

The Politics of Land in Zimbabwe's Communal and Resettlement Areas: A Case Study of Gutu District, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT The discourse of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe has caused polemic and counter-polemic debates and the contestation between traditional leaders and local government structures remains a grey area. Communal and resettlement areas have been characterized by conflicts with the major area of contestation being, control of land and other natural resources. It can be argued that the conflict between traditional institutions and the local government is basically over control of land, hegemony and recognition; hence a struggle of accumulation and power. Despite improved relations between traditional leaders and the state in the post-independence phase, traditional leaders continue to be manipulated by the state for political ends, undermining their precolonial role as custodians and guardians of the land. By the same token, it is argued that the perpetual manipulation of traditional leaders by the state have rendered them powerless in land issues distorting their meaningful contributions to the development of their communities. Such a development brings into question the legitimacy of traditional leaders who were imposed on their communities by the colonial and postcolonial state for political reasons, without embracing the customs of the land in the appointment and installation of traditional authorities. On the other hand, it can be noted that the power and influence of traditional authorities is such that politicians seeking elected office compete with them at their peril. Thus the influence of traditional leaders, either as objects of manipulation or as beneficiaries of a manipulative system should not be underestimated in understanding political developments in Zimbabwe. Gutu District has been taken as a test or experiment to find explanations about the socio-political trajectories of land, power and politics in Zimbabwe's communal and resettlement areas.