

The Third Chimurenga: The discursive construction of exclusion through the land reform in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Zimbabwe's land reform marked a defining period in Zimbabwe's history as a nation. Different scholars have alternatively referred to this period from the perspectives of crisis, nationalism or redress of historical [land] imbalances. The present research looks at the ways in which the state narratives about the land used language/discourse to reconfigure, among other things, national identities. It was a period whereby the hitherto liberation struggle *mwana wevhu* ('son of the soil') discourse was invoked and deployed in the discourse of 'Othering' which mainly separated the 'Us' (ZANU-PF) from the 'Them' (MDC/opposition). It was a period in which, by extension, the label of *vatengesesi* ('sell outs') also became highlighted, thereby constituting defining ZANU PF slogans and graffiti that also became important discursive tools for discrimination. The study adopted a quasi-corpus linguistic approach in which songs, political jingles and slogans, the state and private media (*The Herald* and *Daily News*, respectively) were analysed. The study is couched in a conceptual framework that is mainly informed by the Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics theoretical frameworks.

Introduction

The Third Chimurenga is a historically significant period in Zimbabwe's history that can actually be characterised as a turning point in the nation's trajectory. The period is mainly known for the land reform, which itself has been dichotomously referred to in terms of either restitutive land redresses/occupations, predominantly by state/hegemonic discourses, or through the legal framework of land invasions/grabs, mainly in opposition and/or counter-hegemonic discourses. Consequently, the period was crucial not only for the reconfiguration of patriotic history (Muponde 2004; Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2009a) but also that of national identities. Particular interest is placed on how hegemonic discourses on and around the Third Chimurenga provide a specific

sublanguage that is subjectable to linguistic analysis. Specific focus is placed on exploring how mainly state/hegemonic discourses were used to (re)produce and perpetuate political difference in the country. Emphasis is put on the analyses of the extent to which the discourses reconfigure not only history but also national(istic) identities. The result is an ‘othering’ discursive process and effect that ultimately determined one’s eligibility and access to vital national resources and programs like the land itself, national input scheme and food aid/relief programs, among others.

Methods

The study employs a quasi-corpus linguistic approach in which various types of data are considered for analyses. The data includes jingles, songs as well as newspaper articles on and/about. *The Herald* of 18 November 2003 had it that ‘New land reform jingle takes airwaves by storm’ as they were considered to catch the mood and the imagination of the young and old alike while their lyrics were also considered to be very impressive. Jingles and songs are especially crucial to the study given Musiiwa’s (2013) observation of how they were appropriated and manipulated to communicate the dominant or hegemonic discourses of the state. It is from this perspective that Moyo (2010) had earlier declared that “ZANU-PF jingles [as well as songs] are an expression of nationhood”. A qualitative approach based mainly on snowball sampling was used to select the units for analysis. *You Tube* was especially crucial, and effective in providing linkages of various kinds amongst jingles and songs on the Third Chimurenga. The result was a sample that offers the sort of panoramic perspective that is especially needed to explore the qualitative nature of the period’s hegemonic discourses.

Conceptual framework

Analysis of the data is couched in a conceptual framework that combines elements from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Cognitive Linguistics (CL). The former is instrumental in the exploration of the relationship between discursive practices and power. The theory holds that language is used in the service of political power. In this case, elements from CDA, especially naturalization, are used to interrogate how hegemonic state discourses were (re)produced in the reconfiguration of both patriotic history and identities. The latter theory is used to explore the cognitive rationalisation of the discursive processes used in especially the ‘othering’ process.

Collocation and pronominalisation are CL concepts employed in the analysis of the discursive construction of ‘us’ against ‘them’ in the hegemonic discourses.

Discussion

Raftopoulos & Mlambo (2009), Sachikonye (2011; 2012) and Madziyauswa (2017) characterise the post-2000 land reform period from ‘crisis’ perspective. This crucial period culminated in emergence of new forms of discourses meant to sustain the so-called “Third Chimurenga” (Madziyauswa 2017, p. 199). He characterises the various discourses that emerged in this period as inclusionary and exclusionary as well as monolithic and bigoted or dogmatic. This is indicative of a new form of discourse which Chiumbu (2004), Krieger (03) and White (03) & Ranger (2005) have labelled ‘patriotic history’ in which there was extensive dissemination and repackaging of knowledge. The role played by language/discourse in this critical process cannot be overemphasized. It was in this period that there was a monopolization of ‘the national media to develop an ideological and cultural strategy that has resulted in a persistent bombardment of the populace with a regular and repeated series of messages” (Raftopoulos 2004, p. 161).

Krieger (2003) concludes her research on the ambivalent relationship between the government (ZANU-PF) and the war veterans by asserting that the land reform, and its rhetoric, did much more than the intended reconfiguration of both land ownership and land usage in Zimbabwe. It is on this thread that the present paper tags on. The land reform process, also referred to as the Third Chimurenga, the agrarian land reform/revolution, among its many sobriquets in the country, is conceptualised within the wider framework of the government’s drive to redefine the national agenda, a process in which discourse played a very big role in redefining and reconfiguring both identity politics and the question of belonging (Chiumbu, 2004). Of particular interest is how the country went into ‘war mode’ principally centered on the land question. This brought to bear the inevitable us/them dichotomy in which the question of legitimacy and citizenship were also redefined. Implicated in these land reform discourses were the reconfiguration of subjectivities in the post-2000 era in which the rural – urban divide was once again emphasised and used as the basis of legitimating not only qualification for participation (eligibility for allocation of land) in the land reform but also general inclusion in the new

political dispensation which the land reform brought to bear. Discourses of inclusion and exclusion were therefore integral to the land reform process. All of a sudden, former kith and kin were turned into mortal enemies in the drive to defend the country's independence and sovereignty against perceived Western cultural imperialist and neo-colonial elements in the country. The centrality of popular discourse(s) (which include songs, jingles and slogans), as indispensable discursive practices, is explored. At the end of it all, by exploring and/or unravelling the ephemeral nature of political identities, the paper hopes to, in some way or the other, add on to Gatsheni-Ndlovu's (2009a) enquiry on whether Zimbabweans actually exist.

The term Third Chimurenga has been variously defined as both a 'physical' or 'tangible' process and an ideology. For Boysen (2003), Tendi (2010), Musiiwa (2013) and Sibanda and Maposa (2014), it is a physical process that represents both the continuation and completion of the struggle to redress historical land imbalances brought about by colonial laws. In this regard, the Third Chimurenga is understood as an extension of the heroic wars of first and second '*zvimurenga*' (many/multiple uprisings), to borrow from Musiiwa (2013), that were fought in 1896-7 and 1966-79, respectively (Ranger 2004; Madziyauswa 2017). The Pindula website characterises it as an extensive process of land repossession by the majority local indigenes from the white minority commercial farmers. As Madziyauswa (2017) explains, the Chimurenga wars are chronological only in terms of the overriding motive to redress the colonial land-instigated imbalances. The deliberate use of Third Chimurenga is, for Ranger (2004, p. 215) meant "to proclaim the continuity of the Zimbabwe revolutionary tradition". However, Vambe (2004) clearly lambasts the deliberate discursive narrowing of the term Chimurenga to specifically refer to these three landmark wars. He argues that etymologically 'chimurenga' can be traced back to one of the country's 'founding father', Chimurenga Sororenzou, who is celebrated for both his fighting spirit and prowess as well as the war-songs "he composed to encourage his soldiers to continue the fight against their enemies in pre-colonial Zimbabwe" (p. 167). Crucially, he argues that 'chimurenga' has to be therefore understood not in the narrow paradigm "based only on visible and organized forms of struggle by African nationalists in the Zimbabwe of the 1890s, 1970s, and in 2002", but more widely "as a manifestation of the ideology of African liberation. Chimurenga represents communal African memory harking back to the time of Munhumutapa's

struggles against the Portuguese in the early 17th century, and the Shona's struggles with the Ndebeles in the 1830s" (p. 168).

The constricted use (from both a semantic and discursive perspective) of the term excludes, wittingly or otherwise, the exploits of historical figures such as Maondera and Chaminuka who were crucial in shaping the trajectory of historical development in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Thus, the use of the term to narrowly refer to the three organised uprisings and wars by the nationalists is a deliberate ploy to capture the word to define heroism (as well as the heroic) and, subsequently, who has rights to specific nationally-defined privileges in Zimbabwe. 'Nationalists', as well as nationalism, are therefore defined based on one's involvement, or lack thereof, in especially the Second and Third Chimurengas. This might explain why it is the rural populace, the war veterans and the nationalists who have been identified as the major beneficiaries of the land reform in Zimbabwe. Everyone else, especially the urban populace which has been accused for sympathising with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), has been bracketed off from benefiting in the land reform process.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a) characterises the term Third Chimurenga as another name for a pan-Africanist ideology that is opposed to colonialism and imperialism as permeated by the slogans 'Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans' and 'Africa for Africans', at the local and continental levels, respectively. Muponde (2004) and Muponde and Primorac (2005) argue that the pan-Africanism espoused by the Third Chimurenga represents an ideology of political reconstruction. Repossessing the land from the minority White farmers is therefore one of the salient ways of literally living on that ideology. It is from this perspective that President Mugabe's famous declaration at the September 2002 Earth Summit in South Africa can be appreciated:

... we are not Europeans; we have not asked for any square inch of that territory. *So, Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe* [emphasis mine] (Butcher, *The Telegraph*, 2 September 2002).

The land reform, was much more than just the redistribution of land to,

... over six million people who live in Zimbabwe's marginal rural lands which are characterised by infertile soils and unreliable rainfall, lack of control of water rights and access to the bulk of the nation's natural resources (Moyo, n.d.),

It actually represented Cabral's 'return to the source' discourse whereby each respective party was to get what is rightfully theirs. Chitando (2005) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009b) rightly observes how the return to the source discourse was 'sacrilege' through such theological jingles as:

In the beginning was the land. The people were on the land. The people owned the land.
As it was in the beginning, so should it be always. Welcome to Zimbabwe. We are down
to earth

The jingle espouses 'a return to innocence' message where the 'things that had fallen apart' will be restored. Chitando (2005) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) rightly argue that the jingle represents a common phenomenon where the state appropriates common symbols and canons of both indigenous religion and Christianity in a "political crusade to 'sacralise' its leading articulator and his political party" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009b, p. 1151). The land is discursively constructed as a symbol that represents the continuity of the Zimbabwean people from mythical times to the present (Rosman and Rubel 1985). The jingle therefore constructs and projects President Mugabe as the biblical Moses who led the Israelites from Egypt to their promised land. In this light, Mugabe, through the Third Chimurenga, is leading the Zimbabweans out of the marginal lands they were forcibly made to live on to their rightful and God-given lands now occupied by the white commercial farmers. The land question is thus ideologically linked to the creation story of Genesis 1. Mugabe's leadership is therefore depicted as the fulfillment of a divine prophecy. In so doing, not only is religion used to legitimate the land redistributive exercise – treating it within the sacred and cosmic frame of reference (Berger 1967), but it also politically positions Mugabe as the only true 'chosen one' to lead the nation, especially through the land reform. The land question and the cosmos are then understood as having a mutually inclusive microcosm and macrocosm relationship. It therefore does not come as much of a surprise when the land is referred to as *nhaka yedu* ('our heritage'). It only leaves it as a matter of reuniting the people with their rightful land. Pfukwa (2017), writing for *The Patriot* on the 2nd of January, sums it thus, "The land is us and we are the land". The appropriation of these theological discourses is used to ensure that people have total control over their God-given natural resources (Tarusarira, 2016)).

However, Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009a), in trying to address the question of whether Zimbabweans do indeed exist observes that:

The second central aspect emerging from Mugabe's *Inside the 3rd Chimurenga* was the land question that was elevated to a key and only marker of African being. All other aspects of the national liberation struggle, such as the right to vote, democracy, human rights, and equality, were erased from the narrative of the liberation struggle as the land issue became elevated into a singular basis for freedom (p. 237).

Mugabe's *Inside the 3rd Chimurenga*, which is basically a collection of speeches on and around Zimbabwe's land reform, also reflects the sort of myopic view that Gatsheni-Ndlovu is referring to. Madziyauswa (2017) rationalizes this obsessive capture and/or appropriation of religion for purposes of furthering political goals within the realm of religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism preaches a form of cardinal truth that is exclusionary to other versions of the truth and inclusionary to the versions that are considered politically, economically, ideologically, culturally and socially correct. The jingle, which draws its parallels from the creation story in Genesis 1, shuts out all other alternative forms of defining political correctness, cultural identity and the country's economic direction/drive that are not inextricably linked to the land. Other options actually run the risk of being labelled as neo-colonial or recolonization efforts.

The linguistic dimension provides interesting insights to issues of inclusivity and exclusivity as far as Zimbabwe's land reform is concerned. Key amongst the linguistic resources employed in the land reform are issues pertaining to code choice(s), synonymy, collocation as well as pronominalisation.

It is important to appreciate that the land reform was mainly produced and consumed in two major indigenous languages, apart from English, of course. That is, Shona and Ndebele. This is in the context of a country that has an inherently very rich multilinguistic diversity. Various scholars have identified from between 11-17 indigenous languages spoken in Zimbabwe (Hachipola 1998; Gudlana, Thondhlana, Nhongo, Mutasa 2013). Of the 9 jingles accessed by the researcher, five (5) were in Shona. These are '*Mombe mbiri nemadhongi mashanu*' (Two cattle and five donkeys), '*Dai kuri kwedu machembere*' (If it were in our land, old folks), '*Sendekera mwana wevhu*' (Stay resilient son of the soil), '*ZESA yauya nemagetsi*' (ZESA has brought electricity) and '*Rambai makashinga*' (Remain resilient). Three were Ndebele. These

are, 'Sisonke' (We are together), 'Uyadela' (You are disrespectful) and 'Siyalima' (We farm). Only one (Our future) was in English. Whilst it is appreciated that Shona and Ndebele were, prior to the 2013 Constitution, designated as national languages, questions have to be posed on the political import of choosing only those two over the other so-called minority languages.

Ndhlovu's (2009) *The Politics of Language and Nation Building in Zimbabwe* tackles the politics of language ecology by problematizing this ultimate ethnicisation of the land reform by raising issues concerning the choice of predominantly Shona and English in discussing about the land reform. This apparently innocent sociolinguistic practice ultimately results in the systematic exclusion (bracketing off) of all minority groups in the land reform process. Walula (2012) notes the apparent irony of this situation whereby English, however, is not a threat to the minority languages in Zimbabwe. English is not the international killer of other languages. Rather, the threat is endoglossic. That is, it is coming from within. The danger to the minority languages emanates from a hitherto homogenizing element in a language policy that elevated Shona and Ndebele to so-called national language status, above other indigenous language varieties.

It is little wonder when the key note speaker of this conference, Professor Maurice Vambe, raised issues of how it is generally very difficult to get land in areas that do not correspond to your linguistic-ethnic origin (as reflected by the language you speak, of course). He pointed out how it was, and still is, impossible for a Shona to be allocated land in Matebeleland. Language is used as a tool to determine who and where one gets land. The crucial question is that as Zimbabweans, one can potentially get land anywhere in the country. Maybe the critical factor to consider is their intended land use which would then be dependent on the region in which that land use pattern is most effective in the country. That way, the gains of the land reform are least likely to be greatly constrained by obvious climatic factors, which everyone is fully aware of in the first place.

The second linguistic problem pertains to the issue of what is referred to in this paper as 'the problem of synonym'. Synonymy is a concept which is used to refer to a situation in which closely related concepts are ultimately taken to be one and the same thing. In this particular context, Zimbabwe's land reform and about four other issues can be regarded as conceptually closely related. That is, land reform, land redistribution, agricultural reform, and land

redistribution, among others. There has been a tendency to regard the broader concept of the land reform simply, or rather synonymously, as the agricultural land reform. However, a closer inspection of these concepts will reveal a hierarchical meaning relationship. It turns out to be a ‘mischievous’ way of directing the population’s attention to only one or a few aspects/dimensions of the land reform. Narrowing it down to an issue of farming only creates the impression that that it is what all land can be used for in Zimbabwe. This conveniently overlooks such dimensions as the cultural, for example. A case in point is how the Hwata people needed to be restored to their ancestral lands of origin in Mazowe valley. Instead, they are made to be content by a simple allocation to otherwise random farming land. The land question was obviously much more than a question of farming. As shown, it can also be about social and/or cultural justice, as is noted by McCullum (2006) Semantic/conceptual narrowing of the process. This is no wonder why Boysen (2003, p. 55) declares that “The land reform programme (third Chimurenga) is a monumental agrarian revolution in Zim” reflecting the commonsensical equation of these terms.

Instead, a more hierarchical or hyponimic relationship is proposed by the study. That is, it is possible to understand these terms not from the perspective of synonymy but in terms of a hierarchy that begins from a more general overarching term to a more specific one. That is, from the more general land reform, land redistribution and then finally agrarian reform. Figure 1 below show this relation.

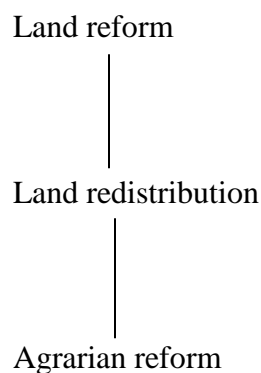


Figure 1: Proposed hyponimic relationship between land reform terms

The figure somewhat demystifies the general equation of the land reform with the agrarian reform. Land reforms involve much more than agriculture-related activities. Thus, the problem of synonymy, in the discursive construction of the land reform, conceptually closes all the other types of land-related reforms that could have happened in the post-2000 era. This myopic interpretation of the land reform might be the reason why all efforts are directed almost exclusively to the repossession of white commercial farms.

Collocation is another linguistic resource used in the discursive construction of Zimbabwe's land reform. Whilst defining collocation is not that straightforward, the general consensus is that collocation, which is traceable to Firth (1957) is a concept that characterises meaning of particular words and/or concepts on the basis of their overall linguistic context/environment. For Lehecka (n.d.) and Heid & Gouws (2006), it refers to the syntagmatic attraction between two (or more) lexical items: morphemes, words, phrases or utterances. Dickinson (n.d.) as well as McKeown & Radev (n.d.) regard collocations as characteristic co-occurrence of two (or more) lexical items on much more than a random chance. The latter distinguish collocations from free word combinations on the basis that a collocation is a group of words that occur together more often than by chance. This brings in the notion of semantic fields where words and/or concepts enter into some mutual meaning-relation with one another. Of great importance is the way in which the Third Chimurenga provided a sub-language within which collocation was operationalised by context-specific language usage.

Of particular interest to this paper is the kind of words and concepts that collocated together with the overall concept of the sub-language of Zimbabwe's land reform. It is critical that we identify two distinct discourse communities in so far as the construction of the land reform is concerned. These are the pro-land reform (sometimes equated with ZANU-PF supporters/sympathisers) and anti-land-reform (equated with MDC-T supporters/sympathisers). In a comparative study comparing the representation of the fast track land reform in the *Daily News* and *The Herald* in May 2000, Chinyanganya (2014) exposes common adjectives that collocated with the concept. On the one hand, the pro-MDC-T *Daily News* predominantly collocated the land reform with the negative notions of, but not limited to, farm/land invasion, food shortages, illegality of the whole

exercise and human rights violations. Thus, the private media aimed to produce a discourse of the land reform whose overall semantic field was aimed at inducing or inciting the ‘rational’ or ‘legally-astute’ citizen to shun the land reform.

On the other hand, the pro-ZANU-PF *The Herald*, mainly collocated the land reform with more positive concepts such as land occupation, redress/reform of historical land imbalances as well as the more neutral land redistribution. Associating the process with notions of redress, reform and occupation rather than associated with invasions is meant to appeal on matters of cultural rights which simply have to be both restored and bestowed. It is apparent that the production, as well as consumption of the discourses, have been intended to be made in a specific paradigm depending on the media chosen. Hill (1999) underscores the vitality of collocation competence on the basis that conceptual knowledge does not spring out of a vacuum. Rather, it is socially created, and sustained, through discourse. It emerges that the media, one way or the other, sought to position particular types of audiences either for or against the land reform based on their specific ideological orientation. Thus, the media, in so far as the reportage and representation of the land reform was concerned, was not just for everybody. Media choices were therefore determined where the audience’s sympathies lay.

Whilst collocation provides an understanding of the implicit ways in which exclusion was embedded in land reform discourses, *pronominals* provide much more explicit ways of doing so. Levinson (2012) regards pronouns, which are rooted in deixis, as one of the obvious ways in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the linguistic structures themselves. That is, deixis, in general, relates to expressions in language that point out or identify their referent(s) in any given context. Although deixis can be divided into different subcategories, which include, person, spatial and discourse deixis, the present research focuses on the former. Person deixis provide, amongst others, a direct way of determining how speakers included or excluded in any give social and/or communicative context. For Gyuro (2015), this phenomenon is a primary concept of CDA as it draws on the notion of exclusion of certain social actors within particular discourse(s). In this manner identity is a social location (Hegel 1807) in which it is considered as an intersubjective matter. In this view, identity is formed when speakers emphasise difference between “in-groups” (where the individual belongs) and “out-group”

It is interesting to note how the othering process labelled those who were not in support of the land reform programme as puppets (of the West). The socio-political import of being labelled a puppet of, and therefore a, sell out to, the West was an automatic unofficial 'retribution' of sorts from predominantly the youth militia, created during this period as enforcers of the land reform programme. Elliot Manyika's '*Mbiri yechigandanga*' (Guerilla fame) and '*Musha une mhandu*' (A home/country with enemies/sell outs) stresses what needed to be done to those against the land reform.

As already alluded to above, supporters of the land reform programme were ZANU-PF supporters by default whilst MDC-T supporters were considered to be the *vatenges* or haters who were bent "on reversing the gains of independence (the land reform in particular) and promoting Western powers' recolonization of the country" (Musiiwa 2013, p. 3). This then created an othering process which then brought into prominence two important discursive tools for discrimination. The first is the ZANU-PF supporter's card which ultimately determined access not only to land but to other critical 'national' initiatives such as food relief input schemes and employment, amongst others (*Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe*; Human Rights Watch' (2013) *Not Eligible: The politics of food in Zimbabwe*, Machingura's 2012, *The Messianic Feeding of the Masses* & Ongwae's 2004 'Using food as a political weapon'). Levi Mukarati (2010), reporting for *The Financial Gazette*, underscores how the party card also determined the extent of one's freedom of movement, especially during election campaign periods:

In the 2008 elections, some villagers only bought the ZANU-PF membership cards for use as passes when entering no-go areas that were established at the time (26 November).

The second is graffiti which determined, depending on which party's name was inscribed on one's private property, whether one was to be 'disciplined' by the youth militia or not. Mangeya (2014) drew parallels between these inscriptions with the Passover writing where having one's property inscribed 'MDC' was a precursor of beatings by the youth militia. To borrow from Pandey (2014) "discursive stances are linguistic choices which reflect and sustain critical stances. It is no wonder then that social reality is often represented in dichotomous terms, a juxtaposition of Us versus Them".

As is highlighted by Gundani (2001), cited in Boysen (2003), the history of the land question is fundamentally a history of alienation in Zimbabwe. It is characterised by the emergence of bipolarity discourses based on differences and interests directly tied to the land question. It was a period that significantly reconfigured national identities based on one's inclinations towards the land reform programme. The period was marked by the discursive alienation (socio-culturally, economically and politically) of the opposition supporter, who was labeled a sell out or a hater. This effectively reinvented the ZANU-PF supporter's card and graffiti as important tools for discrimination. Tarusarira (2016) notes how the linguistic dexterity deployed by mainly the state media served the interests of domination and manipulation.

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