

Soil is the Soul

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Chimurenga (Liberation Wars) in Southern Rhodesia was in the past, and is at present, a *reconquista* of the lost land—the land stolen by the colonial thieves in the 19th century. Soil was the soul of the national liberation movement in Rhodesia.

Southern Rhodesia was a medieval Bantu Kingdom with capital at Great Zimbabwe, a site of massive stone ruins near Masvingo in the southern part. The country took this name - "Zimbabwe" when Lancaster House Agreement in London made it independent in April, 1980. The Shona (70% of the population of about 12 million) civilisation dominated the region from the 12th to the 19th century. The Shona tribe was mainly farmers.

When the land was stolen by British South African Company in the 1880's under the captaincy of the English pirate, John Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902), it was named after him. It was divided into Southern and Northern Rhodesia in 1911. Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing British colony in 1923. Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi) formed a multiracial federation in 1953. Nyasaland (now Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) became independent in 1963. But opposition to the independence of the then Southern Rhodesia under black African rule resulted in a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the White-dominated government in 1965. Economic sanctions and internal guerilla activities forced the government to negotiate peaceful transfer of power to African freedom fighters at Lancaster House, London, in 1979.

The root of the land problem dates back to the 19th century. The illegal appropriation of the land by Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company at the end of the 19th century, was brutal and barbaric. In 1896, a huge uprising (the first liberation war or Chimurenga of modern Zimbabwean history) of both majority Shona and minority Ndebele people killed some 400 white settlers.

The white settlers' response was even more brutal than the uprising, and the native modes of self-organisation was destroyed. The formalisation of white hegemony over the land came in the 1923 constitution. It entrenched native reserves. The 1930 Land Appointment Act divided Rhodesia largely into land privately owned by white settlers (by far majority of land, and the best) and the "tribal trustlands"—a kind of peasant-farmer extended reservation. Land theft reached its climax.

Further salt was added to the injury after the Second World War in 1945.

"...thousands of new white settlers were flocking to Rhodesia and many had been promised farms by the British government. Demobilized soldiers were offered the chance to farm in Africa as a reward for service in the Second World War, and Rhodesia opened up new tracts to provide for them..."

"...Quietly with no fanfare vast numbers of blacks were moved to make way for the new settlers... No fewer than 85,000 black families were evicted between 1945 and 1955, totalling perhaps 425,000 people. Considering that the black

population in 1945 barely exceeded 1.5 million, something approaching 30 percent of all 'natives' were moved from their homes...

"...burning sense of grievance certainly existed. Land had been stolen, with blacks herded into 'Native Reserves' while their white rulers took possession of the most fertile fields" (David Blair : *Degrees in Violence*, London, 2003)

The people were mugged of their own land in their own land of birth by a bunch of colonial crooks and mindless mafias of the so-called civilised West. Land was always at the heart of liberation struggle. Because in the absence of a favourable solution of the land question, the transfer of political power agreed at the Lancaster House, London, in 1979 would always be a paper creation. The war of independence was all about land, and without gaining land, the war would have been fought in vain. This is the hard reality.

Interestingly, the land question is hotting up in South Africa as well, where a handful of white farmers own about 75 percent of the fertile land of the country. The locals—the natives of the land—are merely under-paid and oppressed labourers in the very land of their ancestors. The table is going to turn there as well. The time is not far-off.

It was a tactical mistake not to discuss the land question in great detail during the Lancaster House negotiations, and a serious blunder not to include the methods of recovering the stolen lands and restoring them to the genuinely rightful owners —'the natives' in the clauses of the Agreement and then incorporated duly in the 1980 Constitution. In a conventional sense, ownership of land property is a fundamental right in a civilised society. But Rhodesia does not fall into this category. Land was stolen from real native owners by force, intimidation and coercion and now the thieves have been caught. Law dictates that recovered property -the LAND - should be returned to the rightful owner and that thieves should be punished accordingly. This did not happen when it was to happen immediately after the independence. It may be late now, but better late than never. Violence and bloodshed to enforce the rule of law on land restoration is not at all welcome. It needs to be done peacefully.

Financial compensation for the settler seedlings is the only way out. But who will pay the compensation? The original culprits or sinners? Since they are not available today - their successor seedlings. The British Government is morally, legally and ethically bound to pay compensation to the settler seedlings when their land is nationalised. This will be an act of atonement of the past sin. But unfortunately the British Government is indifferent to this problem since Rhodesia became independent 23 years ago. Zimbabwe has become a victim of perfidious Albion, i.e. British colonialist treachery. Black economic empowerment in Zimbabwe with land legacy at its heart is on the way. It is unstoppable. It will continue unabated. Cecil Rhodes's advocacy of British imperial expansion in Africa "from the Cape to Cairo" is now a shattered fantasy. It brought misery to millions of alien non-Africans. Land reconquista in Zimbabwe is but an act of atonement of the sins of colonial past. □□□