

Performing the Third Chimurenga: Popular expressions of nationalism in the context of land reform in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

At the turn of the 20th century, the Zimbabwean government implemented a land redistribution program to rectify colonial-era disparities. Despite being remembered as a hallmark of the decolonial efforts spearheaded by President Robert Mugabe, this article argues the land question in Zimbabwe has always been and steered by the masses in their various constituencies — even when the government appeared reluctant toward reform. This is best represented through popular post-independence cultural expressions, including song, literature, poetry, and theater that have centered land in their negotiations of what it means to be Zimbabwean. In this article, I argue these artistic-cultural spaces are instructive in reconfiguring and recentering the popular roots of land reform in post-2000 Zimbabwe at a time when most of the scholarship tends to simplistically conflate land reform with Mugabeism.

Keywords: Zimbabwe; decolonization, Third Chimurenga; cultural expressions; land redistribution; Mugabeism

Introduction

“To our Zimbabwean African society, nothing is more important than the land”
(Mugabe, 2001, p.179).

Scholars of nationalism have emphasized the symbiotic relationship between nationalism and cultural expression (Fanon, 1963; Campbell, 1987; Ngugi, 1986.) On one hand, culture is the bedrock upon which nations stand, as Amilcar Cabral argued when he said, “Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history, by the positive or negative influences which it exerts on the evolution of the relationship between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as different societies” (1970). Culture determines how members of a community relate with each other, outsiders, and space: All relationships which are central to our understanding of nation. On the other hand, the nation itself also stands as a facilitator of culture, as Fanon explains: “It is the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation” (2004, p. 172). As the opening quote from long-serving president and apparent architect of land reform in postcolonial Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, asserts, the innate importance of land to the nation cannot be understated. The national question in Zimbabwe has long been defined by the struggle for land ownership. As a settler colony, the very nature of the imperial condition under which the country found itself depended on the displacement of indigenous communities by the British colonialists. The essence of the liberation struggle rested heavily on the reclaiming of land lost in the colonial conquest, and independence was only agreed upon when a plan had been put in place to redress colonial-era disparities in land ownership (Mtisi et al., 2009, p. 165). The land redistribution program of the late 1990s has, indeed, impacted all other tenets of the country’s national question in the 21st century thus far. Given the culture-nation symbiosis established above, it follows that the national question involving land has both inspired and been inspired by critical cultural expressions.

This article draws on evidence from a study conducted in Zimbabwe to illustrate the influence of popular cultural expression in the conceptualization of national ideals on land and the politics surrounding it in the post-colonial era. The study sought to address the following questions: how did Zimbabweans — in various constituents — make sense of land redistribution efforts after independence, given the purported importance thereof in the liberation struggle? What cultural expressions were employed in response to land redistribution? How have these expressions changed in the two decades since the beginning of the program? Ultimately, the study considers how Zimbabweans have made, and continuously make, sense of the land issue as a proxy for nationalism and national identity through such cultural production as song, theater, literature, and poetry. The article demonstrates how the landless peasantry have been the drivers behind the embrace of land as a symbol of Zimbabwean nationalism. While the government of Zimbabwe went on to make land reform the cornerstone of their postcolonial national project, the findings of this study show how the struggle for land has always been waged through cultural production for and by the masses, even when the government has been lethargic and indecisive in addressing landlessness.

Much has been written about Zimbabwe’s land reform program, particularly by agrarian studies scholars (Moyo, 1995, 2000, 2013; Matondi, 2012; Mkodzongi, 2013, 2016), cultural and literary critics (Mpondi, 2018; Gwekwerere, Mutasa and Chitofiri, 2018; Nyambi, 2021; Manase, 2011, 2016) and historians/development studies scholars (Marongwe, 2011, Hanlon et al., 2013; Raftopoulos, 2009). As such, this article does not seek to retell that story or regurgitate the arguments about the merits thereof: rather, I set out to explore the ways in which the people of Zimbabwe asserted agency and amplified their voice by way of artistic-cultural expression surrounding land contestation. I begin the article by describing my sites of analyses and methods of research, before delving into a truncated colonial era historicization of the land

question in Zimbabwe. Thereafter, I transition to a chronological look into the artistic-cultural production surrounding the land question, beginning with the immediate post-independence era, into the 2000s during which the land redistribution program was implemented and, finally, into the aftermath thereof. I conclude the article by looking briefly at the land question in the post-Mugabe era thus far, and the ways in which cultural producers continue to make sense of it.

Research design

I employ an interdisciplinary African centered approach that combines a diversity of qualitative methods including analytic theory induction, ethnographic and literary interrogation, and on-site interviews. The use of the African-centered approach, defined by Keto as “a framework for the centering of knowledge about Africans, at home and abroad, on the experience of Africans as subjects of history” (Keto, 2001, p. 51) is particularly relevant to this study, as land contestation in Zimbabwe has manifested itself along colonial, often racial lines. That is to say, the struggle for land in Zimbabwe has been one of challenging the Eurocentric, colonial ideals of land ownership by the indigenous African peoples. Thus, even accounting for the well-documented shortcomings of the land redistribution at the turn of the 21st century, critical narratives from the West have tended to be devoid of necessary nuance in their demonization of the process and those behind it. The African-centered approach allows for the interrogation of the ways in which African communities and African voices make sense of the land as an African question. For specific content analysis, I have also leaned on the literary pan-Africanist paradigm, designed to guide the “proper explanation of the content, form, and function of African literary creations” (Temple, 2005, p. 4). This paradigm is meant to ensure that African works are “placed in proper historical context and evaluated based on their practical relevance” (McDougal, 2014, p. 41). While the sonic and performative elements of the cultural works explored in this study are also closely interrogated, it is to their literary elements⁹ that closest attention is paid.

The analytical crux of the study is the select songs, plays, and other forms of artistic expression that make either literal or analogous reference to the relationship between the people, nation, and the land. These artistic expressions are drawn from throughout the independence era and, although far from conclusive, represent critical narratives to emerge within the specified temporal and spatial moment out of which they emerged. The analytical findings here are further buoyed by insights gathered from interviews conducted with 11 Zimbabweans—seven men and four women— between 2015 and 2019. By their own identification, the eleven include artists, civil leaders, small scale farmers, and entrepreneurs. The subjects responded to questions regarding their sense of connection to the nation and various national projects, how they self-identify within the nation and, among other things, their understanding and sentiments of land and the land reform program as a national project in Zimbabwe.

Although the study aspires to highlight popular expressions of national identity representative of the country’s diversity, the data points used overwhelmingly skew toward expressions created by men and presented in Shona¹⁰ and, to a lesser extent, English and Ndebele. While these shortcomings are partially a result of the author’s own linguistic and access to personnel limitations, they also represent the real gendered and ethnicized reality determining whose voices are heard — and how loud they can be. Nevertheless, I attempt to interrogate these dynamics where relevant and accessible.

⁹ i.e., the lyrics

¹⁰Itself a colonially constructed conglomeration of several albeit mutually intelligible ethnic groups, but not without their schisms and political hierarchies to contend with, as will be discussed later in the paper.

“Minda Ipe Mbesa!” Land as a nationalistic symbol in independent Zimbabwe

Across the colonized world, the notion of land ownership ubiquitously manifested itself as the metaphor for decoloniality and liberation; however, in Zimbabwe, as in other settler colonies, land was less a metaphor and more the very essence of the anticolonial struggle. The Rhodesian Land Appointment Act of 1930 designated 51% of the country’s land (which consisted of 80% of the arable land) for the White settlers who made up 5% of the population, while only 30% – which included much of the poorer land – was given to the 95% Black populace (Hanlon et al., p. 2013). These disparities were a major impetus behind the anticolonial fight.

Resolving the land disparity was so critical to the nationalists’ vision of postcolonial Zimbabwe that disagreements around the topic almost derailed the 1979 Lancaster House¹¹ meetings, which ushered in the end of the colonial era. African nationalist leaders Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, standing together as the Patriotic Front (PF), refused for the negotiations to continue until a land redistribution agenda was put in motion (Mtisi et al., 2009, 165). The agreed-upon resolution would see 162,000 Black families resettled in the first 10 years, during which the government would acquire land from the white settlers on a willing buyer, willing seller basis, with the British and American governments agreeing to fund the bulk of the process (Mtisi et al., 2009, p. 165). The stage was thus set for the rebirth of an independent African state for whom land would be the basis of the national project.

After independence, the incumbent Zimbabwean government continued to tout the importance of land and agriculture to the fledgling nation. The centrality of land and the adjacent agrarian culture to the notion of the Zimbabwean nation was codified when, in 1994, “*Simudzai Mureza*” was chosen after a nationwide competition to replace “*Ishe Komborera*”¹² as the country’s national anthem. Only three verses long, the second is dedicated to invoking the bounty of the land:

Mvura ngainaye, minda ipe mbesa
Let the rain fall, and the land bring forth crops
Vashandi vatuswe, ruzhinji rugutswe
So that the workers may be strengthened, and the masses fed

It would appear, then, that the vigor for land redistribution that had inspired the Chimurengas and been a sticking point at Lancaster House had not waned post-independence. The sentiment permeated into popular music, as evidenced by popular Chimurenga artist Zexie Manatsa’s 1983 “*Baba Tipeiwo Ndege*” The song, a castigation of former Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) militants accused of murders and instigating social upheaval in protest of their marginalization by the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government in the immediate aftermath of independence, goes:

“Ko imi muri vanhui ko, vanoteura ropa vachisiya kurima?
What type of people are you, who spill blood instead of farming?
*Handei paguva raChaminuka*¹³, *tonotaura zvatakatadza, mvura inonaya*
Let us go to Chaminuka’s grave, and confess our sins, it will rain
Handei paguva raNehanda, tonotaura zvatakatadza, mvura inonaya
Let us go to Nehanda’s grave, and confess our sins, it will rain
Ndookuti nzara ipere
That’s how we end the famine!”

¹¹Signed in 1979 in the UK, the Lancaster House Agreement declared a ceasefire and ended the Second Chimurenga, leading to the independence and recognition of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

¹²The Shona version (also sung in Ndebele) version of *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*, the Xhosa anthem that would go on to be prominent in the struggle for independence and national anthem in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia etc.

¹³Revered Shona prophet who, along with Nehanda Charwe, was a leader in the First Chimurenga.

The upheaval, which marked the beginning stages of what would be the genocidal massacres of citizens in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces by the Mugabe-commissioned Fifth Brigade, coincided with a vicious drought in the 1982-83 agricultural season (Cowell, 1982.) In many African communities, the advent of drought has traditionally been seen as a disruption in the natural order caused by injustices within the community. As such, Manatsa points the finger at the ZIPRA dissidents for this disruption. The song not only shows early enduring sympathies to the Mugabe government as naturally ordained custodians of Zimbabwean independence, but it also highlights the importance of land and agriculture to the nation. Not only were the dissidents' actions preventing them from farming as they should have been in an independent Zimbabwe, but they were also stopping the rains from falling all together. To farm was to appreciate the land and the struggle that went into it, to appreciate the struggle was to be proudly Zimbabwean, and to be proudly Zimbabwean was to stand in solidarity with the government, which itself centered the postcolonial project on the land.

Yet despite the Lancaster House provisions and the rhetorical centrality of land as national project, redistribution proved to be slow and fell far beneath the targets set for the first two decades. The government, seemingly content with the economic "miracle" of post-colonial Zimbabwe, buoyed in large part by the contributions of the white large scale commercial farmers who had retained the land, appeared lethargic in the pursuit of the comprehensive land redistribution for which they had vehemently fought. This suited white commercial farmers as well. Soon, the landless peasantry began to express frustrations at the betrayal of the nation's post-colonial imaginary that rested heavily on the land. Popular theatrical productions, such as *Tseu Yaamai* (mother's piece of land) performed by Chembira Women's Theatre in 1994, lamented the continued plight of landlessness in an independent Zimbabwe (Zenenga, 2008).

The absence of comprehensive agricultural reform became a metaphor for the perceived ineptness and a lack of commitment to the revolutionary ideals and post-colonial reforms that the government had promised. Renowned Zimbabwean musician Thomas Mapfumo's 1991 hit song, "*Maiti Kurima Hamubvire*" (You said you were excellent at farming) castigates the rulers of the land for how, after a decade in power, they had failed to deliver on their promises:

kwapera makore mangani vakuru woye
How many years have passed, oh elders!
hona takamirira zvamakavimbisa
While we still wait for what you promised us
maiti kurima inyore
You said that farming was easy
maiti kurima hakunetse
You said that farming was not difficult
maiti mombe hamushaye
You said you would find the cows
muchiti gejo munaro
And that you had the plows!

That this elaborate and drawn-out land metaphor to critique the lack of post-independence progress came from Mapfumo, who had been influential in defining the Chimurenga music genre during the war, made it a particularly scathing indictment. Other artists employed similar agrarian metaphors to lament the state of governance in the nation, including Sungura¹⁴ Star System Tazvida's 1994 song "Foromani" (Foreman), in which he croons:

¹⁴Arguably the most popular music genre in Zimbabwe, Sungura is a guitar heavy sound that blends elements from Rumba and other regional genres with those indigenous to Zimbabwe.

Vaforomani ndimi maondonga purazi
Mr. Foreman, you have destroyed the farm
Gadzirisai mitemo yenyu vanhu vashande
Fix your laws, and let the people work!

With the farm foreman, a familiar symbol of leadership — especially among the agrarian communities in peri-urban and rural areas — serving as a thinly-veiled reference to the government, Tazvida bemoans the rising poverty and unemployment levels, and continued landlessness compounded by the implementation of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund-mandated Economic Structural Adjustment Plans (ESAP) in the early 1990s. These adjustments resulted in a decline in economic growth from 4% to 0.9% in 1991, recovering only slightly to 2.9% by 1998, while factories were closed and thousands of workers were retrenched (Muzondidya, 2009, p. 188.)

As economic frustrations grew, the decade culminated in the definitive popular expression of frustration surrounding the coloniality of land. In 1997, villagers led by veterans of the Second Chimurenga—the armed struggle waged by Zimbabweans against Rhodesian rule — colloquially known as the ‘War Vets,’ began occupying unused and underutilized land — the enduring colonial excesses of the white farmers. Although dozens of occupations would take place between then and the turn of the century, the 1998 invasion of farms in Svosve and Chikwaka, both in Mashonaland East, elevated the discourse surrounding occupations to a national level. While the mainstream historical narrative suggests that the land reform was the brainchild and sole initiative of the Mugabe government, it is critical to recognize its birth as a grassroots movement. If anything, the government was opposed to these initial occupations, with the police arresting leaders of the occupation movements and then vice president, Simon Mzenda, being deployed to negotiate the villagers’ withdrawal from the farms. While many of these first-wave occupiers conceded and withdrew from the farms, the people had spoken and the “first salvo by a land of hungry and increasingly restless peasantry had however been fired” (Utete, 2003, p. 15).

The growing frustrations of the landless peasantry were captured in Simon Chimbetu’s 1996 song, “*Zuva Raenda*” (The sun has set) in which he employs the metaphor of pending dusk and, thus, the need for dinner to be served, to implore the government to redistribute the land as promised. While throughout the song, he chants “*Rongai nyama, zuva raenda*” (literally “serve the meat, the sun is setting”) he sneaks in “*govai minda, zuva raenda*” almost under his breath, which translates to “share the land, it’s getting late” (Pfukwa, 2019, p. 92). The imploring here is particularly powerful coming from Simon Chimbetu, himself a veteran of the Second Chimurenga and whose songs had been anthems of Zimbabwean and Pan-African nationalism since before the advent of independence.

Chimbetu’s sentiments would be reiterated in Reggae artist Man Soul Jah’s (2000) song, “Mr. Government Man” in which he sings, among other things:

“*Vene vedzino nyika vachauya... tinoda isu, nyika yamadzibaba iyi....*
The owners of this land shall come...we want this land of our forefathers...¹⁵
when subjugation came, and humiliation knocked at the door
didn’t we rise, with blood, sweat and tears, to set ourselves free?
now we’re living like squatters, in the land of our heritage...
Mr. Government Man! Give us Jah land right now!”

¹⁵First line translated from Shona; the rest of the quoted verse is sung in English.

Man Soul Jah's song articulates the land-centric impetus behind the struggle for liberation, as well as the socio-economic collapse precipitated in large part due to the government's reticence to reform within the first 20 years of independence. Much like the people of Svosve and Chikwaka, Man Soul Jah places upon the government the onus of revisiting and delivering the promise of the Chimurenga.

While the 1998 Mashonaland East farm invasions incontrovertibly put into motion the series of events culminating in land redistribution, it is critical to also acknowledge the different communities around the country, often dubbed 'squatters' for their perceived illegal settlement on land as a way of protesting the government's sluggish distribution of land. These communities had continuously advocated for land reform, with their cries often falling on deaf government ears. As early as 1985, for example, 'squatters' at the Killarney squatter camp in Bulawayo, consisting of three villages¹⁶ and at one time comprising 4000 families, refused to be resettled unless "the Government will resettle us (on arable land) so that we revert to what we know best: farming" (Mpofu, 2019, p. 52). That the overwhelmingly accepted genesis for the land invasions is not only in Mashonaland but places the war veterans — traditionally sympathetic to ZANU PF — at the center of the narrative, is consistent with the top-down, ethnocentric selective articulation of history definitive of Mugabeism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). While the place of the war veterans in Zimbabwean society vacillates between that of the common man and the political elite, the undisputable yet marginalized voice of the landless peasantry cannot be understated.

All 11 Zimbabwean respondents in this study agreed to the basic premise that Zimbabwe's post-independence resource disparities were unsustainable and unjust and land redistribution had been inevitable. Law student JC (personal communication, May 2017) argued, "We cannot deny that was very crucial because that was one of the main motives that led to the Chimurenga." Mzee, a 29-year-old entrepreneur, went a step further and argued African ownership of the land was a primordial right, saying "land really belongs to us as Black people. It's our land" (personal communication, July 2017). Hence, despite the later co-optation of land reform as a definitive pillar of Mugabeism, the call for redistribution was most loudly uttered by the poor and landless, and its theoretical importance is widely appreciated outside the scope of the government and formal politics.

***"Siyalima"* — Government cooptation of the struggle for land**

There are three critical sets of events at the end of the 20th century through which the previously lethargic Mugabe government was thrust into synonymy with land redistribution. The first, alluded to in the previous section, was the increasing political pressure leveled by the landless masses and war veterans who were feeling the despair of worsening economic conditions in the aftermath of the ESAP era. The financial compensation given out in 1997 by the government after relentless lobbying from the war veterans had set a precedent that would haunt Mugabe until he left power (Muzondidya, 2009, p. 198). The second, closely tied to the first, was the founding of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as an opposition political party in 1999. With roots in trade union and student politics, and capitalizing on growing socio-economic concerns in the country, MDC immediately became the biggest political challenge Mugabe and ZANU PF had thus far encountered. The threat to ZANU PF was on full display the following year, when 54% of the Zimbabwean electorate voted 'no' in a referendum put forth by the ruling party to amend the constitution in ways that would consolidate their rule.

¹⁶Xotsha, Tshaka and Two Stamp camps

The MDC and allied organizations had led the charge against voting ‘yes’ to the new constitution (Raftopoulos, 2014, p.210). It was the first time that any party had come close to defeating the Mugabe regime by the vote (referendum or otherwise); let alone actually defeat them. The administration was shaken.

The final sequence was the renegeing of the UK and USA on the Lancaster House commitment to fund land redistribution in an independent Zimbabwe. Mugabe and fellow revolutionary leader Joshua Nkomo, who would become the first vice-president of independent Zimbabwe, had famously refused to proceed with the 1979 negotiations until a roadmap for land redistribution was agreed upon, and the agreement was only reached when the British and American governments conceded to providing financial support to the Zimbabwean government to compensate the farmers. As the 21st century beckoned, the government had fallen well under its intended redistribution targets and attempts to expedite the process with the help of the promise from the Western powers were stonewalled. In a now historic communique, British Secretary of State for International Development Clare Short retorted to attempts at further conversation:

I should make clear we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zim (sic). We are a new government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and, as you know, we were colonized, not colonizers. (Utete, 2003, p. 15).

Unrelenting ire toward the Western powers combined with the growing urgency of land reform to quickly manifest into the enduring hallmarks of Mugabeism. The government sought to appeal to the popular memory of the sacrifices of the armed struggle and the inherent enmity of whites at home or abroad. The Fast Track Land Redistribution Program (FTLRP), implemented beginning in July 2000 to resettle thousands, was dubbed the “Third Chimurenga.” The moniker inherently militarized the process and situated it in the same continuum as the First and Second Chimurenga — the resistance efforts of the late 19th century and 1960s-’70s respectively that had ultimately resulted in independence from colonialism. Any ambiguity by the government had ended by November 2000 when they ran newspaper advertisements saying, “This land is your land. Don’t let them (white farmers) use the courts and constitution against the masses” (Hanlon et al., 2013, p. 76).

The Third Chimurenga was sustained in the popular psyche by a series of incessant jingles and songs, mostly borrowed from wartime archives and curated by Jonathan Moyo, who was then the minister of information. The campaign is remembered within the public consciousness as *Hondo Yeminda* (The land revolution), a phrase commonplace in music and discourse surrounding the land redistribution. Under Moyo, the propaganda jingles, such as “*Rambai Makashinga*” by Tambaoga, played every hour on all public radio and television stations (which were all that was accessible to the masses):

Piwai minda murambe makashinga imi!
Get the land, and stay resolute!
Shingirirai, Gadzirirai, ivhu rava redu
Persevere, prepare, the land is now ours
Tave kutonga, ivhu zvarauya!
Now we are really liberated, the land is finally here!

The jingles, often carrying the celebratory tone of wartime *Pungwe*¹⁷ choruses were complemented by original songs from an array of popular artists. Dickson Chingaira, popularly known by his *nom de guerre* Comrade “Cde” Chinx, reprised his role as the voice of

¹⁷ All-night wartime rallies that would bring guerrilla fighters and villagers together.

Chimurenga, during which he had been the lead chanter of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA)¹⁸ choir. He updated several of his wartime songs to include land reappropriation as the new phase of anti-imperialism. In “*Hondo Yeminda*,” the title track to the 2001 government-funded propaganda album meant to be the soundtrack for the Third Chimurenga, Chinx sings “*Hondo yakura muZimbabwe, hondo yeminda!*” (The revolution is raging in Zimbabwe, the land revolution!). Chinx’s government-commissioned songs adopted a racialized tone that reiterated the enmity of the white farmers and whites as a whole, a tone whose radical departure from the conciliatory one of 1980s anthems such as Ilanga’s “*Makomborero*,”¹⁹ which mirrors that of the Mugabe administration in the 2000s. Chinx goes on to sing.

Panguwa yaana Mbuya Nehanda, vanamai naanababa vairobwa
 Back in the days of Nehanda, mothers and fathers were beaten
Havaiswera vose vaivhimwa, vakomana navasikana vaitsvakwa
 They didn’t spend days together, they were hunted, Boys and girls were sought
*Nepamusana pekuti vairamba kudzvanyirirwa (*2)*
 Because they refused to be oppressed

Nehanda Charwe, most colloquially referred to as ‘Mbuya Nehanda’ (Grandmother Nehanda), was a spirit medium who emerged as one of the leaders of the Shona-Ndebele resistance to colonialism in the 1890s also known as the First Chimurenga. By connecting the Third Chimurenga to the struggle of Nehanda in the First Chimurenga, Chinx established a revolutionary continuity in the struggle for land. In doing so, Chinx is, in essence, addressing the so-called ‘Born-Frees’ (those born after independence), challenging them to question how “our ancestors fought, and our parents liberated us and what should we do? Return to thralldom?” (Gonye & Moyo, 2012, p.96). As they stand on the precipice of adulthood, the gauntlet is laid for the youth to assume the reins of the revolution.

Because of the co-optation of their Chimurenga narrative, embracing stewardship of the age-old struggle meant embracing Mugabe and ZANU PF. Because the MDC had not only emerged as the anti-ZANU PF party but had done so with the internal support of the displaced white farmers and that of western governments externally, the party was depicted as being anti-revolutionary and under the puppeteering hand of the whites (Nyawo 2012, 63). Therefore, popular songs that made it to the heavily censored airwaves derided MDC as a party of “sell-outs” (Nyawo, 2012, p. 63). ZANU PF lawmaker and popular musician Elliott Manyika’s “*Usazokanganwa*” (Never Forget) warned the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai by name, saying:

Morgan, usatengesa nyika kumabhunhu
 Morgan, don’t sell the land to the Whites²⁰
Usazokanganwa, ZANU yakakurera ukakura!
 Never forget, ZANU raised you into a man!

While the likes of Chinx and Manyika had overt affiliations to the ZANU-PF government and thus their support of the land reform may have been expected, a myriad of other songs pointing to both the centrality of farming and the importance of land reform in Zimbabwe emerged. “*Siyalima*” by Andy Brown, from his 2001 album *More Fire*, is one of several

¹⁸ ZANU’s military wing.

¹⁹ Ilanga was a multiracial band, ironically fronted by Cde. Chinx himself

²⁰ Literally “Boer”, a term adopted from Apartheid South Africa to mean colonialists in the Zimbabwean contexts- despite their predominantly British background.

Ndebele songs produced during the era of the Third Chimurenga, strategically encouraged by the propaganda machine to disrupt the assumption of Shona hegemony synonymous with ZANU PF.

With both Mugabe and ZANU-PF asserting themselves as stewards of enduring anti-imperialism on the continent, the *Hondo Yeminda* campaign inevitably had pan-African overtones. “*Kutapira*” by Andy Brown, also from *More Fire* serves as both a celebration of Zimbabwe’s land redistribution and a cautionary tale to the rest of the continent to safeguard the legacy that is land. Laced over an upbeat rendition of a traditional Shona harvest song, Brown sings:

South Africa, uchakamirirei ko kurima mumunda mako?
South Africa, why are you still waiting to farm in your fields?
Mozambique, usambofa wakatengesa ivhu rako!
Mozambique, don’t ever sell your land!
Zimbabwe iwe kutapira kunoita kurima,
Zimbabwe, how sweet it is to farm,
Africa, usafa wakanyengerwa
Africa, don’t ever be tricked!

Assuming a didactic positionality based on embarking on the consummate African nationalist endeavor that is land redistribution, the song challenges South Africa, a few years into its post-Apartheid era, to embark on comprehensive Black empowerment. The song also references Zambia, Namibia, and Mozambique in an ode to regionalism, before leveling out a challenge to the entire continent.

Simon Chimbetu’s 2004 ode to land redistribution, “*Hoko*” in some ways, signified the end of the high point of the Third Chimurenga: complementary songs and other expressions included. Not only had much land been redistributed then, but much of the fallout now synonymous with the era was firmly underway. Zimbabwe had left the British Commonwealth in 2003 amidst ostracization by the Global West, and the economic collapse that has defined the country in the early stages of the 21st century was now unmistakable. The Shona song, whose title translates to peg or yardstick — a traditional instrument to demarcate claimed land — is punctuated with bold declarations of resistance spoken in English in a voice described as “solemn, baritone, and oozing with authority” (Pfukwa, 2019, p. 93). The voice proclaims, as the song opens, that:

“The Third Chimurenga has already begun
And the *hoko* has already been pegged
The *hoko* with blood
Because of the lot of blood that was spilled,
No one is allowed to ever temper with the *hoko*.”

The choice of language here is significant. Making the poetic declaration in English, at this advanced stage of the land distribution program, can be seen as a direct challenge to the Western world and, in particular, the British with whom the largest fallout had been. The assertive rhetoric herein mirrors that regularly deployed by Robert Mugabe in this era, most famously at the Johannesburg Earth Summit of 2002 when he admonished Tony Blair (then British prime minister) to “keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe” (Mlambo & Chitando, 2015, p. 8). Equally significant is how the word “*Hoko*” is not translated into English. The implication here is that the significance of the *hoko*, the sacred signifier of claimed land, cannot possibly have a translatable equal in the lexicon of the colonizer as it does among the indigenous Zimbabweans. In a bit of unintended irony, the unyielding defiance of the song

would be Chimbetu's own parting word after more than three decades of nationalistic crooning, as he passed on just one year later.

Even as we acknowledge the weight of the propaganda machine in co-opting the once-people's movement and turning it into a definitive pillar of Mugabeism, artists outside of that machine continued to reiterate the centrality of the land and farming to the Zimbabwean people as well as advocating equitable land redistribution. Oliver Mtukudzi, venerated as the conscience of the nation,²¹ anthemized this idea in 2001's "*Murimi Munhu*" (The farmer is humanity personified):

Murimiwe-e tora kapadza urime
Dear farmer pick your hoe and work
Mvura nevhu zvayanana babawe-e
Let rain and earth build in camaraderie
Kuva muwhimi muimbi kana musori
Whether you be a hunter, singer, or spy
Kudya zvemurimi
It is because of the farmer's produce

Sung at a time when any artist creating works aligned with land reform was assumed to be on the government payroll, Tuku's statement was particularly poignant because it appears on *Bvuma/Tolerance*, the same album as the Mugabe-admonishing "*Wasakara*." In fact, Zimbabwean music historian Fred Zindi would later say he believed "*Wasakara*," taken by many to be critical of the aging president's unrelenting hold to power, was the reason why the University of Zimbabwe had refused to confer an honorary doctorate on Mtukudzi²² in the early 2000s (Chaya, 2016.) That the songs appeared side-by-side on the album is a literal representation of the veneration of land existing outside the celebration of Mugabe and Mugabeism.

Whether by virtue of being on the government's payroll, opportunistically jumping aboard the land reform train for publicity, or a genuine effort to expedite the redistribution of land in Zimbabwe, pro-land reform expressions adopted several modes and platforms. It is also clear that, at least retrospectively, Zimbabweans across the political, socio-economic and generational spectrum feel the land reform was necessary. This in no way implies that support for the land reform among the masses, as reflected by cultural creation, has been unanimous; it has been anything but.

Where Shall We Go? Responses to the shortcomings of the FTLRP

We have thus far established, as evidenced in music and other culturally expressive productions, that the land issue was paramount for different communities in Zimbabwe — even when the government appeared to have forgotten that precept of the armed struggle and independence negotiations. When the government sought to monopolize agency in land redistribution to the soundtrack of the *Hondo Yeminda* campaign, other voices still stood in solidarity with — what was in theory — a noble and long overdue national project.

Despite the popular, grassroots genesis of the push toward land redistribution, public sentiment had prominently shifted by the mid-2000s. By then, not only had rhetoric around the

²¹ Albeit less incendiary and radical than Thomas Mapfumo, a peer with whom he is usually contrasted (much in similar vein to the "Martin Luther King vs Malcolm X" dichotomy.)

²² Mtukudzi did go on to receive an honorary degree from Great Zimbabwe University in 2014.

movement been usurped by the government and made synonymous with Mugabeism, but the movement also itself had been tainted by the violence and seeming incompetence that surrounded it. Furthermore, the rapidly dilapidating economy had led to pronounced human suffering and had disproportionately impacted the common man and woman in the urban areas for whom any socio-economic gains of land redistribution were not readily available. As stated earlier, the purpose of this paper is not to regurgitate these evaluations of the program, as this has been done extensively already; however, it is critical to evoke these effects of land redistribution in as much as they roused responses in the form of cultural expression.

The turn toward lawlessness was in large part due to the growing frustration of war veterans and the poverty-stricken masses in peri-urban and rural areas, the stiff resistance put up by the farmers, and the government's polarity as they rhetorically supported land reform and yet struggled to enforce it and provide support for the potential and new landowners. With the war vets led by the ominously nicknamed Chenjerai "Hitler" Hunzvi, FTLRP farm takeovers became more violent, earning the colloquial moniker "*jambanja*," which translates to 'spontaneous violence' in Shona. The violence coincided with a surge in political violence as well, as ZANU PF responded to the unprecedented political threat posed by the MDC in the 2000 and 2002 elections. In many recollections of the violence of the era, then, narratives often speak of the two symbiotically, and criticisms thereof have appeared accordingly.

As a result of this shift in public opinion, many artists who had overtly supported the Third Chimurenga in their works, often performing at government-sponsored events, were subject to public backlash. In one instance in 2006, concert attendees, mostly Zimbabwean immigrants to South Africa, walked out of Andy Brown's concert in Johannesburg. The Zimbabwe Refugee Forum, responsible for calling for the boycott of shows by artists who had supported the land reform, argued: "Supporting them (the artists) is the same as sponsoring the ZANU (PF) regime" (Dube, 2006.) Until his passing in 2012, Brown remained unrepentant in his support for both Mugabe and land reform, saying after the 2006 walk-out, "My support for ZANU (PF) and Robert Mugabe has nothing to do with my music. As you witnessed, we are good at what we do, Mugabe doesn't play guitars for us, but I am not saying I don't support Mugabe" (Dube, 2006). Two years earlier, he had defended his stance on land reform by saying, "If the white settler fast tracked himself on our land, why not us? We have to fast track the program and sort out everything after that" (Eyre, 2004, p. 104).

The FTLRP's violent turn instantly polarized even those sympathetic to the cause of land redistribution. Theatrical productions such as Amakhosi's *Witnesses and Victims* and the University of Zimbabwe's *Tinoendepi/Where Shall We Go?* (both from 2000) brought to the forefront the victimization of not only the white farmers (many of whom had the economic means to absorb their losses), but also the Black masses meant to be benefiting from the process (Zenenga, 2008, p. 73). Such plays, as well as documentaries and other media critical of the violence fell under heavy censorship in the country, but other media have explored this reality away from Zimbabwe's borders. NoViolet Bulawayo's 2013 award-winning novel, *We Need New Names*, details a fictional farm invasion over the course of 15 pages which culminates with an old white couple being force-marched into the forest by axe-wielding 'invaders' led by an assistant police commissioner. The climax of the scene is perhaps the philosophical identity debate that continues to galvanize the community to this day:

This is Black-man country, and the Black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans, the Boss (leader of the invasion) says to thunderous applause... I am an African he (the white farmer) says. This is my fucking country too, my father was born here, just like you! (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 121).

The conversation captured here begs the fundamental post-colonial question: Who, indeed, has a right for inclusion in the nation? Mugabe's Independence Day conciliatory proclamations of a multiracial Zimbabwe appear to be at fundamental odds with the spirit of anti-colonial African nationalism, which centered on the Garveyist mantra of "Africa for Africans." Although fictional, the scene is a culmination of many stories that seeped into the public consciousness from the heavily censored walls of the Mugabe regime. Respondents not only repudiated the violence as a moral or civil matter, but because the narrative of human rights abuses tainted the already controversial FTLRP and became the justification for the country's marginalization by the global community. It was in response to this violence that the USA, European Union and Australia placed sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2002 and 2003, further sending the country's economy into a downward spiral (Hanlon et al., 2013). Twenty-seven-year-old Nyasha (personal communication, June 2017) lamented the violence:

The land reform program was a great idea. The idea of giving land back to the indigenous owners; or at least making sure the land was shared. But the way it was administered, was a disaster. It was done in a way that bordered on reckless and inhumane, and the economy took a big hit as a result. We should have done better as a country.

Harkening back to Thomas Mapfumo's seemingly prophetic refrain from 1991, "*Maiti kurima inyore!*" (You thought farming was easy), another recurrent criticism of the land reform has been it handed the crucial industry to people who were severely underprepared for the task at hand. The contemporaneous economic collapse that accompanied the FLTRP is often cited as evidence of a cataclysmic misstep on the part of the government. A 2006 land audit revealed 44% of all the new farmers who had received land as part of the land reform were either under-utilizing it or not utilizing it at all (Hanlon et al., 2013, p. 144). Closely tied to this criticism are accusations the distribution of land had fallen victim to cronyism, with government officials and those associated with the regime disproportionately benefitting from the program. These disparities are the subject of the play, *Ivhu versus the State* (1999), which features the following conversation:

Troy: We are losing millions right here at home

Reward: But now affirmative action affirms the chosen few. Indigenous business is business for a few who are more indigenous than others.

Troy: It's like rats in a cage — as the food keeps coming, they get fatter and fatter and then you turn off the food and they start eating each other (Glorstad, 2013, p.116).

While referencing indigenized businesses in general, the consummate indigenized industry benefiting from affirmative action²³ as the play debuted at the turn of the century was farming via FTLRP. The implication of "a few who are more indigenous than others" is that, even after navigating the claim by the white farmers that they too are African and Zimbabwean, there is still a caste among the indigenous granted preferential treatment and access to wealth. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argued this caste of the 'more indigenous' has been defined by the ZANU PF elites in party and cultural-nativist terms as those who "embraced the national liberation struggle, participating actively in it or supporting it" as well as being "patriotic...belonging politically to ZANU PF" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 93).

On account of its reach and accessibility, song is often the cultural expression that best encapsulates the essence of popular sentiments; and the lamentation of the unfulfilled promise of the FTLRP was no exception. In Hosiah Chipanga's 2011 "*Ivhu Redu Nderipi?*" ("Where is our land?"), the singer, famous for challenging socio-political convention, implores:

²³ Policies meant to elevate indigenous communities previously disadvantaged by an unjust colonial system. In the case of Zimbabwe, indigenization has meant—at least in principle—ensuring that companies have at least 51% indigenous ownership, among other things

*“Ivhu ratakatora nderipi ko, nhai Mbuya Nehanda?
Where is the land that we took, Oh Nehanda?
Kuroja kudai, kushaya pekugara...
Here we squat, with no place to live...”*

Chipanga’s protest evokes two important symbols meant to represent Zimbabweans yet now co-opted exclusively by the government. The first one is, of course, the land that “we” as the people are said to have taken back, yet from which the common man has not benefited. The second symbol is Mbuya Nehanda, long regarded as the maternal spirit of the nation, but now co-opted as part of the Mugabeist ZANU-PF mythos (Mavima, 2019, p. 122). By lamenting to her, Chipanga is wrestling away the apparent monopoly of the government over Zimbabwe — land and other symbols included.

The chorus of artists protesting the excesses and ineptitude of the government in the aftermath of the land redistribution program has recently been joined by Tambaoga, whose nationalist jingles such as ‘*Rambai Makashinga*’ and ‘*Sendekera*’ played incessantly on national airwaves during the early years of the Third Chimurenga. In 2020, Tambaoga asked for public forgiveness for his early support of ZANU-PF saying, “As much as I appreciate that it was and is my role as a patriotic cadre to render support to government initiatives and programs such as land reform, I have got this feeling that I was exploited somehow if not duped of a lot of money by the government then” (Ndlovu, 2020.) He has also released new music lamenting governmental corruption and, in the case of 2020’s “*Mutirongo*,” even calls for the incarceration of government officials. While other government-aligned artists of the era, such as Andy Brown and Simon Chimbetu, had decades of other work under their belt upon which fans displeased by their political music could fall back, Tambaoga made his name as a Third Chimurenga artists, hence the need to distance himself from his earlier work. Furthermore, while Brown, Chimbetu, as well other prominent pro-government and land reform crooners such as Elliot Manyika and Cde Chinx have since passed on and are all buried with varying degrees of official hero status from the government, Tambaoga finds himself outside of the government and party structures to lament the socio-economic hardships of the nation with the rest of the laymen.

A growing cohort of millennial musicians, coming of age in the aftermath of the FTLRP and economic collapse, have been more overtly critical of the cronyism-induced disparities in their songs. One such artist is rapper Junior Brown, who laments in his 2016 single, “Tongogara”:

*Vatora chingwa chese vobva vatifonyora brain/ wosiya tichirwira mafufu
zvekutorovana nemheni (They’ve taken all the bread and played mind games
with us/ left us scrambling for scraps enough to put curses on each other.)*

Particularly telling here is the othering use of the word “they” as the subject of corruption and cronyism. Who are “they” as opposed to the “us” that Junior Brown represents here? While the obvious answer may be the government and its allies against the masses, there is also a generational element at play. Described by some scholars as “the lost generation,” the same ‘born-frees’ that Chinx addresses in his *Hondo Yeminda* anthems are now living through the second full decade in a cataclysmic socio-political and economic collapse that had taken them from hopeful children to despairing adults (Ndlovu, 2012, p.252). The “they” then represents the older generation, who are viewed as having betrayed their stewardship of the nation on behalf of their children. The despair of youth, juxtaposed with the excesses of the elites, is often communicated in the urban genres of Dancehall and Hip-Hop, and has been reiterated in Winky D’s “Twenty-Five” (2016), Synik’s “Greed” (2016), and Magikkal’s “Maya” (2017) among others.

Land discourse in the Second Republic

The removal of Mugabe from power by Emmerson Mnangagwa in November 2017, although widely celebrated initially, wrought uncertainty onto the overall national project. Mnangagwa faced the paradoxical task of guaranteeing both a disruption and continuity from the Mugabe era. On one hand, his administration had to show sufficient departure from the Mugabe regime to justify his removal as a change in national course. This was particularly important because the new leadership, most prominently Mnangagwa himself, had been part of Mugabe's inner circle and, in many ways, the architects of Mugabeism. On the other hand, there had to be some ideological continuity from the outgoing regime. Not only did Mugabe and, indeed, key tenets of Mugabeism such as the land reform and supposedly unwavering anti-imperialism remain popular within the party and across segments of society, it also would have been blatant disingenuity for Mnangagwa to disavow everything he had been instrumental in building since the 1960s. These two, oft-dueling, stances are best embodied in two slogans of Mnangagwa's young regime: "The gains of the land redistribution program are irreversible" on one hand, and "Zimbabwe is open for business" on the other; the latter a declaration of return to socio-economic normalcy meant to appeal to investors and the rest of the international community.

As early as December 2017, mere weeks after his ascent to power — and thus at the peak of his charm offensive to the international community — Mnangagwa declared that the land reform was irreversible, a stance he has reiterated on several occasions since then (Reuters, 2017). Yet, while Mugabe was, by the end, unabashed in his antagonism toward the white ownership of any Zimbabwean land, the Mnangagwa administration has gone back significantly on this platform. By the beginning of 2018, members of the government had traveled to Zambia, where many displaced white farmers had settled, in a bid to woo them back on the promise of 99-year leases (Tobias & Duri, 2020, p. 209). In July of the same year, Mnangagwa addressed white Zimbabweans at a campaign rally for the 2018 presidential elections and proclaimed, "Land grabs belong to the past. We are grateful to the white farmers who remained in Zimbabwe, and you must be given ninety-nine-year leases. Everyone is equal" (Ana, 2018.)

Nothing epitomizes this about-turn in Mugabeist policy than the July 2020 announcement that 4,000 displaced farmers would be compensated a combined total of \$3.5 billion, not for the land itself, but for their investments on the land (Mutsaka, 2020). The news proved largely unpopular among segments of the Zimbabwean population, with the obvious exception of the signatories to the deal. Those partial to the land reform felt this was, indeed, the reversal that Mnangagwa continued to speak against. Many among the urban youth felt this was an irresponsible allocation of funds, especially during a global pandemic (Mavhunga, 2020). The masses especially worried that the burden of funding the process would fall largely on them by way of it being funded, in significant part, by tax dollars.

The uncertainty surrounding land has not only manifested in the direction of policy, but through inconsistent yields as well. The 2017-2018 agricultural season saw a quadrupling of the previous year's maize production, numbers which represented a return to pre-land reform harvest levels (Chikowore & Banda, 2018). The following two seasons were hampered by drought, which cut the annual yield to less than half of the required level. The 2020-2021 season is predicted to quadruple that of the previous year, thus exceeding the required annual yield by more than one million tons (Reuters, 2021) Yet even these apparent improvements are accompanied by continued economic instability. A World Bank report (2022) showed, among other things, that around 40% of the Zimbabwean population was food insecure, while the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty had gone up from 30% in 2017 to 40% in 2022.

So where does this leave the populace, who long clamored for the rectification of colonial and neocolonial land disparities as a means of economic uplift? As the 21st century progresses, there seems to be a bitter resignation that, in taking the land, and despite the populist rhetoric surrounding the process, the government and those allied with it may have been more interested in power retention and self-enrichment than equitable redistribution. In 2018, news broke that “as many as 12 500 families faced evictions from their ancestral homes” to make way for a lucerne grass-growing project by dairy conglomerate Dendairy, amidst threats from government officials to “cooperate with the new investors” (Ndhlovu, 2022, p 49.) There are similar, if not more dire, concerns within smaller indigenous groups whose voice is often relegated to the very margins of national discourse — if not muted all together. Mwatwara and Mujere have written about the plight of the Shangaan and Dinde communities, both ethnic minority groups within Matabeleland, whose ancestral homes have been desecrated despite their protestations, as the government gives rights to the land to the highest foreign bidders, and the locals are often arrested for protesting (2022, p.58.) Studies have shown that even when the land has been redistributed to the indigenous groups, the Ndaus of Manicaland, an ethnic group often included under the Shona supra-ethnic umbrella, were underrepresented in land regarded as top tier, while the Karanga and Zezuru — the Shona ethnic groups most associated with national governmental power since independence — were overrepresented²⁴ (Musanga, 2022, p.8.) Women across the country, and particularly in rural areas where they are often relegated to dependents and not landholders, have told of how authorities have demanded sex in exchange for land (Ndhlovu, 2019.) These instances illustrate a replication of colonial era-style marginalization of groups deemed peripheral: the very historical injustice that land redistribution was meant to rectify.

Fanon foretold this phenomenon, among other “pitfalls of nationalism,” when he explained: “For the bourgeoisie, nationalization signified very precisely the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period” (2004, p. 100). The false dawn of the repossession of a natural resource celebrated as key to national economic revival before being sealed off for the exclusive aggrandization of the state and its allies was mirrored in the aftermath of the 2006 discovery of alluvial diamonds in Marange in the Manicaland province. As many unemployed young men and women, already enduring an unprecedented economic downturn, made their way to Marange as artisanal miners, the government initially regulated the trade with the promise of distributing the gains, before descending violently upon those who resisted. Nyamunda and Mukwambo (2012, p. 165) describe the exasperation surrounding the affair thus:

The story of contestation around this informal economy concluded when the gwejas²⁵ and buyers were violently expelled by the state. Although it has been some time since the 'discovery' of diamonds in the country and the violent 'take over' by the state, the diamonds, which were expected to provide a huge windfall for the economy, have not yet led to any apparent improvement in the country's finances. Instead, the institutions that supposedly controlled diamond mining have been implicated in scandal.

As such, the cultural production over the past decade, culminating in the post-Mugabe era, reckons with this reality. As opposed to earlier rhetoric aimed at taking back the land and compelling the authorities to fulfill the last remaining part of the promise of liberation, sentiments now expressed betray a resignation to the unwavering might of the state and pleads to their mercies for their suffering to be recognized. Thus, with its early euphoria waning, the reign of the New Dispensation has been punctuated by a series of songs from various artists

²⁴ The colonial government demarcated the land into seven regions, with region one having the best farming land, and region seven having the most arid. The study referenced here showed the Karanga and Zezuru heavily represented in regions one and two after redistribution, while the Ndaus were given land in regions three and four.

²⁵ Informal miners.

lamenting the contemporary state of Zimbabwe in general, and urban Zimbabwe in particular. One such song is the reggae-infused tune, “*Vanhu Vatema*” by Gary Tight, in which he sings:

Ndati ndironge musika ku Copacabana
When I decide to set up a market at Copacabana²⁶
Dhimoni rekanzuru rabva rabata
The city council’s demons get a hold of them!
Ndati ndifayise madhiri kuMbare,
If I decide to make deals in Mbare
Babylon rabva rakanya
The cops are there to mess it up!”

Tight describes the desperation of the urban youth in a struggling economy in which the authorities themselves prove an obstacle to their enterprise. The song is especially poignant as it samples ‘*Vanhu Vatema*,’ a 1994 song by Thomas Mapfumo, whose earlier songs were the soundtrack of the Second Chimurenga, and his later ones among the first and most confrontational criticism of corruption within the ZANU-PF government. These sentiments lamenting the excesses of the political elite are reiterated in several other recordings, including the 2020 song “Already” by Karizma, in which he raps:

“Why aren’t the doctors getting paid already/
When ministers are getting cars, new Range already...
Why is Hopewell getting jailed already/
When he’s the one doing the work coz you failed already?”

The common thread running through these more recent artistic expressions is the recognition that, even as the colonial legacies of wealth disparity and ownership continue to be dismantled, the wealth and means to getting it — chief among them land — is now firmly in the hands of the political elite with little hope of it trickling down to the masses.

Conclusion

“Land reform is something that I agree with... I think it could have been done better, but that’s a cheap shot- we all can say that.”

— King Isaac²⁷ (Personal communication, March 2018).

Land redistribution in Zimbabwe will forever be tied to the legacy of Mugabe and Mugabeism. The FTLRP, under the spiritual monikers of *Hondo Yeminda* and the *Third Chimurenga*, not only defined the legacy of Mugabe’s regime, but of the nation. Yet this widely accepted narrative undermines the important role of the larger community in advocating for the rectification of the colonial-era disparities in land ownership. Mass movements, punctuated by song, poetry, literature, and theater, vocally pushed for redistribution in the 1990s at a time when the government appeared set on maintaining the status quo. Even after the government had co-opted land reform, it was still accompanied by a definitive anthology of artistic cultural expression, both advocating for the process and confronting its inefficiencies, corruption, and subsequent violence.

Yet four decades removed from the date of independence, and two from the FTLRP, economic disparities still exist and, by some measures, are widening. The Born-Frees have now given way to those born during or after land redistribution and the subsequent economic collapse as the newest generation of voters and cultural creators. For these generations, the

²⁶ Popular bus terminal and informal market in downtown Harare.

²⁷ Zimbabwean Reggae Artist.

tyranny and excesses most recognizable to them are not those of the colonial era, but of the post-colonial government and the indigenous bourgeoisie. The music and other contemporary cultural productions, particularly among the urban youth, thus reflect this shift. This does not mean cultural artistic expression in Zimbabwe is no longer concerned with the process of decoloniality, but it has shifted central focus away from blatant colonialism and its vestiges, such as the whites-favoring land disparities, toward the neo-colonial governance as represented by the excesses of the political elites and the continued marginalization of individuals and communities along the lines of gender and indigenous ethnicity.

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