument (for example, Cousins, 2006); here I will examine how they situate farm workers within their analysis. In their particular class analysis of the events, they explain the hostility towards farm workers and their difficulty in accessing resettlement land as a result of the lack of proper political education by their trade union to prepare them for land redistribution. Accordingly, Moyo and Yeros (2005: 191) argue that farm workers ‘found themselves in a confounding antagonism in which their erstwhile employers and exploiters — the landowners — were defending them, and vice versa, in opposition to land redistribution’; an antagonism which was compounded by the war veterans having ‘an ambiguous, even arrogant, posture towards farmworkers viewing them as incapable of nationalist political consciousness’. They thus explain the discrimination and violence towards farm workers through the latter’s misrecognition of their own class interests that led some to support their employers which, in turn, led poorly conscientized war veterans to become hostile, if not violent, towards them.

The competing perspective is put forward by the MDC and many commentators who emphasize how the ‘land invasions’ were principally about an attempt by the ZANU (PF) regime to stay in power. Land invasions and fast-track land redistribution enabled the regime to curry favour with much of the electorate by ‘playing the anti-colonial race card’, by appearing to meet the popular demand for land reform while distributing land to its leading supporters, and using the occupied farms as base camps to inflict terror on MDC supporters, as occurred on Memphis farm (see, for example, Raftopoulos, 2003). The violence and discrimination directed towards farm workers is condemned, but it is seen principally as a sign of the politicization of the processes of development. As Sachikonye (2003a: 239) argues, ‘If it had been properly carried out, land reform would have provided a positive opportunity for a central developmental mission rather than a predatory role to the state. While land reform provided a short-term electoral advantage to the Zanu-PF government, its long-term sustainability, without requisite domestic and external resources, hangs in the balance’. In this narrative farm workers are assumed to be mainly victims of the process or for some, such as Coltart and Bennett (2001), potential allies of farmers.

At the centre of these conflicting interpretations is the role of the state and ‘rights’. David Moore (2004) characterizes this split amongst Left intellectuals as between ‘patriotic agrarianists’ and ‘critical cosmopolitans’. The former, like Moyo and Yeros, pin their hopes on the consolidation of a progressive class alliance within the state to defend national sovereignty and redistributed land against ‘predatory imperialism’. The latter, like Raftopoulos, are more concerned with liberties, both in the political and social justice arenas. From different angles, both analyse how national and international political forces have been restructuring the institutional arrangements of the state in a way that enables, hinders, or undermines the establishment of
economic rights in terms of land redistribution and/or political rights in the form of ‘democratization’.

Although I would argue that Moore’s ‘critical cosmopolitans’ provide much more insight into national- and international-scale dynamics than the ‘patriotic agrarianists’, it is important to also examine how these rights and those promoting them have actually been translated into the varying conditions and struggles on the land itself. Both positions focus on the actions of ‘the state’ and do not examine how power relations entangled in the state/non-state divide have worked on the commercial farms up to 2000. These power relations helped to situate ‘farm workers’ as a particular represented community in the nation and led to particular forms of dependencies and interdependencies that have been playing out on the farms since 2000 — forms that, for instance, led some Memphis farm workers to seek shelter from the very war vets who had attacked them.

To facilitate a different understanding of these dynamics, I suggest that one needs to examine ‘recognition’ rather than simply focus on ‘rights’, including the way that rights often hinge on certain notions of belonging that have traction with particular dependencies and interdependencies. Going beyond Mamdani’s (1996) felicitous contrast between ‘citizen’ and ‘subject’, scholars of rural Africa are showing how institution-building interventions and objectives of laws, administrative directives and development projects in colonial and post-colonial Africa have not necessarily achieved their goals as they become ‘entangled’ in other social projects and power relations. As Donald Moore (2005:162) argues, Mamdani’s ‘institutional analysis pivots on ideal types of power, identity, and space that obscure both African and administrative practices’. In current literatures of agrarian change and the ethnography of the state, these ‘ideal types’ are being problematized.

In agrarian studies, analysts are showing that African peasants have not solely been subjected to ‘decentralized ethnic despotism’ (Mamdani, 1996) under customary law and traditional authorities, despite the intentions of some colonial administrators and post-colonial politicians. Rather, researchers such as Sara Berry (1993, 2001) have examined how land-based resources in Africa are shaped by negotiation and fluidity — as she has put it, material struggles over resources are also struggles over meaning. Pauline Peters (2004) has added the important proviso that one also needs to examine the limits imposed on such flexibility by processes of commodification, exclusion and class formation. As she observes, since the 1990s growing land conflicts have been predicated on a ‘process of narrowing in the definition of belonging . . . [as] group boundaries are more exclusively defined’ (ibid.: 302, emphasis in original). In their review of the literature on tenure regimes in Africa, Cousins and Claassens (2006: 22) show that ‘land rights’ are embedded in a range of overlapping social relations and identities (households, kinship networks, levels of ‘community’) and ‘derived from accepted membership of a social unit, and can be acquired via birth, affiliation or allegiance to a group and its political authority, or transactions of various kinds
(including gifts, loans, and purchases). They are somewhat similar to citizenship entitlements in modern democracies'. Like 'citizenship' (see Ong, 1996), there are differences between legal regimes and the social meanings of 'belonging', especially given competing forms of political authority over land.

In a converging argument, Henry Bernstein (2004, 2007) suggests that transformations within capitalism more broadly and capitalist agriculture more specifically over the last decades of what is called 'globalization' have made the classic models of land reform a suspect national programme. Bernstein calls for an analysis of particular land struggles connected to crises in livelihoods within a wider political economy in specific historical circumstances and an eschewing of 'any expectations of class (or any other) "purism" . . . or evaluation of "success" or "failure" on the criteria of some rationalist plan of "policy" (i.e. objective, means, outcome) removed from the real worlds of politics' (Bernstein, 2004: 220). He levels this criticism at Moyo and Yeros whose analysis and prescriptions rest on identifying self-contained, discrete class entities with pre-defined interests.

To understand these politics — the meaning of this 'belonging' which Peters alludes to — I draw on the burgeoning literature on the ethnography of the state (such as Das and Poole, 2004; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001) to examine how access to land and other resources, and struggles over it, including in the name of 'rights' or 'revolution', are shaped by modes of belonging with their particular cultural politics of recognition. Rather than basing one's analysis on 'rights' tied to particular identities — for example, the 'rights' of 'peasants' to receive land, the 'rights' of white farmers to their property, the 'rights' of farm workers to receive land or fair wages — I suggest it is better to examine the processes of identification and their contestation that shape access to and control over resources, including labour power (see Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

I take the term 'politics of recognition' from Harri Englund (2004) who uses it to discuss the complicated identification processes that categorize social agency, their dependencies and interdependencies, within particular political economy contexts. Englund proffers this as a way to go beyond the 'ideal types' generated in the growing emphasis on law and human rights. He suggests that one needs to examine how 'rights' talk and practices become translated into existing power relations and social dynamics. Accordingly, one needs to recognize how demands for rights may be predicated on dependencies of others (ibid.: 20; see also Englund, 2006).

To analytically ground these politics of recognition, I use the concepts of 'modes of belonging', 'represented communities', and 'social projects'. 'Mode of belonging' refers to the routinized discourses, social practices and institutional arrangements through which people make claims for resources and rights, the ways through which they become 'incorporated' in particular places (Hammar, 2002; Ong, 1996). Modes of belonging that
inform access to land entail forms of territorialization, which as Nancy Peluso (2003: 233) explains, are attempts to ‘affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area’ (see also Lund, 2006: 694–5). They are spatialized forms of power and authority, imbricating attempts at control over land with control over people (Hughes, 2006:11). Power and possibility do not simply operate through broad social categories — white farmer, black worker, for example — but rather they work through cultural styles of interaction that become privileged and recognized as proper forms of decorum and morality informing dependencies and interdependencies (Ferguson, 1999: 96ff., Hammar, 2002: 228). Claims and decisions over resources — the ‘politics’ — operate through recognized cultural styles, or what one could call a ‘cultural politics’.

Modes of belonging have particular cultural politics regarding the recognition of rights and responsibilities in very specific localities, including building and policing the boundaries of rule themselves. Yet, they are always entangled in translocal processes and histories, including state administrative and legal practices. These practices generate what Kelly and Kaplan (2001: 22) call ‘represented communities’ — “communities” renewed in their existence not only by representations in the semiotic sense, but also by representations in the political, institutional sense’, through state formation via governmentality, hegemony, and practices of citizenship, including mass-mediated narratives and academic analyses of such ‘identities’. These represented communities acquire certain characteristics, institutional forms, and political possibilities on the scale of the ‘nation’ and on more localized or transnational scales. I use the term ‘scale’ to denote the scope of action and audiences envisioned by various social practices and possibly entailed by them, rather than assuming that, say, ‘national level’ institutions automatically have a particular effect on the national territory (Ferguson, 2006). The wider represented communities of ‘farm workers’ and ‘white farmers’, for example, have informed, but not determined, the contours of the modes of belonging that had operated on Zimbabwean commercial farms.

Modes of belonging are not reducible to these wider forms of governmentality and hegemony. Rather, modes of belonging emerge from, energize and are entangled with ‘social projects’, which are organized aims and efforts of action. When such social projects become routinized forms of control over specific localities, they can become modes of belonging themselves. In turn, new social projects are enervated by, cross through, or even oppose such modes of belonging at various, potentially overlapping, scales of action. The interrelationships between modes of belonging, represented communities and social projects determines the specific ‘effective articulations’ (Moore, 2005: 25) of rule; what is effective in one locality and at a certain time may not necessarily work elsewhere or at a different moment in time.
Territorialized Modes of Belonging in Southern Africa

There are many recent studies examining the sedimented modes of belonging in Zimbabwean Communal Areas, the uneven ways in which complex territorialized rule plays out between competing and overlapping sovereignties of, to use the conventional short-hand forms, ‘traditional authorities’ and ‘the state’. Whereas legislation, development projects and political analyses may peddle clear, distinct social agents with delineated rights in their discourses — ‘ideal types’ — in practice effective articulations of rule tend to embed rights and administrative structures into forms of dependencies within a mode of belonging with particular cultural politics of recognition. These modes of belonging are shaped by territorializing projects that could differ dramatically from how officials perceive them. For example, in contrast to laws that specify that only Zimbabweans have rights to land in Communal Areas in the district to which their national registration card says they belong, there are many cases of authority figures in the Communal Areas actively recruiting immigrants or ‘strangers’ from outside the district to settle on land, including many farm workers whose birth-place or ancestry is non-Zimbabwean. Their social projects may be to ‘open up’ particular territories (Spierenburg, 2004: 63), acquire resources and build political followings (Nyambara, 2001: 546; Rutherford, 2001: 213), or to assert claims to lands claimed by others (Hughes, 2006). For these smallholder farmers, their ‘rights’ are predicated on being recognized by the particular land-giving authority; in turn, these authorities, be they localized or translocal, have been contested by others, who themselves may be localized or translocal, with their own claims to be able to distribute land. This is not to say that state practices defining ‘rights’ to land are irrelevant — on the contrary, they can be highly important (Cousins and Claassens, 2006: 10). At various times, Communal Area or resettlement farmers have had to demonstrate a tangible right to belong that is legible to various authorities.

Modes of belonging on commercial farms had been more precarious than those found in Communal Areas. Most analytics deployed in studying labour regimes of commercial farms in southern Africa have been strongly influenced by the racialized colonial heritage of the region, generally viewing them as materialized racial privilege or paragons of capitalist modernity. In so doing, such studies often neglect how such forms of racialized and gendered identification have operated on farms and in the wider political economy and what dependencies and interdependencies emerged from them. Just as the ‘cultural politics of authority’ in Communal Areas is a localized interweaving of state and social forces, as Lund (2006) proposes to understand public authority in Africa more broadly, Tim Mitchell suggests it is problematic to analyse landed property in European colonies as separate from state processes or as simple effects of state intent. Such entanglements made landed property a ‘realm of exception, within which power operated without rights’ as the ‘architecture that formed the enclosed agricultural colony, a
microcolonialism within a larger colonial domain, went hand in hand with a legal architecture that constructed territories of arbitrary power within the larger space of legal reason and abstraction’ (Mitchell, 2002: 70–71). Control over land meets control over people.

Rather than assuming that labour relations on the European farms demarcated and legalized by the British South African Company and then the government of Southern Rhodesia operated independently of state practices, I have suggested that a form of governmentality was constituted on these farms that empowered white farmers in a mode of belonging I term ‘domestic government’ (Rutherford, 2001). The Masters and Servants Act and legislation over movement of Africans provided the legal architecture while the routinized social projects of racial rule operating through state practices, aimed at establishing an economically productive and ‘civilized’ colony for white settlers, helped to lay out the contours of social and power arrangements of European farms. Domestic government was not a seamless colonial process. Its mode of belonging was influenced by political and economic conjunctures and particular social projects: state policies, accumulation dynamics, migratory schemes, gendered notions of respectability, ethnicity, farming practices, religious sentiments, and kinship and marriage ties and tensions, all interacted in shaping these broad contours and the particular constellation of power and possibility through which the cultural politics of recognition on individual farms worked at different points in time.

As discussed elsewhere (Rutherford, 2003, 2004, 2007), these forms of ‘minicolonialism’ in colonial Zimbabwe were territorialized modes of belonging that were part and parcel of colonial state-building projects. The hegemonic forms of recognition in these colonial zones of exception hinged around racialized and gendered rule and cultural styles implemented through bodily disciplining techniques of surveillance, work rhythms, reward, and corporal punishment. Racialized and gendered codes of respect for the farmer and his (or, less commonly, her) management hierarchy were a key cultural style workers needed to learn if they wanted to minimize problems for themselves and acquire whatever resources were permissible for them to acquire (minimal wages, rations, fields to grow food, credit, etc.). Many workers found impermissible routes to acquire resources, subvert and at times challenge such cultural politics, but these modes of belonging were never transformed. Instead they were typically reinforced by supportive arrangements amongst farmers, and between farmers and government officials, and some of the workers.

From the 1920s onwards, as pedagogical programmes of edification and betterment of ‘natives’ in the Native Reserves and townships emerged within government bureaucracies, mission stations and African organizations (Alexander, 2006; Hughes, 2006; Moore, 2005; Worby, 2001), farm workers slowly emerged as a represented community intimately tied to European farms on the scale of the nation that became routinized and institutionalized ‘in practice and memory’ (Kelly and Kaplan, 2001: 152). Farm workers
were excluded from such pedagogical programmes of what eventually became known as ‘development’, for they were both foreigners — European farmers relied heavily on foreign workers, mainly from colonial Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique, until the 1960s — and were identified as agricultural labourers for white farmers. They were configured in policy, laws and general arrangements to be solely belonging to European farms as ‘domestic government’ anchored the dominant cultural politics of recognition in the colonial period.

DOMESTIC GOVERNMENT IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

For the first twenty years of the post-colonial period, domestic government continued to operate as the hegemonic form of cultural politics of recognition on what now became known as ‘commercial farms’. Thanks to the racially skewed economic opportunities and a rise in land prices after the cessation of armed conflict, most of the farm owners and operators continued to be ‘white’, despite the removal of racial restrictions on land ownership in 1978. By 2000, it is estimated that there were about 4,000 white commercial farmers and about 800 black commercial farmers in Zimbabwe.

Not only did the race of the commercial farmers largely remain the same, but domestic government also continued as the routinized mode of belonging in these sites. However, there were some important changes between 1980 and 2000 that ensured land politics remained a source of debate and tension within the nation and positioned farm workers as a represented community in particular ways. Three such conjunctural issues were the expanding profitability of the commercial farming sector, particularly in the 1990s, and the growing joblessness and poverty in the urban and rural areas; the shift in official land reform policies from a focus on resettling landless and displaced peoples in the early 1980s to one emphasizing commercial orientation and indigenous commercial farmers and ‘squatting removal’; and, especially, the changing interventions directed at farm workers, particularly as they became involved in the demands for ‘rights’ in the 1990s. These national and transnational processes added new dimensions to how farm workers were represented on the scale of the nation, leading up to the events since 2000.

Agriculture as Engine of Growth

After the end of the liberation war that was mainly fought in the rural areas in the 1970s, commercial agricultural with its backward and forward linkages to domestic manufacturing and its key export crops was widely recognized as the dominant economic sector in the national economy. The economic growth in commercial agriculture benefited some African farmers on commercial farms and in other landholding areas, but it was predominantly enjoyed by
the largely white commercial farmers (Moyo, 1995, 2000). The growth was due in large part to domestic and international market opportunities and the strong policy support commercial farmers received during these years (Brett, 2005).

Throughout the 1980s, commercial farmers increasingly concentrated on export crops like flue-cured tobacco. In 1980, 1,547 growers earned on average US$ 1,030 per hectare for flue-cured tobacco; by 1996, 2,917 growers were earning an average of US $7,294 per hectare, according to a private report (Kingdom Research Institute, 1999). The implementation of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s ushered in a series of deregulations and financial incentives, including access to off-shore credit that led to an expansion into other foreign-exchange earning land uses such as horticultural crops, game-farming and tourism. As Moyo (2000: 141) points out, by 1995–96 an estimated 30 per cent of commercial farmers devoted some or all of their lands to these new land uses.

This relative thriving of commercial agricultural under structural adjustment policies made it an anomaly as other sectors, noticeably manufacturing and social services, were adversely affected in the 1990s. Whereas in 1994, the agricultural sector comprised 13.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the manufacturing sector 22.9 per cent, by 1999 agriculture comprised 20.1 per cent of GDP and manufacturing 17.4 per cent. In much of Zimbabwe, job losses were increasing, the number of school drop-outs was growing, and there were more and more shortages in health-care provision (Carmody, 2001). This disparity included a growing gap between farmer (and shareholders) and farm workers as the former took a greater share of the profits through the 1980s and 1990s (Kanyenze, 2001). As a report for the International Monetary Fund put it in 1998, commercial ‘farmers gained almost all the share [of the GDP] that wage earners lost’ (Botchwey et al., 1998: 180, cited in Brett, 2005: 10). This visible difference in wealth fed into resentments against white farmers who were already positioned negatively as a represented community on the scale of the nation, given their close association with colonial rule (Hughes, 2005). These resentments were compounded by shifts in the land resettlement programme.

**Settlers to Squatters**

Land reform has always been a strong political demand in Zimbabwe, intertwined with electoral and party politics as well as popular actions and sentiments (Alexander, 2006; Worby, 2001). For a variety of constitutional and diplomatic reasons, the ZANU (PF) government followed, more or less, a market-based, ‘willing-buyer/willing-seller’ model for the first twelve years of independence. With funding from international donors, particularly the British, the government drew on colonial-era land-use models to craft a resettlement programme (Alexander, 2006: 114), which were successful in
terms of actual distribution of land and productivity gains in the first decade, particularly its first half (Kinsey, 1999). By 1985, 40,000 land-poor households, including those from Communal Areas, returning refugees and farm workers were resettled, although the land was generally poor in terms of soils and rainfall (Moyo, 1995: 121ff.). Thirteen years later, the government redistributed land to another 30,000 households (Moyo, 2007: 75).

The slow-down in the resettlement programme was due, in part, to a reduction in donor funding as agrarian reform was generally not supported as a ‘development policy’ in the 1980s and the British government had both technical and political criticisms of the programme (Palmer, 1990). Moreover, there was a significant rethinking of the land resettlement programme by the Zimbabwean government in consultation with donors, commercial farmer organizations and the Zimbabwean indigenous elite (Moyo, 1995; Ranger, 1993). Increasing productivity of African farmers became the predominant focus, while the vehicles for these interventions became the personal characteristics and assets of the settlers as well as planning. Land resettlement was being replaced by land reform in the government’s policies as a greater emphasis was placed on enforcing land-use planning regimes (Moyo, 1995: 244ff.) — regimes which were very similar to colonial-era programmes in terms of their governmentality logics and techniques (Alexander, 2006; Drinkwater, 1991). One result of this shift was that farm workers were widely viewed as unsuitable candidates for resettlement based on assumptions that they were ‘foreigners’ and, especially, that they lacked the proper development ethos to work for themselves. Such an evaluation flowed from the assumption that they were accustomed to working for a (white) boss and thus, the reasoning went, lacked self-motivation (Moyo et al., 2000; Waeterloos and Rutherford, 2004). The heritage of colonial represented communities continued to shape public perceptions of farm workers. By the late 1990s, more than 70 per cent of farm workers were born in Zimbabwe (Sachikonye, 2003b: 66), which at that time accorded them citizenship by law. Yet, the modalities of acquiring official recognition of that status made it difficult for many farm workers to acquire evidence of their legal citizenship to Zimbabwe (ibid.:18).

Two directions that typified this trend were an active promotion of black large-scale commercial farmers, and intensive anti-squatter policies and campaigns by the government. In response to advocacy by indigenous elites, and through leasing government-controlled land (including that bought for resettlement) to black commercial farmers in the 1990s, African elites held around 11 per cent of commercial farmland by 1999 (Moyo, 2007: 75). By the mid-1990s, with land-use planning stringently defining particular rules for acquiring land and who properly belongs in which land area, the government identified squatters — people ‘out of place’ — everywhere: 33 per cent of the officially identified ‘squatters’ on the national scale were found in the Communal Areas, 21 per cent on State Lands, 14 per cent on commercial farms, 12 per cent on resettlement schemes and 10 per cent in
urban areas (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 185). As others have shown, there were innumerable land conflicts involving state agencies, traditional authorities, elected politicians, immigrants and ‘firstcomers’ in the first two decades of independence — conflicts that were mostly not between white farmers and black land claimants (see for instance, Alexander, 2006; Dzingirayi, 2003; Fontein, 2006; Hammar, 2002; Hughes, 2006; Nyambara, 2001; Rutherford, 2001: 203ff.; Spierenburg, 2004; Worby, 1994).

However, in mass-mediated debates and popular discourses, land was very much a racialized issue as different constituencies demanded a particular ‘right’ to land. This included: the constitutional protection of the rights of private property owners as articulated by (white) commercial farmers’ groups (Palmer, 1990); restitution rights expressed by different African groups and traditional leaders (Alexander, 2006); and rights to land in payment for sacrifices made for the liberation struggle as war veterans appropriated the ‘patriotic memories’ promoted by ZANU (PF) that privileged the citizenship claims of those who participated in the 1970s liberation struggle (Kriger, 2006; see also Werbner, 1998). The latter claim was forcibly made when the Zimbabwean National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) confronted President Mugabe in 1997 for compensation, an end to a government inquiry into fraud involving the ZNLWVA, and recognition in future land reform programmes. The President took this threat seriously not only for the symbolic role of the ‘liberation war’ in ZANU (PF)’s political platforms but also as war vets were found throughout the civil service, particularly in the security apparatuses (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 187). As a result of this confrontation, war veterans received a large pay-out, monthly allowances and a promise to receive 20 per cent of all resettlement land.

Around the same time, in November 1997 the government used the amended Land Acquisition Act (1992) to designate 1,470 commercial farms for compulsory acquisition. Combined with a hasty decision to enter the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, this caused the Zimbabwe dollar to crash, and land resettlement was back on the national agenda. Donors and the government met in 1998 to try to find a plan to address the need for a revised land reform programme. However, the actions agreed by donors and government led nowhere, as the focus turned instead to the growing demands for broader political and constitutional reform gathering speed under the auspices of the trade union movement and other civic, church and student organizations (Dorman, 2003; Raftopoulous, 2001). Such demands also started shaping the cultural politics of recognition for farm workers on farms and on the national scale.

Rights and Recognition

Like most other Zimbabweans, commercial farm workers saw their standard of living fall during the 1990s’ structural adjustment period. Starting in 1992, their real average wages dropped below 1980 levels (Kanyenze, 2001). More-
over, very few schools or health clinics were built in commercial farming areas as ZANU (PF) continued to rely on the domestic government assumption that the onus of farm worker care ultimately rested on the farm owners (Rutherford, 2001). However, changes did emerge after 1980 connected to new legislation, the introduction of ZANU (PF) cells, and demands for ‘democratization’ in the 1990s.

Just before independence in 1980, farm workers became legally recognized as ‘workers’ rather than ‘servants’. They were also permitted to vote in the contentious 1979 Rhodesia-Zimbabwe elections and the first independence elections of 1980, regardless of their actual citizenship; a move which critics saw as a way to increase the votes for the candidates approved by white farmers given the amount of control farmers had over farm workers’ lives (Palley, 1979: 10–13, 25). After Independence, new legislation built on their new status as ‘workers’ by providing a minimum wage and introducing a labour relations machinery. This facilitated an improvement in real wages (Kanyenze, 2001) as well as an initial interest in farm workers by activists. In the first years of the 1980s, there was a marked presence of ‘outsiders’ seeking to intervene in labour relations, in stark contrast to the colonial period when very few government officials were interested in farm workers, and trade unions for them were prohibited. Trade union and ZANU (PF) activists (who were sometimes the same individuals) and Department of Labour officials made their presence known on many commercial farms (Ladley and Lan, 1985). They sought to enforce new labour legislation, bring commercial farms and farm workers under ruling party control, establish legitimacy for competing unions and, at times, simply to extract resources from workers and/or farmers (Rutherford, forthcoming). Both farmers and farm workers told me in the 1990s that the early 1980s was a period of great uncertainty and a time of ‘politics’ with promises and perils (depending on one’s perspective), as there were conflicting and novel demands made on farm workers and farmers.

ZANU (PF) activists set up village committees on many farms. These were part and parcel of a governmentality more directly linked to party and national government efforts. Yet, their activities were largely limited to assisting the occasional governmental programmes that included farm workers (such as administering national censuses and supplemental feeding of school children); helping farm management with regard to providing nominal governance and surveillance over the farm compounds (where typically most of the workforce and their dependants lived); and trying to ensure workers provided support to ZANU (PF) during national elections. Some farms also had worker committees that were supposed to work with management to enforce labour relations on the farms. Some were tied to GAPWUZ (General Agricultural and Plantation Workers’ Union of Zimbabwe), the trade union that emerged as the main representative of farm workers. However, GAPWUZ had its own internal difficulties and faced great resistance from management and, at times, workers (Kanyenze, 2001; Tandon, 2001). By the time I began
to research farm workers in 1992, these committees were either defunct, or operated solely to help management on the farms. Since the mid-1980s most of these interventions had subsided as ruling party activists and politicians became less interested in challenging the mode of belonging of domestic government on commercial farms (Ladley and Lan, 1985), particularly for those who became commercial farmers themselves.

There was a clear shift, observable in my research, between 1992–3 and the late 1990s as ‘rights’ had become a growing topic of conversation for many farm workers, particularly younger men. These workers were often better educated than older farm workers, having taken advantage of more educational opportunities; at the same time, they often felt ‘stuck’, forced to work on farms due to lack of other job opportunities for school-leavers. Many recognized the discrepancy between the labour relations laws and what actually occurred on many, if not most, farms, operating through some form of domestic government. The vast differences of material wealth between farmers and workers reinforced their sense of inequities (Rutherford, 2004). Actions on the national scale helped to nurture this interest in ‘rights’.

Starting in the mid-1990s, there were growing protests such as urban riots, national strikes and stay-aways called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and others to complain about deteriorating economic conditions, growing food insecurity and governmental policies (Raftopoulos, 2001). Although the government responded to many of these protests with force, the social movements continued to emerge, with many beginning to focus their energies on the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). Launched in early 1998, the NCA brought together church groups, human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), student groups, and especially the ZCTU, with Morgan Tsvangirai, its Secretary General, becoming the NCA chairperson. The NCA advocated constitutional reform and, in the face of ZANU (PF) resistance, helped to forge a ‘formidable political alliance’ of opposition (Raftopoulos, 2001: 15). The NCA was also abetted by growing donor interest in supporting ‘civil society’, good governance and human rights.

This greater donor interest in good governance also led to increased support of GAPWUZ and a relative growth of NGO interest in farm workers in the 1990s. GAPWUZ and the NGOs had a variety of programmes, with differing effects and responses from different farm workers and farmers. On some farms on which NGOs were operating, committees were formed and links to local government agencies were explored (Rutherford, 2004). For some workers and farmers, for very different reasons, these organizations helped to cultivate a sense of being part of a social project of ‘change’ which was wider than the individual farm; this is demonstrated by the following three examples.

First, in September and October 1997, there were wild-cat strikes for thousands of farm workers. Surreptitiously fanned by GAPWUZ to deal with its deadlocked collective bargaining negotiations with the employers’
organization, these strikes spread to many parts of the country, leading to blockades of highways, destruction of farm property and, on a few occasions, chasing farmers from their homes. They also resulted in an increase in wages, though Kanyenze (2001) calculated their ‘real value’ was still significantly lower than 1991 levels and even below the average wages of 1980.

Second, farm workers began to emerge as a relevant electorate. In 1997, farm workers had the franchise for the first time for local government elections, which meant it was no longer just property-owners or lease-holders in commercial farming wards who could vote to elect their Councillor for the Rural-District Councils. Although in many wards farm workers were ignored and few voted, in other wards candidates actively sought their vote. Most were ZANU (PF) candidates residing in towns or growth points but a few were white farmers who actively sought the votes of their farm workers and those on other farms. As a result, most Councillors representing commercial farming wards after 1998 were black Zimbabweans, and farm workers were considered to be a potential political constituency. This is not necessarily an unalloyed good given the general conduct of politics in Zimbabwe as demonstrated two years later (Rutherford, forthcoming).

The third example is the reception of the Constitutional Commission amongst many farmers and farm workers. In early 1999, as a way to try to co-opt the NCA’s growing mobilization for a new constitution, the government established a Constitutional Commission to travel the country to collect Zimbabweans’ views of a new constitution. The NCA strongly criticized the Commission on the grounds that ZANU (PF) dominated the processes of selecting Commission members and ultimately of crafting the final document. Nevertheless, the Constitutional Commission hearings unleashed a series of public criticisms of the ZANU (PF) government, its constitution, political practices and economic policies (Dorman, 2003: 853). A number of its 4,321 public meetings were held in commercial farming areas, and were attended by farmers and farm workers. Given the many criticisms raised during these meetings, and the lack of government retribution against the critics (which many remarked upon, given the history of political violence in the country; see, for example, Kriger, 2005), some farm workers and white farmers became emboldened by the new situation and actively took part in campaigning for the February 2000 referendum and for the new opposition party, the MDC led by Tsvangirai.

These changes and events played out differently on different commercial farms. Although many farm workers and white farmers explicitly refused to take part in ‘politics’ (see Hughes, 2005: 282–3), many did and by early 2000 there was a new visibility of farm workers and white farmers in public life in Zimbabwe. The visibility of whites in general in the MDC mobilization led to critiques by ZANU (PF) that the MDC was serving ‘colonial interests’ and eventually fed into growing divisions in the opposition party (Raftopoulos, 2006: 18–19). The ZANU (PF) government and cadres also used this to draw
on the established attributes of farm workers as a represented community in Zimbabwe — as foreigners under the control of white farmers. ZANU (PF) tried to use the campaigns leading to the constitutional referendum as a debate over land reform, and characterized the new MDC opposition as supporting ‘white settlers’ (Dorman, 2003: 853–4). As President Mugabe threatened just before the referendum, ‘white farmers urging their employees to vote “No” would be treated to a display of the government’s “true colours”’ (cited in Zimbabwe Independent, 2000). These true colours were revealed a few weeks later when the occupations of commercial farms led by members of the ZNLWVA began. Shortly afterwards, land occupations became explicitly intertwined with political goals of ensuring ZANU (PF) victories in upcoming elections. And so began jambanja — a word that connotes the violence and uncertain times associated with the post-2000 land occupations.2

JAMBANJA AND CHANGING CULTURAL POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

The actions of the occupiers and the government on the commercial farms since 2000 have been very effective in undermining the dominant mode of belonging of domestic government. They ultimately resulted in the eviction of the vast majority of white farmers, with just 300 to 600 white farmers said to still be farming pieces of their land by 2007. In 2005, John Nkomo, Minister of Special Affairs in the President’s Office Responsible for Lands, Land Reform, and Resettlement, declared that since 2000 a total of 5,890 farms measuring 7.8 million hectares were compulsorily acquired for resettlement purposes (Herald, 2005). He claimed that 140,866 families on A1 schemes had been resettled on 2,611 farms measuring 4.2 million hectares; and 14,500 farmers on A2 schemes had been resettled on 2,331 farms measuring 2.3 million hectares.3 Nkomo also admitted that 86 per cent of the total farms acquired for the resettlement scheme were not yet ‘confirmed’, or not yet legally property of the government. When combined with differing statements from government ministers about the land acquisition process being finished while periodic evictions of white farmers or black settlers continue, one begins to learn how unclear the ‘fast-track land resettlement programme’ actually is.

However, the actions of the occupiers and the government have been less effective in ensuring that former farm workers consistently obeyed new directives and orders. Rather, farm workers became caught up in the competing territorializing projects, finding new patrons and making their own claims to land-based resources. This undermining of the dominant mode of belonging on the commercial farms can be seen through confrontations with its cultural politics of recognition.

3. A1 schemes are for smallholder farmers while A2 are for indigenous commercial farmers.
As on Memphis farm in April 2000, land occupiers typically directly challenged the authority figures on the commercial farms — the white farmers, their managers, foremen and clerks. These were the ones who made and enforced decisions at work and in the compound, the key figures in domestic government whose actions shaped the actions of farm workers and who were, accordingly, often disliked or resented by many. The challenge was at times physical, with beatings, torture, rape and, in a few cases, killing. At other times, the confrontation was based on demonstrating the authority of the occupiers through compelling the farmers and management workers to obey their commands, including being asked to do humiliating acts such as crawling around in the dirt. In the build-up to the June 2000 parliamentary elections and March 2002 presidential elections, it was common to make farmers, management workers and farm workers demonstrate their fealty to ZANU (PF) through ceremonial burnings of MDC paraphernalia (t-shirts, hats, membership cards, signs, etc.), and through rallies at which they were forced to dance and sing liberation war songs, including *pungwe*, all-night rallies that were commonly used in ‘political education’ exercises of the guerrilla forces in the 1970s. Some of these demands were met with little resistance, while others led to refusal and even counter-resistance on the part of farmers, management workers or farm workers, including physical assaults, as evidenced on Memphis farm. Many farm workers I spoke to talked about the dilemmas they experienced during this time — a sense they should be defending their jobs or, for a few, their actual bosses, while at the same time feeling that they should be taking advantage of the opportunity to acquire land.

The government astutely introduced legislation aimed at exploiting the hierarchical dependencies on the farms in January 2002, just before the presidential election. Statutory Instrument 6 of 2002 laid out the criteria of compensation for farm workers who lost their jobs due to appropriations for land resettlement, putting responsibility on the farm employer to pay the generous compensation. As domestic government centred authority on ‘white farmers’, they became the focus of farm worker demands. At this point, over 100,000 farm workers had lost their jobs as several thousand commercial farmers had already left their farms (Sachikonye, 2003b: 237), while most of the remaining farmers were in constant negotiations with land occupiers or those who threatened land invasions. Given this context, farm workers who were still employed were anxious about ensuring they received their compensation. In many instances, when farmers refused to pay or when farm workers heard rumours that the farmer was to flee the farm, they confronted their employers, including a number of cases of barricading farmers in their homes, to demand their compensation. Some farmers who were not being

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4. *Pungwe* were also used during the terror unleashed by the ZANU (PF) government’s security forces against residents of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces that saw around 20,000 people killed and many more tortured from 1982 to 1987 (CCJPZ and LRF, 1997).
evicted even paid the compensation to their workers and then rehired them as casual employees. At times, ZANU (PF) activists, war veterans, or members of the ZFTU (Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions, the rival trade union congress promoted by the ruling party to try to undercut the ZCTU) or even GAPWUZ would push farm workers to make their demands, or fan fears that farmers were leaving, and then demand a portion of the compensation workers received.

With the dominant mode of belonging through which farm workers had made claims undermined, if not overthrown, the cultural politics of recognition that has replaced it is much more precarious and subject to greater violence than pre-2000. There are now intense national stakes involved as ZANU (PF) has used the land occupations and distribution both to try to suppress the MDC and to consolidate its hold over power. Moreover, the displacement of white farmers has led to alluring possibilities for the accumulation of prime land, homes and their belongings, and agricultural infrastructure for an uncertain length of time, as legislation and force have limited the displaced farmers’ access to their immovable and movable property. Finally, the deepening food insecurity connected to the great upheaval in agricultural practices and employment possibilities has increased desperation and instability for most Zimbabweans, particularly since livelihoods for the majority, including those in town, have been linked to agriculture (Potts, 2000). The lack of jobs and the high cost and scarcity of most commodities have made land-based livelihoods even more important for the majority of Zimbabweans, in spite of the increased personal insecurity that comes from the shortages of agricultural inputs, capital and labour, as well as the usual incessant uncertainty over rainfall and other weather patterns. Land attainment strategies include acquiring land as settlers or finding work on the newly-resettled farms or other land holdings (Sachikonye, 2003b; SC and FCTZ, 2001). As Bernstein (2004) has noted, this meltdown has made Zimbabwe a perfect example of land conflicts being driven by a crisis of reproduction. Such livelihood dependence on land means that many in rural Zimbabwe are subjecting themselves, willingly or unwillingly, to territorializing strategies of state officials, farm entrepreneurs, and other potential land-giving authorities.

Looking at land reform in Zimbabwe through my framework enables one to focus attention on the politics, ambitions and livelihoods that are intertwined with access to, and control over, land. To end this section, I will note three territorializing social projects concerning current land politics in Zimbabwe (see also Rutherford, 2005) as it is unclear if any emergent mode of belonging has become routinized.

The most powerful territorializing thrust comes from state and ZANU (PF) officials trying to gain ever greater control over all of the rural areas. Since the 1900s, both colonial and post-colonial government officials and white farmers have seen commercial farms as ‘mini-colonies’ in and of themselves. The configuration of politics since the late 1990s, particularly
given the emergence of the MDC with its support among many white farmers and farm workers, led to a direct challenge of these mini-sovereignties which had been previously nurtured by the ZANU (PF) government, following its colonial predecessors. The massive and violent land distribution efforts of the government’s fast-track resettlement activities are not merely a way to ‘take back’ land from white Zimbabweans; they have also allowed the state and ruling party to try to control this land and its inhabitants more tightly than they have in the past. But to an even greater extent than during implementation of earlier resettlement and land-use plans (Alexander, 2006; Goebel, 2005; Kinsey, 2004; Moore, 2005; Spierenburg, 2004), the administrative structures have so far failed to become routinized into the lives or actions of the farmers as they intersect with other territorializing projects, two of which I will discuss.

First, there are individual accumulation plans, whereby people seek to gain control over part or all of a farm, to lay claim to the land and to influence people living on it. This scenario is principally carried out on A2 farms via state institutional authority and power (such as government documents, the courts and the police) and resources (such as agricultural input schemes and state credit and loans). There have been many reports of government support to newly resettled farmers going to senior government and ZANU (PF) officials.5 Others have drawn on authority and power such as the church, business and traditional leadership positions. There have been a number of clashes and conflicts concerning these competing territorial claims, with accompanying means of persuasion, threat and violence. Such claims have occurred on different fronts: between different claimants to land; between claimants and people already living on the land, be they families already resettled or former farm workers continuing to reside at their old place of employment; and between the above-mentioned groups and state bureaucrats and ministers seeking to create some normalcy and order and potential favouritism of one claimant over another (Marongwe, 2003).6 These territorialization tactics are especially apparent in the case of displaced farm workers whose labour new settler farmers try to secure for themselves through various means: by forcing them to pay rent for their homes in the farm’s labour compound (or ‘farm village’), by providing subsidized food on condition of working on the farms, or by using force and the police to displace people from informal settlements (Hartnack, 2005; SC and FCTZ, 2001). In May 2007, the Minister of Public Service, Labour, and Social Welfare even declared that ‘ex-farm workers still living in farm compounds, who are unwilling to work for the new owners, would be required to leave’ (Financial Gazette, 2007). In short, they are trying to impose a new mode of belonging.

5. See, for example, Financial Gazette (2006b); Makiwa (2004); Zimbabwe Online (2004).
6. There are many reports concerning such conflicts; see, for example, Bara (2003); Wasosa (2004); Zim On-Line (2006).
Since 2000 several hundred thousand farm workers have lost their jobs (Moyo and Yeros, 2005: 196). GAPWUZ claims that there are still about 200,000 farm workers, but wages are extremely low\(^7\) and analysts suggest that the agricultural sector has shrunk by 65 per cent since 2000 (Financial Gazette, 2006a; Potts, 2000). Some active and former farm workers have been acquiring land but in many cases they have been actively discriminated against, with estimates that less than 5 per cent of those who have received land in the official resettlement programme being former farm workers (Sachikonye, 2003b: 79). Rather, their dominant represented community of being foreigners, lazy and against African nationalists continues to inform how many of those distributing land perceive them. As Nelson Marongwe (2004) shows, even in the rare case when a former commercial farm was specifically allocated to former farm workers, after they went through two weeks of ‘political education’, the new settlers received less than half the amount of arable land (2 hectares) of the national standard of acres for A1 farms. Marongwe (2004: 8) suggests this occurred because farm workers are ‘considered by the government as not willing to become fully-fledged farmers in their own rights’.

The second overlapping territorializing project is tied to rural leadership. Distributing land has been a major source of rural authority in Zimbabwe since at least the colonial period. Leadership has entailed the distribution of land, settlement of disputes and, at times, making demands upon those living on the land. On the former commercial farms, there has been great competition between leadership claimants and overlapping authorities about who has power, direct or delegated, to distribute territory. The politicization of the civil service and local government authorities since 2000 (Hammar, 2003, 2005; McGregor, 2002) and the general upheaval regarding land have created an environment in which pre-existing land-giving authorities and aspirant leaders have tried to stake out territorializing claims and more openly contest those of others (Chaumba et al., 2003).

Some farm worker leaders have engaged in such actions. For example, on one commercial farm in Goromonzi that had been abandoned by the company, a farm worker heavily involved in politics led other farm workers in contesting claims to the land by settlers and war veterans. The farm workers argued that they had a greater claim to the land than the others since their sweat went into working the soil in the past. More commonly, farm workers attached themselves to other leaders to try to acquire access to land-based resources. They may not officially have been resettled but many have been working through or against competing land claimants to acquire land-based resources such as minerals, wild animals, wild fruit and so forth. These

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\(^7\) In June 2007, the minimum wage for farm workers was Z$ 70,000 per month or about US$ 0.17 at the parallel market exchange rate in late June of Z$ 400,000 = US$ 1. There are stories of farm workers requesting to be paid in food items rather than in money (IRIN, 2007b).
are part of their livelihood strategies which may or may not include stints of working for the typically low wages offered by settler farmers (IRIN, 2007a). Thus those Memphis farm workers who went to the war vet camp and then back to the white farmer were seeking a patron, a new form of conditional belonging, during a time of great uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

Examining the changing situation of farm workers through a framework emphasizing modes of belonging leads to new insight into Zimbabwean land politics and the broader study of rural interventions, including agrarian reform. Farm workers have had only conditional claims to belonging to Zimbabwean commercial farms and the limited resources associated with them by operating through the cultural politics of recognition of domestic government. Many farm workers, like other Zimbabweans, wish to acquire land through the current land redistribution exercises (Moyo et al., 2000; Sachikonye, 2003b; Waeterloos and Rutherford, 2004). Yet, most have been actively discriminated against and have had to find other forms of dependencies — typically more precarious and generating fewer resources and services than they had accessed on commercial farms — with their own particular cultural politics of recognition, often including performative demonstrations of support to ZANU (PF). For current and former farm workers, belonging to the land and to Zimbabwe has been very much conditioned by their position as a represented community on the national scale through domestic government.

By examining practices and conflicts through the lens of modes of belonging and their particular cultural politics of recognition, one can avoid assuming that legal categories and social identities actually operate on the ground as they do on paper, or presuming that some actions are caused by improper consciousness on the part of some social actors. Rather, through this heuristic tool one can attend to the varied forms of dependencies and interdependencies and their associated cultural styles, through which power operates in specific localities during particular political economic conjunctures. It is unclear what routinized territorialized modes of belonging will emerge from the current land conflicts, but what is clear is that anyone who will be struggling for the ‘rights’ of farm workers will have to operate through, if not against, them.

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Conditional Belonging: Farm Workers in Zimbabwe


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