

**The University of Sheffield
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**Urban Property Ownership and The Maintenance of Communal
Land Rights in Zimbabwe.**

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**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of PhD**

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Theories:	Modernisation and dependency theory; structuration theory
Issues and concepts:	Land rights , urban property, communal land rights , property rights, urban elites Urban-rural and rural-urban linkages Socio-economic transformations, social differentiation Assets, safety nets and livelihoods Culture and identity , aliens and identity Gender contracts; Home, households and family networks
Of relevance to:	Countries in Southern & Eastern Africa particularly Namibia, South Africa, Kenya

SUMMARY

Land remains the most central issue underpinning social, economic and political processes in Southern and Eastern Africa. However, the dominance of and pre-occupation with the re-possession and redistribution of former settler colonial (white owned) large farms for distribution to the marginalised majority black population, although very necessary and long overdue, has delayed or precluded serious attention towards other more subtle land related conflicts. These include issues of security of tenure and in-equities in the communal and resettlement areas as well as within the urban and peri-urban zones. The focus of this thesis on continued maintenance of communal land rights by urban property owners gives an opportunity to analyse these dimensions of the Zimbabwe land question and begin to reflect on the future transformation of land rights within and outside settler constructs.

Continued maintenance of communal land rights for urban households has received intermittent policy attention over the last twenty-five years and the debate has been characterised by several features. Firstly, it has focused on urban households from the view of migrant workers, ignoring the growing socio-economic differentiation especially in the post-settler colonial era. Secondly, explicit debate has been short lived, with the status quo argument carrying the day. This status quo argument proposes that lack of urban security of tenure in terms of housing; social security and retirement benefits necessitate continued maintenance of communal land rights by African urban households.

To a large extent academic research has neither challenged nor interrogated this status quo argument; implicitly the research has reinforced it and thus perpetuate the notion of communal land rights. This has been inevitable since key studies have focused on low income groups at the neglect of the other strata in society; characterised in this thesis as the ‘mobilisation of bias’. The studies have also neglected changes in material relations between households and communal land rights, the transformation of the rights and differential access to them. However, it now appears the status quo argument is a notion overtaken by both urban and rural socio-economic transformations and no longer

provides an adequate basis for an exhaustive understanding of why the rights are maintained, how they are likely to change in the future, the various sources of change or the consolidating forces in Zimbabwe's post-settler colonial society.

In the light of recent post-settler colonial socio-economic transformations in Zimbabwe, this study is an attempt to interrogate the necessity for maintenance of communal land rights by urban households using urban residential property ownership as the window or initial entry point. The question is to explore why there cannot be a divorce from the maintenance of these rights and whether there are opportunities and sources for change or reinforcement of these rights at both the local and national levels. Put differently, what keeps the maintenance of rights in place; what would have to happen for the maintenance to disappear; what would be the sources of change and the implications for development ?

The thesis uses 'sensitising devices' from structuration theory to reconcile insights from both modernisation and dependency theories. Structuration is also used at the data theory i.e. to provide a better understanding of the data collection process and the meaning that may be attached to the research encounters as well as the information/data collected.

Drawing on key institutional informant interviews, household interviews and grey literature, it integrates quantitative and qualitative materials which reveal that beyond the status quo argument, agents deploy a multiplicity of arguments which on one hand reinforce and on the other transform the meaning and maintenance of the rights. The material and non-material contradictions associated with these arguments are explored. Relinquish of communal land rights appears to be taking place already even in the absence of explicit state policy on the issue. However, in this transformation, it is the poor families and women rather than the 'urban secure' who relinquish (or will relinquish) these rights. This has both theoretical and practical implications for urbanisation and development in Africa.

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