

Rereading the Zimbabwean “Land Question”: Gender and the Symbolic Meanings of “Land”

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Abstract

As the source of all food production, land in southern Africa has been highly contested. Using a variety of texts that express themes relating to land, I show that in Zimbabwe, in the face of massive political competition, land became the foundation for reform and national sovereignty in dominant nationalist, patriarchal and gendered discourses. I demonstrate that cultural texts centred on land have been embodied and generated in familial troupes, revealing dominant gendered and sexualised overtones that naturalise land ownership and particular land uses. At the same time, these texts reveal symbolic violence meted out on particular bodies. This discursive analysis of texts examines the gendered and sexualised discourses associated with Zimbabwe’s national reforms and security, where the imagining of the security, protection and sanctity of land has been driven by nationalist ideas about its centrality in the healthy (re)production of obedient social and national subjects.

Keywords: femininity, gender, land, masculinity, nation, (re)production

Introduction: “Penetrating Sacred Lands”

Around 2004, while I was stationed as an educator at a rural boarding school in Zimbabwe, three women from the surrounding villages passed me as I walked to the local shops. A local police officer was the topic of their discussion. In apparent reference to the officer’s sexual excesses, one of them said “uya murume anoda kurima mapurazi evamwe” (That man likes farming on possessed lands). Contextually, the officer was popular for seeking sexual satisfaction from women already “owned”. The deployment of the imagery, “mapurazi” (plaas/farms/land), was striking as it invoked the charged politics of land post-2000.

Historically, based on its significant agrarian capacity and food (re)production, Zimbabwe has been known as the “breadbasket” of southern Africa. Although the breadbasket has been filled up mostly by the produce of black women through working on the land and in food processing, its ownership and accessibility have been a contest between white and black patriarchy. The land discourses in post-2000 Zimbabwe have been characterised by violence, especially against minority white commercial male farmers who had “stolen” land from the majority and “rightful” black owners throughout the colonial period. These farmers, labelled settlers, had defiled and “raped” the land, hence the land reform was meant to “correct” this historical imbalance. The violence against the white farmers was often justified as a necessary punishment for historical defilement. Land rapists were being castrated and emasculated through land disposition. Alongside these discursive (re)constructions of land, the land reform discourses justified the violence that accompanied this reform through the depiction of land as a feminine figure, seen as pure, private, sacred, attractive, heterosexual and (re)productive; but also exploitable and violated (Mawere 2019; 2016; McClintock 1995). It was the duty of the state to protect and defend the land “our mother” and source of food as “our inheritance”.

In Zimbabwe, the salience of the land issue pre-1890 is not well discussed. Land became a salient political issue after the 1890 colonisation by the “invading” British South Africa Company (BSAC) and the land dispossession that accompanied it. Two armed struggles primarily over land ensued: firstly, the 1896–1897 war named the First Chimurenga, and the 1964–1980 war of liberation named the Second Chimurenga (Bhebhe 1989; Ranger 1967). The Second Chimurenga brought independence through protracted battles between the Rhodesian Forces and the Patriotic Front armed groups, i.e. the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). The ZIPRA was the military wing of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), and the ZANLA was the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). In 1987, the ZAPU and the ZANU merged into one party (ZANU-PF) through a Unity Accord (Bhebhe 1989). The ZANU-PF’s greatest challenge to power came from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which was formed in the late 1990s.

Following the women’s conversation above, the dramatic irony is that even with the “progress” of ending colonial rule in 1980 and land reform post-2000, land is still owned by men, and women are still objectified, owned and preyed upon by patriarchy. The logic of the struggle against colonialism and the imagery of “mapurazi” is symbolic of the way in which female bodies are positioned for male satisfaction and for (re)production, equating to the way in which land is viewed as (re)producing food and satisfying the citizens of the nation. Since land ownership asserts the narrative of power, self-rule, possession and the (re)production of nationhood and national growth, imagining land as a woman extends the same narrative of power, ownership and control to women. This positions women at the mercy of men and takes agency away from them since as controlled subjects, they lack power. This accounts for the general

subordination of women and their expected subordination by patriarchy. The image of “mapurazi” to describe married women is deployed in a context in which the invasion of territories is a demonstration of manhood, and is usually accompanied by violence. Both land and women’s bodies are represented as objects for male use rather than as independent entities.

The above relationship between land and women’s bodies is reflected in a work by one of Zimbabwe’s early novelists: Patrick Chakaipa’s Shona novel, *Pfumo Reropa* (The Spear of Blood) (1961). The novel shows the way in which even early Zimbabwean novelists framed land politics and struggles along gendered discourses, with land and territories symbolically (re)presented by the bodies of women, and taken as objects of male satisfaction and trophies of male victory. The novel has a precolonial era setting and evidences the sexual commodification of women by patriarchy. One of the main characters, Mambo Ndyire illustrates the symbolic relationship between land and woman. Reflecting his lust for women, Ndyire asserts

Pane munhu ane munda kana gombo zvaro zvisiri zvangu muno munyika here? Ndiani ane simba rokundirambidza kurima pandinenge ndichida? Gombo iri ndarida ndinoririma chete ndione chinouya! (Is there anyone with independent land ownership here? Who is powerful enough to stop me from farming anywhere I choose to? I have been attracted to this land and I will plough it and await the consequences!) (Chakaipa 1961, 1)

Literarily, Ndyire lusted for Munhamo, his subject’s wife, and threatens to satisfy his sexual appetite even with the use of force and violence. He also asserts ownership of all women on the land. Munhamo’s body is vividly visualised as one of Ndyire’s possessed lands, where he can cultivate, harvest and consume to satisfy his hunger and power and without anyone being able to stop him. This illustrates the use of power, position and masculinity to conquer lands and violate women’s bodies. The king meets the woman in the fields, making her one with the land and therefore a symbol of contested spaces and the mediating centre for masculinities and male honour, but also revealing the way in which the occupation of spaces, the making of masculinities and male honour rests on controlling resources and the violation of the bodies of women.

In Ndyire’s patriarchal imagination, Munhamo’s body and being are extensions of the land that she is standing and working on, providing justification for the subjugation, prowling and violation of her body by those claiming ownership. This extends to social realities in which women, even if they are the ones who work on the land, are in effect owned by land-owning men, thus showing the way in which both land and women provide for male economies. Most of the beneficiaries of food aid are women, showing that women do not own the means of production. The fact that Ndyire would not be stopped, but goes on to pillage his “land” reflects the way in which women are raped and violated and the way in which that rape and violation move along with notions of positions, ownership, masculinity and male power. The depiction of women as land to be admired and acquired or conquered by those with power seems to give common

sense, normalcy and naturalness to the violation of women's bodies in the interest of men's power and egos. Such (re)presentation of lands as women and the struggle for land as the struggle for women characterise similar Shona novels such as Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso* (1956).

Lewis (2004) has observed the way in which Nehanda is presented as an extension of her physical environment in Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993). However, unlike in *Pfumo Reropa* where Munhamo is a passive victim of patriarchal excesses, in *Nehanda*, women's agency is not erased as "Nehanda possesses extraordinary powers and autonomy" owing to her special spiritual and physical connectedness to land (Lewis 2004, 198). Unlike Chakaipa, Vera is subversive in her articulation of the relationship that exists between land and women, thus showing the way in which such a relationship is both positive and agentive. In the midst of disempowerment, domination and violence, most of Vera's works show women breaking boundaries by venturing into male spaces such as urban zones, their disconnection from the dominant and patriarchal ties with land, and their refusal of the nationalist task of (re)producing for the nation through infanticide. In many ways, this is a digression from the expectations of (re)productive mothers of the nation, hence Vera's positioning of women as unattached to the past and not yearning for the future, hence rupturing the patriarchal notions of nationhood.

Chakaipa's title, *Pfumo Reropa* means much more than the literal bloody spear or spear of death. By and large, war and weapons of war have been associated with violent masculinities (Cock 1989; Mawere 2016; Nyambi 2012). In many ways, "pfumo reropa" accentuates Mambo Ndyire's masculinity and sexuality, referring to his erect and striking penis with which he colonises. This violent depiction of the penis, especially as demonstrated through the imagery of "pfumo reropa", the spear of blood, a blood-spilling spear or spear of death, and the way in which it conquers the lands desired by Ndyire, mirrors the apparent violence emanating from a show of manhood and masculinity and the way in which such violent masculinities rupture the bodies of women and of men who are feminised. The penetration of Munhamo becomes symbolic of her husband's emasculation and conquering by the powerful Ndyire in the same way that the predation on women by the police officer emasculated their husbands. The occupation of claimed land is therefore equated with the takeover of another man's wife as imagined in the militarisation of Ndyire through his penis. In the 2018 national elections in Zimbabwe, both Emmerson Mnangagwa and Nelson Chamisa from the ZANU-PF and the MDC respectively, made use of phallic symbols and virility targeted at the bodies of women to demonstrate their power and capacity as presidents (Mawere 2019), illustrating the violation of women's bodies in the competition for power.

The state related the land issue to past Zimbabwean struggles through its coding as the Third Chimurenga, which aimed to repossess land and extend its ownership to black people. Anyone attempting claims to land and nationhood outside the discourse of Third Chimurenga was labelled an invader and any such actions were associated with invading

possessed lands – something which “spoils” the harvest and “starves” the citizens. Thus, the arrival of the MDC into Zimbabwe’s political arena marked a serious turning point regarding the relations between the state and its subjects (Sachikonye 2011). The situation provided “fertile ground” for the (re)assertion of both aggressive and persuasive nationalism by the state, and the land as both physical and symbolic became central to whip up emotions and (re)establish the sensible. The MDC was labelled an imperial project (Mugabe 2001) aimed at polluting the fertility of the land. I therefore demonstrate that cultural texts about land have been generated in familial troupes and bodies, revealing dominant gendered and sexualised overtones that naturalise land ownership, land uses and the status quo.

Land/Nation, Gender and Power in Postcolonial Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, recent literature on land has focused on issues of inequality, appropriation, distribution, its use and economic relevance, without factoring in the symbolic aspects that attach land to the everyday and to ambiances of Zimbabwean nationalism and its gendered and sexualised character. The historical characterisation of land as symbolic of patriarchal control is articulated by Chenjerai Hove in his novel *Ancestors*. Through the narrator’s father, Hove’s *Ancestors* (1996) interestingly reveals a patriarchal hold on land, which ironically is aided by the Western culture (as symbolised by Western agricultural interventions), and its resemblance to the father’s macho-hold on the family. In many ways, land has been located within a charged discursive context and the rhetoric and claims around it have provided the language with which to talk of security, resistance and war, as well as the material and immaterial ground where these concerns play out. The discursive context has also provided symbolic resources for defining the self and others. Reference to land as an essential and sacred (re)productive space entangles Zimbabwean nationhood within a gendered, naturalised, consumptive and heterosexual identity that glorifies national purity and sovereignty.

The presence of hegemonic masculinities that track the discourses of land, conquest, control, power and protection, makes manliness the psychological foundation on which the Zimbabwean nation is (re)constructed and the space in which a passive femininity is (re)constructed. Such a conception of femininity has determined the position of women in society and their access to resources. Nyambi (2012, 1) states that “Zimbabwe’s history of an often-masculinised violent liberation war has created post-war gendered political power configurations bordering on political misogyny”. These are made part of the everyday through discourses about land and its symbolism. The focus on land discourses and gender draws from Yuval-Davis (1997) who argues that gender and sexuality should not only be critiqued in terms of dominant and missing voices and bodies, but extended to particular discourses that inscribe and naturalise particular gendered and sexed identities.

Former president Robert Mugabe’s sentiments that the country or land was repossessed through protracted struggles and blood sacrifices (Muponde 2015) – and therefore

needed “amadoda sibili”, meaning real men, for its control, protection and purity – reflects a warrior–masculinist national project. This makes sense in Zimbabwe in which the state has feminised men who did not go to war, reflecting the way in which “chimurenga” struggles are regarded as the permanent, inflexible and non-negotiable markers of masculinity, nationhood and citizenship.

In Zimbabwean nationalist politics, divergence is taken as opposition and political parties such as the MDC have been seen as “prostituting” with white people, who are “outsiders,” in a manner that resonates with Peterson (1995) who says that the making of group or communal identity of “us against them” rests on divisions of masculinity and femininity. The labelling of the MDC as prostitutes was a way of giving it a particular gender and sexuality that restrict its claim to resources and power, hence its exclusion from citizenship. The MDC was seen to resemble a defiled feminised body that is unproductive, hence its political presence has been associated with national hunger. Owing to its alleged association with colonial “rapists” and pollutants, the MDC’s attempt to enter into national politics and governance was taken as a defilement of acceptable national (re)production. It was also considered a negation of national growth that would lead the country into perpetual hunger after the selling out of the land which is the source of food, life and nationhood.

The state has thus feminised certain men who cannot perform the expected male roles and whose characters fail to act manly, hence their (re)invention as homosexuals in a “hetero-normative” nation whose emphasis is on purity, fertility and (re)production (Mawere 2016; 2019). Projected as homosexuals, political opposition parties have no capacity to (re)produce the nation, hence the sanctioning of violent resistance against them. The (re)construction of the Zimbabwean nation as founded on the land question provides a space for the institutionalisation and naturalisation of sexual categories and gender differences and the naturalisation of knowledge of productivity, (re)distribution and survival. Speaking of the (re)production of the land, in turn, speaks of a nationhood with rigid sexual categories that glorifies heterosexual relations which are naturalised as the only sexual identity, sexual practice and the foundation of life and national growth. In many instances, the state projected Morgan Tsvangirai as weak, a coward and a prostitute, symbols of “barren” femininities, and so sought to disqualify him from categories of “amadoda sibili” and respectable masculinities that are able to control land and make it (re)productive.

The above narratives speak to issues of dichotomous representations (Eco 1984), which create systems of othering (Fairclough 2003; Wodak 2002) that delegitimize and de-authorise oppositional voices (Carvalho 2008) by excluding them from the realm of common sense (Gramsci 1971). Furthermore, the positioning of the MDC as female and at the same time asserting its inability to govern and affirming that it will never govern takes away power and authority from feminine bodies, consequently associating power and authority with male figures. Doing so naturalises and accounts for men’s ownership of resources and male domination in public spaces while figuring women as property,

pushing them to marginal spaces and naturalising these marginal locations. Women who break these boundaries are vilified as whores and witches (Mawere 2019), damaging their reputations.

At the same time, dominant state narratives have naturalised gendered roles of support, care, (re)production and nurturing by linking them to land and motherlands to effect a natural order of mothering and so framing women as sources of nourishment. This has been done in a manner that relates women to the way in which land supports life, produces and feeds its people, the way in which it sustains or nurtures the nation's growth, and the way in which it should be guarded or secured to remain pure and (re)productive. There is a particular narrative in the ZANU-PF that has exalted the former Zimbabwean first lady Grace Mugabe as a mother. Responding to her positioning as a loose woman and estranged wife following her marriage to Robert Mugabe, which was facilitated by her "contagious sexualities" (Mawere 2019), Grace attained a prefixed identity as "Amai" (mother). She carried this narrative at rallies and gatherings, claiming to be the mother of and to all citizens. This naturally extended to her purported role as providing for her children, orphanages and care homes to reinforce the mother identity.

Using her Gushungo land (farm), Grace produced food just as is expected from the land, and distributed it at rallies, feeding her "children" as a mother is expected to do and therefore using her labour and identity to feed the nation. In this manner, Grace (re)positioned herself as the caring and nourishing land giving life to Zimbabweans and as a mother who cares and sustains livelihoods. Her infamous physical attack on the South African woman, Gabriella Engels, can be seen in the sense of a mother nurturing and securing her sons from evil women's contamination so that she (re)produces healthy sons and citizens. In this way, Grace satisfied the gendered domestic role, a performance expected from all women and also the (re)productive role of the land. The domestication of particular bodies in Zimbabwe works to provide role models to set boundaries for women, that is, for how they should be and the way in which they should act. This explains the discomfort that society has when women occupy public spaces, hence the various cases of bodily and symbolic violence against women in public spaces. This performance equates the nation to a culturally distinct nuclear family that assumes a single male-headed household in which both men and women play differential "natural" roles (Yuval-Davies 1997).

Zimbabwean nationalism positions women as sacrosanct lands and pure sources of food and life that should only feed and sustain national bodies or those identified as citizens of the nation. The country has witnessed frequent and random police raids on women who were labelled prostitutes, vagrants, or on those seen to be public nuisances such as the popular pole dancer, Bev Sibanda (Mawere 2019), as their actions and characters are perceived as wasting and polluting the "food." This reveals the way in which women's bodies, and at times the bodies of feminised men and certain sexualities, have been (re)imagined as contaminations disturbing the natural body politic and

(re)productive capacity of the land. Women and particular men supposedly represent dominated beings and therefore weak and feminine subjects; their frailty renders them vulnerable to prostitution, which pollutes and dishonours the nation and so invites their frequent surveillance. The appropriation of land, and the language of appropriation by the state, echoes a patriarchal enforcement of gender and sexual categories. Talking of land in nationalist terms implicitly communicates naturalised gender and sexual meanings and behaviours that are acceptable to the state as well as determining those with power: those who own, those who (re)distribute, and those with access. Land, which is space for sustenance, also manifests as a space for the performance of power, and a space for struggles concerning citizenship, (re)distribution, access and satisfaction.

In many ways, land has been feminised and its feminisation has demonstrated its ownership by men, while at the same time naturalising the ownership, domination and plundering of women's bodies by men. The heterosexual positioning of land implies and normalises heterosexual relationships and penetrations. People seen as non-conforming are made non-citizens and as non-citizens, they are easily violated since they are conceived to have no rights and privileges that citizens have. This is not surprising in a nation such as Zimbabwe in which people who are non-heterosexual and those crossing gender boundaries have been denied human rights, dignity, and citizenship, and have been labelled as dirty and cancerous parts of the national body needing to be cut off to save the body (Mawere 2019). This obviously is a call for all forms of violence and exclusions against people who do not conform to expected genders and sexualities. It is in this context of a heteronormative culture that the term homosexual has become a metaphor used to exclude and violate people who are seen as having contrary views.

Hailing Subjects through Land, and the Subversions

Since the 2000s, the Zimbabwean state has been calling for and instituting reform and national control through institutional and economic controls regarding the land issue. The state repackaged and resold the land issue as core to Zimbabwean nationalism (Logan 2007), and also as important to livelihood and citizen satisfaction since land, the "breadbasket," was being recovered from white commercial farmers. Cultural texts regarding land resurfaced to articulate trending nationalist sentiments. These texts have been diverse and carry a range of shifting meanings that either reinforce or subvert state narratives of land.

Texts that were directed towards land reform and control became part of Zimbabwe's notion of the Third Chimurenga. These texts included slogans, jingles, songs and were circulated in the media and performed during political campaigns, state-sanctioned events and state-organised funerals. Reflecting on the incessant presence of land-related slogans, Chitando (2005) brings forward the slogan:

Ivhu (Land)

Kuvanhu (To the people)

Kuvanhu (To the people)

Ivhu (Land)

The above shows a forceful call that the land should be given to the citizens, who are referred to as “vanhu” (people) and that citizens should have livelihood and feed themselves from the soil. This communicated that citizens have authority and legitimacy to feed and survive from the land in a symbiotic relationship akin to a mother feeding her children. However, citizenship in this case had to fall within the state’s parameters and within the context of the Third Chimurenga. The state called upon citizens, “vanhu”, to turn to the land as their mother. Articulated by the slogan is a naturalised connection between land and the people, also identified as children of the soil (“vana vevhu”).

The “ivhu kuvanhu” (land to the people) slogan has been associated with slogans regarding anti-colonialism and means repossessing the source of livelihood and food. There are racial undertones that intrinsically and implicitly characterise land reform discourses in which “vanhu” refers to the black majority who have been landless, abandoned and left without care and nurturing owing to the “raping” of the land or forced “penetration” of land by white people through colonialism. The black majority, however, are constituted as those allied with the Third Chimurenga, since those seen as outsiders and disloyal are (re)constructed as contaminated and compromised, hence unworthy of the inheritance and fruits of the land. In apparent reference to oppositional parties, particularly the MDC which has been feminised, they cannot be married to the land since that would not (re)produce the nation but instead, lead to its starvation and death. To this extent, “vanhu” is intertwined with racial, gendered, sexualised and political identities that determine authority, legitimate access to resources, and dispossession. Giving land to people has been seen as repossession, a symbol of conquest, independence, sovereignty, family order and control, and satisfaction that calls for buffering against colonialism and all non-citizens.

The 2000s also saw the emergence of the slogan “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again” to buttress the need to give land to the people. Since land ownership is understood as a landmark of conquest and power, repossessing land is seen as a process of decolonising and symbolic cleansing of a polluted motherhood; an affirmation of divorcing the land from colonial contact. The above slogan implies that to avoid citizen starvation, the national body or land shall never be penetrated by foreigners for the satisfaction of their own hunger. Vambe (2006) argues that such slogans became the guiding ideological discourse used to alienate those Zimbabweans failing to admit the national threats posed by former colonialists. The inclusion and exclusion from resources and food in Zimbabwe should be understood within this framework.

However, Vambe (2006, 266) disputes the above slogan and advances that some literary works about land “in some ways confirm that ‘Zimbabwe can be a colony again,’ but

this time of the nationalist elites who have grabbed most of the productive land”. This reflects the way in which “rape” of the Zimbabwean land and the inversion of motherhood are not limited to foreigners and the distrusted opposition, but are performed by those entrusted with taking care of the land, hence relocating rape, violence and starvation in the national family. Vambe (2006) argues that although some literature advocates land redistribution to benefit the black majority, it glares upon land appropriation and looting by the powerful. To Vambe, land is used both as a political signifier and a physical space in which the violence of possession and dispossession is performed.

The slogan, “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again” is also contested or twisted in Paul Madzore’s song “Gumbazvose” (One Who Takes Everything)¹, which reflects the poor’s plight as new colonialists in state leadership amass wealth for self-aggrandisement. In this way, “Gumbazvose” characteristically brings the patriarchal state closer to Chakaipa’s avaricious king, Ndyire, and the policeman known for penetrating other men’s wives and plundering resources mentioned earlier. This kind of view resists the temptation to think of colonisers and rapists only in terms of the insider or outsider distinctions. This also complicates the issues concerning the ownership of and access to the “breadbasket”.

Motherland, Sons of the Soil, and Sovereignty

The symbolism of the bodies of women and men in relation to land has a long colonial legacy, but as Samuelson (2007) and Lewis (2002) have shown, it is continued in liberationist and postcolonial nation-building discourses. Both the Zimbabwean land and the Zimbabwean land issue have been feminised in a way that connects the bodies of women to the (re)construction of the Zimbabwean nation after 2000.

Land has offered a symbolic language to talk about ownership, belonging and identities, through its association with the bodies of women, hence the popularisation of the “mwana wevhu” (child of the soil or land) cliché. Dominant and patriarchal treatises on land and nationalism are derived from a parochial version of Nehanda’s feminised figure in a way that links femininity to land. For Gundani (2002), the inalienable nature of land and its people could be evidenced by the fact that umbilical cords and those who passed on were buried on the land, libation was performed on the land and snuff was smeared on the land during traditional prayers, figuring land as the source or mother where everyone comes from, feeds from and returns to. These practices rendered land as a sanctified space of colossal religious, social, economic, political and psychological value. Land is linked to continuity and regeneration, and therefore needs protection and defence by those with rights of ownership. In the light of the land’s strongly gendered

1 Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzaw0PmSLVw>.

imagining, contests over land have taken patriarchal fabrications that locate land as a key marker of identity, giving rise to labels such as “vana vevhu”.

However, state narratives are clear that not everyone is pure enough to get in touch with the land. Those who are impure tend to “poison” the land and a poisoned land (re)produces a contaminated harvest which leads to national starvation. Since the MDC has been figured as the alien appendage of the white race and an enemy of reform with a polluting nature, it needed to be flushed out from the land by “vana vevhu”. Apparent is an invitation to the violent removal of pollutants from the land by inviting “jambanja” (violence) to reclaim, restore and protect the purity and sanctity of the land endangered by foreign bodies and those who prostitute with foreigners, hence failing the land to be (re)productive and feed its children. This logic became instrumental in the selective and partisan distribution of land and other resources in the post-2000s as well as to the violent suppression of the opposition or those who refused to stick to their social roles as citizens.

Where land is politicised and gendered, a political defeat means that claims to land rights are taken away also. One becomes alienated from all entitlements associated with belonging to the land, including citizenship and belonging in naturalised families and it means gross emasculation and dishonour. In the post-2000s, all those who fell outside the Third Chimurenga became non-citizens and their rights to feed from the land were revoked since “vana vevhu” were in the process of reclaiming and cleansing their “raped mother” and source of life. This is well-articulated by “Ivhu nderako iri mwana wevhu” (the soil is yours, child of the soil) and in the popular jingle, “Rambai Makashinga” (Remain Resolute) by Last “Tambaoga” Chiyanga. The jingles buttress the imagery of a familial order where the children should feed from their mother. Tambaoga also links land (re)possession to power and ownership through “Shingirirai, gadzirirai, ivhu rava redu, zvino tava kutonga, Zimbabwe ndeyedu” (Be resolute, get prepared, now we own the land, we are now in power, Zimbabwe is ours).

Thus, land ownership is associated with sensual feelings of power in a way that parallels the way in which women are controlled and owned through a patriarchal hold that enables an “ordered” life. This shows the way in which land is feminised and the way in which its control is linked to national (re)production. State narratives do not restrict the land issue to a Zimbabwean agenda, but to an African one. The narratives invite other southern African countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia to emulate Zimbabwe’s land (re)possession. This is explicitly articulated in Andy Brown’s “Uya uone kutapira kunoita kurima” (Come and witness the sweetness of farming), which is part of the popular Chave Chimurenga commercials about reform which frequented the state media in the post-2000s (Mawere 2016). The act and satisfaction of “kurima” (farming the land), is taken as consumption, hence one experiences “kutapira” (some sweetness). However, since “kurima” is also symbolic of penetration in the context in which land is an extension of women’s bodies, the message is that the satisfaction from “penetrating” the given land by its rightful owners sensualise

and naturalise the satisfaction and honour when penetrating pure, faithful and “obedient” women. In the context in which land was generally taken over from white males by black males, patriarchal ownership was inevitable, and in which there is patriarchy, expressed in imagery of “owning” and “farming” women’s bodies, there is also violence. Through land and farming, power, control and ownership are rendered as male privileges while the control and violation of women’s bodies is made commonsensical and downplayed or ignored in societies.

Since land is feminised, giving it away is seen as a loss of sovereignty and as impermissible as giving away the nation’s women to foreigners. Other countries such as Namibia and Zambia are invited to witness the benefits of land ownership since Zimbabwe is positioned as a land of plenty as reflected by the lyrics:

Tapi tapi tapi (Sweet sweet sweet sweet)

Kubva kumabvazuva kumadokero (From the East to the West)

Hapana kana chatinoshaya (There is absolutely nothing we lack) (Mawere 2016)

The above resonates with the idea of development and progress in relation to land which is given emotional meaning in the slogan, “Our Land is our Prosperity.” The land’s link to prosperity resonates with the way in which women are hailed as central to nation craft and the way in which women’s fecundity is glorified. The messages of abundance and prosperity are obviously distorted considering the way in which the majority could not taste the sweetness because of continuous years of exclusion, poor rains, lack of agricultural inputs, and the record-breaking hyperinflation that grounded almost everything in Zimbabwe during the crisis years. However, the emotional underpinnings of this slogan give it a distinctive logic, one that often appeals to many Zimbabweans.

These emotional underpinnings are intensified by the myth of Nehanda’s last words. A person’s last words before death are highly valued and have lasting effects on the memory of the living (Shoko 2006). The myth about Nehanda’s last words of her bones that would arise was central in the Second Chimurenga revolt. Banking on the popularity of the prophecy, and knowing the role it had played in mobilising support for the Second Chimurenga, the state (re)appropriated it in the 2000s. Its (re)appropriation was meant to (re)produce a continuum of “zvimurenga” (revolutions), making the land reform both inevitable and justified. For the state, land reform was influenced by ancestral spirits who would not rest until the land was linked to the people. In this sense, the front runners of the Third Chimurenga styled themselves as Nehanda’s “rising” bones and as instruments in the hands of the ancestral powers. This led to the portrayal of the former president Mugabe as a loyal “mwana wevhu,” a son of the soil fulfilling Nehanda’s prophecy (Chitando 2005).

Under Mugabe’s rule, land became the material, psycho-religious and social space of national reform and control, moving from the colonial legacy to sovereignty, giving

Mugabe's pronouncements on land reform a popular appeal. Such popular appeal is evinced by former Harare mayor Tony Gara's claims that Mugabe is "the other son of God" (Chitando 2005). This equates Mugabe to the biblical Jesus Christ who came to save humankind through suffering and blame. This locates the anti-Mugabe campaigns as part of the tribulations and perils that the son experienced and endured so as to accomplish his mission. This identification as the son of God also positioned him as the son of the soil who was prepared to save his motherland. Similar utterances came from the then Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who said, "I want to tell you that President Mugabe is Divine. He is our Moses from the bible who salvaged Israelites from captivity in Egypt."² The above glorified Mugabe's manhood and established him as the one to repossess and purify the "raped" and stolen land and protect it from foreign penetration and pollution so that it (re)produces for the nation and ensures national well-being.

In this regard, it is crucial to talk of the (re)productive nature of the land as enshrined in the "vana vevhu" concept that identifies those who are citizens. Land is (re)productive but also attractive to outsiders, yet very sacred to the extent that it needs to be guarded and protected. This perceived vulnerability became usable as justification for the "jambanja" or violence that accompanied the land reform and that is witnessed during political contests in Zimbabwe. In her novel *Without a Name*, Vera (1994) reflects that the violent effort to gain ancestral lands is similar to the violence directed toward a woman's body. This is based on the way in which the woman's body signifies land or territories. Vera shows that the struggle for land is attached to the rape of women. This is apparent considering that land and countries are feminised in discourses of nationalism. Vera's overtones make sense in post-2000 Zimbabwe where "jambanja" was used, visualising the raping of the land in a game of power and (dis)possession.

Men and women are identified differently as subjects in the body politic of the Zimbabwean nation where men are "sons of the soil." This locates them in the politics of belonging since they are "sons of . . ." and in stories of resistance and violence since, as sons, they are called upon to protect their motherland and their source. The soil that gives birth to the sons is naturalised in the discourses of motherhood where issues of surveillance, purity, protection and fecundity are supreme. At the same time, the land's (re)production is imagined as pure and positive if it is cultivated only by those who rightly own it. This, however, gives an image contrary to motherhood, in which land is positioned as a woman and therefore penetrable. The state argued that if the land is cultivated by aliens, it becomes unproductive to citizens since they do not own or control it, hence accounting for the black poverty.

However, considering the way in which the plough punctures the soil during "kurima" (ploughing) and the way in which seed is buried, "kurima" metaphorically shows the

2 See <http://www.thezimbabwean.co/2013/07/mnangagwa-praise-worships-mugabe/>.

way in which the penis goes through “mapurazi” (female bodies), planting seeds in an act of symbolic territorial domination and bodily satisfaction. Land (re)possession and “kurima” shows not only the way in which land as a source of food has been ruptured by both the colonial and postcolonial patriarchy, but also the way in which women’s bodies, imagined as the “penetrated” land, have been owned, controlled and violated by colonial and postcolonial patriarchy. The above perspective on land (re)possession and farming challenges state narratives that locate Zimbabweans on the same space when discussing the benefits of the liberation struggle and relationships that people have with land. To those who have been pawns in the struggle and the women whose relationship with land is more symbolic than ownership, the breadbasket remains inaccessible. The land discourse as a performance of reform and national control leaves particular bodies as outsiders and with neither access to nor satisfaction from the land. More so, it naturalises the domination, marginality and violation of feminised bodies.

Conclusion: Land, Ownership and Hegemony

In many ways, dominant nationalist and patriarchal discourses have drawn land ownership as an act of reform and national control which sustains Zimbabwean nationhood, hence land has been spoken of in the language of matrimony, loyalty and (re)production. Notions of land as a source of food production, as a political signifier, and as a space in which violence is performed have been projected onto gendered and sexualised national bodies. Discourses about land discipline the genders and sexualities of national bodies and justify their surveillance. As stated, the entrance of the MDC into Zimbabwe’s political space evoked from the state strong nationalist sentiments centring on land. The state has not only extracted these sentiments in gendered and sexualised discourses that naturalise Zimbabwean statecraft, but has also strengthened the sentiments.

This study has argued that land has been a site for political contestations that often reinforce forms of patriarchal, heterosexist, neo-imperial and class authoritarianism often associated with the ZANU-PF. The protection and sanctity of land or nation have been associated with its purity and its capacity for healthy (re)production that ensures abundance and growth along a parochial-macho sense. I posit that the control of land in Zimbabwe performs a massive naturalisation and control of gender and sexuality, ultimately leading to power hierarchies. In dominant discourses, land is feminised; it is a space for masculine penetration in the form of neoliberal corporate food economies and patriarchal nationalist appropriation. Dominant discourses about land reinforce hegemonic knowledge (re)constructions of citizenship and belonging. Zimbabwean politics is strongly tied to land and (re)production, with the centre of nationalism being in defending and protecting the feminised resource to ensure an uncontaminated nurturing of the nation.

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