

Struggling on the periphery for survival: The impact of the Lowveld Sugar Estates on the Shangane environment in south-east Zimbabwe, 1951-2008.

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ABSTRACT

The discourse of development studies literature in Africa has of late concentrated more on the involuntary and voluntary displacements, planned and unplanned resettlements, compensated or uncompensated displaced people of relatively large ethnic groups, but pays little attention to the post-eviction ecology, their livelihoods and social and political landscapes of the historically marginalised minority groups who were also affected by the large scale technological developments of sugar plantations. The post-eviction era of such groups has escaped the attention of many scholars of development-induced displacements. It is, against this backdrop, that this study seeks to explore the history of the establishment of the Lowveld Sugar Estates in south-east Zimbabwe and its impact on the Shangane people who were geographically and linguistically alienated from the entire nation by the colonial state. Using a mix of both primary and secondary sources, the study specifically examines the way the establishment of the Triangle, Hippo Valley and Mkwazine Sugar Estates affected the ecology, livelihoods, social, political and religious institutions of the Shangane people who fell within Chief Tshovani's traditional boundaries. The main thrust of this thesis is that the forced movement of the Shangane people and the subsequent reluctance by the administration of the Lowveld Sugar Estates to accord them alternative options for resettlement engendered poverty and underdevelopment. This had also much to do with the written or unwritten company policy to realise maximum profits by, among other things, ensuring cost minimisation at the expense of the poor. Though the Lowveld was occasionally affected by droughts, it should, however, be observed that the Shangane people had developed their own indigenous coping mechanisms (see p.81 of this thesis) on how to deal with the adverse climate shocks which, sometimes, prevailed in the region, had it not been for the forced displacement which exposed them to

poverty. Elsewhere across the globe, there is overwhelming evidence that the large ethnic groups who were displaced to pave way for national projects, such as dam construction and irrigation schemes, were at least resettled. Even the Tonga of the Zambezi were resettled on either side of the river, following the construction of a dam at Kariba. On the contrary, the minority groups, with the same predicament as the Shangane, were not officially considered for resettlement, but had rather embarked on what may be termed 'self-resettlement.' This was a situation whereby the evicted Shangane people sought to salvage sustenance by relocating themselves to areas already inhabited by other people. Thus, the marginalised Shangane people struggled from the periphery for survival since the colonial period. Therefore, poverty among the Shangane people was accelerated by their forced removal and the reluctance by the colonial state and the capitalist sugar company to allocate them alternative productive land for resettlement. In the same vein, the post-colonial state also failed to provide the Shangane inhabitants with the long- anticipated poverty relief through its indigenisation policy related to its reform programmes, manifested through its malfunctioning economic policies which hardly created jobs and other livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the activities of the colonial and post-colonial regimes also created, for the Shangane, a legacy of environmental degradation as they struggled to salvage sustainable livelihoods.