

ESSAY REVIEW

THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE TRIBAL AREAS OF RHODESIA RESEARCH FOUNDATION

*It may be we are meant to mark with our riot and our rest
God's scorn for all men governing. It may be beer is best.*

G. K. Chesterton

*Peasant farming behaviour once called conservative has
been so thoroughly understood and so thoroughly interpreted
as rational that peasants now appear almost as embodiments
of the eighteenth century enlightenment . . .*¹

AT A TIME when there is an urgent need for problem-oriented research in the field of African agriculture in Rhodesia, it is a matter for serious regret that the main contribution of The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation is to provide an outlet for material that would not be accepted for publication by any academic institution.

It is not, the reviewer hastens to add, that there is anything basically wrong with Bulman's account of the Native Land Husbandry Act, in the context of its original and limited purpose as an M.Sc. thesis;² but the work is too schematic in its descriptive aspects to serve as a reference source and too superficial in its assessment to provide insights into either particular or general problems of land reform. It is also unfortunately marred by the inclusion of a number of factual errors of which the following are examples. She says that, 'After European settlement, tribal occupation was restricted to the reserves', thus ignoring the Unassigned Area, and the 'squatter' problem in the European area which was not seriously tackled until after the Second World War; that, 'In 1926, the Government, faced with these problems [such as overcropping] devised a policy of centralization', whereas in fact the policy of centralization was not introduced until 1929, and contrary to the general impression conveyed by the author remained a relatively minor aspect of Government policy until 1955; that, 'All extension resources and surveying skills in the Colony were transferred to the Plan', when in fact the European agricultural extension staff was never deployed in the African area.³

By curious coincidence, however, the Native Land Husbandry Act, viewed rightly as a conservation measure implemented within the rigid doctrinaire framework of the policy of Land Apportionment, provides a unifying

¹ R. Chambers, *Managing Rural Development* (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1974), 60.

² M. Bulman, *The Native Land Husbandry Act of Southern Rhodesia: A Failure in Land Reform* (Solisbury, The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation, 1975), 45pp. no price indicated.

³ *Ibid.*, 4, 12; on centralization, see Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Director of Native Development for the Year 1929* (Sessional Papers, C.S.R.13, 1930), 80.

theme in this miscellaneous collection of publications under review. The veld management schemes described by Danckwerts,⁴ are precisely in direct line of succession. It is rather ironic, therefore, that this glowing optimistic assessment of the schemes should come under review at a time when the 1975 report of the Natural Resources Board has officially acknowledged them as a failure: 'In the Board's 1974 report, it was noted that they appeared to be faltering: they now appear to be collapsing.'⁵

But even a superficial reading of the facts presented by the author could never have warranted his optimism. It involves no distortion of the situation to state that a scheme, which had not been proven suitable to tribal conditions and does not appear to have been subject to regular supervision and assessment, was introduced into an area suffering severe ecological deterioration and heavily overpopulated in terms of both people and stock. It would have been truly miraculous if it had proved to be a lasting success; the wonder is that it lasted so long!

An awareness by the author of the rise and decline of similar schemes in the 1950s would perhaps have tempered his optimism. But it is impossible to regard this publication as a serious cost-benefit study even in the loosest sense of that term. As an indication of the calibre of the work, it may be noted that the author begins by castigating those Europeans who 'think white' and then proceeds to impute monetary values to virtually all goods in a basically subsistence economy, though omitting what might have been the only legitimate variable in an objective function, namely, the increase in the number and value of stocks of cattle. At another point, however, he quotes with apparent approval the view of an Agricultural Officer that tribesmen tend to think in terms of 'enough' and 'not enough'. He may be interested to learn that sophisticated economists, such as Sharples, in writing about sophisticated American farmers have lately been debating whether the concept of a target income may not be more realistic than that of profit maximisation.⁶

The major finding of Theisen's field-work, presented in the two pamphlets under review, is that there is a simple causal relationship between socio-economic status and family size; this is positively dangerous. The following is a reasonable summary of the present state of research on the topic:

'In a recent work, Karen O. Mason and her associates reviewed and analyzed more than a hundred studies on differential fertility in the developed and developing countries. In this work, the authors present the major studies undertaken to measure the effect of socio-economic variables on family fertility. The major variables included in the studies were: income, occupation, social and geographic mobility, education, family structure, female labour-force participation, egalitarian maternal relationship, religion and religiosity, value orientation, and family planning. After a careful examination of the

⁴ J. P. Danckwerts, *A Socio-Economic Study of Veld Management in the Tribal Areas of the Victoria Province* (Salisbury, The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation, 1974), 149pp, Appendices and Tables, no price indicated.

⁵ *The Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Natural Resources Board of Rhodesia for the Year ended 31st December, 1975* (Sessional Papers, Cmd R.R. 16, 1976), 16, 17.

⁶ J. A. Sharples, 'The representative farm approach to estimation of supply response', *American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings* (1969), 59, 171.

⁷ R. Theisen, *The Exploding Population Problem in the Tribal Trust Lands of Rhodesia* (Salisbury, The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation, 1975), 29pp., no price indicated; *Agro-Economic Factors Relating to the Health and Academic Achievement of Rural School Children* (Salisbury, The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation, 1975), 12pp., no price indicated.

results of these studies, the authors have found very little evidence of uniformity and consistency in the findings of the studies.⁸

The general conclusion, based on Iranian data which would appear to be borne out also by experience in India,⁹ of particular interest in relation to Theisen's study, is summarised as follows:

Finally, while modern value orientation and high socio-economic mobility reduce the high fertility, norms and practices among the urban Spirazi, these factors seem to have a positive effect on the fertility pattern of the tribal population.¹⁰

To return to the basic theme of Land Apportionment, whereas the authors of the Native Land Husbandry Act may be forgiven for believing that the problems of African agriculture could be solved within the area allotted for African use, it is impossible to justify the acceptance of this constraint by their successors. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that either Danckwerts or Theisen could be ignorant of the existence of between five and six million hectares of unused or under-utilized land in the European sector. Apart from the evidence available in the official agro-ecological survey,¹¹ the factual position is freely acknowledged by representatives of European farming interests. For example, at the most recent Annual Congress of the Rhodesia National Farmers' Union, it was stated that 'a scheme [European Land Settlement] was needed urgently, not only in the tobacco and crop areas but also in the 3 240 000 ha. of unoccupied or sparsely-occupied land, most of which was in the hands of large landowners.'¹²

Dire ecological necessity, not to mention equity, requires a carefully planned and executed settlement scheme for progressive African farmers to relieve the excessive population pressure in the tribal areas and to enable this elite to contribute through the fiscus to the relief of their less fortunate compatriots. Such research as is embodied in these papers contributes nothing towards a solution of such basic problems.

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⁸ A. A. Paydarfar, 'Sociocultural correlates of fertility among tribal, rural, and urban populations in Iran', *Social Biology* (1975), 22, 151.

⁹ T. T. Poleman, and D. K. Freebairn (eds), *Food, Population and Employment. The Impact of the Green Revolution* (New York, Praeger, 1973), *passim*.

¹⁰ Paydarfar, 166.

¹¹ Southern Rhodesia, *An Agricultural Survey of Southern Rhodesia. Part I: Agro-ecological Survey* (Salisbury, Govt Printer, 1962).

¹² *The Rhodesia Herald*, 29 July 1976.

