



## Environmental Impacts of Transnational Corporations in the Global South

Transnational Corporations, Violence and Suffering: The Environmental, Public Health and Social Impacts From Comparative Case Studies in Zimbabwe and Uganda  
Fernanda Claudio, Kristen Lyons,

### Article information:

**To cite this document:** Fernanda Claudio, Kristen Lyons, "Transnational Corporations, Violence and Suffering: The Environmental, Public Health and Social Impacts From Comparative Case Studies in Zimbabwe and Uganda" *In* Environmental Impacts of Transnational Corporations in the Global South. Published online: 14 Nov 2018; 145-169.

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# CHAPTER 5

## TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS, VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING: THE ENVIRONMENTAL, PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL IMPACTS FROM COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES IN ZIMBABWE AND UGANDA

Fernanda Claudio and Kristen Lyons

### ABSTRACT

*The present effects of transnational corporations (TNCs) on social, health, and environmental aspects of local societies have a long history. The pre-conditions for the insertion of the types of economic initiatives now seen in the Global South, and driven by TNCs, were set through histories of colonialism and development schemes. These initiatives disrupted local economies and modified environments, delivering profound effects on livelihoods. These effects were experienced as structural violence, and have produced social suffering through the decades.*

*In this paper, we compare two African cases across time; the conjunction of development initiatives and structural adjustment in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe in the early 1990s and industrial plantation forestry in present-day Uganda. Each case presents a specific constellation of political and economic forces that has produced prejudicial effects on local populations in their time*

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Environmental Impacts of Transnational Corporations in the Global South

Research in Political Economy, Volume 33, 145–169

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ISSN: 0161-7230/doi:10.1108/S0161-72302018000033006

*period of application and are, essentially, different versions of structural violence that produce social suffering. While each case depicts a specific type of violent encounter manifest at a particular historical moment, these are comparable in the domains of environmental impacts, disruptions to societies, co-opting of local economies, disordering of systems of meaning and social reproduction, and nefarious effects on well-being. We analyze the conjunction of these effects through a theoretical lens of structural violence and social suffering. Our analysis draws particular attention to the role of TNCs in driving this structural violence and its effects.*

**Keywords:** Structural violence; economic structural adjustment programmes; transnational corporations; social suffering; environmental impacts; health impacts

## INTRODUCTION

In 1572, Luis de Camoes published *The Lusiad*, an epic poem of Portuguese navigation which described with awe the discovery of “a new hemisphere and new stars”, and passage through many lands where sailors witnessed “what strangeness, but what qualities!” (De Camoes, 1572/2013, Canto V). These tales of first encounter depict the nature of the contradictory relationship between western powers and African countries over the centuries; affection and exploitation at one and the same time. As history tells, the pure wonders of discovery soon turned to colonization and abuse of environments and populations. In the midst of its magnificence, the African continent has known a long history of upheaval in the form of wars, land disputes, and exploitation of populations, driven by both external and internal forces, and often combinations of both. Almost no major form of abuse, from slavery and plantation systems to structural adjustment and resource-based capital exploration, has been propagated by only one player. Drawing from the intersection of political ecology and medical anthropology, this paper conceptualises this historical – and contemporary – abuse as structural violence. This violence is enabled via the convergence of national and international forces, as well as public and private interests, and delivering profound social suffering.

This paper examines the forms and forces of structural violence through a comparison of two African cases across time; the conjunction of development initiatives and structural adjustment in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe in the early 1990s and industrial plantation forestry in present-day Uganda. In so doing, we draw attention to the role of transnational capital at key historical moments; the onset of structural adjustment in Zimbabwe, and the rapid expansion of industrial forestry for carbon offset, thereby driving a particular form of “green” structural transformation, in Uganda. Each case presents a specific constellation of political and economic forces that have produced prejudicial effects on local populations in their time period of application and are, essentially, different versions of structural violence that produce

social suffering. We assert that both structural adjustment policies in Zimbabwe and industrial plantation forestry in Uganda follows a long history of violent colonial encounter, the events of which have produced a cascade of social disruptions and providing platforms for new forms of exploitation. Through a comparative spatial and temporal case study analysis from Zimbabwe and Uganda, we argue the systemic features of structural violence in dominant development approaches engender social suffering at the local level.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL SUFFERING

### *Conceptualizing Violence*

Violence has been conceptualized in a multitude of different ways. While some analysis includes a focus on direct, embodied, immediate, and material violence, others refer to violence as structural, terminology that captures the gradual and insidious ways it can occur, with outcomes that may be invisible, or at least not immediately apparent (Bohle & Funfgeld, 2007; Scott, 1998). While there is a long history of direct violence associated with the development project (see McMichael, 2017) as applied in the global south (including the destruction of crops, sites of cultural significance, murder and others – the conceptual focus in this paper is upon the architecture of structural – or slow – violence that is imposed through development schemes (Galtung, 1990).

Galtung (1969) used the term “structural violence” in the late 1960s, and in so doing, distinguished those forms of violence that are built into, and arise directly from, social systems. Transnational corporations (TNCs) are recognized as significant actors in establishing the basis for structuring violence into development projects, by asserting new global power asymmetries that drive inequality and disadvantage. Structural violence is not necessarily visible or immediate, but rather is stable, long-term and differential in terms of its higher impact on lower social groups (Galtung, 1990). It is also distinct from inter-personal violence and is, of necessity, situated within political processes and action. In a later article, Galtung and Høivik (1971) argued that if direct violence is measured in deaths, then “structural violence is the difference between the optimal life expectancy and the actual life expectancy”. In other words, the loss of opportunity to live longer and healthier lives due to an absence of resources is one way to gauge this form of violence that is otherwise not easily visible. On this basis, Galtung differentiates so-called “non-spectacular” structural violence from other, direct forms, including those that render the impacts of violence – to people and the environment – clearly visible in material and often embodied ways (Galtung, 1990).

Building from this early work, Nixon (2011) has conceptualized structural violence as slow; given the effects of such violence are often delayed over space and time. Nixon asserts that while slow violence might be difficult to recognize via any immediate adverse impacts – similar to Galtung – its spectacle lies in

the significant social, cultural, and economic effects it garners over the long term.

Structural and slow violence has been applied across political ecology literature, especially in burgeoning scholarship that documents processes driving land grabs and neoliberal enclosures and their consequences (see for example, Büscher, 2013; Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012). Privatization and enclosure of territories is identified as driving resource conflicts, as well as giving rise to diverse forms of resistance. Tienhaara (2012) and others also document the violent impacts at the local livelihood level on the basis of such enclosures. Local and Indigenous people are identified as disproportionately bearing the costs of development interventions in the form of structural, slow violence (see for example Bottazzi et al., 2013; Daniel & Mittal, 2010).

### CONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL SUFFERING

While Galtung and Høivik first highlighted violence in terms of its impacts on life expectancy (as detailed above), other authors also reported its effects on quality of life, namely in the realms of differential levels of suffering. This was termed social suffering. While social suffering captures a difficult and subjective category, medical anthropology provides some useful distinctions to navigate this nuance and complexity.

Medical anthropologists frame social suffering as a moral barometer “intended to bring critical scrutiny to the ways in which the character of society is exposed through the incidence of suffering” (Wilkinson & Kleinman, 2016). Social suffering is “a moral register of political and economic processes that leave people materially disadvantaged, culturally undernourished, and socially deprived. Social suffering takes place wherever harm is done to human life” (Wilkinson & Kleinman, 2016, p. 14) and is expressed through illness and/or distress amongst the disempowered (Wilkinson & Kleinman, 2016, p. 95).

Medical anthropologists, often on the frontlines of social inequality and bearing witness to its negative health (and other) outcomes, proposed that structural violence and suffering must be considered from broad geographical and historical perspectives (Farmer, 1997). From this view, one must acknowledge the global forces at play that produce “a global economy of brutality” (Farmer, 1997, p. 274) in which dynamics of disempowerment result in continuous conditions of suffering. Farmer further argued that to understand the impact of these forces, consideration must also be given to various axes along which violence develops; gender, ethnicity, race, class, and cultural difference. While it is true that structural violence plays out at international, national and local scales, it is at the local scale where differential impacts can be observed, and where variants of social suffering are manifest.

In this way, social suffering provides a lens to understand the locally differentiated experiences of slow and structural violence that emerge from political and economic processes. This is the lens adopted in this paper. Before turning to the selected cases of Zimbabwe and Uganda, we provide a brief review of the

historical antecedent of the modernist development project (McMichael), which we argue has created the current conditions for transnational capital to perpetrate violence and suffering.

## DEVELOPMENT, VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING

The implicit understanding of any type of development is that improvement to people's lives will occur. The international development project has the objective of improving lives; and with outcomes that are measurable via national indicators, including gross domestic product (GDP) and various health indicators. Central to this approach is economic advancement, which is widely understood as a precursor to other kinds of development via a "trickle down" effect. Since the post-World War II period, economic growth and development has been enabled via nation states – in both interventionist and *laissez faire* ways, depending on the policy preference of the day – as the basis for delivering positive outcomes at the local level (McMichael, 2017; Webster, 1990).

But history tells a different story, in which violence and social suffering frequently accompany development – alongside the reordering of local people as colonial and transnational subjects – resulting in deleterious effects to populations. This is particularly evident in the African colonial and post-colonial development context, as we detail here. In this paper, we contend that structural violence and suffering is inherent in international development initiatives and their ascendant economic schemes, including those propagated by TNCs. We demonstrate that the continuous post-World War II development project (McMichael, 2017) between the global North and South has created a political economy wherein economic schemes put forward by TNCs find acquiescent and compliant national governments. If the current state-of-affairs depicts structural violence, which as Galtung (1969) argued is ensconced in political action, how did this take place?

*Encountering development*, a post-development treatise written in the wake of two decades of development initiatives in South America – and providing a profound contrast to development norms and values that preceded it – explained the concept of modern development that emerged after World War II. Its author, Escobar, identified the development project as occurring in tandem with the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine of 1949, and as part of the broad American foreign policy agenda. This project was also backed by multilateral institutions and global policies, including the Bretton Woods Agreement, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later becoming the World Trade Organization), as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Escobar, 1995). Escobar described the Marshall Plan as a way:

to bring about the conditions necessary to replicating the world over the features that characterized the 'advanced' societies of the time-high levels of industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values (Escobar, 1995, pp. 3–4).

The author argued that the seemingly benevolent western development paradigm greatly disadvantaged recipient countries through its forms of knowledge, systems of power; and constructed subjectivities (Escobar, 1995, p. 10). The new vocabulary of “poverty” with its attached ideas of mobility, vagrancy, promiscuity, frugality, and ignorance laid the groundwork for management of the poor through education, healthcare, hygiene, morality, employment, and child rearing (Escobar, 1995, p. 23). Similarly, the tropes of “village” and “peasantry” and associated concepts “small farmer” and “landless labourer” permitted “a broad range of economic, political, and cultural, and discursive processes” (Escobar, 1995, p. 106). He further argued that relationships between clients and aid providers are “structured by bureaucratic and textual mechanisms”, or “documentary practices” emblematic of the power relations within development (Escobar, 1995, p. 127). In his view, the disempowerment of recipient countries occurred through reorganization of local economies towards market-oriented production, and the concomitant commodification of land, labor, and money, and “invention of the economy as an autonomous domain” (Escobar, 1995, p. 60). He argued:

Economic men and women are positioned in civil societies in ways that are inevitably mediated, at the symbolic level, by the constructs of markets, production, and commodities. People and nature are separated into parts (individuals and resources), to be recombined into market commodities and objects of exchange and knowledge Escobar (1995, p. 61).

As part of the global capitalist development project, new subjectivities were created through violent encounters with colonial regimes, European modernity, and post-colonial and post-Independence national projects. These each suppressed local cultures, identities, and histories (Escobar, 1995, p. 214). We argue that these processes of social and economic reinscription of local society occur in both development schemes presented as case studies in this paper, as seen in the Zambesi Valley of the 1990s, and in the actions of Green Resources in present-day Uganda.

While Escobar delivered a strong critique of the development paradigm, which he thought a failure, Ferguson (1994) took a less instrumental view in his book *The Anti-Politics Machine* (Ferguson, 1994). Ferguson proposed that rather than expecting development to be a coherent practice, histories, circumstances, and contingencies of each site of application should be examined. He rejected the stance that development was “an institution whose fundamental beneficence” was a given as well as the neo-Marxist and neo-classical (Prebisch, 1981) view that development aimed to establish centre-periphery relations (Ferguson, 1994, p. 13). Instead, he believed that development initiatives are particular, and supported and maintained not by “capitalism” in the abstract, but by historically specific political and economic interests in each case (Ferguson, 1994, p. 14). The real story in his mind was not why development schemes failed, or produced unintended consequences, but why the development approach persisted. Whose interests did it serve? He contended that outcomes of development projects are manifested:

As unintended yet instrumental elements in a resultant constellation that has the effect of expanding the exercise of a particular sort of state power while simultaneously exerting a powerful de-politicizing effect Ferguson (1994, p. 21).

Whilst Escobar viewed international development approaches as instrumental and coherent, and aimed at constructing a centre–periphery agenda deleterious to the Global South, Ferguson saw no necessary intentionality in development approaches, but recognized that a specific power agenda was at play in the seeming fragmentation of programs. Our historical perspective leads us to agree with both authors in their assessment of the fraught arena of interventions on local populations, whether framed as development or capital initiatives. Inspired by Escobar, we see that transnational economic schemes applied to countries with weak economies in terms of ability to tax (Acemoglu, 2005) have negative impacts at the local levels at which populations live and work. Economic structural adjustment in Zimbabwe seriously curtailed livelihood strategies in the remote Zambezi Valley, especially when layered upon a resettlement scheme, and industrial plantation forestry affected food security in Uganda. But, as development specialists, we also acknowledge that the best laid schemes can go awry once locally applied, and we highlight why there is a persistence of top-down and locally uninformed schemes when these result in so much (recorded) suffering.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This paper examines the forms and forces of structural violence through a comparison of two African case studies across time; the conjunction of development initiatives and structural adjustment in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe in the early 1990s and industrial plantation forestry in present-day Uganda. In so doing, we draw attention to the role of transnational capital at key historical moments; the onset of structural adjustment in Zimbabwe, and the rapid expansion of industrial forestry for carbon offset, thereby driving a particular form of “green” structural transformation, in Uganda.

The first case study presented in this paper is a development project in the Dande area of the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe. Eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork was conducted during 1992 and 1993 on the local impacts of combinations of development schemes and a severe drought. In this paper, we focus on one development scheme, the Mid-Zambezi Valley Rural Resettlement Project (MZP), while at the same time acknowledging that the ethnographic approach elicited the complexity of disruption to local livelihood, political, and family systems in the area (including beyond this specific scheme that forms the focus of this paper). The site of this case study was Chikafa village, situated at the intersection of the Manyame River and the Mozambican border. Data were gathered through two household surveys conducted in mid-1992 and mid-1993 (before and after a serious drought), attendance at village meetings related to health, land, and drought relief, attendance at spirit possession ceremonies, interviews with leaders and residents, and participation in local activities such as cotton-picking, cooking, gathering firewood, attending religious gatherings, use



of public transport. In all, the data gathered encompassed approximately 200 residents.

The second case study presented in this paper is a TNC-led development project to establish industrial plantation forestry in Uganda. We draw from fieldwork with one TNC – Green Resources, a private Norwegian company engaged in forestry plantations, carbon offset, forest products, and renewable energy. This provides a case to explore the violence and social suffering associated with private sector plantation forestry in Uganda. Green Resources is engaged in activities in Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda claims to have planted more trees than any other private company in the last 10 years – with over 40,000 ha of standing plantation forestry – and to have invested over US \$125 million in tree planting in Africa (Green Resources, 2018).

In Uganda, Green Resources has obtained licenses to engage in plantation forestry in two Central Forest Reserves; the Bukaleba Forest Reserve in Mayuge District, and the Kachung Forest Reserve in Dokolo District, covering a total of 6,721 ha. Research methods included interviews with representatives from central and local government, environmental non-government organizations, journalists, and company representatives. It also included two field visits to both Bukaleba and Kachung Central Forest Reserves, and spread over a year between 2012 and 2013. At each of these sites, focus group meetings were undertaken in nine villages (with between 7 and 30 people in attendance at each focus group). Three of these villages are located in the license area at Bukaleba, while six villages are located on the edges of the plantations at Bukaleba and Kachung. In total, at least 150 community members living in or adjacent to the plantation forestry sites were included in this research. These primary data were supplemented with the analysis of documents, including annual reports, policy documents and company publications (Fig. 5.1).

## **CASE STUDY 1: ZIMBABWE: STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DURING THE 1990s**

Zimbabwe is a country in flux. Its populations have experienced disruptions to their social, economic, and political lives for centuries, particularly as foreign powers, including transnational capital, have attempted to secure control over land. The fall of the Munhumutapa state to the Portuguese in 1629 led to their subsequent control over parts of the Zambezi through alliance with local hereditary chieftaincies (Newitt, 1995). The Chimurenga (liberation) wars with the British South Africa Company of the late nineteenth century led to British control of the country until 1963, when the Unilateral Declaration of Independence was made by the white minority leadership, led by Ian Smith who sought national self-determination, but whose government did not represent the African majority population. Each of these events led to control over land and economy, and to social disruptions in the form of labour migration. Since 1980, in the post-colonial era, Zimbabwe has been the site of various initiatives to improve the state of the economy. Amongst these initiatives, the International Monetary Fund's economic structural adjustment programme of the late 1980s, which was

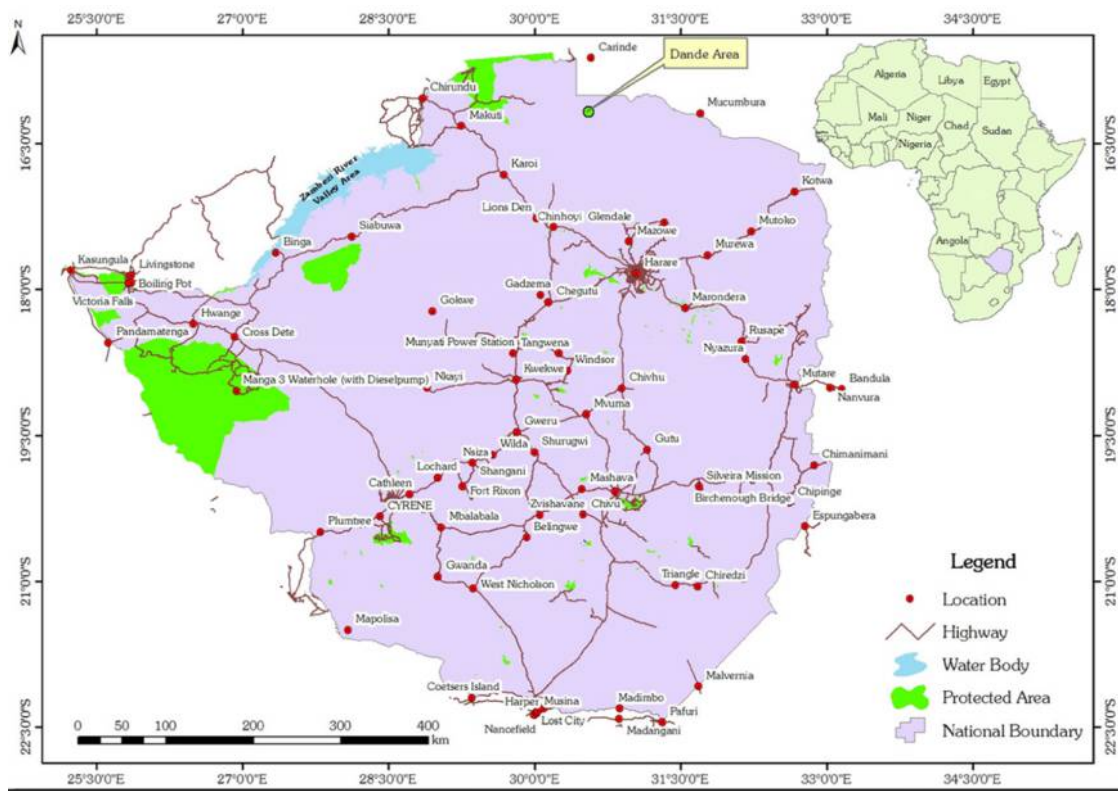


Fig. 5.1. Map of Zimbabwe. Location; Highway; Water Body; Protected Area; National Boundary.

known locally as “hapanasadza” (no food) and “ESAP: Europeans suffer, Africans perish”.

## STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND VIOLENCE

During the 1980s, economic structural adjustment initiatives were applied globally to a selection of developing and developed countries with mixed results. Generally, the effects were negative and produced reduced standards of living in developing countries. In developed countries, the results were mixed. For example, a structural adjustment programme applied to the New Zealand economy during the 1990s produced negative effects on poverty and health (Kelsey, 1997), while the South Korean experience rendered positive results both socially and economically (Haggard, Pinkston, & Jungkun, 1999). The Korean case is specific in that the combination of strong and centralised governance, compliance of the business sector, and strong oversight by government agencies resulted in improved economic outcomes (Haggard et al., 1999). In African countries, where histories of colonial disruptions, contradictory relationships between centralized and prescriptive governments and policies of decentralization promoted by structural adjustment programmes, results were mostly negative. There, structural adjustment was applied under the guise of development, and with the promise of producing employment, better access to consumables, facilitation of mobility and participation in the economy, and ultimately higher standards of living for populations. Yet history has recorded the opposite effect in African countries, delivering structural violence in the form of low economic performance across a range of indicators, particularly in terms of poverty and food production (Sahn, Dorosh, & Younger, 1997). Structural adjustment also prejudiced health, especially for women and children, as a result of reductions in health spending and education, removal of subsidies on basic foods, and fragmentation of families due to labor migration (Logie & Woodroffe, 1993).

In Zimbabwe, economic structural adjustment was applied in the late 1980s, with outcomes that failed to bring about benefits for the population. By this time ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front), the party that won the Independence War as a result of key support by rural populations, had been in power for almost a decade and needed the political gain of an improved economy. Structural adjustment promised to improve conditions for rural populations and on this basis was welcomed by the ruling party. However, its impact on the agriculturally based economy was especially negative. In terms of agricultural policies, at first there were benefits from the incorporation of African farmers into “the state-marketing system [...] through marketing depots, crop collection points and extension services in the communal area and making modern crop development packages available through Agritex” (Gibbon, 1996). At this time, Zimbabwe’s African smallholders produced about half of Zimbabwe’s export maize, and a large proportion of cotton. This level of production and distribution was made possible by the existence of the centralized Grain Marketing Board (GMB), which collected and distributed crops. In 1991, the World Bank objected to the GMB, arguing that the cost of services in rural

areas was uneconomic and counter-productive, especially given the number of remote depots, and the shipping costs involved (Gibbon, 1996). As a result, the GMB was forced to reduce grain depots around the country, as well as reducing staff and maize stocks. When the great drought of 1991–1992 occurred, the GMB had to import large amounts of grain (Gibbon, 1996). In addition to modifications of the GMB, the World Bank also drove market deregulation, including partially decontrolling trade in the staple white maize (to enhance the position of independent traders), and “to eliminate all controls and restrictions in the trade in beef, dairy products, cotton, oil seeds and yellow maize” (Gibbon, 1996).

There were widespread repercussions of these measures for the whole farming sector in Zimbabwe. Commercial farmers found it more profitable to switch from maize crops to tobacco (from 31% cultivating tobacco to 79%), as well to engage in horticulture to produce vegetables and flowers for export. This sector employed 300,000 workers, and so any changes that affected employment would have important repercussions for communal areas, whose residents engaged in labor migration. In conversation during the early 1990s, a young white farmer who managed a farm approximately 50 km outside of Harare stated he would prefer to grow “food” (meaning maize) instead of the more lucrative tobacco. Communal areas, already suffering from the effects of serious drought, also lost their grain collection points. This caused many problems and suffering for small farmers, “as marketing through the GMB became more physically difficult for them and more turned as anticipated to small-scale private traders” (Gibbon, 1996). This situation rendered small farmers, without their own means of transport, and in the absence of local cooperatives, vulnerable to the exploitation of traders.

Structural adjustment also affected the Cotton Marketing Board (CMB), and in the years from 1989 to 1992 cotton prices fell. With the new export market-led approach, the CMB found it more profitable to sell cotton lint overseas, rather than to supply local spinners in Harare, thereby putting the spinning sector in financial difficulties and risking job cuts. Political intervention avoided this circumstance, but this case also illustrated the drawbacks of a purely export market-led approach (Gibbon, 1996).

Structural adjustment rejected the protectionist approach, which the industrial sector had inherited from the Rhodesian regime because of structural problems, which it said, prevented growth. Pre-Independence and well into the 1980s, the industrial sector, which was varied and included, for example, pharmaceuticals and agricultural input companies, had access to local capital and benefited from foreign exchange controls. This sector developed in part due to foreign sanctions on trade with Rhodesia which stimulated local production of consumables for the domestic market. In contrast, structural adjustment prescribed rejection of protectionist foreign exchange policies and encouraged liberalization of foreign investment, reduction of national budgets, and reinvestment in equipment all of which accommodated the interests of TNCs. In other words, ESAP suggested a restructuring of production that would include reduction of employees across sectors (Gibbon, 1996).

As Nyabereka (2017) found, GDP growth in the wake of structural adjustment did not meet targets to improve local livelihoods (except for 1994). Austerity measures had a negative impact on individuals and families who depended on wages and public services, and produced progressive underdevelopment (Nyabereka, 2017; Scoones, Melnyk, & Pretty, 1992) (Fig. 5.2).

This history of structural adjustment produced struggling economies with social inequality, suffering and impoverished populations, which became vulnerable to constellations of development, economic, and transnational initiatives. The effects of failed economic strategies can be measured in poor production, joblessness and other indicators, but what of the effects on populations? We frame these effects as violent encounters structured into policies that reduce quality of life, including of health, and opportunities for education and employment. Structural adjustment policies could not be applied without the agreement and cooperation of national governments in Africa (and as evidenced elsewhere) that tend to have top-down governance approaches. The complex web of interests at play in the application of these nefarious plans to whole populations, with little regard for their health and social outcomes, is also present in the case of the actions of TNCs in African countries today. One problem is corruption, which can be mitigated through civic action (Mondlane, Claudio, & Khan, 2016). Another problem is the policy void left by poorly redistributed national budgets in these countries that is filled by foreign development and capital schemes. Another problem is the legislative frameworks that allow for initiatives that have little good and potentially much negative impact on populations. We are interested in the empty spaces in governance of African countries; in economic policies devoid of local logic and ahistorical in their lack of consideration for the lessons of colonialism, and in legislative frameworks that do not mandate

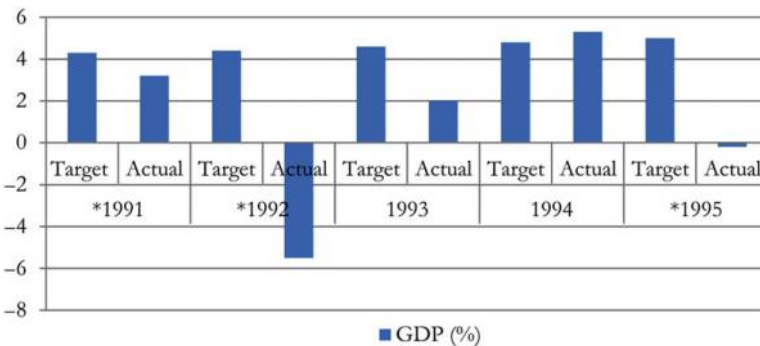


Fig. 5.2. Gross Domestic Product Growth Compared to Actual Targets. Sources: Adapted from UNDP, World Bank and African Development Bank databanks. Note: \*1991–1992 and 1995 were affected by severe drought (Nyabereka, 2017). Zimbabwe's target and recorded annual GDP growth from 1991 to 1995.

and enforce appropriate impact assessment to protect their populations. Their similar entanglement with transnational forces, in which they have little voice, and which produce suffering, links Zambezians of the 1990s and contemporary Ugandans.

## STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND THE MAKING OF SUFFERING

As outlined earlier, structural adjustment weakened the agricultural production base in Zimbabwe during the 1990s and caused unemployment and attendant withdrawal of government supports in education and healthcare. These were national level policies that played out at the local level, as we will describe in this section. Nyabereka (2017) noted that in the rush to implement structural adjustment programmes, the Bretton Woods institutions neglected to provide lasting social, economic, and political development. The violence associated with structural adjustment in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s at the local level produced vulnerabilities within society such that the perfect storm of drought (1991–1992) and development precipitated hardship not seen since the Independence War, which ended in 1979. These development schemes reduced political representation, as well as disrupting environments and local economies, and generating food insecurity and social inequality. Zambezians suffered structural violence at three scales during the 1990s: international, national, and local. Clear examples of these disruptions included fragmentation of families in search of food when crop failure could not be mitigated by traditionally held grain stores because the GMBs had ended. Hunger in rural areas, including in the Zambezi, became a feature of life due to the combination of local crop failure, absence of grain stores, and lack of jobs in areas of traditional seasonal labor migration. In the ethnographic area here discussed, a cholera outbreak was a most striking outcome of hunger caused by the combination of drought and socioeconomic disruptions brought about by structural adjustment.

Suffering happened because of drought and economic structural adjustment, but an ill-timed development scheme exacerbated an already problematic situation. We have seen how the IMF promoted structural adjustment in Zimbabwe with the cooperation of the Zimbabwean government. While Zimbabweans were affected by the withdrawal of services including education, healthcare, employment, and others, many could expect support from family-based agricultural activities in the regional areas. However, in the Zambesi Valley, a conjunction of drought, structural adjustment, and a resettlement scheme severely disrupted lives and led to much suffering.

How did this structural violence occur? During the late 1980s, the Zambesi Valley, an area historically considered to be marginal by both British and Rhodesian regimes, became a focal point for development. Colonial attempts at cotton cultivation had faltered, and the presence of tsetse fly until the early 1990s precluded keeping of cattle. Very poor infrastructure in terms of roads, electricity, and telephones impeded communication. Few schools and under-equipped health clinics meant that services could barely support the existing

population. Its harsh environment with poor soils, extreme heat, malarial mosquitos, and profusion of wild animals, made conceiving of dense human habitation almost impossible.

Given these inhospitable conditions, why in the late 1980s, was the Zambesi Valley suddenly considered suitable for development? One reason was population pressure on the plateau where Communal Areas had become degraded and lacked water. Another reason was the fact of a young underemployed – given very few employment options in the Valley – population needing livelihood opportunities. But perhaps the greatest reason was the fact that the Zimbabwean leadership had achieved power by winning a guerrilla war based on control over land and its equitable redistribution. They did so with crucial backing of rural populations who had fed, sheltered and ritually supported rebel guerrillas, especially in the vast Zambesi Valley. Ten years on from Independence, the fact that the African Development Fund would finance a land resettlement program dovetailed nicely with the government's own political needs. But, as we describe below, the resettlement scheme added another dimension of hardship to the lives of Zambesians.

## MID-ZAMBESI VALLEY RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (MZP): DESIGN

According to the “Appraisal Report: Mid-Zambesi Valley Development Project Zimbabwe” (1986), the objectives of the project were the following:

To develop the Mid-Zambesi Valley, a communal area, in accordance with Government policy contained in the Five-Year (1986–1990) National Development Plan; to settle 3,000 families and to improve the living conditions of these plus the 4,600 families already resident in the project area through the provision of agricultural services, and physical and social infrastructures; to increase crop production thus insuring self-sufficiency in food and cash incomes for the farming community and contributing to the earning of foreign exchange for the economy through exports; and to conserve and utilize the natural resources of the area African Development Fund (1986, p. 24).

The MZP was a rural resettlement program with a top-down design. Its immediate objective was to promote cash-cropping of cotton. Curiously, the project aimed to resettle households within what oral histories described as longstanding (about 100 years) lineage-based residential areas. In fact, the project aimed to reconfigure residential patterns such that already existing lineage-based settlement would make way for migrant families from environmentally degraded plateau areas in Zimbabwe. Each household was to be given 12-acre plots to cultivate, and a 0.5-acre residential plot. Around 3,000 newcomer families were to be settled in 130 villages of between 20 and 25 households (Fund, 1986). The boundaries of the project area fell within the districts of Guruve and Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central Province. Because assessment methods were flawed (census figures as well as aerial photographs used were outdated), the MZP had to accommodate an additional 2,500 households into its plans (Derman, 1990).

The MZP was administered through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural and Urban Development and the Department of Rural Development Division. The demarcated project area “was a strategic area during the war and important for the victory of the liberation forces. Both ZANU and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People’s Union) were very active here” (Derman, 1990). Within the MZP design, new villages, clinics, and schools were to be constructed near boreholes. Each village was to have a communal grazing area, and numbers of animals were to be controlled through a permit system (Fund, 1986). In short, the MZP aimed to change the system of land ownership. In pre-colonial and colonial eras, land distribution was done by Zambesian headmen and spirit mediums. Land allocation procedures changed in 1985 with the creation of the Provincial Councils and Administration Act extending powers to distribute land to Ward Councilors and Village Development Committee chairpersons. Thus, in practice in the early 1990s, a combination of hereditary and elected representatives deliberated on land use which was based on Usufructuary right. Effectively, the MZP transferred land use governance away from locally imbedded authorities to project planners and district level decision-makers who had no local engagement.

While the MZP encompassed the entire Mid-Zambesi region, the site of this analysis is Chikafa, including one of six villages belonging to Zvaitika Village Development Committee, one of four village development committees within Neshangwe Ward.<sup>1</sup> Two lineage-based groups, the Chikunda, whose ancestors had conquered the area in the late 1900s, and the Korekore governed Chikafa. A hereditary headman who was Chikunda governed alongside the Chairman who was Korekore. The MZP met with much resistance in this area. The Chairman had assisted in designating (pegging) about 200 fields of 12 acres each for resettlement by Chikafa residents, but these ignored the new demarcations and refused to move, complaining of poor soil and lack of water. The project then proposed four other areas, which were also rejected by the population who rallied several local politicians, including the provincial governor, Member of Parliament and AGRITEX (Agricultural Technical and Extension Services of the Ministry of Agriculture in Zimbabwe) to protest resettlement. The village hereditary headman, sabhuku Chikafa vowed that residents would never move to proposed areas stating, “there is no sadza (food) there”.

While the majority of the population refused to accept the MZP, local fractures in the social organization of the village occurred. Influential residents from the two dominant lineages were offered plots in the most fertile areas, which they eventually accepted. A second group of newcomers from a defunct mining area on the plateau was also resettled. However, the bulk of the population refused successive offers of poor lands, while the ongoing battle to avoid resettlement took its toll in anxiety and distress. The new farming approaches prescribed by the project especially took their toll. These included moving away from riverbanks that sustained gardens that fed families during the dry season, and ensured survival during cyclical droughts. Also, the project aim of encouraging cotton cultivation caused anxiety because of the necessary financial investment in inputs (seed, chemicals, and tools) and the labor intensive aspect, which



would reduce time for food crop cultivation. Past collective experience of cotton cultivation failure in the Zambesi instigated by both the British and Rhodesian regimes, also contributed to anxieties with the MZP. Residents expressed desire to earn cash to pay for schooling, health care, transportation and other items. Cotton cultivation was in its infancy in 1993, and only done by households from the two dominant lineages who could afford the monetary and labor costs: of 93.5 acres under cotton cultivation in Chikafa, 39.50 (42%) were owned by the Chikunda and 44.50 (48%) by the Korekore. No one made profit from cotton at that time.

In a marginal area with little opportunity to participate in the cash economy, why did Zambesians resist a cash crop scheme? The short answer is that people understood their great vulnerability within a harsh environment of poor soils, precarious water sources, and cyclical drought. Their livelihood and survival strategies included diversification of agriculture between dryland and riverine crops. Maize was the staple food and its importance cannot be overstated. During the rainy season, villagers cultivated maize in both dryland and riverine fields, which they dried to eat during the dry season. Maize is synonymous with life in this area; it represents both sustenance and social continuity. Maize is also brewed into ritual beer and drunk during ceremonies that foster and affirm local identity and social cohesion. During the severe drought of 1991–1992, a shortage of maize meant suspension of all social rituals, except for the annual rain-making ceremony which was considered to be urgent. One hundred thirty-six acres of maize were cultivated in Chikafa in 1993, 83.50 acres owned by the Chikunda (55%) and 57.50 (38%) by the Korekore. Thus, these two groups, who were the traditional keepers of both wealth and ritual and hereditary power, were threatened by cotton cultivation. Additional sources of food included millet and sorghum dryland cultivation, which was intercropped with pumpkin, and riverine gardens which produced vegetables including cabbage, sweet potato, tomatoes, beans, onions, various leafy greens, and chilies. Gardens were labor-intensive, but enabled survival in drought years. Chickens and goats provided sources of protein, although the latter caused many disputes related to damaged crops.

Cotton cultivation affected household production of food in a similar way to drought; decreases in maize production precipitated a greater investment in the relatively easy-to-cultivate riverine gardens. But, and as discussed above, gardens provided food that was complementary to the sustaining food crop, maize, and survival food during droughts. Thus, intensification of garden production was a sign of increased fragility of food security.

While the MZP espoused a discourse of empowerment through the economic promise of cotton cultivation, in its infancy this scheme created hardship for resettled families and great uncertainty for those who resisted resettlement. The occurrence of a serious drought in 1991–1992 served to both exacerbate the weaknesses of the project and highlight the fragility of the population's relationship with the environment.

In Escobar's terms, the MZP created new subjectivities, including individual economic empowerment. However, such subjectivities did not work in the fragile

Zambezi environment, where livelihoods were based on deep historical knowledge of the environment and social relations. Settlements patterns, centered on the households of lineage elders, were composed of relatives who farmed together with a gender-based division of labor that fostered a diversified approach to food, including maize and vegetable cultivation, fishing, bush foods and some seasonal labor migration. The MZP stipulated that arable plots should all be of the same size irrespective of household size, that fields were situated away from rivers, and that the names of settlements should be changed from family names into descriptive terms or letters. Residents resisted these new designations citing loss of identity. They also resisted threats to the established political hierarchy brought by the MZP, which provided scope for younger residents and newcomers to have a political voice, while at the same time creating uncertainty. Loss of time-tested governance structures also increased observable fragility of livelihoods, and increased vulnerability to environmental conditions. These circumstances, in combination, fostered resistance to the MZP.

The legacy of the combination of structural adjustment, poorly designed development schemes and poor governance in Zimbabwe has led to a fragile economy vulnerable to exploitative capital. This has been manifest in diverse forms of social suffering, as detailed above. While valiant efforts to resist socially meaningless and potentially destructive economic schemes take place at the local level, what about at the national level? Significant threats to local livelihoods in Zimbabwe now take the form of mid-level TNCs that are registered and active in countries with poor legal frameworks that do not protect people. Green Fuel is one such company now active in Zimbabwe in the agricultural sector where traditional systems of local governance are co-opted to sign over huge areas of locally owned land that support livelihoods in the absence of a functioning national economy (Hobbes, 2016). A longstanding habit of structural violence in Zimbabwe, and a lack of care for the social suffering of its people have paved the way for the insertion of capital schemes that precipitate further harm.

## **CASE STUDY TWO: INDUSTRIAL PLANTATION FORESTRY IN UGANDA**

### *The Entry of Transnational Capital Into Industrial Plantation Forestry*

In Uganda, similar to Zimbabwe and elsewhere, foreign investment for development has been institutionalized via processes and policies at both the international and national levels (Mamdani, 1987) (Fig. 5.3). As Wiegratz (2010, p. 128) describes, Uganda's economic reforms have been driven by a domestic power elite and foreign interests committed to "the unregulated market is best" doctrine. At the international level, structural adjustment and trade liberalization programs have integrated Uganda within the international economy, creating new forms of dependency and obligation. Meanwhile at the national level, a number of programs, introduced since the 1980s, have facilitated the liberalization and privatization of national economic activities.

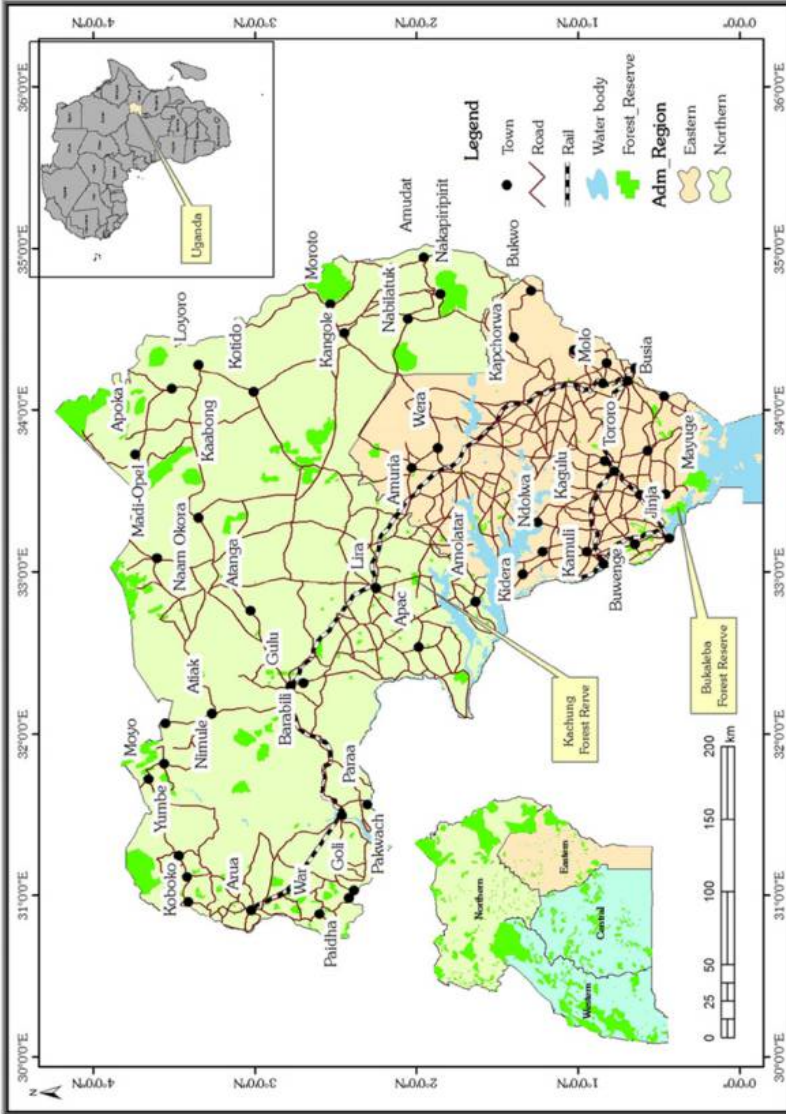


Fig. 5.3. Map of Uganda.

The introduction of the “Economic Recovery Program” in the mid-1980s, for example, aimed to transition Uganda from a peasant to modern industrial economy (Wiegatz, 2010). This introduced new “business friendly laws” for investment, as well as driving the privatization of most state-owned businesses. The expansion of international investment has also been supported by a number of other institutional mechanisms, including the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995, and amended 2005), which provides legal policy and infrastructure for private investment, as well as the Uganda Investment Authority and the Uganda Revenue Authority, each established to assist transnational capital investment (Bomuhangi, Doss, and Meizen-Dick, 2012). Turning to industrial plantation forestry – the second case study presented in this paper – foreign investment in the form of transnational capital has come to play a central role in sectoral expansion.

The Ugandan National Forestry Authority (NFA) identified declining forest cover – estimated as occurring at around 6,000 ha each month (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2013) – as a primary national environmental challenge. Deforestation is also linked to other environmental problems, including soil erosion, biodiversity loss and climate change, and Norwatch (Norwatch, 2011) warns Uganda will face acute timber shortages within the next 10 years.

In this context, central government managed Central Forest Reserves have become a primary focus for national re-afforestation efforts, with private investors identified as key actors in driving afforestation according to a National Forestry Authority representative. National Forestry Authority policy documents also describe foreign investment in plantation forestry as creating local employment and economic growth, while the National Forestry Policy (2001) and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003) articulate support for private investment in forestry development (Republic of Uganda, 2003).

This policy-enabling setting has occurred alongside the expansion of transnational capital investment in Uganda’s forestry industry. Demonstrating this, since at least 2005, international private sector investment has supported the establishment of an estimated 100,000 hectares under forestry plantations in Uganda, a figure NFA aims to increase up to 250,000 hectares by 2050 (National Forestry Authority representative, 2012). Norwegian owned plantation forestry company Green Resources is an exemplar case of the movement of transnational capital into Africa, claiming to have planted more trees than any other private company.

Violence has been a historical feature at each of these sites licensed to Green Resources as part of the acquisition of land and management of industrial forestry operations (Lyons et al., 2014; Lyons & Westoby, 2014b). We explore this below.

## **INDUSTRIAL PLANTATION FORESTRY, SLOW VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL SUFFERING**

It is necessary to provide a brief background to the contemporary contestation related to access and use rights for local people in forest reserves now licensed to

Green Resources. The early post-colonial period set the stage for local villagers use and access rights to public lands. A number of Acts (including the 1962 *Public Land Act* and the 1969 *Public Lands Act*), for example, permitted local communities to occupy public land for agricultural purposes, and without prior consent from the government. During the Idi Amin regime (1971–1979) – and supported by the 1975 *Land Reform Decree* – farmers were also encouraged to occupy public land, including forested land, to improve household self-sufficiency and reduce pressure upon the state. The Amin government (and later Milton Obote during his second regime), also reportedly distributed portions of protected areas to communities (Okuku, 2006, pp. 10–11; Turyahabwe & Banana, 2008). Central Forest Reserves (established between the 1930s and 1950s) were amongst those land holdings distributed by Amin.

As evidence of this land redistribution, at a number of villages at both Bukaleba and Kachung Central Forest Reserve, villagers described a familial connection dating back to the 1950s. Villagers discussed burial grounds and cultural sites, as well as housing and trading centres, as evidence of their connection to places now recognized as being within the company license area. Community members also described long standing access and use rights; including for animal grazing, fishing, as well as the collection of firewood, spear grass and medicinal herbs, as well as access to watering holes (Lyons & Westoby, 2014a)

The introduction of policies in the early 2000s – including the 2001 National Forestry Policy and the 2003 National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (Ministry of Lands of Water, Lands and Environment, Republic of Uganda, 2001) – represented a turning point in policy approaches, by articulating a commitment to the privatization of both forestry and public lands. This was part of a broader neoliberalisation of Ugandan policy and development approaches that was occurring during this period (Wiegatz, 2010). Such policies, and the privatizing agenda they embodied, have driven structural violence and local level suffering, including as local villagers are punished for “illegal encroaching” and “trespassing” onto land that was once vital for local food growing and grazing, but is now licensed to – and controlled by – foreign transnational companies.

## PRIVATIZATION OF LAND DELIVERS SOCIAL SUFFERING

Significant adverse local level livelihood impacts occurred alongside the arrival of Green Resources. To begin, many community members describe the destruction of crops, housing, and local trading centres to make way for the company’s plantation activities. Since the early days of eviction, community members also described ways the company – often aided by police and government officers – constrained access and use of land in and around the plantation areas. The impact has created an acute food insecurity crisis, with villagers describing land shortages for growing food and grazing animals. Similarly, villagers also described suffering on the basis of their constrained access to firewood and water. Some local villagers also described being arrested for “trespassing” onto

the companies' plantation to grow crops, graze animals, or collect firewood, with penalties that included both cash fines and jail sentences.

Villagers at Bukaleba also described social suffering through the destruction of burial sites to make way for the forestry plantation. As a consequence of relocation alongside the arrival of Green Resources, some community members described being a long distance from sites of cultural significance, including burial grounds. This represents a slow erosion of cultural connection to land, as villagers are less able to visit cultural sites and practice ceremonies.

Similarly, villagers also suffer in terms of constrained access to education and health services. Villagers are often overlooked by both the company and government in terms of the delivery of vital services – including health and educational service provision – due to their location on land that is neither clearly the responsibility of public or private interests. While the company has engaged in some social service delivery as part of its broader corporate social responsibility agenda (see for example Lyons & Westoby, 2016), these initiatives fall well short of community needs.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

What is the future for rural Africa? In the West's historical oscillation between wonder and exploitation of African territories exist populations whose very livelihoods and sense of place in the world are threatened. As we have discussed in this paper, the conditions that allow for current exploitative practices by transnational companies were established during early post-colonial periods in Africa, in which young inexperienced and authoritarian regimes, with their own political agendas and poor legal and rights frameworks, cooperated with foreign concerns to accept economic schemes deleterious to their own populations. The case of structural adjustment in Zimbabwe during the 1990s, with its resulting harm, is one such case. While the parallel application of a villagization program at the local level illustrated how combinations of initiatives, at various scales, can act to produce suffering structured into the very fabric of lives. Similarly, 25 years later, industrial plantation forestry in Uganda – as part of the broader neoliberalization of nature and natural resources – has shown a comparative problematic of exploitation, including where transnational capital plays a key role as arbiter of social suffering.

As we demonstrated, these forms of slow and structural violence, articulated through economic and land use policies, have had profound negative effects on target populations. Escobar (1995) suggested that development consisted of a coherent approach with processes of subjectification of populations, technicalization of established local economies, and propagation of education based on values of the centre. In both our case studies, we observed elements of Escobar's argument. For example, in Zimbabwe, the combination of a coherent economic structural adjustment policy applied at the national level and technical changes to local farming practices in Zimbabwe (via the MZP) in which pre-existing knowledge of the environment was ignored, placed food security at risk and contributed to serious hunger. Similarly, the more observably violent dispossession

of land in our Ugandan case study, with its land grabs and resulting food insecurity, and reconfiguration of local systems of meaning through destruction of burial sites, illustrated a high degree of planning and instrumentality. However, as ethnographers, we also acknowledge that local politics and circumstances render the application of development initiatives inconsistent. For this reason, we also agree with Ferguson's (1994) contention that development occurs through a conjunction of political, economic, social, and environmental features that produce unintended results. In Zimbabwe, economic structural adjustment was meant to strengthen the economy through liberalization of trade and other features, but lack of investment in infrastructure, coupled with drought, had the opposite result. In another example, the MZP was meant to enable small scale farmers to earn cash and improve their position in the economy, however, the process of implementation served to strengthen regional authorities and further disenfranchise already politically marginalised rural populations. In Uganda, planned evictions from land created space for Green Resources to establish their business, but it also deprived local populations of viable livelihoods and confounded their ability to manage day to day living through, for example, constraints on water and fuel sources. Good planning could have mitigated these impacts, but as Ferguson (1994) argued, development is characterized by political processes not necessarily related to the objectives of projects.

Development has brought about much suffering. It does not have to be this way. Anxiety for wildly uncertain futures, chronic powerlessness, hunger, and illness are avoidable. We argue that to mitigate these conditions, to take another road politically, it is helpful to understand the historical antecedents of the current architecture of exploitation. Adopting case studies from eastern and southern Africa across a span of 25 years, we have elicited a number of common themes related to land use.

First, we note that the modernist development project has created new openings for transnational capital, including as evidenced with the application of structural adjustment in Zimbabwe in the 1990s and privatization of industrial plantation forestry in Uganda in the contemporary period. This privatization has driven adverse social impacts, which are slow, and structural. It is also directly tied to national and international policies that, in design, do not account for the potential, and historically verified, adverse human impacts and social suffering. These outcomes include crises in food and water security, dispossession from sites of cultural significance and disconnection from the social and ecological worlds which are fundamental to meaning and social reproduction. In Zimbabwe, the MZP removed land-use decision-making from the hands of local authorities and, thus, reduced the voice of local populations who spoke through both hereditary and postcolonial representatives. In Uganda, dispossession from land in seemingly arbitrary forms created crucial alienations from the very sustenance of life. Increasing fragility of livelihoods is a feature of both of our cases studies.

Second, we argue that privatization of land and the rise of transnational capital, in which the ethics of development are outsourced to private actors, are failing crucial ethical tests in terms of impacts for populations. Are these the

unintended consequences of development? In the case of the MZP, great technical shortfalls in project design, including use of outdated measurements, poor reading of environmental conditions, and neglect to account for readily available historical records, resulted in avoidable upheavals and torment for target populations. In the case of Uganda, the effects appear to be less unintended and more instrumental. Poor impact assessment and neglect to acknowledge the observable and reported effects of the initiative appear to be to blame for the reported suffering. Our findings point to the profound ethical shortcomings of the so-called new green development paradigm.

The modernist development project, as articulated in this paper to include both structural adjustment in Zimbabwe and carbon trading in Uganda, drives accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003), and has delivered mixed results at the local level. In contrast to capital accumulation by expanded reproduction within an economic system, this approach involves predation and violent expropriations of land and resources as a way to gain new horizons for capital accumulation. Many of the adverse impacts of such projects also remain poorly understood on the basis of limited measurements of impact, including constrained impact assessment processes. We conclude that the development project has created structures of violence and a culture of acceptance of local level suffering. The very nature of violence and dispossession we have described is structural, and is based upon an accumulation by dispossession. Structural change will be required to address these slow nefarious forms of violence, and further ethnographic work. More than simply standard poverty and health measurements will be necessary to both gauge social suffering as well as establish appropriate responses.

## NOTE

1. In the 1990s, the governance structure of the Communal Lands was composed of a hierarchy of Wards, Village Development Committees, and then individual villages.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank anonymous reviewers for detailed feedback on an earlier version of this paper. We also thank Eric Fromm for assistance in the production of maps included in this paper. Fernanda Claudio would like to acknowledge the assistance of September Shereni in the Zambezi Valley. Kristen Lyons worked in Uganda in collaboration with Dr Peter Westoby, David Ssemwogerere, Laura Dunstan and Connetie, Ayesiga, Jimmy Lutakome, AldonWalukambe, Phillips Obele, and Emma Karake.

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