

Vulgar acts of entrenchment: The depiction of the Zimbabwean postcolony in Chenjerai Hove's *Palaver finish*

Tasiyana D. Javangwe
Department of English and Communication,
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
javangwet@msu.ac.zw/ tasijavangwe@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to interpret Chenjerai Hove's depiction in *Palaver Finish* of the Zimbabwean postcolony in the period leading into the new millennium. It seeks to argue that the portrayal of political developments in Zimbabwe in that period presents the nation as plunging into a state of vulgarity where human life and dignity are sacrificed at the expense of political power. Vulgarisation in this sense refers to gross distortions by the ruling party and state authority and the machinery of discursive processes, morality, culture and social life – all in an attempt to retain power. It also refers to the manner of doing things, to the use of the obscene, whether this is through the ab/use of language in its literal or metaphorical sense, dehumanizing sex or violence or disregard of civic etiquette.

Introduction

Zimbabwe's decline into political and economic chaos from the late 1990s right into the new millennium elicited, then and now, both keen interest and apprehension from its civic population as well as the international community. From the time it attained its political independence in 1980, the nation of Zimbabwe showed every potential to develop into a modern democracy, one that had marked its birth with promises of reconciliation (Mugabe, 1980) for all its citizenry. With the then prime minister magnanimously extending the hand of reconciliation to former adversaries in the liberation war, both the citizenry and the international community anticipated the broadening of civic and political spaces that would allow for free expression and participation in the new nation's political processes. The public captured this euphoric moment with a celebratory fervour that registered their hope for more democratic spaces. Also registered was the hope for the possibility of imagining a nation that would transcend dichotomies of race, ethnicity, gender or political affiliation. It is in the context of this dispensation that multiple civic and political voices began to demand space in a political environment that was increasingly beginning to show exclusionary tendencies informed by racial, ethnic and ideological differences. Chenjerai Hove's *Palaver finish* (2002) is a lament on the dashed hopes for the democratic opening of the political and civic spaces – dashed hopes that were fast becoming evident by the

beginning of the new millennium. The closures of the democratic spaces are explored in Hove's critical commentaries and quasi-journalistic essays that, because they are set in different social spaces and times, and are unfettered by the constraints of a rigid plot, enable him to comment on various socio-political subjects. The essays comment on ethnic elements of Zimbabwean politics, the rule of law, censorship, modes of apprehending reality in the postcolony, freedom and political violence among other issues. The essays also go on to decry the vulgar means employed in the closure of democratic spaces, and also the contradictory nuances implied in the efforts to arrive at a shared and imagined Zimbabwean postcolony.

Hove's work is premised on the assumption that independence should bring about a stable Zimbabwean nation guided by a common vision to which all civic groups and political players will subscribe. While it acknowledges the diversity of interests in the new nation, it stubbornly hopes for a homogeneous national interest that should work towards the democratisation of Zimbabwean society. Mbembe (2001) validly points out that the postcolony is not made up of one public space, but of several, whose specific logics are nevertheless entangled with each other. The new nation is thus a stage on which different publics bargain for participation and belonging. In the wake of this stark reality of the nation's composition, Hove's essays interrogate the ways in which certain interests, particularly those of the ruling party, are imposed upon the other publics in the new nation. Throughout the essays no apologies are made for Hove's overt sympathies for the opposition movement's demand for an alternative political order in Zimbabwe.

Mbembe's (2001) exegesis of the postcolony is useful in the case of Zimbabwe in the sense that it explodes the semblance of stability that national reconciliation and majority rule were expected to bring about. His insistence that 'it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images and markers current in the postcolony' forearms one with the tools with which to understand the violent narrowing of spaces in the Zimbabwean postcolony, right from the time it got its independence. This also unravels the inherent contradictions attendant to the process of nation building. The Zimbabwean nation, despite all its realness as projected through various forms of representation, exposed race, ethnic, ideological and class fissures soon after its birth. At the centre of the new nation emerged a particular core group that, from the liberation struggle, had managed to exploit the popular rhetoric of nationalism, common destiny and belonging. Mayer (2000:12) usefully observes that it is the elites who often construct the nation, and that these have the 'power to define the nation in ways that further their own interests'. The same elites determine who should occupy the marginal and central spaces of the nation project. The veneer of a compact, homogenous project is fragile, and the various constituencies once accommodated under nationalism are defined by their contractual obligations to the centre. Each constituency or group comes to realise that shared nationalist consciousness rises in the wake of grave national danger and ebbs when the common danger recedes. When that happens, what then holds the various interests in a loose assemblage is the social contracts to a perceived common good. As in a business empire, when contractual obligations are perceived to be violated, preventive and

even punitive measures are taken by those with the power against the perceived culprit. Fanon (1968) contextualises the inevitable disengagement of the various forces that once grouped under nationalism to achieve national liberation once the colonial oppressor has been removed.

The feeling of national belonging degenerates from a promising dream to a nightmarish experience where minorities are not only side-lined, but are often faced with ethnocidal elimination. It is the possibility of ethnocidal elimination in the Matabeleland region in the early 1980s, the electoral violence in the 1990s, violent repression of civic voices in the late 1990s, and the chaotic land repossession programme in the new millennium that provide the platform on which the vulgar acts of entrenchment are played out. The text lends itself to postcolonial reading where concepts of identity and nation are interrogated to reveal their minimalist meanings that are hidden behind facades of unitary nationalist narratives. In reading this text, one is forced to confront questions of how the Zimbabwean nation is conceived and constructed by its ruling elites, who constitutes the nation's core and its periphery, as well as how and through what stratagems is the periphery attached to the centre of the nation?

Contextualising Zimbabwe's millennium crisis

The birth of the new Zimbabwean nation was attended to by severe contradictions, most of which had been embedded in the seams of the liberation movement itself. The internecine conflict between the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the two major political forces of the liberation movement, was barely contained beneath the surface at the Lancaster House conference. Even as the signatures were appended to the Lancaster House agreement, ZANU had decided to ditch the Patriotic Front arrangement in order to go into the elections as a single political force. Chung (2006:87), a ZANU political insider, categorically states that 'ZANU was not prepared to share the leadership of Zimbabwe with the other three parties, namely the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), the African National Council (ANC) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).' As such, the unity government formed at independence in 1980 was riddled with mistrust, and in its deep structure betrayed the ruling party's intentions of consolidating the apparent power advantage chalked at the war front, at the conference table and at the ballot. Such power advantage tended to define itself in terms of ethnic allegiances, with ZANU having largely won control of the Shona speaking regions while ZAPU largely controlled the western Ndebele speaking regions. Effectively this meant that the new nation was subject to continued contestation, this time not between African nationalists and the settler community, but, at least in the early 1980s, between the two dominant political parties, ZANU PF and PF-ZAPU, whose political agendas had been ethnicised from the time of their split in 1963. This development spelt a momentous consequence for the construction of the nation, and if anything, exposed the underlying fissures that would potentially threaten the nation with shrinking democratic spaces, authoritarian rule as well as ethnic fragmentation. It is in the context of these circumstances that Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003:2) conclude that the

recent history of Zimbabwe shows tendencies towards 'intensified assertions of sovereignty, increasing violent modes of rule, deepening forms of authoritarian nationalism, and narrowing spaces of citizenship.'

The Zimbabwean political scenario that Hove's *Palaver Finish* depicts is placed in the context of what Erikson (in Spencer and Wollman, 2005:147) has called a particularist nationalist ideology which exudes 'mechanisms of exclusion and ethnic discrimination' more than the 'mechanisms of inclusion and formal justice.' Exclusion and ethnic discrimination in the case of the Zimbabwean postcolony are rationalised by historians such as Mudenge (1988:364) who posit that present day Zimbabwe is 'a reality that has existed for centuries, with a language, a culture and a worldview of its own, representing the "inner core" of the Shona historical experience.' In this way, as much as such a submission glosses over the social, class and ideological diversity within the identified core group, a particular ethnic group is firmly placed at the centre of the nation while the rest are located variously at the periphery. Such historical/nationalist narrative tends to be reductive and to emphasise the friction between the dominating and the dominated groups within the framework of the nation-state. Those at the centre of the nation state will not seek legitimacy of political office through, as Chazan et al, (1992:16) submit, 'arriving at a consensus on the valid exercise of authority', but through brute violence, murder, rape, electoral fraud, intimidation and unbridled corruption. The invaluable principles of participation and inclusion are paid only lip service in the conception and construction of the new nation. Zimbabwe's ruling elite fails to foster coherent relationships among the diverse interest groups within the nation, only advancing its narrow interests of retaining power.

Such a mode of political governance has, according to Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003:32), embedded 'undemocratic practices' and produced 'extremely brutal forms of exclusion and dispossession.' The nation as the expression of modern social-political organisation, as Giddens (1991) argues, brings forth difference and marginalisation. Patriotic nationalism in its narrowness reproduces the restrictive conditions that formerly characterised the colonial situation. It is in this sense that Spivak (1999:62) criticises nationalism as 'a reverse or displaced legitimation of colonialism doomed to repeat the epistemic violence of colonialism it had rejected.' The ultimate manifestation of such limitations of nationalism in Zimbabwe is the subject of Hove's essays which explore how the ruling ZANU-PF party violently entrenched itself in power in a period that has been referred to as Zimbabwe's 'mutating millennium crisis' (Hammer et al, 2003). Hove's work focuses on a period when the hegemony of the ruling ZANU-PF was under particularly severe pressure from the civic organizations and the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Vulgar acts of entrenchment

The analysis of Hove's essays in *Palaver Finish* will be largely informed by Mbembe's (2001) monumental efforts to theorise African and Diasporan politics within the post-

colonial paradigm. Focusing on the politics of the Cameroons, Mbembe articulates the complete disregard of the democratic mores by the political leadership as it pursues narrow interests of retaining power at the cost of the general welfare of the citizenry. At the helm of the postcolony, Mbembe (2001:103) identifies the ‘commandement’ that produces ‘signs, vocabulary and narratives’ that are ‘invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge.’ He also argues that in its conduct of state affairs, the commandement gives the postcolony a character that is defined by a ‘tendency to excess and lack of proportion’ (p.102). This is how the postcolony derives its vulgar character. In the scope of this essay, and with particular reference to the Zimbabwean situation depicted in Hove’s work, vulgarisation will be used to refer to gross distortions by the state authority and machinery of discursive processes, morality, culture and social life all in an attempt to retain power. It shall also refer to the manner of doing things, to the use of the obscene, whether this is through the ab/use of language in its literal or metaphorical sense, dehumanising sex or violence or disregard of civic etiquette. All these practices speak to agendas whose intention is not only to silence alternative voices of defining national destiny, but also to permanently entrench into power a narrowly defined nationalist cadre. Hove cites a number of strategies through which Zimbabwe’s nationalist discourse is reduced to a monologue.

Ab/use of state machinery

Hove characterises the Zimbabwean postcolony as being trapped within the misfortunes that Fanon (1968) spelt out in his exegesis of ‘the pitfalls of national consciousness’. Independence does not usher in a visionary leadership with the capacity for moving the nation forward, but one that conceives of ‘nothing but the fear of losing power’ (Hove, p.8). As such, national interest is defined narrowly and subordinated to the pursuit of political longevity for the incumbent leadership. Mbembe (2001:102) defines the postcolony as consisting of ‘a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence.’ Violence spearheaded by the state security organs such as the military, the police, party militias and the secret service is enlisted as a necessary ritual to cow down contestants for the country’s political leadership at every election time. Thus Hove observes that ‘violence has become part of our culture’ (p.10), all at the expense of a unified nation envisaged at independence. The first essay in *Palaver Finish*, titled ‘Africa’s abused soldiers’, creates a social setting that is intended to replicate the composition of the Zimbabwean nation. It foregrounds notions of harmony and inclusivity by bringing together four friends from four different ethnic groups, from the four corners that represent the character of the nation. These four friends hail from the Karanga, the Zezuru, the Ndebele and the Ndau ethnic groups, and interestingly, surrender their meagre financial resources into a commonwealth from which they all spend on social drinking. The place of the meeting is also symbolic in that it takes place in Masvingo, the town that takes its name from the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe. Nations are imagined around myths and symbols (Anderson, 1983) and it is the ancient symbol of Great Zimbabwe that gives its name to the new nation. Thus, in this narrative

stroke, Hove creates the ideal nation that is nevertheless undermined by the violence the four friends are subsequently subjected to by the military men.

Even as they reminisce on 'political violence of one form or another' (p.1) experienced in the various towns, and of which some of them were victims, they are jolted to the ghastly reality of the moment when 'several young soldiers with hot blood in their veins arrive and take over the bar' (p.1). The soldiers beat up everybody present and loot money from the bar tills as well as from the patrons. It is only after the soldiers have left that the Zezuru friend from Harare reveals the reason for the wanton violence on unsuspecting civilians by the military. He informs his colleagues that, in Epworth, soldiers had carried out daily raids on social and public places and demanded to know why the people had voted for the opposition. This revelation is in reference to the 2000 elections in the country in which the ruling party faced its most severe challenge from the Movement for Democratic Change. Hove uses these undemocratic tendencies to raise critical issues about the nature of governance in the country. On the first level, and in a subtle way, he reveals how the ideal nation – as represented by the four friends in Masvingo (the metaphor for Zimbabwe) – is subverted by a ruling party that is bent on stifling the popular will of the people. On the second, he exposes the general trend in Africa where ruling parties, once they get into power, do not want to relinquish it through democratic elections. To this extent, the military becomes the tool through which the ruling party, which has appropriated the liberation history exclusively for itself, entrenches itself in power through violence and corrupt means. Hove argues that the soldiers are reduced to a 'political militia that salutes the President of the Republic by name [and] not by position' (p.3) and its major responsibility becomes that of keeping the ruling party in power.

Hove's reading of the Zimbabwean situation in the new millennium estimates to what Mbembe (2001), borrowing from the Haitian experience under Papa Doc Jean Duvalier, has called the 'tonton macoutisation' of society. This happens when the uniformed forces, including so-called state security agents, become 'a weapon in the establishment of authoritarian rule' (Mbembe, 2001:83). The security forces are placed at the forefront of closing all democratic spaces and processes in the most violent ways imaginable. Just as in Haiti where the Tonton Macoute became the dark force of murder, repression, forced disappearances, rape, and torture and economic plunder in order to maintain Duvalier in power, Hove lays responsibility for 'all the disappearances, torture and cruelty in African countries' (p.3) at the hands of the soldiers who in the first place 'are supposed to defend them' (ibid). In the case of Zimbabwe, the will and aspirations of the people were flagrantly subordinated to the ruling party's crude obsession for power. It is just as Zegeye and Vambe (2009:2) argue: that 'Robert Mugabe, a one-time firebrand against colonialism, has turned his guns on his people.' The means of maintaining the ruling party in power in Zimbabwe is thus portrayed as an expression of vulgarity that has eaten right into the core of the democratic ethos.

The strength of Hove's essays lies in the fact that they draw from reports, both newspaper and oral, on the exercise and impact of ruling party activities on the citizenry during the turbulent years after the 2000 elections in Zimbabwe. His partiality in not commenting on

how the opposition was also implicated in acts of violence in certain instances is deliberate as it heightens the sense of the moral ineptitude of the ruling party. The violence that characterised the Bikita-West by-elections was widely reported, and as much as Hove openly shows his sympathies for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, his comments are important in that they also show a collapse of the ruling party's capacity to open up the democratic space and level the ground so that there can be fair participation in the elections. He succinctly observes that 'African politics is always marred by a dangerous obsession with power and money' (p. 39), thus alluding to the corrupt motives that define the lack of ethics in the exercise of power. Democracies in the continent are said to be 'measured in corpses and not flowers' (p. 42). Closer to home he thus laments that 'political power in Zimbabwe really stinks' (p. 40). In the aftermath of the Bikita-West election, the villager is described as an 'endangered species' (p. 37) exposed to 'political barbarism and vulgarity' (p. 39) by politicians who will only be too happy to celebrate their victory over corpses.

The repulsive nature of the vulgar acts of entrenchment by Zimbabwe's ruling elites is captured at the moment when the 'government decides to defend itself against its own people' (p. 17). Recent developments in North Africa, particularly in Libya, and also in the Middle East, where governments have taken up arms to butcher their own people in order to retain political control speak of the disjuncture between people-legitimated power and obscene political greed. The deployment of military personnel to enforce a positive vote for the ruling party (p. 13) – and to threaten the electorate with imminent annihilation if they vote otherwise – provides testimony of the ruling party's appetite for an orgy of violence against its people. Both intimidation and real physical violence have one objective, which is to suffocate contestatory voices on the way the nation should be run, thus forcibly creating conditions for autocratic rule. Vulgar acts of violence and intimidation are often complimented by more subtle, but nevertheless vulgar forms of maintaining the ruling party's hold on power.

Censorship as a vulgar act of political entrenchment

Keane (1991:94) submits that the modern state, Western democracies included, has since the nineteenth century realised the importance of 'regulating and distorting the exchange of information and opinion among their citizens'. However, as much as the methods of regulation may be the same in Western democracies as in the developing world, Hove's depiction of the Zimbabwean postcolony suggests that the degree, crudeness or intensity of application varies with the level of commitment to democratic practice in a particular state. A government that does not derive its legitimacy from the majority of its populace is more inclined to use more obscene methods of silencing its populace so as to maintain its grip on authority. Keane identifies a number of common methods of censorship in the modern state, among which is censorship through emergency powers, armed secrecy and lying.

In the Zimbabwean postcolony, Hove seems to see the manipulation of state powers in

varied and modified forms such as fast-tracked statutory acts, threats to media practitioners and their houses, the issuing of straitjacketing instructions to the media, newspaper bans and arbitrary arrests and prosecutions. Newspapers expressing alternative views are banned or their printing presses are bombed by unidentified persons (p. 18). There is an obvious reference to the bombing of the Daily News printing press at the height of the conflict in which the ruling ZANU PF party's image continued to receive bruising exposition in the independent press. Keane (*ibid*) maintains that this constitutes censorship that involves the banning of perceived anti-state publications whose views are seen as undermining the state's authority. The state or ruling party creates conditions for its own entrenchment through not only banning, burning, shredding and confiscating newspapers that are classified as hostile to the state, or sanctioning the bombing of their printing presses by unknown people, but also through its rigid control of the state newspapers and the television. In this way, the 'roads to new ideas through books and broadcasting are all closed' (p. 14). The people are made to feel impotent against the production of monologic views that represent only the ruling party's obsession with retaining power. The smothering of a vibrant media is read as consistent with the desire of the ruling party to exclude everyone else from the liberation narrative that they put in place as the qualification to political supremacy in Zimbabwe.

The use of oppressive media statutory instruments that are touted as necessary regulatory frameworks in Zimbabwe, such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), is often accompanied by the churning out of systematic but misleading statements, even gross lies, that divert public attention from the serious matters of their own governance and socio-economic welfare. Hove submits that such obscene propaganda is fuelled by the 'illusion that every citizen is a moron, a fool who will believe anything as long as it is in the newspapers or on television' (p. 6). Keane adds weight to this view by stressing politicians' obsession with lying. He notes that politicians everywhere believe that 'half of politics is image-making and the other half the art of making people believe the imagery, whatever the facts' (1991:101). Paradoxically, the illusions that the ruling elite fosters through repeated broadcasts on national television and in print media often works out with a section of the population which will then fail to question the legitimacy of the political leadership.

Hove regrets the fact that the state in independent Zimbabwe has chosen to undermine the freedoms of its people through the use of 'the police, the secret service and all the other secret this or that' (p.4). The invisible repressive state apparatus, as much as it is standard in almost all modern states, is marked by its overzealous excesses at a time when the Zimbabwean ruling authorities faced stiff challenges from the civic population and the emergent political party(ies). These agents of state repression not only instil fear in the hearts and minds of the populace, but also create conditions for the reproduction of fear within the people themselves. Thus, totalitarian regimes do not always superintend over their subjects so as to manage the flow of information and curtail criticism. They have subtle ways of permanently transferring fear to the populace, which when it manifests itself as silence, constitutes a form of self-censorship. Keane (1991:39) succinctly points

out that censorship 'is not necessarily the all-seeing eye and iron fist of a distant authority which towers over its subjects.' The citizenry can be effectively oppressed through the fear of the unknown, of the potential danger of being informed on to government authorities by the next person. Through this process, self-censorship becomes the manifest way of leaving the authorities to their own business, thus allowing them to self-perpetuate. This is what Hove captures where he says 'if you talk of the rise of food prices the person sitting next to you in the bus might tell you to hush or your next destination will be prison' (p. 19). In the title essay 'Palaver Finish' the narrator is brutally frank about the degree of self-censorship that has taken hold of Zimbabwean society. He declares that 'me got no have pinion at all. In dis country opinion is bad' (p. 26). At this stage, censorship will have ceased to be the practice of authority directed at the people, but will be something inherent within them. As Keane further elaborates, censorship 'can echo within us, take up residence within ourselves, spying on us, a private amanuensis who reminds us never to go too far' (ibid.). In other words, self-censorship cultivates within the individual a lethargy that refracts him or her away from the politics that governs and affects him or her. It is something akin to Chinodya's (1989) portrayal of the Tichafas' religious doctrine that negates individual agency in matters of politics and believe that it is God's will that regulates who gets into power and when they have to be relieved of that power. Self-censorship breeds a false consciousness that seeks to say that, as a private citizen, one has no business in the affairs of the state, all to the calculated advantage of those in power. The private citizen's life focus congeals around perceived individual and family reputation, or the preservation of one's career or business. What is more disturbing, according to Keane, is that self-censorship can disguise itself in 'bodily gestures, in cautious and respectable clothing, and above all in intellectual cowardice, insipid humour, slothful imagination, and dissembled opinions wrapped in flat words' (ibid.). Once this situation comes to be, the state can sing about its 'democratic' credentials without the slightest reference to the obscene seizures of fear systematically induced in the populace. Instead it creates images of a happy and loyal citizenry that is constantly behind its leadership.

To forestall critical discussion on the legitimacy of their leadership and competence, Hove depicts a ruling party elite that has deliberately chosen to galvanize itself from the onerous tasks of progressive leadership by adopting 'small talk' at the highest levels of national debate. This also constitutes a form of censorship that denies the citizenry the right to be informed on critical issues that affect the nation. The august house of Parliament is reduced to a place where cheap politicking is the order of the day at the expense of debates on how to revive the plummeting economy. One example is that of a learned parliamentarian who, 'amidst a severe fuel shortage and an unprecedented economic crisis, tried to introduce a motion to ban the MDC open hand symbol' (p. 29). Small talk diverts focus from the inadequacies of the political party in power, and in effect maintains it in control through vulgar subterfuge.

A more crude form of censorship, particularly towards election times, is the creation of 'no go areas' in rural Zimbabwe. The 'no go areas' are created by ruling party militias and war veterans sympathetic to the ruling party as a way of preventing opposition politics in

the areas so designated. The express objectives are to ensure that no ideas critical of the ruling party reach those areas as well as to ensure that voting patterns are tilted heavily in favour of the ruling party. The methods of enforcing the no go areas are as underhand as they are vulgar in that they go against the grain of the fundamentals of development in the developing world. The three critical aspects that are targeted are the road, the bus as a means of transport and the teacher. All three are viewed as mediums through which the ruling party's grip on power can be subverted. The road opens up the interior to allow for the free movement of ideas, which is a contradiction to the survival of a dictatorship. Roads open up the countryside for buses to ply, bringing urbanites to mix with the rural people who are supposed to be the support base of the ruling party. The bus also carries the conductor who is armed with music that spreads new forms of consciousness, and the teacher, who is armed with ideas and newspapers that do not speak well of the government. The ruling party's dominancy is threatened, and thus 'at election time the bus has to be stopped so that teacher can be subdued to silence' (p. 50). As if this was not enough, schools have to be closed so that teacher does not 'contaminate' his charges with the ideas from the city. This introduces a contradiction in that the regime hopes to sustain itself by destroying the population that it wishes to preside over. The vulgarity of this logic is exposed in the fact that the regime will not refrain from 'killing the people who produce the ideas and destroying the machinery by which they can be disseminated to the public' (p. 63).

Conclusion

The contention that Hove's *Palaver Finish* makes is that the overall behaviour of the ruling party in Zimbabwe is guided by the single logic of retaining power at all costs. The methods of achieving political longevity vary from pretensions to democratic values and all the way to downright political indecency where citizens are subjected to degrading violence in order to stave off resistance. As Mbembe (2001:103) observes, to defray any challenges to its authority, 'the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts; [and] resort, if necessary, to the systematic application of pain.' Such political behaviour arguably speaks of ideological bankruptcy and an absence of a long-term political vision on the part of the governing party. This depiction of the Zimbabwean postcolony is consistent with the predictions and observations made by critical theorists such as Fanon (1968) and Mbembe (2001) about the fortunes of post-independent Africa. It is a bankruptcy that reflects not only in the political realm of Zimbabwe, but in economic and national cultural programmes as well as in its idioms of expression. Thus, Hove argues that even language is corrupted by leading politicians who in vain try to force it to carry only those meanings that promote their agenda to remain in power. If not this, then language is used to insult the citizenry, that is to discursively displace them from the contested political arena of the Zimbabwean nation. All this amounts to the vulgarisation of the Zimbabwean post-colony where 'the beginning of corruption' (p. 5) is manifested in senior politicians who use vulgar language in public. In other words, what is presented in Hove's essays is the

blighted moral state of those who lead the nation. Ultimately, the essays in *Palaver Finish* amount to a statement that the morally blighted leadership of Zimbabwe has entrenched itself in power through indecent means and violence.

References

- Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined communities – Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. Verso: London.
- Chazan, N., Mortimer, R., Ravenhill, J. and Rothchild, D. 1992. *Politics and society in contemporary Africa*. Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.
- Chinodya, S. 1989. *Harvest of thorns*. Baobab Books: Harare.
- Chung, F. 2006. *Reliving the second chimurenga – Memories from Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle*. Nordic Africa Institute in Cooperation with Weaver Press: Harare.
- Eriksen, T. 2005. ‘Ethnicity and nationalism.’ In 2005, *Nation and nationalism*, Spencer and Wollman eds. Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.
- Fanon, F. 1968. *The wretched of the earth*: Penguin, London.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity – Self and society in the late modern age*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Hammar, A., Raftopoulos, B. and Jensen S. 2003 (eds). *Zimbabwe’s unfinished business: Rethinking land, state and nation in the context of crisis*, Weaver Press, Harare.
- Hove, C. 2002. *Palaver finish*. Weaver Press: Harare.
- Keane, J. 1991. *The media and democracy*. Polity Press: UK.
- Mayer, T. 2000. *Gender ironies of nationalism – Sexing the nation*. Routledge: London.
- Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the postcolony*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Mudenge, S.I.G. 1988. *A political history of Munhumutapa*. Zimbabwe Publishing House: Harare.
- Mugabe, R.G. Speech delivered on Independence Day, 18 April 1980. Harare.
- Spivak, G.C. 2001. ‘The burden of English. In 2001, *Postcolonial discourses: An anthology*, Castle, G.ed. Blackwell Publishers: Oxford.
- Zegeye, A. and Vambe, M. 2009. *Close to the sources– Essays on contemporary African culture, politics and academy*, Unisa Press: Pretoria.