



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Reclaiming Zimbabwe's unfinished business

Citation for published version:

Fontein, J 2005, 'Reclaiming Zimbabwe's unfinished business' *Africa*, vol 75, no. 4, pp. 599-605. DOI: 10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599](https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599)
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Africa

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Fontein, J. (2005). Reclaiming Zimbabwe's unfinished business. *Africa*, 75(4), 599-605 doi: 10.3366/afr.2005.75.4.599

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



RECLAIMING ZIMBABWE'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Joost Fontein

AMANDA HAMMAR, BRIAN RAFTOPOULOS and STIG JENSEN (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: rethinking land, state and nation in the context of crisis*. Harare: Weaver Press (pb £20.95 – 1 77922 011 1). 2003, 316 pp.

HORACE CAMPBELL, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: the exhaustion of the patriarchal model of liberation*. New York: Africa World Press (pb £21.99 – 1 59221 092 9). 2003, 352 pp.

Emerging from a research seminar and conference held in Copenhagen in September 2001, the edited collection by Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen, *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business*, represents the first wave of academic reflection and thought on the myriad of issues thrown up by the dramatic turn of events in Zimbabwe since February 2000. For an edited collection, there is remarkable consistency across the different contributions, which suggests that the time between the conference and publication was constructively used to fashion not a selection of rushed knee-jerk responses, but rather carefully reasoned and sophisticated commentary.

As Hammar and Raftopoulos stress in their formidable first chapter, Zimbabwe's multi-layered crisis (and they insist that 'by any measure Zimbabwe is *in crisis*', p. 3) is 'specific in its location, timing, form and effects, while necessarily complex and dynamic' (p. 3). They chronicle its background, and its expansion in the late 1990s, tracing the 'multiple origins and emerging trajectories', as well as exposing the persistent, but shifting 'polarities' (pp. 16–17) through which the crisis is maintained, reinforced and sustained. Although shifting and multiplying, these polarities are based upon 'core discursive divides' which posit 'a historicised and racialised assertion of land restitution and justice' against 'ahistorical, technocratic insistence on liberal notions of private property, "development", and "good governance" '; or 'a new form of "indigenous" authoritarian nationalism' against 'a non-ethnicised, "civic" nationalism'; or 'a radical pan-africanist, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist critique of "the west" ' against 'a "universalist" embrace of certain aspects of neo-liberalism and globalisation' (p. 17). These dichotomies are the very sustenance of both the ruling party's hegemonic control, and of the 'counter-hegemonic moves of various opposition

JOOST FONTEIN is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Edinburgh.

actors', and we are told early on that part of the point of this volume is to undermine the 'misplaced concreteness' of these commonsense notions (p. 17).

A large measure of the success and maturity of this book is in its ability to mount, on the whole, a consistent, unflinching challenge to these polarities. It does this by focusing on the way that issues of land ownership and resource use, nationhood and citizenship, and the modes of operation of the state interact, converge, and are being reinvented, and restructured, as 'new configurations of alliance and animosity' emerge that 'simultaneously disrupt old essentialisms and construct new ones' (p. 41). After Hammar and Raftopoulos have set the scene, Worby powerfully, and unapologetically, examines the 'often unspoken but always implicit question' whether 'Zimbabwe's slide to catastrophe' represents the 'end of modernity'? (p. 55). The answer is a resounding 'no', because as Worby demonstrates, the idea of the 'modern state' has always, at least since the Second World War, involved a tension between 'self-determination' or 'sovereignty', and 'development'. The current obsession with issues of 'sovereignty' represents not a 'retreat' from modernity, but rather a redefinition of the state, and an indication that 'the see-saw of political modernity has tipped to one side – the side of sovereignty' (p. 68).

In Chapter 4 Hammar explores changing conceptions and practices of 'normal' government and critically examines the emergence of what one newspaper called 'the tragedy of government by war veterans' (p. 120) in Rural District Councils. She places recent events in the broader context of ongoing 'persistent yet paradoxical struggle between the making and unmaking of local government' (p. 140), and reminds us that although war veterans' 'revived political authority' derives from the 'revalorisation of political heroism linked to the national liberation struggle' (p. 147), ultimately their status, and influence, remain limited by the inevitably ambivalent contingencies and constraints of power. As Hammar puts it, they inevitably face 'the challenge of combining sovereignty and biopolitics' (p. 147).

Although this volume clearly seeks to avoid reifying a narrow view of Zimbabwe's crisis as merely one of land, it also avoids simply falling into an opposing view which focuses solely on the crisis of governance. Hence several chapters focus on land occupations. Alexander (Chapter 3) contrasts state responses to the land occupations that have occurred since 2000 with those that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Marongwe (Chapter 5) looks specifically at the different roles played by 'peasant' communities in the land occupations of 1998–9, and post February 2000, employing material generated through unique research carried out on occupied farms during the second period. Both are uneasy about Sam Moyo's position which sees recent land invasions as part of the longer continuum of an ongoing and clearly identifiable 'land occupation movement' (p. 19). Both stress differences between earlier land occupations and those of 2000 onwards, whilst acknowledging that one constant has been, in Alexander's words, 'the existence of popular demands for land from a wide set of social groups, driven not only by

historical injustice but also increasingly by the pressures of a faltering economy' (p. 114). For Alexander, the ideology behind the occupations of 2000 reflected a re-imagined nationalism that was 'reconstituted as authoritarian anti-colonialism, not modernising developmentalism' (p. 114). This ideological change was mirrored on the ground by the 'strange spectacle [of] a government effectively unravelling its own state with great vigour' (p. 114). Stating that contests over land occur across tenure regimes, and not just on commercial farms, Marongwe argues that the occupations of 1998–9 were 'community-led' (p. 163), while those of 2000 which were instigated by war veterans as part of ZANU (PF)'s 'official campaign strategy' (p. 165). Nevertheless, he states, 'this does not negate the sense of empowerment that some occupiers experienced during the process' (p. 187), although he also gives a well-judged warning (especially given the much more recent, and quite public disillusionment of some war veterans)¹ that this sense of individual and community empowerment later reversed in reaction to the lack of transparency of the controversial land committees, and 'the direct involvement of the militarised arms of government' (p. 187).

A further contribution to issues of land is made in a chapter by Rukuni and Jensen, who, taking a long view, insist that 'the need for modernising and democratising the agricultural sector is clear' (p. 260). Importantly, they stress that reform of the land tenure system is vital to the political project of land reform, and 'a necessary step toward alleviating poverty and avoiding hunger' (p. 260).

The theme of citizenship links chapters six and seven by Rutherford and Raftopoulos respectively. Rutherford reminds us forcefully of the very serious plight of farmworkers, and highlights how a 'narrow understanding of the "farm" in "farmworkers"' has been constitutive of their political and social identification in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe' (p. 192). It is through this discourse of 'belonging to the farm(er)', Rutherford tells us, that the 'political agency of farm workers has been strongly circumscribed' (p. 192). In the current crisis, farm workers have clearly lost a great deal and gained very little. The shifting politics of citizenship means that 'ZANU (PF) activists tell farm workers that they do not qualify for land... They emphasise farmworkers' foreign-ness, their Malawian roots, using their lack of legal belonging, and their murky citizenship status, as a form of coercion at the voting booth' (p. 197). Raftopoulos picks up on this theme of citizenship through his analysis of the gradual emergence of the project of 'authoritarian nationalism'. In particular, he focuses on the 'devastating rupture' (p. 218) that has 'developed in Zimbabwean political discourse, between redistribution and rights issues', highlighting, like Alexander, that the currently central and exclusive concern with land is a severe narrowing of the much broader social, political and developmental agendas of Zimbabwean nationalism during the struggle and at independence. This 'rupture', and the

¹ See 'War Veterans ditch Zanu PF' in *The Standard*, 20 March 2005.

dramatically narrow focus on land, have been mirrored in political discourses centred on citizenship. While civic opposition 'has espoused its agenda largely through the language of citizenship rights' (p. 235), the ruling party responded with sometimes devastating effect 'through an essentialised racial discourse, which included ... a series of other exclusions such as farm workers, urban workers "without totems", women, and members of the political opposition' (p. 217).

Ben Cousins' chapter, the last in the book, places events in Zimbabwe in a regional perspective. The focus on questions of land and agrarian reform, democracy and development across the region, but particularly in Namibia and South Africa is significant, especially given the shared saliency of these issues in those countries. He ends by telling us that inequity of land distribution and insecure property rights are a 'festering wound on the body of post-liberation southern Africa' (p. 308), but although 'radical surgery' is needed, events in Zimbabwe demonstrate these must be accompanied by an 'extension of the struggle for democracy as well as the adoption of development policies that bring real reductions in poverty and inequality' (p. 308). It is hard to disagree with Cousins' conclusions.

Given the acknowledgement that the constitutional referendum of February 2000 marked a 'watershed' in Zimbabwe's post-independence political history (p. 1), Sara Rich Dorman's paper delivered at the initial conference in Copenhagen, but strangely not included in this publication, would undoubtedly have added another layer to the book's potency. Dorman's focus on NGOs and the constitutional debates of 1997–2000 as a 'window through which to examine the ambiguity of state-society relations' (Dorman 2003: 845) exemplifies how the politics of inclusion and exclusion has been central to Zimbabwe's recent crisis. This is a major theme of *Unfinished Business*. The passing of the controversial NGO Act² in December 2004 reaffirms the importance of Dorman's contribution to these debates. But her paper's prominent publication elsewhere (Dorman 2003) means its exclusion here is more odd than devastating. More significant is the startling fact that no major international publisher took up this book, a decision that I am sure is already regretted but which has rightly revealed the importance of Weaver Press's continuing, tenacious and highly laudable approach to publishing in Zimbabwe. The best testimony to the importance of this volume is that despite the fast changing nature of events, its focus on the 'analytic inseparability of questions of land, state, nation and citizenship' (p. 41) remains central to the ongoing analysis of Zimbabwe's crisis. The insistence of the assertion that 'it is critical to deconstruct ... new relations and their dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in order to understand changing forms of rule and practices of government ... and the shifting contours of nation and citizenship produced by such states' (p. 41) will ensure the continuing importance of this book, and

² For more on the NGO Act, see www.zimbabwe.situation.com/nov18_2004.html and www.zimbabwe.situation.com/dec11_2004.html.

the contributions in it, for the huge amount of academic research and reflection that is still to be carried out in Zimbabwe and across the region. *Unfinished Business* surely sets the pace for this future work.

Set against such an excellent multi-authored collection such as *Unfinished Business*, Campbell's *Reclaiming Zimbabwe* is perhaps inevitably disadvantaged. The point of Campbell's book is to use Zimbabwe as a case study to demonstrate his broader argument about the pitfalls of what he calls 'the patriarchal model of liberation'. In this sense, his book seems to be written less for a Zimbabwean, or Zimbabweanist, or even an African or Africanist audience, and more for an imagined Pan-Africanist audience, providing moral council for 'new models of emancipation'. Indeed one of the first questions that came to mind as I began to read this book was whether, in looking for and identifying the 'patriarchal model of liberation' – derived or inherited, we are told, from the 'European ideation system' (p. 83) – as the root cause of Zimbabwe's current problems, this book is merely another addition to a broader international discourse that seems to focus solely on finding a singular, unifying, and solvable cause for the huge myriad of problems facing postcolonial states across the African continent. It undoubtedly does often read like a generalizing exercise in reducing complexity, and perhaps agency and responsibility too. This is not helped by the fact that chapters two to six are an eclectic, even bizarre, collection of reprinted articles (originally written over a period of two decades) on a broad range of subjects that seem to have very little unity of purpose or even of perspective. The early chapters, on the liberation struggle, the transformations at independence, and the integration of the armed forces, are markedly weak in their lack of references to the broader literature on Zimbabwe. Given how 'ethnographically and historically thick' the academic study of African nationalism and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe has become in the last two decades, Campbell's lack of any mention of this body of literature is a startling omission that only undermines the authority of the book, and reinforced my first impressions about its tone and purpose. Section two entitled 'Consolidating independence', which consists of two disparate and unrelated commentaries on the opening of the (United Methodist Church funded) Africa University in 1994, and the 'SADC organ' on defence, is even weaker, and I have no doubt that their inclusion adds nothing but further frustration for the reader.

Sections three and four are better. Chapter 7's focus on 'executive lawlessness' and the 'land question' provides an analysis that complements that of *Unfinished Business*, and adds other material: for example, on water reforms (pp. 109–11), genetic resources and the 'gendered seed' (pp. 105–8) not considered in the edited volume. Most importantly, it is here that Campbell begins to develop his argument about gendered politics and patriarchy. In chapter 8 this is further developed in relation to homophobia and the 'politics of intolerance', another aspect where the analysis can be seen to complement that of *Unfinished Business*. The chapters of section four take the question of patriarchy

and explore it in relation to Zimbabwe's misadventures in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is here that Campbell is at his most comfortable, and most interesting. There is no denying that the focus on understanding, unpacking and problematizing the notions of 'sovereignty', macho-ism, militarism and the complicit plundering of resources by 'military entrepreneurs' is of great importance, not just for Zimbabwe, but for the region. His uncompromising analysis goes a long way towards revealing the complex mesh of interrelated militarism, and the 'politics of plunder' and capital accumulation across the southern and central African region. Campbell's emphasis on the hidden and obscured details of battles in the DRC may sometimes make heavy reading, as he himself acknowledges (p. 19), but he is arguably correct in recognizing the need to work towards an authoritative, alternative account of 'this senseless war'.

The last section, particularly Chapter 15, is in my opinion, the best, in that it is here that he consolidates his argument about gender and the 'exhausted' politics of nationalism and liberation. Here his generalized, Pan-Africanist perspective – viewed from a necessarily self-conscious, Afro-American/Caribbean standpoint – is most apparent, but also in a strange way least problematic. Here there is some reference to the works of other Zimbabweanist scholars such as Norma Kriger, Teresa Barnes, Rudo Gaidzwana and Brian Raftopoulos. And it is here that Campbell brings out more of the substance of his feminist critique of the 'patriarchal model of liberation', and begins to build his vision for an emancipated, post-patriarchal future through a somewhat belatedly brief consideration of recent movements for women's rights in Zimbabwe.

For all of the problems of this book, and there are many, I do think that Campbell is onto something. Exploring the relationships and tensions between gender, resistance, anti-colonial nationalism, regional wars and postcolonial states, and the politics of militarism and accumulation is undoubtedly important. Making a link between the gendered politics of colonial macho-ism, exclusion and military might, and the situation that Zimbabwe now finds itself in is valid, and potentially very significant. I might even go so far as to say that there is room for these subjects to be addressed using the kind of generalized approach – weak on original research, but strong on Pan-Africanist, emancipatory fervour – that Campbell clearly favours. I do find it ironic that the name of Bob Marley is used to exemplify opposition to this 'patriarchal model of liberation' (p. 298), but am willing to suspend my disbelief in favour of the author of a book as evocatively titled as *Rasta and Resistance: from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. The main problem of this book is that it is one book at all. The arguments to do with gender, nationalism and postcolonial politics are important, but might have been more effectively condensed into a single, powerful article or a much shorter book. Similarly, the material on the war in the DRC is also important and perhaps should appear separately in a greatly refined publication. This would have brought out Campbell's most important contribution, which is that it is a Pan-Africanist critique of Zimbabwe's ruling party's liberation credentials. Given the amount of high profile

legitimacy currently drawn in Zimbabwean politics from sometimes poorly informed Pan-Africanist and Afro-American circles, Campbell's *Reclaiming Zimbabwe* does provide an alternative voice that needs to be heard. But for thorough academic commentary, and informative and incisive analysis of recent events in Zimbabwe choose *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business*.

REFERENCES

- Campbell H. 1987 *Rasta and Resistance from Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*. New York: Africa World Press.
- Dorman S. 2003 'NGOs and the constitutional debate in Zimbabwe: from inclusion to exclusion', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (4): 845–63.