

“Blair, Keep Your England, and Let Me Keep My Zimbabwe”: Examining the Relationship of Physical Space and Political Order in Zimbabwe’s Land Redistribution Programme (2000-2008)

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Abstract

While interest in land appropriation in Zimbabwe has produced a significant amount of literature in recent decades, much of this research has not been located within an explicatory schema that explores the relationship between physical space and political order in Zimbabwe’s land reform programme for purposes of political control and power retention. The attempt by Mugabe to appropriate different arguments to justify his veterans-led land redistribution programme has been interpreted differently in the existing scholarship on Zimbabwe’s land reform programme. Mugabe’s speech quoted in the title of this article opened for us a new lacuna to explore in the ongoing debate on Mugabe’s motives for land reform. In this respect, we need to examine the politics of space in Zimbabwe’s land reform programme, which saw the expropriation of white-owned commercial farms by veterans of Zimbabwe’s war of liberation, discussing the various strategies and subtle arguments appropriated by Mugabe to reconfigure the structures of power. While a common concern for the landless poor was no doubt Mugabe’s campaigning philosophy, we explore the possibility of arguing that land reform was driven by political imperatives masquerading as such concern.

Key words: Third *Chimurenga*, physical space, political order, land redistribution

Introduction

President Robert Mugabe's famous speech at the Earth Summit in South Africa in 2002, in which he targeted the then British prime minister, Tony Blair, opened up a new dimension in the land redistribution debate of Zimbabwe's 2000-2008 years of crisis. The speech revealed what can be argued in Mugabe's scheme of things when he conceived the idea of instituting a land reform. Mugabe's words against Tony Blair presuppose that there was an existing relationship between the physical space of the people resettled by Mugabe, especially veterans of Zimbabwe's war of liberation, and Mugabe's political order. While a common concern for the landless poor was no doubt part of the ideological foundations of Zimbabwe soon after attaining independence, we argue in this article that the redistribution of land and farm invasions (termed the "Third *Chimurenga*" (Uprising) in official and popular discourses) were concerned with transforming the lands acquired during the process into zones of Mugabe's political support base. This is so because the land occupations by veterans, whatever their origins, took on a symbolic character in political debate on the elections of 2000 (and subsequently in 2002, 2005 and 2008), with the backing of Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Party (ZANU - PF party) (Sachikonye & Zishiri, 1999: 23).

Approach to the Study

Our approach endeavours to be phenomenological, descriptive and analytical. Thus, we seek to understand the strategies employed in land redistribution, instead of assessing the moral status of land reform programmes. We examine how land was functional as the categorical focal point for political control, mobilisation of political support, and resistance. In talking of "resistance," we refer to Mugabe's use of the word to explain the context in which he views himself and veterans of the war of liberation as the embodiments of resistance against Blair and everything that represents imperialism in all its forms. We also examine the notions of the sacredness of land and patriotism appropriated and deployed in reconfiguring physical space and political order in Zimbabwe. Whereas many critics are quick to label Mugabe a "dictator" and highlight the use of violence as an electoral strategy, we call for a more nuanced approach. It is instructive to note that two of Mugabe's most strident critics have acknowledged his persuasive side. Hence, Sithole and Makumbe (1997: 132) write:

Moreover, the ruling ZANU (PF) has remained consistently to the left of Zimbabwe's political spectrum before and after independence. It has skilfully articulated populist policies on land, employment, indigenization of the economy and on any and everything, particularly on the eve of each election year. No other party has portrayed a more nationalist position than ZANU (PF). It above all has a shrewd and articulate spokesman in the person of its leader, President Robert Mugabe, through whom the party has remained ingrained in the minds of the masses of the people.

We also argue that true comprehension of Mugabe's sophisticated strategies and his scheme of operation can be enhanced by employing a certain range of comparison with instances in world history where the process of reconfiguring physical space and political order was intimately linked with the strong imperative of preserving the power and claims to moral legitimacy of those in power. So our reference to the era of client armies of the late Roman republic (in particular Sulla's veteran settlement policy) is warranted by the fact that soldiers or freedom fighters in both political landscapes either lost their property (having been conscripted or otherwise forced to abandon their homes), or never had any to begin with, as the great majority of the land was occupied by a small elite – the Roman upper class or as in Zimbabwe, the white farmers who owned the greater portion of arable land. The poorer strata and more particularly, those who had served in battle, were a deprived class, living at subsistence level, and could legitimately feel that they had a right to land. Reference to the period of client armies in ancient Roman history illuminates our analysis of the mechanics of Mugabe's land redistribution to veterans. The two situations are indeed different, but they are based upon related realities (see Bloch (1953) for the benefits of such an approach in actual comparative studies, which employ comparative history as a method).

To address the crisis described above, Mugabe in the case of Zimbabwe, and commanders of the client armies in the late Roman republic such as Marius, Sulla and Julius Caesar, resorted to the distribution of land, which meant, of course, coming into conflict with those who were already in possession of it. But this is not all. We argue that veterans represent a special group, since they are not only indigent, once hostilities have ceased, but are also trained in war and often have group solidarity; this means that they are a force to be reckoned with (Mlambo, 2015). Land redistribution in such cases is thus a crisis phenomenon which is readily manipulated for political reasons. In this case, redistribution of farmland is viewed not only as a means used by Robert Mugabe for creating new social and political zones, but also as a process of disturbing and dismantling the existing colonial order to conform with his political programme. Land redistribution, we argue, demonstrates Mugabe's anxiety over the relationship between his regime and the space in which he must exercise control. As such, it is argued that the redistribution of land physically inscribed political meaning and defined spheres of Mugabe's political control.

The Roman example helps to demonstrate how the relationship between physical space and political order was manipulated for the benefit of Roman generals during the period of client armies. The character of such settlement schemes shows us some instances in which veterans' land allotments reveal the relationship between politics and space. Our approach pays attention to cross-culturally, cross-historically shared logic and rationales in veterans' settlement schemes. If we compare Roman and Zimbabwean veteran settlements, we see a pattern of self-preservation by military generals. So, the study alludes to patterns of processes and mechanisms which are inherent in all veteran settlements. Farm invasions by veterans have led to more invasions of other properties such as ranches and conservancies, and have been a challenge to the rule of law which has resulted in the collapse of large-scale capitalist farming and the withdrawal of aid and foreign investment (Worby, 2001: 475).

Therefore, the benefits of Mugabe's veterans-led land invasions to the economy have been seriously questioned. Similarly, the Sullan colonies did little, if anything, to revive the Italian countryside (Gabba, 1976: 46). In Praeneste, Latium, Sulla's landless veterans re-sold the plots assigned to them to private citizens (Cic. *Agr* 2.78; id. *Agr* 3.14; Cic. *Cat* 1.8). Sallust describes Sullan veterans who joined Catiline in the 60s BC as spendthrift upstarts who had squandered their ill-gotten properties and hoped for new civil wars and confiscations, to escape their debts (Thein, 2010: 84; Sall. *Cat* 16.4; 28. 4). It has also been argued that the prosperity of Italian agriculture experienced in Varro's time dates back hundreds of years and had nothing to do with the Sullan resettlement policy (Ibid). The logic, it can be argued, of Sulla's land allotments was, therefore, to buttress his dictatorship. Such logic will be argued to have been behind Mugabe's strategy. The insights provided by Sulla's veteran settlement scheme helps us to perceive and to rethink Mugabe's veteran settlement strategy in contemporary Zimbabwe. This approach is fully discussed in the doctoral dissertation of one of the authors of this article (Mlambo, 2013) where the said author's approach borrows from the book, *Dictators and Dictatorships: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes and their Leaders* by Ezrow & Frantz (2011). The book offers a survey and synthesis of current approaches to dictatorships and their power bases, and it does offer a clear outline of key questions relating to typologies of dictatorships and redistributionary politics. We are not going to delve into such matters in this article, save to highlight issues that inform our attempt to explain Mugabe's strategy by referring to the Sullan example. The Sullan model is well documented – thus the whole historical process of veteran settlements, as well as the implications for society, are known, and it is also quite informative how physical space and political order was reconfigured when one studies Sulla's veteran settlement scheme. The reason for having chosen this example from the late Roman republic is that the case provides the potential for understanding Mugabe's strategy and also predicting the societal implications of Zimbabwe's veterans land seizures (2000-2008), which violate property rights, and undermine democracy and the rule of law.

We argue that the redistribution of land inscribed limits or boundaries which perceived opponents of the regime were reminded not to violate (in this case the former colonial master, Britain and her allies). In Mugabe's scheme of things, Britain and her allies are understood to be assaulting the stability of the nation, the sovereign property of Zimbabweans, and more importantly, the political space in which Mugabe must exercise control. Land redistribution is, therefore, Mugabe's means to assault the material power and private property of his political foes. Sulla rewarded his soldiers with land and appropriated his opponents' land as punishment for insubordination (Salmon, 1969: 129).

Victor Okafor's (2006) study, *Towards an Understand of Africology* contributes to the perspective adopted in this article. Okafor examines the impact of World War II veterans (and Vietnam veterans). He provides valuable perspectives in the quest to understand Mugabe's approach to land in Zimbabwe. His argument clarifies the emergence of Africology and the relationship between education and society.

Further, our essay recognizes that the religious and political dimensions of Mugabe's land redistribution scheme and sacralization of land are characteristic of African nationalism more generally, a factor that has contributed to Mugabe's popularity in Africa, and the global South.

Politics and Space

To achieve the research goals, it is worthwhile to refer to scholars of politics and space in order for us to illuminate our conceptualisation of the motives, ideas and perspectives behind Mugabe's veteran settlement scheme. According to Willis (2011: 7), quoting Elden (2005: 151), space is political and there is politics of space because politics is spatial. Land redistribution in Zimbabwe is, therefore, seen as a political tool used to transform physical space into Mugabe's political strongholds. We view Mugabe's act of distributing land to veterans of the war of liberation and even to rural people to have been a process that turned every part of those settlements into the "force-field of his political order" (to use Carl Schmitt's terminology; see Schmitt, (2003) on the theory of spatial organisation). Willis (2011: 7) quoting Schmitt states that; "*Nomos* [is that] by which a tribe or a people becomes historically situated and turns a part of the earth's surface into the force-field of a particular order." Willis further argues that:

Nomos transforms physical space into the force field of political and social and legal order. This transformation also situates a people in history, so that, for Schmitt...to become terrestrially settled is also to become historically situated (Willis, 2011:7), see also footnote 29 p.133).

In view of the above quotation, we found it worthwhile to reflect on Mugabe's famous remark in his Earth Summit Speech on 2 September 2002, in South Africa, which also forms part of our title, where he said: "So, Blair, keep your England, and let me keep my Zimbabwe" (www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-136292, accessed on 8th July 2013, 17:41hrs). The speech captures the idea that Mugabe is conscious of the importance of the role he played in bringing political independence to Zimbabwe, through a protracted war which reconfigured the structures of power and which he uses in his political rhetoric to reconfigure physical space by ejecting the whites from their farms and replacing them with Black people.

To put Mugabe's fierce tirade against Tony Blair into perspective, we also refer to Walter Benjamin, another theorist of politics and space. He contends that every age always strives with renewed vigor to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it (Benjamin, 2003:391). For Benjamin, history is the proper site of political action (ibid). For him, it is through engagement with the past, not the future, that political change can be effected (ibid). In this light, the British colonialists are seen to have violated the *nomos* (which for Schmitt means a wall or boundary), when they colonized Zimbabwe.

This view, therefore, can usefully be applied to derive meaning from Mugabe's speech in general, and from his political belief and position with regards to Britain and other forces seen as assaulting his position at the helm of power, as the people's choice, who is being persecuted by the British for giving his people land (Mlambo, 2013). Mugabe appeals to the perception that since the physical space called Zimbabwe belongs to Zimbabweans, the British do not have the moral obligation to seek to influence what happens in Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2013: 233). Zimbabweans, through ZANU (PF) and Mugabe's leadership, must be left alone to chart the destiny of the country without having to suffer any external interference from the British (Mlambo, 2013: 234).

Mugabe also demands loyalty and appreciation from beneficiaries of his land distribution programme. The process also naturally expresses a mutually reciprocal asymmetrical relationship between the *imperator* (general) and the beneficiaries of land distribution. After getting allotments, veterans and peasants see their settlements as a creation of their *imperator* and, therefore, they view the *imperator's* political programme as the force which stabilizes and protects their wellbeing. Conversely, in the eyes of the *imperator*, the resettlement zone is viewed as the space which stabilises the regime and protects it from regime change forces.

Britain is told to back off and to stop interfering in the internal processes of a sovereign nation, Zimbabwe, whose obligation is to give its people land. These settlements are more than ordinary agricultural communities, although they are configured as "A1 or A2" resettlement areas. They are, in the eyes of the politician, a force-field of political order. Mugabe's argument of correcting the colonial injustices in land ownership between Blacks and the white elites seems to us to serve purposes of political control, when one critically examines the social realities on the ground, which reveal some serious paradoxes. In Zimbabwe, those who have been given land have no land rights. There is the potential to maintain loyalty, as the land could be taken away from the rural population on a whim. If they are tenants forever, they will always behave in a politically acceptable fashion, (Mlambo 2013:161). There is a sense in which Mugabe would rather have everyone who has any land eating out of his hands.

This was almost a similar scenario in the Roman period in question. Returning veterans needed some form of pension or reward after their period of active service. Their generals could try to initiate bills for some veteran resettlement schemes. These schemes have been called the land marks of the Roman revolution (Blois, 1987: 19). De Blois aptly captures this development, thus:

Conflicts arose time and again, because members of the ruling oligarchy were afraid that the returning general would consolidate his power by creating a large "para-military" retinue of veterans, planted in united groups in new settlements or within existing communities (ibid).

The provision of land to veterans and the extent to which the land “entitlement systems” for veterans, enacted through the politics of land distribution and conceived as their rewards, turned out to be the focal point for the appropriation of political power and control for political leaders. This was how things worked out in the late Roman republic. The demobilization of veterans worked as a politically critical turning point in the sense that the Roman government’s political and social control over soldiers was tenuous in the wake of conflict. As a result, the state feared the possibility that the armies could use their military experience towards anti-social ends such as the engagement in violent agrarian processes which posed a challenge to the constitution of the *res publica*. The case of the Marian, Sullan, Pompeian, Caesarean and Octavian, or, arguably, of Scipionic veterans earlier demonstrates that the settlers (veterans) clearly were given land as veterans, and they were a problem as veterans. This is the picture that occurs in one’s mind when thinking about Mugabe’s veterans. To illustrate this view, we examine Sulla’s veteran settlement scheme to see how it can work as a model to rethink Mugabe’s veteran settlement scheme.

Sulla’s Veteran Settlement Policy

Sulla’s veterans played an active role in the politics of the Roman Republic, thus the veteran settlement scheme was made to serve a clear political purpose. Veterans’ privileged access to the means of violence and coercion placed them in a position to challenge the Roman senate, which was a stumbling block to their attaining of land allotments. This made them capable of possessing strategic value for mobilisation by generals in their quest for political power. Thein (2010: 79) states that Sallust, in his speech of Philippus implies that Sulla’s colonies (communities in Italy whose lands were allocated to his veterans) constituted a reserve of military manpower which could be mobilized to support the regime. In this regard, it could be argued that veteran colonies served to protect and strengthen Sulla’s regime. According to Plutarch, the Sullan dictatorship, which was supported by a huge force of veterans included the “power of life and death, confiscation and colonization, founding or demolishing cities, and taking away or bestowing kingdoms at his pleasure.” (see Plut. *Sull* 33.2, App. *BC* 1.105-106). Sulla’s veterans were also involved in his constitutional reforms and abdication, and identified as one of the three pillars of Sulla’s power as dictator (Thein, 2010: 82). The two passages below further demonstrate this point.

When charges against individuals failed Sulla took vengeance on whole communities. He punished some of them by demolishing their citadels, or destroying their walls, or by imposing fines and crushing them by heavy contributions. Among most of them he placed colonies of his troops in order to hold Italy under garrisons, sequestrating their lands and houses and dividing them among his veterans, whom he thus made true to him even after his death. As they could not be secure in their own holdings unless all Sulla’s system was on a firm foundation, they were his stoutest champions even after he died (App. *BC* 1.96).

In order to provide the same kind of safeguard throughout Italy he distributed to the 23 legions that had served under him a great deal of land in the various communities, as I have already related, some of which was public property and some taken from the communities by way of fine (App. *BC* 1.100).

Sulla's veterans left an enduring mark on the Roman political landscape. Apart from those of his veterans who joined Catiline along with their fellow colonists from Faesulae, many did not and remained at Arretium with Caesar's veterans into the Augustan period (see Thein (2010: 85), who also cites Keppie (1983: 4f) Sall. *Cat* 3.14, Cic. *Mur* 49 and Plin. *NH* 3.52). Appian is of the view that Sulla and even Caesar founded colonies not to reward their veterans but to cement their tyranny, and their veterans marched into their allocated farms or colonies in military units under their standards (*sub vexillo*) (App. *BC*. 2. 141). A passage from Appian below reveals this aspect of veteran power and potency. It goes thus:

And there were 120 000 men throughout Italy who had recently served under him in war and had received large gifts of money and land from him, and there were the 10 000 Corneliis ready in the city, besides other people of his party devoted to him and still formidable to his opponents, all of whom rested upon Sulla's safety their hopes of impunity for what they had done in co-operation with him (App. *BC* 1.104).

The above quotations help us to put into perspective and to rethink the role played by veterans in Zimbabwe during the land occupations. Sulla's activities with his veterans are similar to the acts of the then leader of Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), Chenjerai Hunzvi. The Hunzvi-led veterans had become increasingly powerful and dangerous. Their actions can be construed as having effectively transformed physical space into politically meaningful zones to harness a state of dictatorship. During periods leading to elections, any sector of the community perceived to be opposed to the ruling party was in danger of being attacked by these veterans (Feltoe 2004: 193-224). A similar strategy was used by Sulla. His (Sulla's) colony established at Corsica in 82 BC is said to have been established to offset the Colonia Mariana (Marius' colony meant for his veterans) (Salmon, 1969: 129).

The veterans who occupied white owned farms in different parts of Zimbabwe were a well organised and politically conscious bloc. In most parts of the country war veterans who occupied farms believe to have had exercised some political power during the third *Chimurenga* episode. During the *jambanja* (commotion) episode, most occupied farms that were no go areas.

They had become almost like war zones. War veterans erected sign posts along the roads that link the farms which were inscribed: “War Veterans Ahead, Reduce Speed.” This made people visiting or living in and around these areas feel besieged. Cars were subjected to thorough searches and people had to produce their identification particulars before they were allowed to proceed. War veterans had become the police manning these road blocks.

On the 8th of February 2011, the authors visited a particular farm intending to conduct interviews. Upon arrival one veteran who saw us first (he was busy thatching a fowl run) shouted at us thus: “*Chii charira!?*”(What is the source of that sound!?) (Interview with Mr X (freedom fighter, 8th February 2011). We got very frightened. Afterwards, he told me that the riddle was their signal during the *Jambanja* era which they used to distinguish between a stranger and one of their fellow group members. People were supposed to respond by giving the code for that particular day or time because it was subject to change. We asked him why they developed the coded language, and he said:

It was a time of uncertainty. It was a time of a political upheaval. We had started a war and we were not sure about the direction of the politics of the country. Remember we were headed for the 2002 presidential elections. We needed our patron to win and the process of mobilisation of most areas had started in anticipation of the election. We did not want anyone with contrary views about what we were doing to influence these areas (ibid).

The use of veterans as a force to transform physical space into zones of Mugabe’s power base was one method among several other strategies deployed. Below we examine Mugabe’s appropriation of arguments of the sacrality of the land and patriotism in the quest to transform physical space into zones of political influence.

The Ground Which We Stand is Holy: Imbuing the Land with Sacrality

In order to appreciate the ability of generals to mobilize support on the basis of land distribution, it is critical to understand the extent to which appealing rhetoric is deployed in order to whip up emotions around the land issue. In this regard, it is instructive to observe that secular interpretations of land are a recent invention; across cultures and in different historical epochs, land has always elicited deep seated religious interpretations. For example, ancient Greek religion celebrated nature. According to Larson (2010:58), “Mountain peaks, groves, springs, caves, and other landscape features were often regarded as inherently sacred, and their symbolic fascination was bound up with their aesthetic appeal.” Similarly, Mikalson (2010:143) indicates that the land and its agricultural products were regarded as sacred objects which the young men were “obliged to defend and to protect.” The land, therefore, was regarded as sacred and proper rules of conduct were to be upheld in relation to its utilization.

To mobilize the support of the veterans Mugabe has consistently argued that the fast-track land reform programme is not a new initiative, it only brings the struggle for land to its logical conclusion. It represents the culmination of the Black people's struggle for dignity and recovery of stolen ancestral lands. Crucially, blood was spilled for the land to be repossessed. In such a scheme, erstwhile oppressors such as Britain have no role in trying to lecture Black people on democracy and human rights. In his own words, Mugabe (2001: 109) says:

Our perspective on the land reform programme derives from our struggle for sovereign independence, and the compelling fact that the last and decisive seven years of that struggle took on an armed form that demanded of us the precious and ultimate price of our blood. We died and suffered for our land. We died and suffered for sovereignty over natural resources of which land, *ivhu[/]umhlabati*, is the most important.

For Mugabe, the shedding of blood in order to get the land means that the land is a non-negotiable resource. One of the television advertisements at the height of the Third Chimurenga captured this in a pithy declaration; "*Nhaka haigobwi*" (inheritance is not sold/shared/given away). Land represents God's very own gift to the indigenous people of Zimbabwe and no "Tony Blair" or any other force should seek to rob them of this precious gift. Britain, the USA, the European Union, the opposition and even "sell outs" from within the "revolutionary party" should not dream of untying the sacred umbilical cord that ties the Black people to the land. As Jeater (2012) has observed, Mugabe and his party have succeeded in portraying greater closeness to the ancestors, while the opposition has tended to focus on abstract notions of citizenship, democracy and human rights. These are Western glamour concepts that are not readily translatable into votes, or readily able to mobilize the rural population and veterans to rally in support of a specific cause.

In the Zimbabwean context, Mugabe has been adept at invoking the sacredness of the land to justify his land reform programme (Chitando, 2005: 224). In his scheme, Europeans have divested the land of its sacred dimension due to their greed and avarice. They reduced the holy land to mere soil (Manley 1995: 27) and failed to appreciate the indigenous spirituality which underpins it. Ignoring the spirituality of the land, they have abused it, Mugabe charges. Mugabe's rhetoric serves to contrast two types of human beings: the secular and selfish white settler on the one hand and the religious, communitarian and authentic "child of the soil" on the other. This trope alienates the white farmer and privileges the Black farm invader as indigenous. While Makamani (2010) dismisses Mugabe's use of rhetoric, we are convinced that a more patient analysis of Mugabe's emotive declarations around Zimbabwe's land issue require attention.

In his struggle for physical space, Mugabe deploys the concept of sacred space with some creativity. Black people do not find themselves in Zimbabwe/Africa by dint of a historical accident, he avers. It is part of God's redemptive plan for humanity that Blacks are in Zimbabwe. When God created the world, God placed the various racial groups in their respective spaces. Europeans were placed in Europe and they had a sacred duty to remain in Europe. Africans too had the sacred duty of remaining in Africa. Blair's business is to keep "his Britain," while Mugabe's business is to keep "his Zimbabwe."

By identifying white farmers as "foreigners" who were violating the sacred space of the indigenes, Mugabe was representing them as a national security threat. Mugabe's preoccupation with security might be traced back to the intrigues of the 1970s war of liberation and has remained part of his repertoire (Alao 2012: x). By mobilizing veterans to remove white farmers from the physical space that they occupied, Mugabe was removing what he perceived to be a security threat. He sought to address a possible weak link by transforming white commercial farms into sacred and safe spaces occupied by his supporters. Like the Roman generals before him, Mugabe consolidated his grip on power by ensuring that his veterans and their associates accessed land. Simultaneously, he neutralized his opponents by depriving them of the same resource. In doing this, his regime made extensive use of propaganda to alter perceptions. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009: 945) have argued that the government of Zimbabwe resorted to "Afro-radicalism" and a "nativist interpretation of the nation" to face mounting opposition.

For God and Country: Patriotism and Participation in Land Reform

Veterans who participated in the fast-track land reform programme had to be convinced that they were undertaking a sacred and patriotic task. Reclaiming the lost ancestral lands had been touted as one of the leading causes of the armed liberation struggle in the first instance. The memory of dispossession, ill-treatment and marginalization at the hands of the settler minority had been kept alive in myths and songs. In particular, the figure of Nehanda, patron saint of the liberation struggle, was evoked to mobilize cadres to participate in both the armed liberation struggle and the fast-track land reform programme of the 2000s. Nehanda is believed to have prophetically proclaimed in the 1890s that although she was dying, "her bones would rise" (Shoko 2006: 2). By appealing to Nehanda, Mugabe was projecting the land redistribution exercise as a sacred duty to honor a remarkable ancestor. Although long dead, Nehanda was alive.

One central feature of the veteran's claim to physical space was the reburial of fallen comrades. In different parts of the country, the land reform programme was characterized by veterans reburying the bodies of comrades who fell during the liberation struggle. These were symbolic acts that sought to dramatize the recovery of memory by the indigenes and the decisive defeat of invading forces.

We argue that both the living and fallen veterans were deployed to become combatants in the new armed struggle to expel whites (and their surrogates) and to establish a new spiritual order. The bodies of the deceased veterans were particularly potent. According to Shoko (2006: 11-12):

By selling the verdict and power of the fallen heroes, the government plays or manoeuvres the body politic. When the dead bodies are exhumed, paraded and reburied, they become 'magic' and influence perceptions. Reburials reorganise the world of meaning centred on issues of justice, suffering, blame, and compensation. These issues characterize the land question. As ritual practice, reburials are effective tools for shaping the politics of restitution, nation building and moral accountability. On a broader perspective, manoeuvring of dead bodies in both the physical and symbolic senses help[s] re-write national history.

As Ruzivo (2013: 6) has demonstrated, civil religion in Zimbabwe blends aspects of African traditional religion and Christianity. Veterans of the liberation were encouraged to return to combat mode, figuratively and practically, through the deployment of ideology and the promise of concrete rewards. At the level of ideology, they were mobilized to feel that they were fulfilling a moral duty to God, the ancestors and Zimbabwe. At the practical level, they were offered the newly acquired farms as reward. These were conflated to communicate the message that God and the ancestors had deemed it fit to return the stolen land back to its rightful heirs. As Makanda (2014: 81) argues, there was a strong belief that the ancestors protected and guided the combatants during the liberation struggle.

In appreciating the logic (no matter how controversial), it is critical to recognize the role played by patriotism in motivating the veterans to "return to war." As was the case with the Roman veterans, the fact of having acquired military skills was a powerful resource, at once alluring and threatening to those wielding political power. Mugabe seized on the veterans' patriotic fervor and maintained that participating in the land reclamation movement was the highest expression of patriotism. Although Mangena (2010) has drawn attention to the contradictions in the understanding of patriotism in Zimbabwe during the period under review, it remains true that appeals to patriotism have immense power. Veterans were persuaded that by participating in the land reclamation movement, they were defending Zimbabwe against hostile forces in Europe and North America. "Zimbabwe Will Never Be a Colony Again" became the mantra.

“Ties That Bind”: Transactions Between the General and Veterans

Our narrative has thus far concentrated on the strategies deployed by the patron, Mugabe, to mobilise veterans in his quest to reconfigure physical space and political order in Zimbabwe. Such a trend suggests a one-way track for understanding dynamics in the country. Richard Werbner (1977) interrogated such an approach and called for a more nuanced analysis of the model, where big men and brokers were at the centre, and scholars focused on their chains and networks. In this paradigm, the strategies of the big men and brokers determined what would happen, and all other players were at their mercy.

An analysis of the interface between generals and veterans suggests the need to acknowledge the leverage that veterans enjoy in relation to their patron. During the 1970s armed liberation struggle, the dictum, “the party leads the gun” was popularised in an endeavour to keep the armed young people in check. Most of the older, well-educated party leaders were not trained soldiers and constantly feared that the less educated younger men and women who fought at the battle front would defy them. However, the tension between the civilian party leadership and the armed wing of the party has always been simmering. In order to understand how it is managed, it is important to appreciate the transactions between the two sectors.

It is instructive to observe that Mugabe and the nationalists had been willing, for political expediency, to suspend radical views regarding land redistribution during the early years of independence. In fact, they sought to project a positive international image by proclaiming reconciliation and calling upon the various aggrieved parties to let bygones be bygones. However, when the political and economic situation changed, the land issue was brought back forcefully. Sadomba (2011: 62) puts it across lucidly that:

The ingenious Mr Mugabe kept the land card close to his chest. Eventually, faced with economic downturn, mutinous War Veterans, a surging land movement, growing opposition and international pressure, he abandoned his alliance with white capital to forge a ‘new’ alliance with the land movement now led by the War Veterans. He needed the land to reward the loyal members of his regime, at which point the commercial farmers were shown the door. But it took time for ex-guerrillas, peasants and farm workers to discover that this was not the beginning of their emancipation. The ancestral spirits with which they had bonded in the bush would not come down to their rescue without a struggle. A Third Chimurenga was now required, almost two decades after independence, to fight the settlers, international capital and indigenous bourgeoisie being rapidly built up by the ruling elite.

Sadomba's analysis highlights the tension between the general and his veterans. Veterans do not get the land without a struggle. They do not come empty handed to the quest to transform physical space and political order in Zimbabwe. Their role as trained soldiers, organisational skills, familiarity with political leaders, appeal to the spirits and immersion in the community are valuable resources that their generals and patrons recognise and dread. We shall briefly comment on each one of these resources as we highlight the extent to which war veterans in Zimbabwe became a formidable force that even their revered patron had to transact with using high levels of tact and vigilance. Wilfred Mhanda (2011), himself a senior combatant during the liberation struggle, traces the deployment of war veterans in independent Zimbabwe's politics and notes that as the ruling party became desperate in the late 1990s, it sought the support of war veterans.

However, the war veterans had many grievances against the government as they felt used and abandoned. In August 1997, war veterans drowned Mugabe's speech at the National Heroes Acre and demanded compensation. With his back against the wall, Mugabe conceded and the economy went into a free fall as the Zimbabwe dollar lost value. Mugabe was wary of the veteran's military abilities and sought to placate them.

It is instructive to note that the army, police and intelligence operatives did not dare arrest veterans during their demonstrations. These military skills were put to use during the farm invasions after 2000, with the veterans providing the lead as youth and militia were involved in the land reclamation movement. Their training became a powerful resource at both the practical and ideological levels. Practically, it enabled them to co-ordinate the movement of diverse groups that were at the heart of the farm invasions. Ideologically, it gave them an "untouchable" status, as they had the aura of victors, having fought the Rhodesian forces. Veterans of the liberation struggle (and some very young people who assumed the veteran identity) could collaborate with Mugabe in reconfiguring physical space and political order in Zimbabwe on the basis of their military experience.

However, there is often a danger of exaggerating the chasm between the veterans and their general. They are comrades, having suffered together during the struggle. In addition, they share the same anti-colonial resistance and regard "Tony Blair" as the ultimate enemy. This gives them leverage in their transactions with their general as they are regarded as having the same ideological stance as the general. In their transactions with the general, they are not regarded as "puppets of the British" or "sell outs" as they are understood to be principled revolutionaries. Whatever differences they may have with their general are minimized on the basis that they share the same commitment towards liberating the land and handing it back to its "legitimate owners", who include them and the rural population.

It is also crucial to acknowledge the shared religio-spiritual outlook between the general and his veterans. The conviction that the land reclamation movement is essentially involved in the quest for justice characterizes the stance shared by the general and his veterans.

Like Mugabe, the veterans contended that the ancestral spirits were behind the struggle for land. They deployed this belief in mobilizing support for the land invasions. Here, we notice a convergence between the religious orientations of the general and his veterans. The land on which the veterans and the rural population would be resettled would be reclaimed from white settlers and be re-inscribed within indigenous spirituality. The physical space would be transformed and a new political order would be instituted. Mugabe understood that the veterans had the same claim to the spiritual realm as he had. Consequently, he took the veterans seriously, as they appealed to the same Nehanda tradition as he did. The veterans' "spiritual assets" have to be taken into account when appreciating what they brought to the transactions with their principal. He could not dismiss them easily since they claimed to have access to spiritual power. As Ellis and ter Haar (2004: 68) write in relation to African politicians, "All over the continent, in private and in public, politicians cultivate religious specialists whom they, as well as the general public, believe to have the power to mediate between the visible and invisible worlds."

Above all, veterans were deeply immersed within the community, especially in the rural areas. Their alliance with people in the areas (although there had been tension during the liberation struggle) was a massive bargaining point in their favour. Mugabe desperately needed to transform the commercial farms into zones of his support base. This became an urgent undertaking as the urban areas had been turned into opposition strongholds. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), formed in 1999, and had very strong labour roots and appealed to many people in the urban areas. It was crucial for Mugabe to mobilize the war veterans to ensure that the opposition's popularity would not spill over into the rural areas. Consequently, it is vital to appreciate the "give and take" relationship between the veterans and their general.

Narratives that concentrate on the alliance between the general and his veterans, however, need to acknowledge the contradictions within the alliance. The veterans had serious grievances with their general and they literally dragged him back into the struggle for land. They challenged his "softly softly" approach to land redistribution in the early years of independence and fast-tracked his radicalization of land reform. To his credit, Mugabe seized the opportunity and repositioned himself as the representative of the dispossessed indigenous people. The fast-track land reform programme disenfranchised farm workers, most of whom came from neighbouring countries such as Malawi and Mozambique (Mpondi 2012: 51). However, Mugabe regarded them as agents of the regime-change agenda, and was convinced that they were collateral damage in a bigger battle against the "wicked forces of imperialism." Their removal, alongside the white farmers, was imagined as the consolidation of new force-fields where Mugabe, with war veterans as the foot soldiers, and thus, Zimbabwe was the undisputed sovereign nation of an equally new political order.

Conclusion

In this article, we contend that physical space is not neutral: it is open to contestation at various levels. Mugabe marshalled and deployed conceptual, theological and practical occupation strategies to pacify his opponents. In so doing, he was also simultaneously transforming physical space (commercial farms previously occupied by white farmers and their loyal farm workers) into a strategic political resource. On the one hand, he was emptying the space of a perceived threat, while on the other hand he was instituting a network of patronage. The war veterans and rural people who would take over the land would be indebted to him and would defend him at all costs. However, they were not entirely at his mercy. In this article we demonstrated that the veterans were a particularly potent force in Zimbabwean politics. They came to the land occupation movement with significant strengths and were able to force concessions from their patron and the ruling elite. Even as he called upon Tony Blair to “keep his Britain” while he (Mugabe) would “keep [his] Zimbabwe,” Mugabe was looking over his shoulders to ensure that his veterans would forge a “winning partnership” with him in defending the sacred space of Zimbabwe in the face of domestic and foreign opposition.

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