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Battle for legitimacy: revisiting autochthony and (re)invented authority in Zimbabwe's resettlement areas

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of autochthony and (re)invented claims of authority in Zimbabwe's resettlement areas, exploring how traditional leaders and war veterans battle for legitimacy in the resettlement areas. It argues that despite the general view that chiefs are recognised by everyone in the rural areas, their legitimacy is being challenged and in some cases with the use of violence. Although chiefs are recognised as the legitimate leaders in some resettlement areas, this study shows that their authority is being challenged in Insiza District's resettlement area, covering Mpalawani, Gwamanyanga, Mpopoti and Lambamayi. The study also highlights how different people define autochthony, tradition and belonging in Zimbabwe's resettled areas.

KEYWORDS

Autochthony; authority; chiefs; Fast Track Land Reform programme (FTLRP); modernism

MOTS-CLÉS

Autochtonie ; autorité ; chefs ; Programme accéléré de réforme agraire (FTLRP) ; modernisme

Bataille pour la légitimité : revisiter l'autochtonie et l'autorité (ré)inventée dans les zones de réinstallation du Zimbabwe

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude examine l'intersection entre l'autochtonie et les revendications d'autorité (ré)inventées dans les zones de réinstallation du Zimbabwe, en explorant comment les chefs traditionnels et les vétérans de guerre se battent pour la légitimité dans les zones de réinstallation. Elle fait valoir que, malgré l'opinion générale selon laquelle les chefs sont reconnus par tous dans les zones rurales, leur légitimité est contestée et, dans certains cas, avec l'usage de la violence. Bien que les chefs soient reconnus comme les leaders légitimes dans certaines zones de réinstallation, cette étude montre que leur autorité est remise en question dans la zone de réinstallation du district d'Insiza, couvrant Mpalawani, Gwamanyanga, Mpopoti et Lambamayi. L'étude met également en évidence la façon dont différentes personnes définissent l'autochtonie, la tradition et l'appartenance dans les zones de réinstallation du Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Zimbabwe's war veterans led land occupations in 1998 protesting the unequal distribution of land. The occupations were endorsed by the state in 2000 and transformed

into the Fast Track Land Reform programme. The Fast Track Land Reform programme (FTLRP) is a land redistribution programme implemented by the Zimbabwe government from 2000 with a view to redistributing land from about 6000 white commercial farmers to landless black peasants (Moyo et al. 2009; Scoones et al. 2011). The FTLRP followed two resettlement models, namely A1 and A2 resettlement models. A1 refers to villagised plots meant primarily to decongest communal areas, while A2 refers to indigenous commercial plots. The plot sizes vary across Zimbabwe's five agro-ecological regions (Utete 2003). This large-scale, broad-based land redistribution programme resulted in the reconfiguration of authority structures in Zimbabwe's countryside. However, the resultant changes in land use – particularly in the A1 resettlement areas – from large-scale commercial farming to a peasant-led agricultural praxis under the FTLRP, led to conflicts over power as well as access to and control over land (Engels and Dietz 2017; Borras and Franco 2013). Chiefs revived their demands for restitution based on autochthonous claims, despite the nationalist, equitable land redistribution focus of the FTLRP (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003; Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006; Fontein 2006, 2009; Mkodzongi 2016, 2019; Mujere 2011). These conflicts as well as issues of identity are dominant in areas experiencing macro-scale land-use changes (Peluso and Lund 2011). This study refutes the notion that war veterans' authority is waning while the authority of chiefs is increasingly being entrenched in all resettlement areas as advanced by Fontein (2006, 2009) and Scoones et al. (2011). However, it serves to show the nuanced nature of power relations and authority configurations in Zimbabwe's resettlement areas. The study utilises the case of Insiza North in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland South Province to demonstrate that war veterans still command and exercise power in some resettlement areas. The war veterans are contesting the authority of traditional leaders in resettlement areas. Unlike the 'subservient' war veterans who voluntarily ceded power to chiefs portrayed in Fontein's and Scoones' studies, war veterans in Insiza District have maintained their hold on power in the resettled area. These war veterans are recognised as the legitimate leaders by most land beneficiaries. This study endeavours to highlight the traditional leaders' autochthonous claims to resettled land and how war veterans are contesting these claims. It is essential to note that although the War Veterans Act recognises any individual who underwent military training and participated in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle as a war veteran, the state has remoulded this definition to cover those ex-combatants who are supportive of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) ruling party and are members of the ZANU–PF-aligned Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), which serves as the ruling party's support mobilisation machine in the countryside (McGregor 2002). The study noted that the ZANU–PF-aligned war veterans were the ones recognised as the legitimate leaders of the informal land occupations which served as a precursor to the FTLRP. This study also examines the role of the state in this conflict. The study will also give an overview of the impact on the environment of the power contestations in the resettled area.

Autochthony and modernity

Land claims based on ancestral autochthony and indigeneity have been on the rise in both African and European countries (Geschiere 2009). This is in spite of the claims

of modernisation and globalisation by many countries which claim equality regardless of race, creed and ethnicity across the globe. There is therefore much debate on whether resource claims anchored on autochthony should be tolerated in the modern world. Some scholars argue that autochthony is primitive and belongs to history due to its threat to democracy and the equality of mankind (Geschiere 2009; Bøås 2009). Geschiere (2011, 323) argues that autochthony leads to the undermining of national unity and equality which are the key aims of democracy. On the other hand, it is argued that incorporating autochthony claims in policy making leads to uneven and inequitable development (Milgroom and Ribot 2020; Li 2000). Some studies indicate that the deployment of autochthony is essential as it helps to prevent the destruction of indigenous people's livelihoods by global capital (Fokou et al. 2010; Li 2010). Côte (2020) argues that autochthony helps in defending local roots and preserve cultures. In this regard, autochthony may be viewed as being instrumental in the expression of indigenous people's social malaise, challenges and livelihood precarity in the context of global development. Yet other scholars argue that autochthony is a result, not a cause, of democratisation and decentralisation (Berry 2009; Lentz 2013).

Zimbabwe has not been an exception, as the country is facing numerous demands for land restitution based on ancestral autochthony. The land redistribution exercise under the FTLRP saw the revival of chiefs' demands for land restitution (Fontein 2006, 2009; Mkodzongi 2013, 2016; Mujere 2011; Scoones et al. 2011). However, war veterans involved in leading land occupations occupied the newly created authority spaces created in resettlement areas (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003). The 1998 land occupations and FTLRP gave rise to new settlements and communities without an already existing leadership structure. War veterans filled this void, having led the land occupations, and were actively involved in land allocations. On the other hand, the state's position regarding the status of chiefs has been unclear since independence in 1980. At independence, the state sought to replace chiefs with democratically elected institutions in the form of village and ward development committees (Alexander 2006, 103). The state regarded chiefs as having been complicit with the colonial regime, aiding in the repression of black people (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003). This saw the promulgation in 1983 of the Communal Land Act (Chapter 20:04) which stripped chiefs of their land allocation powers. However, chiefs continued to allocate land in communal areas as they were still regarded by their subjects as the rightful land authority. The state also continued to recognise chiefs, incorporating them into the local governance structures. Chiefs were allowed into district councils as *ex officio* members; the state continued to pay them salaries as was the case during the colonial era (Alexander 1994). As such, chieftaincy has continued to thrive alongside the democratic institutions.

Despite this 'recognition', chiefs were not given authority over the 1980s resettlement schemes. The state considered them as 'the conservative guard of an unproductive system' in the agriculture sector (Alexander 1994, 333). Indigenous peasants resettled during the 1980s were therefore required to completely separate themselves from traditional socio-cultural ties with communal areas and become 'islands of modernisation' (*Ibid.*, 334). In 2000, however, the state revived the chieftaincy through the promulgation of the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17). This revival was meant to utilise chiefs to mobilise political support for the governing party, ZANU-PF, towards and during

elections in the countryside (Moyo and Yeros 2007). Although statements by politicians and government officials seem to magnify chiefs' views and contributions to policy making, the Traditional Leaders Act places chiefs under the authority of rural district councils (Alexander 2006, 108, 163). Furthermore, the Traditional Leaders Act does not authorise chiefs to allocate land in resettlement areas. It also emphasises the vesting of communal land allocation authority in rural district councils as stipulated in the Communal Land Act (Chapter 20:04).

Who are autochthons

Autochthony implies an entrenched historical and ancestral attachment to a particular geographical area where claimants see themselves as having been 'born from the soil' (Geschiere 2011, 322). It is linked to resource, civil or political rights claims in a particular place by a group of people, based on the premise that they 'were settled there first' (Côte 2020, 2). Claims of autochthony are based on the fact that it enables claimants to participate in the struggle for resources while excluding 'strangers' (Mamdani 2002, 5). There are two forms of autochthony, namely individualised and collectivised autochthony. Individualised autochthony makes a connection between the 'individual, territory and group' in a manner that shared culture and lineage follow from the place of birth or permanent residence (Zenker 2011, 1). Collectivised autochthony occurs when a community evokes the same past (*Ibid.*). Autochthony is usually deployed where there is immigration and is used to defend claims to territory on the basis of 'who came first' (Lentz 2013, x). It forms the basis for claimants' 'rights to have rights' (Côte 2020, 1). The 'sons of the soil' therefore claim priority in resource allocation, employment opportunities and other socio-economic benefits ahead of 'strangers' or 'newcomers' (Bøås 2009).

The deployment of autochthony in claiming resources, particularly land, is not solely based on its scarcity but on the fact that land is a pivotal asset in the rural areas. While the argument of having settled in a particular territory before other groups seems to be generally accepted as a legitimate autochthonous claim, autochthony may result from other claims and events. Zenker indicates that:

collectivized autochthony is based on the claim that, in the past of one's own group, a pivotal event such as discovery or labour (or conquest) turned the group and its future members into the legitimate 'owners' of the land, either because the group was (allegedly) first, because the group was (allegedly) there before rival groups (yet after irrelevant others) or because the group has been there for a sufficient length of time to be on an equal footing with even more 'autochthonous' groups. (Zenker 2011, 16)

For instance, in a study on citizenship and belonging in Cameroon, the Beti and Bulu people claim to be autochthones, 'born from the soil' of the forest in the southern part of the country (Geschiere 2009). They label the Bamileke people who came after them as 'strangers'. Interestingly though, the same Beti and Bulu people boast of taking control over the said forest area by conquest when they migrated from the Savannah area in the north. In Europe, the Dutch claim autochthony over the Netherlands, yet they claim ancestry from the Huguenots who entered the country from France in the seventeenth century (Geschiere 2009). Autochthony can therefore result from having taken over a particular territory through military conquest, among other methods.

Study site and data collection methods

A map of Insiza District, where the study site was located, is presented at [Figure 1](#). The area of study covers four villages, namely Mpalawani, Gwamanyanga, Mpopoti and Lambamayi under Wards 20 and 21 of Insiza North's House of Assembly constituency. These four villages cover an area of 65,800 hectares, which were part of Debshan Ranch. The area is bordered by the communal areas of Shurugwi District to the North, Zvishavane and Mberengwa Districts to the east and Insiza South to the south. These communal areas, like many other communal areas in the country, have poor soils due to overgrazing, overcultivation and deforestation (Maposa, Gamira, and Hlongwana 2010), thereby serving as motivation for inhabitants to relocate to the Debshan area for better soils. Debshan Ranch was uncultivated for more than 35 years as it was used as pastureland.

The study utilised key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), as well as direct and participatory observation, to collect qualitative data from January to September 2019.¹ Key Informants included senior Matabeleland South provincial officers and Insiza District officers from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement (hereafter Ministry of Agriculture) and the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing (hereafter Ministry of Local Government).² These were interviewed to appreciate how Chief Jahana and the war veterans claim authority over the resettled land and how the state was involved in these groups' access to the land. Headman Ernest Nxumalo, Chief Jahana (Ndumiso Khumalo) and war veterans were interviewed to gather data on the basis of their claims of authority and legitimacy over the resettlement area and the inhabitants thereof. Focus group discussions with land occupants from Midlands, Godhlwayo Communal Area as well as those who came with Chief Jahana were conducted to ascertain the strategies employed by the contending leaders to establish their legitimacy in the disputed area. The focus group discussions were also conducted to ascertain the settlers' views on which group they consider to be the rightful leaders in the resettled area. Another key informant was from the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), to verify claims of violence between the land occupants led by Chief Jahana and those led by the war veterans.

Autochthons of Insiza North

Chief Jahana revived his request for land restitution in 2005, taking advantage of the FTLRP. His previous land claims had been refused by the state since independence, as the state sought to modernise and depart from traditionalism. The state considered autochthonous land claims to be archaic, undemocratic and unproductive (Alexander 2018). Jahana and Headman Nxumalo appealed to the then governor of Matabeleland South Province, Angeline Masuku, in early 2005 (Interview no. 1).³ In the appeal, Jahana indicated that his people and their ancestors had been displaced from the Debshan area upon expropriation of the land by the colonial regime in 1965. Chief Jahana indicated that his forefathers are buried in the Debshan area, where they lived before expropriation. He argued that there is the need for posterity to easily access their forefathers' and chiefs' graves for ritual purposes, according to *amasiko* (custom). Jahana argued that it was essential that he rebuild his forefathers' homesteads which

had been razed by the colonial regime. Chief Maduna from the adjacent Godhlwayo Communal Area corroborated Jahana's deployment of history-scapes during a provincial chiefs' council meeting convened by Governor Masuku. Maduna confirmed that Jahana was indeed his neighbouring chief who was settled in the Debshan area before being forcibly removed by the colonial government. The provincial chiefs' council subsequently endorsed Chief Jahana's land claim and appealed to the state to consider land restitution. These chiefs contended that the rightful owners of the land were being sidelined while 'foreigners' from Midlands Province took ownership of their land (Interview no. 2). Apparently, all these chiefs belong to the Ndebele 'nation' of tribes, yet the land claimed by Jahana was occupied mainly by the Karanga (Shona) people from Midlands Province. The chiefs' endorsement of Jahana's land claims was therefore based on autochthony, as they insisted that the land belongs to the Ndebele people and should not be allocated to 'strangers' from other provinces. Furthermore, it was only after collective speaking by the chiefs that the state capitulated to Jahana's request. However, the chiefs' 'collective voice' was necessitated by a common interest – resisting the resettlement of 'outsiders' in the perceived Ndebele land. The chiefs' unanimous endorsement of Jahana's land claim marks a departure from the deployment of contending history-scapes noted in other studies (Fontein 2006, 2009; Mujere 2011; Mkodzongi 2016, 2019; Dande and Mujere 2019). Matabeleland South-based national politicians from across the political divide also insisted that the state accede to Jahana's land restitution claims. They argued that the land belongs to the Ndebele people, not the Karanga who had moved into the area since the onset of the FTLRP (Interview no. 3). The politicians argued that refusing Jahana's land while allowing the Karanga people to settle in the Ndebele area was tantamount to marginalising and disenfranchising the Ndebele people. However, before the occupation of the land by the Karanga people, the chiefs and politicians did not support Jahana's persistent land claims.

Chief Jahana's autochthonous land claims are also shared by ordinary peasants who moved into the Debshan area from the neighbouring communal area at the beginning of the FTLRP. Some of these peasants claim to have settled in the Godhlwayo Communal Area under Chief Maduna after displacement from the Debshan area by the colonial government. During a focus group discussion with land occupants from the neighbouring Godhlwayo Communal Area, a participant indicated that:

Land reform enabled us to reclaim our ancestral lands and reunite with our relatives. This is our land. We used to live here under Khumalo [Chief Jahana] until the whites chased us from our land. Some of the rubble you see here is from our homesteads which were destroyed by the [colonial] government when we were pushed out. Although most of our people moved to Gokwe, a few of us settled in Chief Maduna's area. (FGD no. 1)

The state gave in to the chiefs' demands and allowed Chief Jahana and his subjects to return to Insiza North. However, peasants mainly from Zvishavane and Mberengwa Districts had already been allocated plots in the area. These peasants occupied the land to improve their livelihoods and accumulate through agriculture. The soils in their communal areas had become barren and unable to meet their food requirements due to overcultivation, overgrazing and overcrowding (FGD no. 2). The state made the land restitution decision in order to ensure the chiefs' continued cooperation in support mobilisation during elections. In Zimbabwe, most chiefs are supportive of ZANU–PF and have

been serving to prop up the party's image among their subjects (Moyo and Yeros 2007; Mkodzongi 2019). Chiefs are actively involved in politics, campaigning for ZANU–PF, barring opposition political parties from canvassing in their areas and sometimes evicting opposition party supporters from their areas of jurisdiction (Kurebwa 2018). The state has therefore managed to maintain its hegemony in the countryside through chiefs. Chiefs act as 'localized state despots', serving to legitimate state policies and actions (Mapedza 2007, 184). This is contrary to the notion that chiefs contest state hegemony in Zimbabwe's rural areas (Mkodzongi 2016).

However, Jahana's return from Gokwe was met with resistance by war veterans who had led the Debshan land occupations in 2000 for fear of eviction by the state to pave way for Jahana's subjects. The war veterans do not necessarily refute Jahana's claims that his ancestors owned the land before its expropriation. However, they contend that the FTLRP was not about land restitution but about equitable distribution of land to all black Zimbabweans, regardless of ethnicity (Interview no. 4). In Insiza North, land occupations were led by a committee of seven war veterans (hereafter referred to as the farm committee) who are also members of ZANU–PF. The war veterans and the majority of land occupants from Midlands argue that the land belongs to them on the basis that they 'came first' to settle in the area at the beginning of the FTLRP. In an interview with one of the war veterans (RTM⁴), he indicated that:

This land now belongs to us. If Jahana was sincere in getting back the land, he should have occupied it at the onset of the land occupations. Chief Svosve led his people to reclaim their land but Jahana was sitting comfortably in Gokwe, only to come because we have successfully taken the land. (Interview no. 4)

The committee led the land occupation in 2000, after which Debshan Ranch offered 34,000 hectares for allocation to the peasantry. RTM stated that:

We came here in 2000 and occupied the land. Debshan management then offered us 34,000 hectares and we distributed it to 943 households by 2003. We allocated the plots in line with guidelines given by the Ministry of Lands. However, many other people continued to come in search of land; by the end of 2004, about 1000 people were squatting on land reserved for grazing. We then approached Debshan management and they ceded an additional 30,000 hectares after protracted discussions. (Interview no. 4)

RTM's account was corroborated by MDM, who indicated that the Ministry was also involved in the negotiations for the additional 30,000 hectares (Interview no. 3). The Ministry then pegged plots for the peasantry, working together with the war veterans who had organised themselves to form a farm committee at the onset of the FTLRP. The farm committee in the study area comprised seven members who are all war veterans. MDM indicated that the farm committee was responsible for 'protecting ZANU–PF's political interests by vetting potential beneficiaries to weed out perceived opposition members' (Interview no. 3). He also highlighted that the war veterans provide a link between land occupants and the Insiza District Land Committee (DLC). During land allocation, the farm committee provided a list of beneficiaries to the DLC chaired by the district administrator for the processing of land permits.

Land occupants from the Midlands province shared the war veterans' sentiments about Chief Jahana's return from Gokwe. During a focus group discussion, one of the participants stated that:

This is our land; we came here first while Jahana and his people were skeptical of the land reform exercise. Now they want to come here and attempt to remove us from the land. Never! If they really wanted the land, why didn't they demand it before we came here? (FGD no. 2)

The contradicting land claims are reflective of the ever-shifting state position with regard to its vision of a post-colonial Zimbabwe. The war veterans subscribe to the early 1980s government ideology of modernism characterised by equality of all citizens and nationalism. On the other hand, chiefs envision a state based on customary practices, that is, a state which considers the role of traditional leaders in state-making. Although some chiefs were actively involved in the 1998/2000 informal land occupations, Chief Jahana did not participate in the land occupations (Chimhowu and Woodhouse 2006; Fontein 2006, 2009; Scoones et al. 2011; Mujere 2011; Dande and Mujere 2019; Mkodzongi 2019). In other instances, chiefs were invited by the war veterans into the resettlement areas after war veterans had led people on land occupation and had allocated plots to them. However, in Insiza North the war veterans did not invite chiefs to preside over the resettled area as they had not envisaged traditional leaders' claim over resettlement areas (Interview no. 5).

Conflict and resistance

Resistance to Chief Jahana's relocation and settlement was spearheaded by war veterans. Having led the occupation of Debshan Ranch in the early stages of the FTLRP between 2000 and 2002, war veterans filled a leadership gap in the resettlement area, as the government was yet to establish structures for managing land issues in resettlement areas. The allocation of land in Insiza North, as in many other resettlement areas across the country, was therefore the domain mainly of war veterans, as they were the leaders of the informal land occupations (Mujere 2011; Scoones et al. 2011; Mkodzongi 2016) which were then regularised by the state under the ambit of the FTLRP. The authority and acceptability of the former freedom fighters' control over land allocation in the Debshan area was therefore uncontested thus far. The fact that they had control over land allocation made it easy for the beneficiaries to accept their authority and therefore regard them as the rightful leaders in the resettled area.

During the focus group discussions undertaken as part of this research, participants drawn from occupants from the Midlands province indicated that the war veterans' right to superintend land allocation and the community emanated from three main issues. First, the land which was now being redistributed was wrested from the white settlers by virtue of their efforts in fighting for the country's liberation. Second, it was the war veterans, under the leadership of the ZNLWVA national chairperson Chenjerai Hunzvi, who forced government to concede to the people's demands for land. Third, it was these war veterans who had settled first between 2000 and 2002, before Chief Jahana and his people came in 2006 (FGD no. 3). The war veterans' involvement in demanding an additional 30,000 hectares to resettle the landless peasantry earned them recognition among the peasantry. These 30,000 hectares were allocated to peasants from Zvishavane, Mberengwa and Shurugwi Districts before Chief Jahana's return from Gokwe. Jahana's subjects who relocated from Gokwe indicated that although the war veterans should be applauded for their contributions in the land redistribution exercise,

they should accept Jahana as their chief (FGD no. 4). These peasants argue that the land belongs to Chief Jahana, and that anyone who occupies land in a given territory should recognise the authority of the respective chief.

The return of Chief Jahana, however, threatened the authority, and therefore the legitimacy, of the farm committee members. Subsequently, the farm committee members each adopted the title of ‘village head’, and were thus recognised by the people already resettled in the area. Although other studies indicate that war veterans were incorporated into chiefly authorities, Chief Jahana appointed his own village heads, thus sidelining the war veterans (Scoones et al. 2011). Sensing the threat to their authority, the war veterans mobilised the people already settled in the area from Zvishavane and Mberengwa to resist Chief Jahana’s return (Interview no. 4). During interviews with land beneficiaries from Midlands, interviewees indicated that the war veterans advised them not to accept Chief Jahana’s return to Insiza. They indicated that the war veterans claimed that Chief Jahana intended to evict them from the land and allocate the land to his subjects. Apparently, the state did not take more land from Debshan Ranch to allocate to Chief Jahana and his subjects. This reluctance by the state to acquire more land for resettlement in light of the land restitution created land conflicts, as those already settled on the land feared eviction. In an interview, Chief Jahana indicated that the land occupants from the Midlands used violence to try to intimidate him and his subjects to drive them off the land. He claimed that these occupants pelted his homestead with stones, hurling insults and telling him to take his subjects back to Gokwe. Jahana stated that the war veterans and ZANU–PF leadership in the resettled area were undermining his authority, demanding that he (Chief Jahana) should report to them on all his plans and programmes in the area. In the interview, Jahana exclaimed:

I am a chief, not a politician. *Induna ayivotelwa, iyazalwa* [Chieftaincy is hereditary, not through elections]. I cannot report to strangers on my forefathers’ land. If they want to stay here, they need to observe our values and customs. These people [from Midlands] have no regard for me as a chief. They throw stones at my homestead and have burnt down some of our people’s huts. (Interview no. 6)

Interviews with a key informant from ZRP confirmed that Jahana’s subjects’ huts had indeed been burnt down. The police handled several cases of assault and arson arising from the land dispute between Jahana’s subjects and land beneficiaries from the Midlands province.

Peasants from the Midlands province refuse to acknowledge Chief Jahana’s authority in the Debshan area, thus disrespecting local traditions and customs dictated by Chief Jahana. These peasants argue that traditional leaders do not have authority in resettlement areas (FGD no. 5). In separate interviews, Headman Nxumalo and Chief Jahana indicated that land occupants from the Midlands blatantly ignore *izilo* (the traditional weekly day of rest) imposed by the chief, arguing that chiefs only have authority in communal areas (Interviews nos. 1 and 6). Nxumalo and Jahana indicated that the majority of the occupants from the Midlands ignore the chief when he summons them to his court over violations of *izilo* and illegal land allocation, arguing that they are busy. These villagers and their ‘village heads’ also ignore judgments made by the chief in respect of fines imposed for disregarding *izilo* or violating other traditional regulations set by the chief.

In apparent contempt of Chief Jahana's *izilo*, the 'village heads' set up their own *izilo* on a different day, and the peasants from the Midlands province respect it over the one set by Chief Jahana. During a focus group discussion, the peasants from the Midlands province argued that they could not abide by Chief Jahana's traditional rites as he is not their chief (FGD no. 5). These land occupants insisted that they could only take instructions from their 'village heads' as these were the ones who led the land occupation which resulted in them accessing land in the Debshan area.

Chief Jahana appealed to the Matabeleland South provincial chiefs' council seeking mediation and resolution of the conflict between him and the war veterans (Interview no. 6). The council appealed to the state for intervention, arguing that the peasants from the Midlands province should respect the chief's regulations or return to their province. As a resultant, Zimbabwe's former vice president, Phelekezela Mphoko, held a meeting with the members of the provincial chiefs' council in March 2016. Vice President Mphoko promised to institute investigations into the matter and address the chiefs' concerns. However, it is essential to note that the ZANU–PF-led government and war veterans have had a 'mutually' exploitative relationship where both tend to use each other for the pursuit of their respective distinct agendas (Fontein 2009). War veterans 'trade' their loyalty to ZANU–PF by mobilising political support for the party during elections. In Insiza North, the war veterans clashed with opposition supporters, even using violence to assert ZANU–PF domination in the resettled area (Bulawayo24 News 2017). Although the state had revived the chieftaincy institution with a view to using chiefs to mobilise support in rural areas, this role is now being played by war veterans, who accused Chief Jahana of being a member of Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP). The accusations (of 'disloyalty') were compounded by the fact that most Matabeleland chiefs, including Jahana, were supportive of the coronation of a Ndebele king against the state's wishes (Ndlovu, Tshuma, and Ngwenya 2019). The state barred the planned coronation for fear that the installation of a Ndebele king might give traction to secession demands spearheaded by the MRP. The High Court stopped the coronation based on the state's argument that the planned coronation was unconstitutional (*Ibid.*). However, the state sponsored the coronation of a Shona *mambo* (king), Mike Moyo, at Mawabeni in Matabeleland South Province, in a move aimed at neutralising the Ndebele chiefs' political influence in the region (Ndlovu 2019). Chief Jahana denies belonging to any political party, indicating that the war veterans were labelling him an MRP member merely because he refuses to engage in political activities.⁵ Chief Jahana indicated that his conflict with the war veterans was premised on the fact that he was not willing to engage in political mobilisation, as the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that traditional leaders are to be apolitical.

The war veterans responded to Chief Jahana's appeal to the state by inviting Chief Mapanzure and Chief Hwedza of Zvishavane and Mberengwa Districts respectively to assume authority over the resettled area. During an interview, RTM indicated:

When we heard that the Chiefs' Council had resolved to dismiss us, we had to take action. We held an urgent meeting and decided to send envoys to our chiefs where we come from. Since the issue is about giving authority to traditional leaders, we decided to rope in our own chiefs. (Interview no. 7)

Chiefs Mapanzure and Hwedza welcomed the invitation, viewing this as an opportunity to extend their territory and influence. Accordingly, the duo visited the Debshan area and endorsed the ‘village heads’, thereby transforming them from self-proclaimed ‘village heads’ to ‘traditional leaders’. The move by the war veterans does not necessarily reflect a shift in their stance against chiefs’ claiming authority in resettlement areas. Rather, the move was aimed at neutralising Chief Jahana’s authority claim in the resettled area. Under the new dispensation headed by President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the issue has become more difficult for Insiza District or Matabeleland South government officials to handle (Interview no. 8). This is due to the fact that President Mnangagwa’s rural home falls under Chief Mapanzure, and government officials are afraid of going against Chief Mapanzure. Their worry is that despite being the head of state and government, President Mnangagwa can still be summoned by Mapanzure and be forced to comply, in order to gain and maintain favour and political support among traditional leaders.

Legality and legitimacy

Although legality does not necessarily equal legitimacy, legal endorsement can go a long way towards fostering legitimacy (Friedrich 1963, 234). During focus group discussions with land occupants from the Midlands province, participants indicated that they were prepared to recognise whoever the law stipulates as the rightful authority in the resettled area. One participant stated that:

Jahana wants us to recognize him yet he is violating the law. How can we follow someone who does not acknowledge the law; chiefs have no jurisdiction in resettlement areas, they belong to the rural [communal] areas. If the law says he is the rightful leader, we will submit to him. (FGD no. 5)

This argument is in spite of the fact that the state’s decision to restore the Debshan area to Chief Jahana and his subjects and Jahana’s subsequent installation was reinforced by the required gazetting of the decision, as stipulated under Section 29 of the Traditional Leaders Act, Chapter 29:17. The persistence of land conflicts, in spite of the legal installation of Chief Jahana and gazetting of his authority over the resettled land, therefore proves that legality does not necessarily guarantee legitimacy. Chiefs Mapanzure and Hwedza also claimed authority in the resettled area, disregarding both the Traditional Leaders Act and also General Notice no. 175 of 2012, which states that the resettled land was placed under the authority of Chief Jahana. This claim of authority by Chiefs Mapanzure and Hwedza is based primarily on the fact that their subjects are the ones who have access to the larger part of the resettled area. However, in Zimbabwe chiefs have stipulated geographical territories under their authority. If a particular chief’s subjects move into another area, that area does not then become under his jurisdiction. The claim of jurisdiction in the resettled area by Mapanzure and Hwedza, in spite of the law recognising Jahana, proves that indeed ‘Chiefs do not talk law, most of them talk power’ (Kirst 2020).

Although Chief Jahana is legally the rightful authority in the resettled area, he does not have the authority to allocate land in the resettled area. This authority lies with the minister of agriculture and is exercised at grassroots level through the DLC. Any individual

whose land allocation was not registered and formalised by the DLC is deemed an informal settler or squatter and is susceptible to eviction by the Land Commission: the (Zimbabwe) Land Commission is a statutory body responsible for the management of state land and resettlement of people on agricultural land in the country. The Land Commission, working through the Ministry of Agriculture Insiza District officials for instance, issued some of Chief Jahana's headmen with eviction notices (Interview no. 9). The headmen had been allocated land by the Chief without the knowledge or consent of the DLC. Apparently, when Chief Jahana relocated to Insiza from Gokwe in 2006, the resettlement programme was already under way, having begun in 2000, as alluded to earlier. The chief then advised his subjects to identify land which had not been taken up by the initial allottees whose names had, however, already been registered by the Ministry of Agriculture officials. Of Chief Jahana's subjects, only those who were allocated vacant plots by the DLC were duly registered by the Ministry and appear in the Ministry of Agriculture database. Those who occupied land already registered to other people were therefore issued with eviction notices, being considered illegal settlers.

The disempowerment of chiefs from allocating land in resettlement areas tips the scales in favour of the war veterans. The centrality of land in Zimbabwe's social and economic landscape cannot be overemphasised. Land questions cut across cultural, socio-political and economic spheres of life (Alexander 2007). It is against the backdrop of land and access to it that identity is based, and production takes place (*Ibid.*). In the early phases of the FTLRP, the state allowed war veterans to allocate land, thereby securing the land occupants' recognition of the veterans' role. Apart from land allocation, the link between the war veterans and councillors – local state actors – continually reinforces the war veterans' legitimacy in the eyes of the land occupants. The state distributes food aid and farming inputs through councillors who work with war veterans to identify potential beneficiaries (Interview no. 10). The councillors in the resettled area are aligned with the war veterans who have been campaigning for ZANU–PF candidates in the resettled area. When Chief Jahana tried to submit a list of potential beneficiaries compiled by his village heads to the Department of Social Welfare, he was turned down by the state officials (Interview no. 6). The state only recognises councillors and, in some cases, ZANU–PF officials in the distribution of food aid and farming inputs. Contrary to the observation in other studies where base commanders and farm committees handed over administrative functions to chiefs, the war veterans in Insiza North still perform these functions (Fontein 2009).

Ecological concerns

Official records from the Ministry of Lands, Insiza District, show that although the initial 34,000 hectares had been designated to accommodate 1054 households, there had been over 4000 households in the area by February 2019. Such overcrowding defeats the purpose of the FTLRP, which was aimed at decongestion of rural communities (Utete 2003). There have been accusations and counter-accusations between Chief Jahana and the 'village heads' over the illegal allocation of land thereby leading to overcrowding. This study, however, noted that the failure by the state to secure land for issuance to the Jahana people before their departure from Gokwe led to the said congestion and animosity. Not all of Jahana's subjects managed to get vacant plots, thereby forcing some to stay

at the congested farm compound originally meant for farm workers (Interview no. 11). Some ended up building their homesteads in communes and areas originally meant for grazing, thereby compromising sustainability.

The battle for legitimacy by the contending actors contributed to the congestion in the disputed area. Having noted the coming in of Chief Jahana and sensing a threat to their power, the ‘village heads’ invited more land seekers from Zvishavane and Mberengwa Districts with a view to gaining support from numbers. During focus group discussions with Jahana’s subjects who came from Gokwe, participants indicated that in the period following their arrival in the Debshan area, they saw very large numbers of people suddenly arriving from Mberengwa and Zvishavane. Consequently, Chief Jahana also invited those who had remained in Gokwe and some descendants of those who had been chased off by the colonial government to return to their ancestral land. In an interview with Chief Jahana, he however indicated that he had invited his subjects as they are the rightful owners of the resettled land (Interview no. 11). The proliferation of informal settlements in the Debshan area is therefore a result of the battle for legitimacy between the Chief and the war veterans. Both parties aim to host large numbers in order to have a majority on their side, regardless of the consequences of this development to the environment.

Some land occupants highlighted that corrupt ruling party officials took advantage of the situation, selling land to land seekers (FGDs nos. 3 and 6). Participants drawn from Jahana’s subjects indicated during focus group discussions that some ‘village heads’ and ZANU–PF officials were demanding amounts ranging from US\$600 to US\$1000 or a beast in exchange for land. The state issued eviction notices to land occupants that did not have permits of occupancy, but the people served with eviction notices have not vacated the resettled area. The state has also not employed force to remove the informal land occupants. During interviews with some informal land occupants, they confirmed giving money and livestock to some war veterans and ZANU–PF officials in exchange for land. However, these informal land occupants are afraid to openly complain or report their cases to police for fear of arrest, as they are fully aware that they participated in corruption. Ironically, some war veterans and ZANU–PF officials warned against the eviction of informal land occupants (Nkala 2019). They argued that the party would lose significant votes in the anticipated 2023 elections if the state is to proceed with the evictions. The reluctance by the state to evict informal land occupants, despite having issued eviction notices to the informal occupants, seems to be tacit endorsement of the informal land occupations. It also seems to confirm the authority of the war veterans ahead of Chief Jahana.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the FTLRP, rural authority has been a contested terrain with chiefs and war veterans contesting for power and recognition in resettlement areas. In the study area, the state acceded to Chief Jahana’s autochthonous land restitution claims in spite of the nationalist, equitable land redistribution focus of the FTLRP. Contrary to the popularly accepted view of increasingly powerful chieftaincy in resettlement areas, war veterans are contesting Jahana’s autochthonous claims to authority in Insiza North. The war veterans argue that the war of liberation and the FTLRP were meant to ensure the nationalist and equitable redistribution of land. They also question Chief Jahana’s loyalty to the

state, arguing that the chief is supportive of an opposition-sponsored secessionist agenda. The conflict between the war veterans and Chief Jahana reflects a divergence of aspirations between modernism and traditionalism. Since independence, the state has been straddling modernism and traditionalism for political expedience. Although the state acceded to Chief Jahana's autochthonous land claims, it continues to recognise the war veterans ahead of Jahana. For instance, the state still consults war veterans on infrastructure development and distribution of humanitarian aid and agricultural inputs in the resettled area. Most of the land occupants recognise the war veterans as their legitimate leaders, due to the war veterans' role in the FTLRP and to their perceived control over access to land. Therefore, autochthony is inadequate as a basis for claiming legitimacy in all resettlement areas of Zimbabwe. Control over access to land remains instrumental in fostering legitimacy in resettlement areas. In the study area, this control is currently domiciled in the hands of the war veterans. Chief Jahana was therefore made a 'virtual chief', without power over land issues. However, the shift of power from traditional leaders to war veterans observed in this study is not reflective of authority configurations across all resettlement areas in Zimbabwe. Rather, it is a divergence from the norm, where traditional leaders have assumed authority in most resettlement areas across the country.

Notes

1. A full list detailing the interviews and focus group discussions is given at the end of the article, after the reference list.
2. In Zimbabwe, matters relating to traditional leaders fall within the remit of the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing.
3. Interview no. 1, with Headman Nxumalo, Debshan, took place on 15 February 2019. Chief Jahana (Solomon Khumalo) passed away in February 2016 and was succeeded by his son, Ndumiso Khumalo. Customary authority is based on kinship and is passed on mainly from father to son through a patriarchal system. Accordingly, Ndumiso Khumalo became Chief Jahana following his father Solomon Khumalo's death.
4. RTM, MDM and SDM are coded names to protect the identity of the interviewees.
5. In line with the code of ethics under which this research was conducted, Chief Jahana was not asked for his political affiliation. He disassociated himself from politics in his response to the causes of the land conflicts in the resettled area.

Disclosure statement

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List of interviews and focus group discussions

Interviews

1. Headman Nxumalo, Debshan, 15 February 2019.
2. Ministry of Local Government senior provincial officer (SMM), Gwanda, 8 March 2019.
3. Ministry of Agriculture senior provincial officer (MDM), Gwanda, 22 March 2019.
4. RTM, Debshan, 17 May 2019.
5. RTM, Debshan, 5 June 2019.
6. Chief Jahana (Ndumiso Khumalo), Debshan, 10 August 2019.
7. RTM, Debshan, 11 August 2019.
8. SMM, Gwanda, 5 September 2019.
9. Ministry of Agriculture senior Insiza District official, Filabusi, 13 June 2019.
10. Ministry of Local Government senior Insiza District official, Filabusi, 13 June 2019.
11. Chief Jahana, Debshan, 28 August 2019.

Focus group discussions

1. Land occupants from Godhlwayo Communal Area, 3 July 2019.
2. Land occupants from Midlands, 5 July 2019.
3. Land occupants from the Midlands, Debshan, 7 July 2019.
4. Jahana's subjects, Debshan, 16 February 2019.
5. Land occupants from the Midlands, Debshan, 9 July 2019.
6. Jahana's subjects, Debshan, 19 August 2019.