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Private and state-led contract farming in Zimbabwe: Accumulation, social differentiation and rural politics

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Abstract

Contract farming schemes often amplify existing patterns of socio-economic differentiation. In Zimbabwe, processes of differentiation were underway before the current expansion of contract farming and they have deepened through the Fast Track Land Reform process. This article examines how pre-existing dynamics of differentiation shape the forms of contract farming adopted, as well as which groups of farmers gain access and on what terms. Social differentiation partly explains the outcomes of contract farming, even if contract farming in turn results in further differentiation. This article contrasts private sector-led contract farming of tobacco and state-led financing of maize production (the 'command agriculture' programme) in two high-potential sites and across different forms of land use. Unlike in many other settings, contract farming in Zimbabwe is highly influenced by the state, through the regulation of private sector arrangements and the establishment of a state-led contracting programme. The state-led programme boosted maize production amongst medium-scale farmers and resulted in an embedding of patronage relations. Meanwhile, the private-led contract farming has supported a widespread boom of tobacco production, mainly amongst smallholders. We find therefore that contract farming is highly dependent on the contingent, politically mediated processes of social differentiation.

KEYWORDS
agricultural financing, contract farming, rural politics, social differentiation, Zimbabwe

1 | INTRODUCTION

The reconfiguration of the agrarian structure in Zimbabwe following the fast-track land reform programme from 2000 altered agricultural financing opportunities and intensified contract farming. Permits provided to resettled smallholder farmers and 99-year leases promised to medium-scale farmers have proved insufficient to release private bank agricultural credit, previously accessible to large-scale commercial farmers. Financing agriculture has been a recurrent problem since land reform, linked to capital flight and an economy-wide downturn from 2000. This has led to the rise in contract farming as an alternative source of finance for particular crops, notably tobacco and maize (Mazwi et al., 2020; Moyo & Nyoni, 2013; Scoones, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba, & Sukume, 2017; Shonhe, 2017). The imposition of 'sanctions' by the West prompted Zimbabwe to turn to the East, and from 2003 to 2004, the Chinese started to support tobacco contracting through the state-owned enterprise, Tian Ze (Mukwereza, 2015). Chinese finance was soon followed by other private-sector players, some local and others with international connections. Following a series of state-supported programmes for resettlement areas, mostly focused on input supply and mechanization, after 2016 the government introduced a state-led contract farming programme—Command Agriculture (CA)—which is aimed at increasing food crop production, particularly among medium-scale farmers (Dube, 2020; Mazwi et al., 2019).

In the last 20 years therefore a mix of private and state-led financing arrangements has emerged in Zimbabwe, focused on different crops via different types of contract. In *Living under Contract*, Little (1994, p. 220) observes that 'Contract farming schemes usually arise because of imperfections in the market environment that do not allow normal price signals to regulate supply', a pattern seen across Africa (Glover & Kusterer, 1990; Hall et al., 2017; Oya, 2012). Yet in Zimbabwe, the state is strikingly present both in regulating private sector arrangements (through price setting, regulating auction floors and providing the legal/institutional context) and through a major state-led programme (CA); although here too, state-facilitated private financing is important. Outcomes of contract farming arrangements are therefore highly dependent on the contingent institutional and political arrangements of the scheme. With contracting schemes in Zimbabwe embedded in state practices and political relations, this contrasts with a context where contract farming acts simply to connect farmers to agribusiness finance in a post-adjustment context where state marketing arrangements have been withdrawn (cf. Grosh, 1994; Kirsten & Sartorius, 2002).

The wider literature suggests a number of different outcomes from contract farming. Contracting can for example accentuate adverse incorporation into global commodity circuits (Daviron & Gibbon, 2002; Shivji, 2009). It is thus seen as triggering social differentiation (Clapp, 1988), social and political contradictions (Moyo, 2016) and heightened indebtedness (Martineillo, 2016). Contract farming can also be seen as responsible for turning smallholder farmers into quasi-employees (Reardon & Barrett, 2000) or their proletarianization without dispossession (Watts, 1994). By contrast, contracting can equally offer opportunities of finance for those who previously had none (Glover & Kusterer, 1990), adding an extra option in already highly diversified portfolios, and so helping drive differentiated petty commodity production and accumulation (Sachikonye, 2016; Scoones, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba, & Sukume, 2017; Shonhe, 2017), from both above and below (Mamdani, 1987; Neocosmos, 1993).

Assessing the impact of contract farming and its effects on smallholder livelihoods is therefore an empirical task and is highly dependent on historically-defined institutional and political contexts, as well as prior conditions and

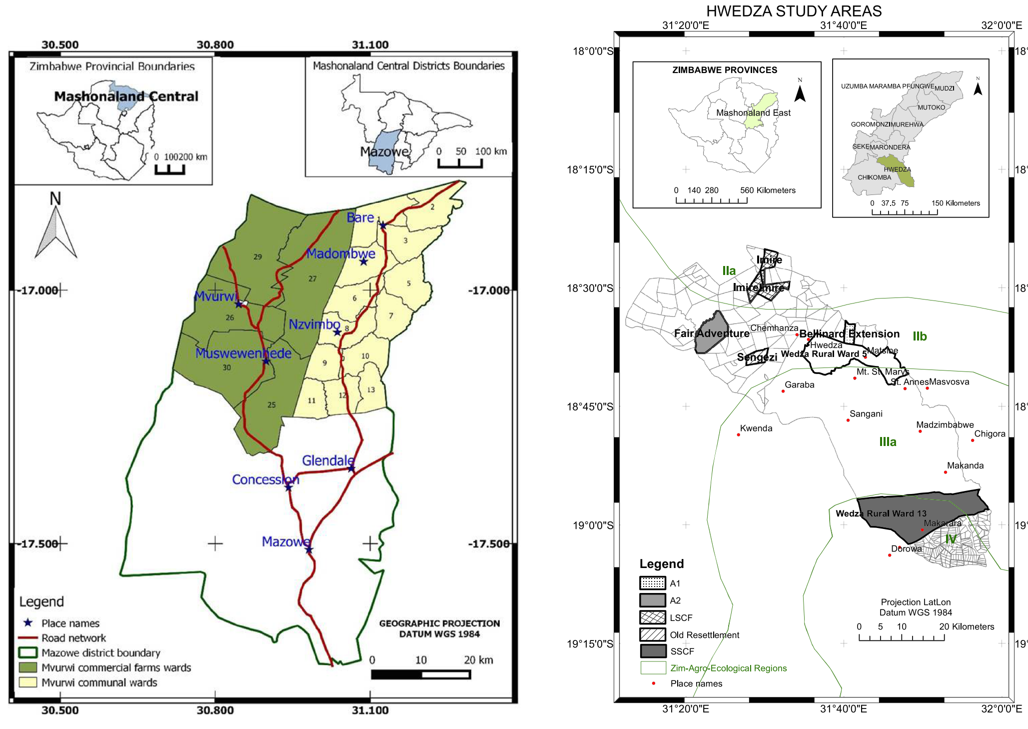

FIGURE 1 Maps of the study areas

patterns of differentiation among farming populations. In the absence of alternative financing, Zimbabwe's land reform has created a new set of opportunities for contract farming around strategic crops (tobacco for export and foreign exchange and maize for national food security). But given the importance of the land reform for the state both in enlisting political–business–military elites and in supporting a wider group of smallholders, contract farming in Zimbabwe has taken on a particular form with significant state involvement. Situating contract farming arrangements within a wider understanding of agrarian political economy in Zimbabwe, this article asks: in which ways have the dynamics of social differentiation, patterns of accumulation and rural politics in Zimbabwe shaped the type of contract farming schemes adopted and the selection of contract farmers? To this end, we contrast types of contract financing—private and state-led—for tobacco and maize in two high-potential sites and across different land-use and ownership types.

Zimbabwe's post-2000 agrarian structure includes a mix of smallholders (including communal lands, new A1 resettlement areas and pre-2000 old resettlement areas—1.3 million farms, over 25.8 million ha nationally), medium-scale farms (new A2 resettlement farms and existing small-scale commercial farms—31 200 farms, over 4.4 million ha) and remaining large-scale farms and estates (1618 farms, over 2.6 million ha) (Moyo, 2011, p. 512). This article focuses on three land use types—communal lands (CLs), post-2000 smallholder land reform areas (A1) and post-land reform medium-scale farms (A2). The article is based on research in Mvurwi and Hwedza in Mashonaland (Figure 1), which are both high-potential agricultural areas, producing both tobacco and maize.[1]

Sampling involved stratified random sampling targeting the three land use types in a purposively selected ward in the CL, A1 and A2 areas in each of the two sites, with each ward covering different parts of the overall area. Within the wards, we randomly selected villages and then chose households randomly from village lists. In Mvurwi,

[1]Mvurwi receives 650–800 mm of rainfall annually, compared to 450–800 mm received in Hwedza district.

we conducted surveys with 519 CL households, 310 A1 households and 40 A2 households in 2017–2018, while in Hwedza, we conducted surveys with 53 CL households, 46 A1 households and 32 A2 households in 2016. The surveys were complemented by 20 informal interviews with individual farmers, along with six informal discussions/focus groups, with contracting firms, workers at auction houses, the Tobacco Industry Marketing Board (TIMB) and government officials. These took place between 2016 and 2018 and were continued in 2020. The informants were purposively selected, targeting those with in-depth knowledge on maize and tobacco production dynamics in the two districts.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 offers a brief history of contracting in Zimbabwe, while Section 3 introduces contemporary forms of private and state-led contracting for tobacco and maize. Section 4 focuses on outcomes in the two sites, and Section 5 explores how the processes of accumulation, social differentiation and rural politics shape different forms of contracting, before Section 6 concludes.

2 | STATES AND MARKETS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTRACT FARMING IN ZIMBABWE

The role of the state and the private sector in crop contracting has changed significantly over time in Zimbabwe, reflecting shifts in the political regime and the economic context. As Jackson and Cheater (1994) explore in *Living under Contract*, from colonial times onwards, the state was heavily involved in various contracting arrangements with farmers, initially through nucleus estate and outgrower arrangements for tea, sugar and cotton production. The purchase of Murray MacDougall's company Triangle Limited by the Sugar Industry Board in 1944 signalled the commencement of state estate-nucleus contract farming in Zimbabwe. Outgrowers, operating an average of 50 ha, supported industrial sugar milling. A centralized management system was cemented through a supporting infrastructure, later sold on to the South African Hulett Company. Before Independence, tea production was dominated by four large-scale private and state-run Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA) plantations, supported by centrally administered outgrowers. Almost all outgrowers then were White Europeans or, in the case of sugar, Mauritians recruited to take up cane farming. It was only at Mkwasine—a joint venture of Triangle and Hippo Valley—that the smaller 'African' outgrowers on sugarcane plots of 10 ha were first established in the 1970s (Scoones, Mavedzenge, & Murimbarimba, 2017). Elsewhere, tea plantations had started in Chipinge in 1925 (Sachikonye, 1989), even though the first processing estate was established much later in 1969. This bought tea leaves from independent outgrowers, initially with only European World War II war veterans being involved. Later, other crops, notably cotton from the 1980s and horticulture from the 1990s, became significant contracted crops, with smallholders in particular engaging extensively in contracted cotton production (Tschirley et al., 2009). Some became purely private arrangements with large international agribusiness companies involved (such as sugar and tobacco), while others continued as state-owned estates (including cotton and tea plantations). Horticultural crops were linked to local supermarkets, but increasingly to international exports through contracting arrangements (Binswanger-Mkhize & Moyo, 2012).

Contracting therefore was shaped by the political contexts and state-market relations of the time. In the colonial era, contract farming, whether private or state-led, largely benefited White outgrowers, mirroring the racially skewed access to agricultural loans and state support in the pre-Independence period. After Independence in 1980, there was an increase in African smallholder contract farming, particularly of cotton and organized through the Cotton Marketing Board parastatal. With the liberalization of the economy, following structural adjustment programmes implemented from 1991, state support declined and private sector players increased. Prior to land reform in 2000, large-scale White producers benefited from the liberalization of the sector and the growth of private sector contracting, especially for export markets for tobacco, horticulture and floriculture.

Following the major land reform, and the decline of available agricultural finance due to the flight of capital, 'sanctions' and massive economic mismanagement, contracting became vitally important to sustain the new farms created by the land reform process. In the period of relative political and economic stability associated with the Government of National Unity from 2008 until 2013 in particular, the financing of tobacco through private contracting resulted in a massive boom in smallholder production, supported by multiple private companies. While private sector tobacco contracting has continued, the wider decline in economic conditions, especially since 2016, has seen the state seek alternative strategies for agricultural financing. Through the Command Agriculture (CA) programme, public sector-mediated contract arrangements, implemented in collaboration with private capital, have emerged (Mazwi et al., 2019, 2020). The programme targets food crops—notably maize, wheat and soya beans—where private finance is difficult to secure. Importantly, CA targets richer, medium-scale farmers with larger farms in higher potential areas, often with irrigation facilities, and thus relies in part on the patterns of land distribution and capital accumulation forged by the recent political process.

The CA programme is administered centrally, with military involvement in logistics, distribution, monitoring and recovery of loans through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Resettlement (MLAFWRR) and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). Especially since its participation in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the extraction of resources that entailed, the Zimbabwean military has become involved in various sectors of the economy, especially in mining, forestry, agriculture and transport. Over the last period, key figures in the Zimbabwean army have emerged as potent political and economic forces (Shumba, 2016, p. 10). Military involvement in the land reform and later CA fostered an aspiring capitalist class status of military leaders, while consolidating their political hold on local and national politics as part of a 'state-military complex' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006; Sachikonye, 2012). This has resulted in the capturing of state institutions combined with deepening authoritarianism, all associated with personal wealth accumulation (Shumba, 2016). These forms of politically driven accumulation provide an example of extra-economic processes creating the grounds for different types of contract arrangements. In this case, state-led CA centred on large-scale maize producers. By contrast, smallholder farmers rely on private-led tobacco contracts, which are not so conditioned by wider political processes.

The shifts in contracting arrangements, from the colonial era to the present, therefore reflect changing political configurations of the state and its constituencies. Significant state support for large-scale White commercial farming was evident through the colonial era and persisted into Independence as part of the government's 'reconciliation' policy. A 'corporatist' style of state involvement in the agricultural economy was central to post-Independence economic planning and politics (Brett, 2005; Herbst, 1990). From 1991, this gave way to a 'liberal' approach under pressure from the International Finance Institutions. This however was combined with a more 'populist' stance, where selective schemes of state support, including via contract farming, were directed to particular groups. The state's support for land reform from 2000 introduced a dramatic break: it reflected a particular political dynamic, whereby populist support for those invading land (and subsequently being allocated smallholder plots under the A1 schemes) was combined with the backing of more elite medium-scale A2 farmers (Moyo & Chambati, 2013; Scoones et al., 2010). This resulted in new political configurations and forms of differentiation between farmers gaining access to different land sizes and contrasting levels of support from the state (Cliffe et al., 2011; Marongwe, 2011; Zamchiya, 2013). Finally, in the period from 2017, with the ousting of President Mugabe and the installation of Emmerson Mnangagwa as president in a military-led coup, a new approach has emerged. This combines populist rhetoric with many liberalized, market-oriented policies, but has also resulted in the return of state (and military)-led corporatist interventionism and authoritarianism. This is framed in terms of a commitment to a 'developmental state', with the Chinese experience of 'command' approaches to economic development being especially influential.

This article argues that the forms that contract farming takes, in different periods and across different crops, are a response to specific configurations of power and politics. In other words, the nature of the contract at any particular moment has to be understood in relation to a wider political economy. International relations (around sanctions, capital flows and political partnerships), ideologies (in relation to the role of the state or a liberalized market, for example) and political settlements (with certain constituencies, whether White farmers, poor smallholders, medium-scale farmers or state and military elites) all impinge on how contract farming is played out. Over time, Zimbabwe has had perhaps an unusual role for state involvement in farming, and so clientelistic, patronage arrangements have been important in how state-market relations are constructed, whether in the colonial era or more recently.

While conditioned by the particularities of Zimbabwe's history and politics, close state–market relations are not unusual in contract farming, contradicting the assumption that contracting is simply a market solution to gaps in financing. Across Africa, for example, the state's role is central to understanding contracting arrangements in Kenya (Ochieng, 2009), as well as state-led input subsidy arrangements not linked to contract farming in Malawi (Chirwa & Dorward, 2013) and Zambia (Mason et al., 2013), where patronage relations affecting wider politics also have a major impact (Chinsinga, 2011).

3 | PRIVATE AND STATE-LED CROP CONTRACTING AFTER LAND REFORM

This section discusses the prevailing arrangements for private and state-led contract farming in our study areas. Even though the state is central in both contracting arrangements, we regard tobacco contracting arrangements as private led compared with maize, which is state-led due to differences in the level of influence in the institutional and processing arrangements, as we detail in this section.

3.1 | Private sector-led contracting of tobacco

A decline in agricultural financing from US$315 million in 1998 to an all-time low of US$6 million in 2008 negatively affected agricultural output (Moyo & Nyoni, 2013: 235) and led to increased reliance on private company contract farming, especially for export cash crops. Through a stop-order system, centrally administered by the state-run TIMB (Tobacco Industry Marketing Board), contracting companies deduct the value of the inputs supplied and wages support advanced to the grower before any payments are disbursed. In support of production, contracting companies provide technical extension support, monitoring and advisory services as well as farming inputs, including seed, fertilizers, chemicals, packaging material, coal, transport and financial support for wages. In some cases, contracting companies may also provide finance for the acquisition of productive farming assets such as tractors and irrigation equipment.

Tobacco contract farming has evolved over time, especially as it has become focused on smallholder farmers post-2000. However, tobacco retains its prominence as Zimbabwe's largest agricultural export. Of the 26 tobacco contractors buying in Zimbabwe during 2019, seven were linked to foreign parent companies (TianZe from China, Curverid Tobacco P/L from Russia, Intercontinental Leaf Tobacco Company and Premium Leaf Zimbabwe are from the United Arab Emirates, Zimbabwe Leaf Tobacco and Mashonaland Tobacco Company are from the United States of America and Northern Tobacco has United Kingdom connections), while 19 were local companies. Farmers sold 226.9 million kg through the contracting system amounting to US$469.6 million (89.2% of sales) in the 2019 season. This was complemented by 32 million kg valued at US$57.1million sold through public auction floors in Harare, representing 10.8% of total sales in the same year. In total, US$526.7 million worth of tobacco was produced in Zimbabwe in 2019, down from US$736.2 million in 2018, accounting for 23% of exports in 2019 (Zimstats, 2019). Politically, tobacco production is central to a highly fragile economy and provides both important sources of foreign exchange and tax revenue, with a broadening base of farmers involved.

The overall arrangement for tobacco contracting and sale is shown in Figure 2. While TIMB is responsible for the administration of the tobacco industry, it does so under the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture and in liaison with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for policy direction.

A combination of domestic and international capital is coordinated through the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and local banks via contracting companies in ways aimed at reaching an increasing diversity of farmers across

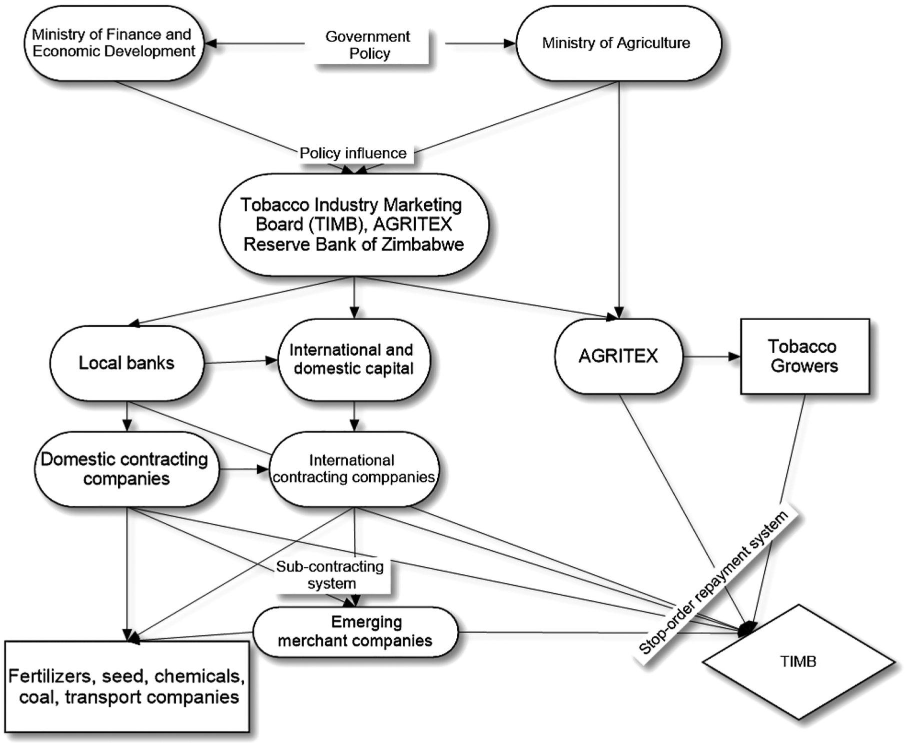

FIGURE 2 Organization of private-sector led contract farming of tobacco

land-use types, while mitigating credit risk. Due to the supervisory workload, large international companies now sub-contract to the smaller merchants to contract farmers on their behalf.[2] Due to cut-throat competition, tobacco contracting companies offer different packages, dependant on growers' productivity, experience and loyalty. For instance, one popular merchant operating in Mvurwi area has three types of contract scheme based on anticipated levels of production and trust relations.[3]

Although these private contract arrangements are less prone to political manipulation, the wider macro-economic and currency conditions have a substantial impact on capital accumulation and social differentiation for the smallholder farmers. For example, the stopping of 100% foreign currency payment for tobacco sold reduced farmers' income. While farmers now receive 60% of tobacco sales value in hard currency, this has not fully enabled growers to secure the viability levels enjoyed previously. The reliance on the inter-bank rate for the conversion of the remaining 40% of funds further erodes growers' income. Thus, due to the uncertainties around currency stability, there has been a proliferation of side-marketing. For example, some Chinese and local middlemen/buyers are offering US dollar payments for tobacco crop contracted by other merchants thereby undermining state regulation through the TIMB stop-order system[4] (also see Shonhe, 2021). The issue of unfair pricing has become a focus for mobilization among farmers, although the absence of functional farmer associations has undermined this effort.[5]

As a TIMB official observed, the price-setting system enables the five top (international) merchants—Northern Tobacco, Zimbabwe Leaf Tobacco, Tian Ze and Mashonaland Tobacco Company—to fix prices on the auction floors.

[2]Personal interview with DZ (contracting company manager), on 15 February 2020.
[3]From 2021, the TIMB however started regulating and monitoring the minimum support offered to farmers per ha of cropped land, with some contracts being nullified for non-compliance (Business Weekly 15 February 2021—https://www.ebusinessweekly.co.zw/timb-nullifies-20-000-tobacco-contracts/).
[4]Personal interview of BH (A2 in Mvurwi), on 21 February 2020.
[5]A1 focus-group, contribution by RN, held in Hwedza district on 16 February 2020.

Also, there are concerns that the TIMB now provides both a market regulation role and is directly involved in supporting contracting through the provision of US$98 million in 2017 and 2018 by the RBZ (World Bank, 2019). Some complain that 'the tobacco board is offering contract farming, rather than monitoring players. They now compete for space and profits, much to the disadvantage of the farmers who need protection'.[6] The TIMB however claims that its participation in contract farming is intended to preserve the public auction system and to provide an avenue for the provision of favourable contracts to growers.[7] However, this is constrained by the global tobacco system and the wider network of players. For example, British American Tobacco (BAT) exports Zimbabwean tobacco at cheap prices to sister companies in South Africa and elsewhere where they manufacture and often re-export finished tobacco commodities (Shonhe, 2021).

As commercial operations, merchants pay little regard to the challenges faced by farmers who fail to repay; instead, they resort to litigation. A company extension supervisor observed that: 'With the assistance of law enforcement agents and unevenly drafted agreements, we take swift legal action because as leaf officers we get a 'recovery bonus' based on a mandatory 95% credit repayment at the end of each season'.[8] Tobacco merchants thus seek to incorporate smallholders in such a way that they are subordinated to capital through contract agreements (Martineillo, 2016).

As already noted, multiple companies are involved in tobacco contracting, although only a subset will operate in any one area. Here again there is selective participation by farmers, as some do not have the relevant registrations, while others feel that the risks of taking on the contract are too high. Still others prefer to self-finance and gain unencumbered access to revenue through direct selling at auction floors. Many choose a mix of options, with some contracting, combined with formal and informal direct marketing (Mazwi et al., 2020; Sachikonye, 2016; Sakata, 2016; Scoones, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba, & Sukume, 2017; Shonhe, 2017). Some self-finance production then sell under contract to gain access to higher prices. Crucially, the choice to engage in contracting or other types of marketing of tobacco depends on the access to assets and alternative sources of income by farmers. This influences risk perceptions and the ability to diversify, as well as the capacity to market directly.

Despite the expansion of local operators, international firms contribute 65% of tobacco production, earning 73% of total income (Shonhe, 2017). These international tobacco merchants wield significant power due to their financial clout and are therefore able to subcontract the small local firms. Tobacco commodity circuits are thus configured to satisfy global markets and finance. However, locally private sector-led contract farming of tobacco remains regulated by the state, and is seen as a route in particular to support smallholder land reform beneficiaries. The approach has had considerable success, with tobacco production exceeding the pre-land reform levels, and the A1 smallholders in particular are driving this on the back of private financing. This experience of tobacco contracting however contrasts with state-led contract financing of maize through the CA programme, which is discussed next.

3.2 | State-led contracting of maize

After an initial rise in maize production in the period after Independence, production declined resulting in regular deficits. Persistent droughts, input supply constraints, credit and commodity market challenges and the decline in state agricultural support due to structural adjustment measures from 1991 all contributed. After land reform, disruptions to the agricultural sector, combined with sanctions and frequent drought periods, have resulted in reduced nationally recorded maize production in years when rainfall was low, resulting in the country relying on food imports and donor support in most years.

To ramp up maize production and so assure national food security, the Command Agriculture (CA) programme (also known as the Special Grain and Oil Seed Programme) was introduced in the 2016–2017 farming season,

[6] Personal interview BG, (tobacco contract company) in Hwedza, on 17 February 2020.
[7] See footnote 3, on 16 February 2020.
[8] Personal interview with JF (company extension supervisor) in Hwedza, on 17 February 2020.

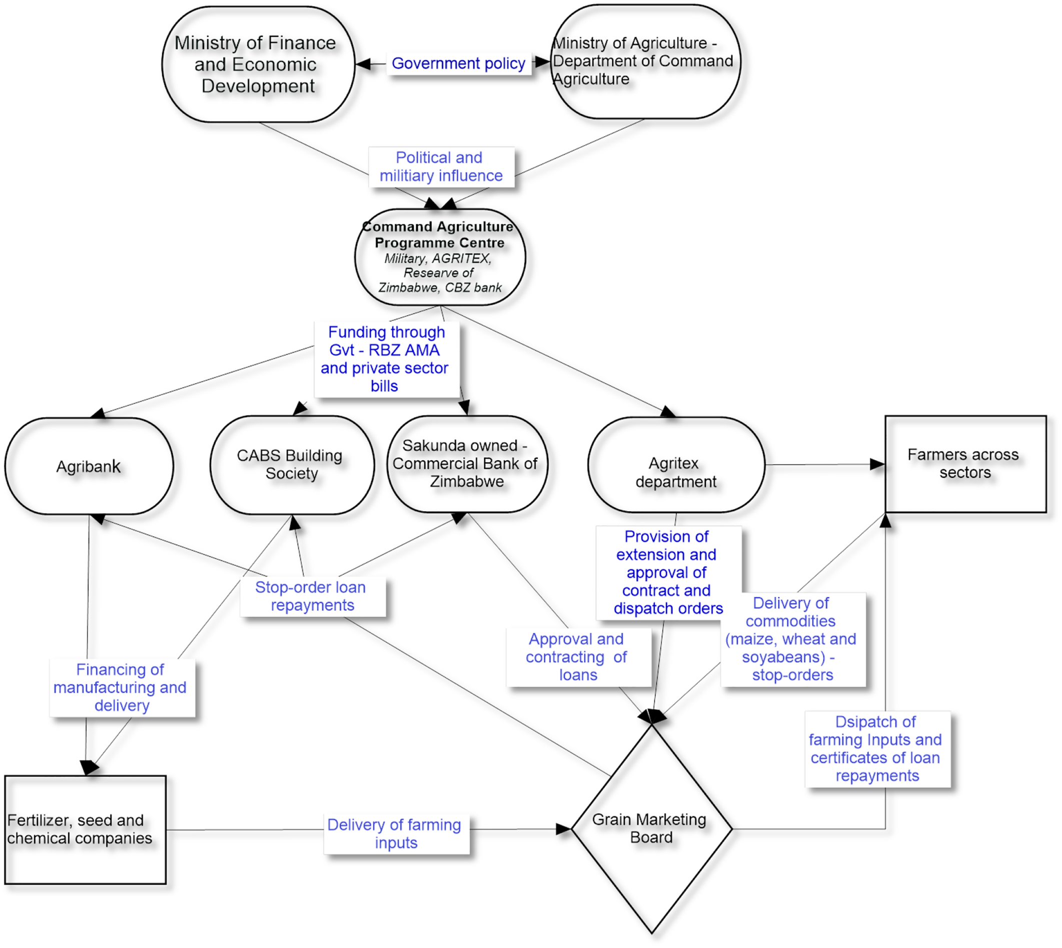

FIGURE 3 Organization of state-led command agriculture contract farming

focusing on increasing the output of irrigated maize and offering a mix of seeds, chemical inputs (fertilizer, pesticides, lime and herbicides) and diesel (World Bank, 2019). Initially targeting medium-scale A2 land reform farmers occupying farms with functioning irrigation infrastructure, by the end of the first season, it had however been expanded to include other beneficiaries and moved beyond maize. The programme is highly politicized, with military involvement, and its financing and beneficiary selection is not transparent. Figure 3 shows the CA programme's institutional and funding arrangements.[9] Those who have benefited to date are mostly larger, often well-connected, A2 farmers,[10] although there are some A1, small-scale commercial farmers and even communal land farmers who have gained access to inputs (APM, 2019). But the design and original targeting of the programme demonstrate how this intervention aimed at a massive increase of supply for domestic staple markets, was predicated on a tenure structure that was starkly differentiated already. Moreover, the delivery of farming inputs favours politically well-positioned growers, with political and military heavy-weights being given the first preference upon delivery of inputs at the local depots.[11]

[9]The World Bank (2019) explains how the movement of funds, inputs and grain under the supervision of the Command Agriculture programme task team. In essence, Treasury entered into a facility arrangement with a private party to supply inputs securitised by Treasury Bills. The private party would source and deliver inputs to various designated GMB depots across the country. Government funded to the tune of US$105 million, US$439 million and US $238.3 million in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with high non-repayment rates of 54% and 81% in 2017 and 2018.

[10]Personal interview with SZ (Agritex officer) in Mvurwi, on 10 March 2020.

[11]Personal interview with VM (Agritex officer) in Mvurwi, on 11 March 2020.

Although overall maize planted area increased by 52% in one season (Mazwi et al., 2019) and farmers confirm that those who receive inputs from the programme produce higher outputs (see Table 3), the viability of production without subsidy has been widely questioned (World Bank, 2019). Even though maize delivery to the GMB depot in Mvurwi rose from 166 metric tonnes to 20 740 metric tonnes between 2016 and 2018, deliveries were actually mostly from smallholder farmers, with 82% from A1 farmers, nearly all of whom are outside the CA programme.[12]

During a focus-group[13] in Hwedza district, one farmer revealed that smallholder farmers were frustrated by the way the programme was being administered:

> *For the majority of us, the promised support often does not get delivered or gets to the farm late in the season rendering planning extremely challenging and lowering productivity. Waiting for the inputs is quite demeaning as we are treated like street kids who have to wait in a long queue for days, wasting valuable production time. Indeed, what help does it lend, if, even after waiting for so long, only the chefs (bosses) end up collecting all the inputs while we can only watch?*

The CA programme is therefore wrapped up in national politics and the balance of power between the ruling party factions and the military, particularly in the post-2017 coup era. The idea of a 'command' economy, led from the centre and executed through military assistance, is inspired by long-term Chinese influence on key individuals dating back to the 1970s. The portrayal of the effort as 'public–private' partnerships hides the underlying political deals around finance that occur between the RBZ, involving its issue of Treasury Bills, and the Sakunda petro-fuel company that is the notional private sector partner (Mazwi et al., 2019). The details of how funds are circulated and who benefits remain murky, but the sums involved are large, especially given the overall level of state support to agriculture.[14] The programme involved the mobilizing of substantial private financial resources, but also relied on significantly scaled-up Treasury and quasi-fiscal spending to meet this demand. Connections between key individuals involved in the programme and those in power have been widely documented, illustrating a tight network of control.[15]

On the ground, another layer of patronage politics unfolds. Here, other actors are involved, ranging from Ministry of Agriculture officials to local party chiefs. Getting to the top of the queue for inputs requires connections; these may go up to the CA taskforce in Harare or may be negotiated locally. Sakunda plays a facilitating and profit-making role, connected as it is with the military and ruling elites. Coupled with its participation in artisanal gold purchases, Sakunda's purchase of CBZ bank—now jointly leading the CA financing with Agribank—is important in the wider political economy of CA.[16]

While land reform predominantly involved enabling access to land for the poor—coming from communal lands or urban centres—and was led by invasion of properties eventually ending up as A1 resettlement schemes, the A2 farms were different. They were initiated later as part of a more controlled process led by state officials and can be seen as a form of class compromise, ensuring that the professional middle classes and political-military elites remained committed to land reform and the party (Scoones & Murimbarimba, n.d.; Shonhe et al., 2020). Having got the land, the new beneficiaries demanded support and, following a series of disastrous subsidy schemes led by the RBZ through the 2000s,[17] CA contract farming has been the most recent solution. As part of the wider post-land reform political settlement, CA's institutional framework is designed to deliver political patronage to an emerging

[12]Personal interview with ZB (GMB manager) in Mvurwi, on 14 March 2020.

[13]NG contributing at a Focus Group Discussion held in Hwedza district on 10 February 2020.

[14]Expenditure on agriculture increased from US$145 million in 2011 to US$547 million, US$1.1 billion and US$775 million in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively (World Bank, 2019)

[15]See online (http://kubatana.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/document.pdf).

[16]A2 interview with LP, Mvurwi, on 13 March 2020.

[17]For example, the Productive Sector Finance Scheme, Maguta and Champion farmer schemes, the Agricultural Sector Productivity Enhancement Facility and the Farm Mechanisation Programme.

middle class, alongside political-business-military elites, and is aimed at bolstering political support to particular factions within the ruling party.

4 | PRIVATE AND STATE-LED CONTRACT FARMING: CONTRASTING OUTCOMES

What then are the outcomes of these two very different types of contracting arrangements, focused on different crops and different people and with different roles for the state and the private sector? How do the highly specific and contingent political, institutional and economic relationships described in the previous section influence the patterns of accumulation and so process of social differentiation among those engaging with contract farming? And what in turn are the consequences for rural politics? With detailed data from Mvurwi and Hwedza, this and the following section explore these questions.

The two cases reflect quite different political and institutional dimensions of contract farming. For private tobacco financing, companies keen to ensure repayment will choose only those that they believe will pay back. This means insisting on a set of criteria for gaining access to funds and inputs. This immediately creates a difference between those who can gain access to finance and those who cannot, although of course there are means of getting around this through joining others' registrations. Those who do not pay back get struck off lists, but there are often other companies who are offering contracts, and so growers may rejoin elsewhere, as it is a highly competitive market in the tobacco growing areas. Side-marketing is increasingly common, as farmers manipulate the system, offering the minimum as repayment and marketing higher quality products to other companies, brokers or directly to the auction floors. Even with bad repayment records, influential figures can still sometimes negotiate access, although most companies remain strict.

In the case of CA, it is social and political connections that facilitate access. Direct connections to those organizing the programme may mean by-passing the process of applying and waiting for deliveries altogether. Such individuals may also be able to negotiate repayment waivers, and the loans become effectively a grant from the state. But such access is only available to very few, and connections to the top are fickle and variable over time so cannot be relied upon. For most, it is a matter of negotiating locally, with extension officials, councillors, district administrators, GMB officials and others, and hoping that you get on a list. Even if you do, then getting the promised inputs may mean waiting for days at depots and sometimes they never come.

The insertion of private or state capital into agrarian settings thus triggers social differentiation across scales, resulting in new political dynamics (Amin, 2012). How has this played out with tobacco and maize contracting in Mvurwi and Hwedza, based on very different forms of contract? Tables 1–6 present the results of our surveys in Mvurwi and Hwedza, contrasting those households involved in contracts for tobacco (private) and maize (state-led CA) and non-contract farmers across CL, A1 and A2 areas.

4.1 | Private contracting for tobacco

Tobacco is a major crop in both sites (Table 1). In Mvurwi, the area under tobacco increased from 6404 ha in 2015 to 11 079 ha in 2018, while in Hwedza, the tobacco area was 3824 ha in 2018, up from 2952 ha in 2015 (TIMB, 2015, 2018). Contracting is most common in the resettlement farms where land holdings are larger. At 35.9% of farmers in our sample, the highest proportion of tobacco contractors is found in the Mvurwi A2 site, although 17.5% and 19.6% of A1 farmers in our sample contract in Mvurwi and Hwedza respectively, adding up to considerably larger numbers of farms overall. CL farmers have overall lower participation in tobacco contracting, with 13.5% in Mvurwi and 1.9% in Hwedza involved (Table 1), reflecting the lower agro-ecological potential for tobacco production in Hwedza. In contrast, however, national contracting patterns show uneven participation across land use

TABLE 1 State-led command agriculture and private sector-led tobacco contract farming in 2016

			State-led command agriculture		Private sector-led tobacco contracting	
Study site	Land use type	Participation options	*N*	%	*N*	%
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	15	2.9	70	13.5
		Not-contracting	519	97.1	449	86.5
	A1	Contracting	17	5.5	54	17.5
		Not-contracting	310	94.5	256	82.5
	A2	Contracting	17	47.5	14	35.9
		Not-contracting	21	52.5	26	64.1
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	0	0.0	2	1.9
		Not-contracting	53	100.0	51	98.1
	A1	Contracting	5	10.9	9	19.6
		Not-contracting	41	89.1	37	80.4
	A2	Contracting	7	21.9	3	10.3
		Not-contracting	25	79.1	29	89.7

TABLE 2 Private sector-led tobacco contract farming: tobacco and maize production (2014–2016)

			Production patterns				
				Tobacco (average across 2014–2016)		Maize (average across 2014–2016)	
Study site	Land use type	Participation options	Area cultivated in 2016 (average ha)	Tobacco area planted (ha)	Output in kg	Area under maize (ha)	Maize output (tonnes)
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	3.2	0.8	1240	0.9	1.6
		Not-contracting	2.2	0.5	591	0.6	1.0
	A1	Contracting	4.4	1.3	1795	1.6	5.1
		Not-contracting	3.3	0.9	1507	1.3	9.5
	A2	Contracting	36.8	4.6	15 221	18.6	118.5
		Not-contracting	22.9	7.9	20 373	13.8	63.5
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	3.5	1.0	433	2.0	1.7
		Not-contracting	6.3	0	0	1.1	0.4
	A1	Contracting	6.0	1.0	1222	1.6	1.8
		Not-contracting	4.0	0.6	644	1.3	0.3
	A2	Contracting	8.7	2.1	9311	3.6	3.8
		Not-contracting	6.6	0.6	242	5.1	14.0

types.50.4% of CL farmers and 37.5% of A1 farmers participate in tobacco contracting, while a few A2 farmers (6.6%) are involved (Shonhe, 2017; TIMB, 2018), showing how many farmers therefore sell independently grown tobacco through auction floors, often with the mediation of brokers, commonly known as 'makoronyera'.

In the smallholder farms (A1 and CL), contracting households generally produce both higher tobacco and maize outputs, indicating greater finance access in support of farm operations (Table 2). However, non-contracting A1

TABLE 3 Private-sector and state-led contracting: accumulated assets in 2016 (numbers)

			Private sector-led tobacco contracts			State-led command agriculture		
Study site	Land use type	Participation choices	Water pumps	Cattle	House with improved roofing	Water pumps	Cattle	House with improved roofing
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	0.3	6.0	0.9	0.3	4.3	1.1
		Not-contracting	0.1	4.8	0.8	0.1	4.8	0.7
	A1	Contracting	0.1	9	0.5	0.1	9.0	1.0
		Not-contracting	0.1	8	0.7	0.1	8.0	1.0
	A2	Contracting	1.4	25.6	1.0	1.2	12.4	2.0
		Not-contracting	0.6	10.2	0.8	0.7	18.4	0.6
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	1.0	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	2.0	2.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
	A1	Contracting	1.0	8.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
		Not-contracting	0.0	4.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
	A2	Contracting	2.0	13.0	4.0	0.6	19.0	2.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	19.0	1.0	0.2	18.0	1.0

TABLE 4 Gender and education level across private sector-led and state-led contracting in 2016

			Private sector-led tobacco contracting		State-led command agriculture contracting	
Study site	Land use type	Participation options	Female-headed households (%)	Education level (attained up to Form 4) (%)	Female headed households (%)	Education level (attained up to Form 4) (%)
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	9.1	69.8	1.3	90.4
		Not-contracting	35.5	52.0	4.9	58.8
	A1	Contracting	17.9	72.0	13.3	70.8
		Not-contracting	19.3	53.6	17.9	53.7
	A2	Contracting	0.0	100	5.9	94.1
		Not-contracting	16.0	94.8	13.6	95.2
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	3.7	66.7	0.0	65.9
		Not-contracting	13.3	85.0	0.0	63.6
	A1	Contracting	3.7	33.3	14.7	78.0
		Not-contracting	4.4	55.0	20	44.6
	A2	Contracting	0	100.0	8.8	63.6
		Not-contracting	10.3	55.0	11.8	60.7

households report higher maize output, perhaps owing to the existence of sources of individual finance or the diversion of tobacco contracting finance used for food production. Over time, households may switch between tobacco and maize, depending on the season, level of contract debt or the availability of alternative financing. Our data show how tobacco contracting in smallholder areas is generally associated with the cultivation of larger areas, higher fertilizer use and increased labour hiring. Those contracting also are mostly men who, compared with non-contractors,

TABLE 5 Permanent labour employment (male and female) across contract types (numbers)

Study site	Land use type	Participation options	Private sector-led tobacco contracting		State-led command agriculture	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
	A1	Contracting	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
		Not-contracting	0.4	0.0	0.1	2.0
	A2	Contracting	6.1	0.2	9.1	11.1
		Not-contracting	2.3	0.3	4.7	6.4
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	8.4	0.0	0.0
	A1	Contracting	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	A2	Contracting	2.0	0.0	2.0	4.0
		Not-contracting	21.0	0.0	2.0	0.0

TABLE 6 Tobacco and maize production under command agriculture

Study site	Land use type	Participation options	Production patterns				
			Tobacco (average across 2014–2016)			Maize (average across 2014–2016)	
			Total area cultivated in 2016 (ha)	Tobacco planted area (ha)	Tobacco output (kg)	Area under maize (ha)	Maize output (tonnes)
Mvurwi	CL	Contracting	3.4	0.7	1142.6	0.8	1.6
		Not-contracting	2.8	0.9	949.0	0.7	1.3
	A1	Contracting	4.0	1.6	1240.0	2.2	6.6
		Not-contracting	4.5	1.3	1966.0	1.9	2.6
	A2	Contracting	38.9	8.3	22 328.0	20.9	135.7
		Not-contracting	18.7	3.9	13 397.6	11.1	39.8
Hwedza	CL	Contracting	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
		Not-contracting	1.0	0.5	350.0	0.5	0.2
	A1	Contracting	5.0	0.8	290.0	1.5	1.2
		Not-contracting	3.0	0.4	277.0	1.1	0.8
	A2	Contracting	8.20	1.7	5566.0	5.1	17.6
		Not-contracting	6.8	1.2	3614.0	4.5	5.4

own more assets, including cattle and water pumps, although improved roofing on housing is more evenly spread (Table 3). Contracted farmers are generally more educated, except in the cases of tobacco contracted CL farmers and A1 contracted farmers in Hwedza (Table 4), as some poor households fail to qualify. Alternatively, as Shonhe (2019) revealed, smallholders in Hwedza use contract farming as a start-up, quickly exiting once they gained the ability to self-finance.

Access to labour is important for successful accumulation (Table 5). Production of tobacco demands highly skilled labour for cultivation, but also curing and grading so as to achieve maximum prices. Smallholder farmers usually hire temporary labour, including from the labour compounds on former large-scale (now A1) farms, although some have permanent wage-workers living at their households. Emerging patterns of differentiation linked to contracting therefore have important implications for the labour regime in the post-land reform setting (Scoones et al., 2019).

In the medium-scale (A2) farms, a slightly different pattern is observed. Non-contracting tobacco farmers produce larger amounts of tobacco in Mvurwi, as they have the capacity independently to self-finance the sourcing of inputs (Table 2). A2 farmers who have tobacco contracts in Hwedza however produce more maize, and may well use inputs supplied through the contract to support maize production, especially. Patterns of asset ownership among contracting/non-contracting A2 farmers do not show clear trends. For example, non-contracting households in Hwedza have more cattle, while they have fewer in Mvurwi (Table 3). Overall, A2 famers hire more labour than the smallholder farmers—both permanent and temporary—due to the larger scale of their operations (Table 5).

Overall, it is the relatively rich and the poorest who are least likely to engage in contracts (cf. Scoones, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba, & Sukume, 2017). For some richer farmers, self-financing from other sources, rather than taking out a contract, is preferred as they can get better deals for their crop by directly negotiating on the auction floors and transporting their crops using their own vehicles. Meanwhile, poorer farmers are reluctant to take on a contract for fear of getting into debt. They may not be qualified for a 'grower number' without having access to land, and may not have finances to meet transport costs to travel to the nearest registration centre and pay for registration fees or they may belong to some churches where the production of tobacco is not permissible. They may however sell tobacco through someone else's contract, as part of an informal arrangement with friends or relatives. Those who do take up contracts tend to be those who are comparatively wealthier, but without enough funds to self-finance. For them, contracting is an important route to accumulation providing much-needed inputs and support with marketing their key crop. This pattern was commented on in one of the focus-group discussions:

> *Contract farming has been critical in enabling us to grow tobacco and maize, the two foremost crops important for cash and food in this area. However not all of us have access to this facility, as quite often either some fail to meet the conditions or may have been expelled from previous arrangements due to their failure to repay or simply opt out due to perceived unfavourable conditions. Our experiences differ by individual, as those of us with less assets fail to join, while those who would have accumulated tend to exit and may prefer to self-finance.*[18]

Contract farming for tobacco is inserted into an already differentiated setting, both across land use types and so scale and asset bases, and within sites where some already have assets and connections, while others do not. Those with existing sources of income may be able to escape the need to take up a contract, while those with some assets are able to engage. Such assets include available land, labour and transport to facilitate marketing. There is therefore an important group of aspiring farmers, centred on the resettlement areas, who are making use of contracting to accumulate as they are currently without sufficient resources to go it alone. They are accumulating from farming and reinvesting in farm assets, including mechanization equipment, motor vehicles and cattle. Meanwhile, those who are unable to take up offers of contract farming include the extremely poor, who are surviving off piece-work and low-output agriculture, mostly of maize. Thus, contract farming builds off existing patterns of social differentiation, even if in the process it also contributes to deepening these patterns or creating new ones.

[18]KD commending during a focus group held in Mvurwi on 10 March 2020.

4.2 | State-led command agriculture contracting

State-led CA contracting of maize is far less common than private tobacco contracting in our study areas. However, for those who can gain access to it, CA is an important source of sometimes quite substantial funding. As Table 1 shows, the highest proportion of beneficiaries in our sample are found on A2 farms, with 47.5% of and 21.9% in Mvurwi and Hwedza, respectively, gaining CA contracts in 2016. Next are A1 farmers, with 5.5% in Mvurwi and 10.9% in Hwedza having CA contracts. Very few CL farmers have CA contracts, with 2.9% in Mvurwi and none in Hwedza. As explained in a focus-group, systems of patronage are central to the CA programme:

> *Gaining access to Command Agriculture is not a matter of choice for most of us here as farming inputs have become both expensive and are incredibly in short supply. However, political considerations seem to be favouring the A2 farmers who include those in the military and those working for the government, occupying high positions. For the majority of us it has been both hopeless and frustrating and the process has been opaque.*[19]

Well-connected A2 farmers are able to gain CA contracts and grow large areas of maize. In our sample, they are all men, with larger land areas tilled and they hire higher numbers of farm workers (Tables 4 and 5). They plant larger areas with maize, get high outputs and have higher yields than their non-CA counterparts (Table 2). Such A2 farmers with CA contracts have higher asset endowments, including vehicles, water pumps/irrigation facilities and improved housing, although not necessarily cattle (Table 3).

Not all those receiving CA support of course do so through patronage connections; some have to fill in the forms and queue at the depots, but it is still the richer farmers who mostly engage. Outside patronage networks, gaining access to CA support requires investment of time and very often requires you to have your own vehicle (or hire one) to collect inputs. In other words, benefiting from CA contracting provides opportunities for accumulation, but is dependent on prior access to resources and, for some, political connections. Contracting schemes in these cases are adjusted to existing patterns of social differentiation and the existence of groups with differential access to political networks and patronage relations, which are in turn reinforced through the CA contracting.

There are of course also A2 (and some A1) farmers who are also accumulating through maize production, producing large quantities and investing on the farm, while increasing asset holdings, but without reliance on CA contracting. In fact, this route to accumulation is probably more significant than via CA overall. As Table 6 shows, the commercial production of maize, and the ownership of assets is not all skewed towards those with CA contracts, and there are no strong relationships between contracting and other variables, as there are those both with and without CA contracts who are succeeding and failing. Some farmers without access to CA are therefore able to accumulate, but this again requires prior access to resources, particularly independent finance from off-farm sources. Such successful maize farmers may also combine with tobacco contracting, often with a focus on different crops across years.

5 | PATTERNS OF ACCUMULATION, SOCIAL DIFFERENCE AND RURAL POLITICS

Across the sites and between the two contracting arrangements we see varied patterns of accumulation linked to contract farming. Contract farming contributes to furthering patterns of class formation in these areas, but in combination with other processes. For some, contracting is a route to 'accumulation from above' (via the state-led CA pathway, centred on A2 and some A1 farmers, usually through patronage connections); for others, it fosters

[19] Ibid.

'accumulation from below' (especially via private tobacco contracting among smallholders, especially in the A1 areas). Some however deem contracting as too risky to engage with, whereas others have other means of finance through off-farm employment and can avoid getting into contracts altogether while continuing to accumulate.

Cutting across these groups are gender and age differences. Participation in contract farming by female-headed families in our sample is low, except in Mvurwi where 20.7% of the A1 growers who gained access to private tobacco contracts in 2016 were female. Some women though are heavily involved in contract farming, as part of a family arrangement. One male A1 farmer noted:

> *The contracting company provides me with inputs for only one ha of tobacco. This makes it difficult to for me to produce the quantity and quality of tobacco I want. As a result, my wife now borrows separately under a different grower number and manages her own crop, even though the income is managed jointly. I have also allocated two ha to my 28-year-old son who is also producing tobacco on 1.5 ha. Through tobacco contract farming he managed to acquire a tractor and a car over the past five seasons.*[20]

This arrangement is akin to how 'wives refashioned the contract through renegotiating the terms and conditions of conjugality' observed by (Watts, 1994, p. 64). It gives women (and children) the opportunity to make decisions in the cropping programmes and to engage independently in commercial contracts. During a focus-group discussion,[21] participants observed that some of the richer farmers in the area were women. Some women, they explained, have been elected into community and political leadership positions where they have a voice over issues involving the distribution of farming inputs, including through CA, so helping their families and communities navigate the political terrain.

Younger households tend to be in the poorer groups, relying on land allocated by parents. With diversified income streams, they are involved in on- and off-farm income generating projects and small businesses. Many are investing in small-scale irrigation equipment and expanding tobacco production, sometimes initially through a shared contract with a parent. If they can secure a grower's card, they may apply for a contract allowing on-farm accumulation to proceed.

Crop contracting is thus profoundly shaped by existing patterns of social differentiation and, in turn, it has generated new patterns of differentiation and a new politics of rural finance in the post-land reform period. In contract farming, relationships and connections really matter. Whether it is a relative with a tobacco grower number who you can work with to sell your tobacco or an extension officer who can tip you off when CA deliveries are in the offing, contract financing is deeply embedded in local social relations and politics. The state is especially central to the execution of the CA programme, working together with politically well-connected private players. Here the creation and maintenance of patronage relations is central and gaining access to finance is much more explicitly political.

Wider political mobilization of farmers is however limited. Without coherent farmer associations existing, the voices of many farmers, even those who are doing well and accumulating, are not heard. This generates much resentment against the state, which has failed to support them in the past years. Careful political control in the resettlement areas by the ruling party further restricts opportunities. As a result, it is those (mostly) A2 farmers with connections, and who are beneficiaries of CA, who have the ear of government and influence policy in favour of the narrow commercial interests of a few.

In summary, different forms of contract, situated within different political and institutional contexts, target groups that have become differentiated through the tumultuous colonial and contemporary shifts in the tenure structure. Furthermore, outcomes are contingent on the particular social and political relationships that are constituted around a contracting arrangement, as well as these prior conditions (cf. White, 1997). In our cases,

[20]Personal interview in Mvurwi with MB, A1 farmer, on 12 March 2020.

private sector-led tobacco marketing has benefited an emergent entrepreneurial class of petty commodity producers, particularly in the A1 smallholder areas, while the state-led CA programme has mostly benefited a wealthier group of A2 medium-scale farmers, often through patronage relationships ‘from above’. Unlike private sector-led tobacco contract farming, CA for maize was only introduced in the 2016 season, such that its social differentiation outcomes will only become clearer into the future. In both cases, pre-existing patterns of differentiation and access to political networks influence who wins and loses out.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have examined two very different types of contract financing: private sector-led contracting for tobacco and state-led contracting for maize through the CA programme. In both instances, contracts are dependent on socio-economic status and social–political relationships and these are conditioned by patronage and asset ownership. It is no surprise then that social differentiation, contract financing, and class formation are closely linked and co-constructed. Across our sites, therefore, the data show how contract financing—whether from the state or from private companies—is associated with on-going dynamics of social differentiation and outcomes are affected by pre-existing patterns. However, contracting is of course only one factor among many influencing how some accumulate and some do not.

Contract farming provides the opportunity for some to improve livelihoods and accumulate through access to finance and inputs, but this depends on contingent conditions and contexts. For many, access to private sector-led contract finance has been vital to improve the production of tobacco, especially in the post-2000 period when bank finance was not available and the wider economy was in a dire state. The results have been accumulation from below and growth in incomes and asset ownership for a significant group, especially in the A1 areas (although some A2 and CL farmers too). As for state-led contracting through the CA programme, if political connections allow you to avoid repayment, the deal is a good one, but being in favour with the political-military elite may suddenly shift, given the changing of political factions, and this too is a risky option even if for a time it is a profitable route to ‘accumulation from above’.

Meanwhile, others prefer not to be bound to any contract and some cannot afford to engage and independently finance their operations. For tobacco and maize farmers in Mvurwi and Hwedza (perhaps unlike sugar or tea farmers linked to a single crop and one company on an estate), there is a choice, and switching crops or diversifying financing options remains possible. Unlike the down-trodden, captured contract farmer sometimes depicted in the literature, the contract farmers in Mvurwi and Hwedza have more agency, when they have the resources to exert it.

Contract farming is strongly rooted in processes of social differentiation across the study sites. Through participation in contract farming, a new rural middle class among smallholders is emerging that is reliant on private contract finance of tobacco for extended accumulation. The politicization of contracting via state-led CA for maize by contrast largely excludes small-scale farmers. In the post-land reform setting in Zimbabwe, capital and the state interact to create variegated conditions for accumulation through contract farming. The processes of social differentiation and class formation we have observed also generate a new rural politics, with some able to access finance and others not, and in turn conflicts and resentments arise as agricultural financing becomes linked to party politics and patronage connections. Twenty-five years after *Living under Contract*, contrasting the two contract farming arrangements in contemporary Zimbabwe demonstrates how these state and private-led forms of organizing production and providing credit through contract farming are conditioned by specific institutional and political contexts prevailing and how contract farming is in turn affected by the prior conditions of social differentiation—including access to political networks—and in turn influences the divergent dynamics of rural accumulation through differential access to agricultural financing.

[21]Ibid.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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