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## Remnants of Empire? British media reporting on Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

*This article explores the various ways in which the British media, and the broadsheets The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph in particular, have framed and represented events in Zimbabwe since 2000. It argues that representations of the situation in Zimbabwe have been largely struggles over meanings and definitions of the 'crisis' in the country. The extensive media coverage of Zimbabwe in the British media generated a significant amount of debate and this article demonstrates how the Zimbabwean government drew upon international media representations in order to define the situation in Zimbabwe as a struggle against imperialism.*

**Keywords:** media coverage, Zimbabwe, British media, foreign news, discourse, representation, post-colonial studies

In his book *The invention of Africa*, Valentin Mudimbe (1988) examines how in earlier days navigators, traders, travellers, philosophers and anthropologists played an important role in shaping the modern meaning of Africa and of being African. Whereas Mudimbe stresses the crucial role of anthropology in representing Africa and Africans in the nineteenth century, Askew (2002: 1) argues that in the current age it is essentially the media who is doing the job formerly belonging to anthropologists. News accounts shape in decisive ways people's perceptions of the world.

Since early 2000, Zimbabwe has occupied an important place in both broadcast and print media in Britain. Foreign representations of Zimbabwe, and British media coverage in particular, have been sharply criticised by the Zimbabwean government. Public debates, both at home and abroad, on the situation in Zimbabwe often were about *representations* of the crisis. The Zimbabwean government became increasingly concerned about how the country was covered in the international media and made various attempts to expel resident foreign correspondents and to ban other reporters from visiting Zimbabwe.

This paper discusses how Zimbabwe was represented in the British media, why it attracted so much attention and what responses British media coverage provoked from the Zimbabwean government. The analysis will emphasise the way in which Zimbabwe was reported in two British newspapers, namely *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*.<sup>1</sup> It aims to give an impression of the nature of media reporting on Zimbabwe in Britain rather than to offer an exhaustive account, and will hence serve as a starting point for further investigations.<sup>2</sup> In order to gain insights into the practices of news-making and journalism, I also conducted semi-

structured interviews with foreign correspondents from various British newspapers and foreign news agencies. Although news is often portrayed as a reflection of reality, for example through the metaphor of a 'mirror', this paper will depart from the notion that news is always socially constructed, shaped by the particular context in which it is produced. It is therefore crucial to analyse the socio-political environment in which news stories are made.

Finally then, this paper will argue that the international media -and in particular the British media- have helped to create the conditions that allowed the Zimbabwean government to define the situation in Zimbabwe as a struggle against imperialism.

### **Long-term correspondents**

One of the reasons for the large amount of media coverage on Zimbabwe in the British press was the presence of long-term Harare-based correspondents. Whereas other countries in Africa are generally covered by short-term so-called 'parachute journalists' flying over from London-based newsrooms or regional offices in Johannesburg, most British newspapers already had correspondents on the ground in Zimbabwe. Newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and news agencies such as *Associated Press*, *Reuters* and *AFP* all had permanent correspondents in 2000. Several of these were Zimbabweans citizens who had worked in the country's media for a long time, some had even written for *The Rhodesia Herald* before Independence. Others like the American-born correspondent for *The Guardian*, Andrew Meldrum, came to Zimbabwe briefly after Independence and never left. The fact that the majority of British newspapers had correspondents based in Zimbabwe implies that they felt the country was already important irrespective of the events taking place since 2000.

During a seminar on Western media reporting of Congo in London in 2001, Liz McGregor, who was *The Guardian's* Deputy Comment Editor at the time, noted that:

With countries with a large white population like Zimbabwe and South Africa there is a lot more interest and I think this is largely because the [British] newspapers are white-run and owned and they are trying to identify with people who look like them. A lot of their view is skewed by the fact that they're white-owned newspapers and a lot of those follow British commercial interests. And I think that one of the reasons why there is not a lot of interest in the DRC is that there is not a big white party involved.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, well before the events in 2000, the British media had already decided that Zimbabwe was a 'story' important enough to 'deserve' a permanent correspondent. Whereas neighbouring countries were mostly covered by a Johannesburg-based correspondent, Zimbabwe could count on their own correspondents. In addition to the Harare-based reporters, most British papers would also send extra reporters during important events such as the 2000 Parliamentary Elections and the 2002 Presidential Elections. The presence of Harare-based reporters greatly facilitated a steady flow of reports in the British media on Zimbabwe.

However, with the appointment of Jonathan Moyo as Minister of State for Information and Publicity in the President's Office in 2000, new regulations were introduced that sought to restrict the flow of foreign correspondents. More and more short-term parachute journalists were not able to enter the country and permits of long-term correspondents were not renewed. In February 2001, the first two journalists were expelled from Zimbabwe: Mercedes Sayagues (*South African Mail and Guardian*) and Joe Winter (*BBC World Service*). In June 2001, they were followed by *The Daily Telegraph* correspondent David Blair. In September 2002, the *AFP* correspondent Griffin Shea had to leave and in May 2003 – under a large amount of media

attention, Andrew Meldrum of *The Guardian* was deported. Whereas *The Daily Telegraph* managed to continue its reporting from Harare by hiring a Zimbabwean journalist, *The Guardian* chose to carry on from Pretoria. In February 2005, three more foreign correspondents from *Associated Press*, *The Times* and *Bloomberg* decided to leave Zimbabwe after having been harassed by the police.

In July 2001, Minister Moyo announced that his Ministry had suspended all accreditation of *BBC* correspondents in Zimbabwe. This announcement came after a report by *BBC* correspondent Rageh Omaar on a speech that President Mugabe had given at the opening of a new session of parliament.<sup>4</sup> Moyo complained that Omaar had misrepresented the language used by President Mugabe in the speech. In a letter to the *BBC*, he argued that contrary to reporting by the *BBC*, President Mugabe had never stated that he “vowed to continue with the forcible [land] acquisition”. Instead, Moyo argued that “the president made it clear that land would be acquired as it has been, in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe”. According to Moyo, it was “apparent that, as it has happened many times before, the *BBC* approached the president’s speech with a preconceived view to distorting it to give a false impression that there is no rule of law in Zimbabwe”. Moyo argued that there was a world of difference between forcible acquisition and lawful acquisition.

Despite the government’s refusal to accredit *BBC* correspondents, the broadcaster still managed to produce at least seven documentaries on the country, apart from regular feature stories on the news.<sup>5</sup> According to a report published by a *BBC* watchdog, out of 48 documentaries shown on the *BBC* from November 2000 to January 2004, Zimbabwe received most attention with seven documentaries. Zimbabwe came after the Israel/Palestine conflict which was covered in 16 documentaries.<sup>6</sup> Apart from regular news features, programmes like *Correspondent*, *Panorama*, *Hard Talk* and *Breakfast with Frost* carried several editions on Zimbabwe. Most documentaries were made by reporters not officially accredited by the Zimbabwean authorities. Both John Sweeney and Fergal Keane came to Zimbabwe on tourist visas which further seemed to dramatise the content of programmes. When John Sweeney wanted to interview Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), he went to hide in the boot of the car when entering Tsvangirai’s premises.<sup>7</sup> Inclusion of footage on Sweeney’s acrobatic exercise sought to strengthen the image of the foreign correspondent as a courageous hero willing to sacrifice his life for ‘the truth’. Equally dramatic footage of Meldrum’s expulsion from Zimbabwe and the subsequent publication of his memoirs sought to reinforce the same image.

### **Simplification**

Whereas the existing infrastructure of foreign correspondents in Harare clearly played a crucial role in the steady flow of news coverage from Zimbabwe, there is no doubt that another important reason was the presence of a white minority in Zimbabwe. In a report that was published in 1997, the Zimbabwean human rights organisation the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) estimated that 20,000 people were killed in the 1980s during the *Gukurahundi* in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces.<sup>8</sup> However, at the time, the media paid considerably less attention to the country as compared to the events in 2000. Within the space of a few weeks, Zimbabwe came to dominate the headlines of major newspapers and agencies, *BBC*, *CNN*, and even *Hello!* magazine<sup>9</sup> devoted a five-page special to Zimbabwe, mainly reporting the death of the farmer David Stevens.

Foreign correspondents would generally blame their editors or newspapers for the large amount of coverage devoted to white farmers. One correspondent argued that the extent of attention was inherent in the news business:

In general, in the international media, if one white farmer was killed, that created far more news input than if thirty blacks were killed, in general. And I think that's wrong. I am not happy with that. But I saw it happen and I couldn't change it. In [*the newspaper I write for*], if white farmers had been killed, it would often be a front page story. I didn't affect that. (...). And so, I don't like to think that the death of one person is more than the death of another person but you know, that is one of the things in the news business that does happen.<sup>10</sup>

Another correspondent felt it was a very important story that British newspaper readers with often strong ties with Zimbabwe wanted to read about:

I am really pleased that the white farmer story was there. Because everywhere in the world, if you are working for an Austrian newspaper and you are in Bangkok and an Austrian gets hijacked, that story of that Austrian will do better in Austria than it will do in Sydney or in Bangladesh. And people like to read about themselves. And that's what I am part of. I am not trying to change the world. I am not a politician. I don't want to influence people at all. I simply want to say what's going on.<sup>11</sup>

This particular correspondent felt that “journalists were simply responding to what is going on; we suck it up and we move on”.

The incidence of the farm occupations also enabled journalists to greatly simplify the situation in Zimbabwe. In their classic study on news values, Galtung and Ruge (1965: 65) argue that “the more clear and unambiguous the signal (the less noise there is), the more probably that it will be recorded as worth listening to”. In other words, the significance of an event should be relatively unambiguous so that the diversity of potential interpretations may be kept to a minimum. News events do not have to be necessarily simple but the range of possible meanings must be limited. In the case of Zimbabwe, the occurrence of the farm occupations enabled the media to explain the situation in terms of a conflict between black and white. Because of the British media's primary interest in the well-being of -as often mocked by Mugabe- ‘its kith and kin’, the situation came to be seen as a racial one. Although the land occupations were part of a much more complex situation, it was a tale that could easily be made understandable to foreign audiences without having to provide much context. The story spoke for itself, or as another foreign correspondent put it:

Look, it [*the farm occupations*] was a big story that you couldn't ignore. I mean it was a big story. (...). What I had a problem with, the prominence that was given to white farmers. And one of my editors said to me “look, put white and black in your lead paper, and you know, you are on the wire”. White farmer killed by black militant. And that's on the wire, you know.<sup>12</sup>

A picture made by *Associated Press* photographer Rob Cooper also captures this simplification on the part of the media very well.<sup>13</sup> In March 2000 it was published in newspapers all over the world and Peter Stiff later also used it for the cover of his book *Cry Zimbabwe: Independence – twenty years on*. The picture displays the wife of a white farmer protecting her two little daughters, all dressed up in immaculate pastel colours, against the danger of approaching ‘black squatters’ behind a fence. The photographer is choosing the side of the white farmer by showing the ‘squatters’ from his perspective, or his side of the fence. ‘White’ here represents innocence

and vulnerability whereas 'black' represents danger and threat. This dichotomy between good and evil would easily do well in a soap opera or drama, and Fiske and Hartley (1989: 268) have argued that the difference between fictional and news narratives are not always that different as may initially seem:

Conflict is as important in making a good news story as it is in making a good fiction, and its relationship to the social system is similar. News values and fictional values stem from the same society, they both bear the same need to be popular, and it is not surprising that they are fundamentally similar.

### **Ethnicisation**

Some newspapers have also further supported the idea of racial conflict by suggesting the incidence of 'ethnic cleansing'. On the 10 August 2001, *The Daily Telegraph* put it as following:

When a mob laid siege to Two Trees farm yesterday, sealing off the property with roadblocks, a carefully planned operation swung into action to sow terror among the white landowners around Chinhoyi. [...]. It was the latest escalation of President Robert Mugabe's offensive against white farmers, and amounted to the ethnic cleansing of a swathe of Zimbabwe's most fertile region.<sup>14</sup>

Or in another article one year later on the 7 August 2002:

Horseshoe, Mutorashanga, Raffingora, Umboe Valley, Ruzawi River, Mvurwi - these are the names of some of the farming districts from where heavy hearted farmers and their families are leaving in one of the last chapters of Mr Mugabe's ethnic cleansing of the countryside.<sup>15</sup>

This seemed to echo discourses used by some Conservative MPs like Lord Elton who asked his colleagues the following in the House of Lords:

My Lords, the Government of Zimbabwe made clear their objective of removing white people who own property in Zimbabwe. Is that not a form of ethnic cleansing? When will it be treated as such?<sup>16</sup>

It was part of the Conservatives' general criticism of the government's 'lack of action' on Zimbabwe. Often, comparisons were made with the situation in Kosovo and Mugabe was equated with Milosevic, as the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Michael Ancram put it in an opinion piece in *The Guardian*:

Yet the fact that Mugabe is getting away with murder has not bestirred our government. Its inaction is a damning indictment of its foreign policy. What is the difference between ethnic cleansing, or state murder and torture, in Kosovo and in Zimbabwe? Why was the government so keen to act in Kosovo and yet is so inactive on Zimbabwe? Mugabe is every bit as evil as Milosevic. So why is our government afraid to stand up to this despot? Zimbabwe is not some distant country of which we know little. We know it very well and we owe it our support.<sup>17</sup>

In an earlier debate in the House of Commons in April 2000, Foreign Office Minister Peter Hain dismissed the term 'ethnic cleansing' as 'Tory rhetoric'. Asked by Conservative MP David Wilshire whether he agreed that "what we are now seeing is the beginnings of ethnic cleansing", Peter Hain responded:

I do not want to use that phrase. This phrase has been used in an inflammatory way by the Opposition. I think we should take this opportunity, if I may say so, to adopt a measured response.

To compare what is happening in Zimbabwe with what happened in Kosovo I would have thought was ludicrous. It does not make it any more acceptable to find the lawlessness and violence and now deaths of all sorts of people. I do not think the targeting of the predominantly black (though multi-racial) Opposition, with the whole succession of killings, with up to 100 people violently attacked, I do not think you can describe that as ethnic cleansing because it is often black on black, but it is equally serious.<sup>18</sup>

By portraying the situation in Zimbabwe as one of ethnic conflict, both newspapers and politicians seem to have reiterated media coverage of other parts of Africa. In recent academic studies, anthropologists and media studies scholars have pointed to the failure of journalists to provide nuanced accounts of crises in Africa. They have particularly criticised media coverage of Somalia and Rwanda for using tribalism to explain the events unfolding in those countries without paying attention to the West's own role in the roots of the problems. Although these scholars do not deny that ethnicity can be used to manipulate people, they have stressed the social constructedness of identities and the invented character of ethnicities. Or as Jan Nederveen Pieterse, quoted in Carruthers (2004: 165), argues: "Ethnicity, although generally considered a cause of conflict, is not an explanation but rather that which is to be explained. The terminology of ethnicity is part of the conflict and cannot serve as the language of analysis". To some extent, media coverage of Zimbabwe seems to have fallen into the same trap.

### **Marginalisation**

British media's framing of the situation in Zimbabwe as a black versus white conflict ultimately made the much larger number of black victims invisible. According to statistics of human rights organisations, ten white farmers have been killed between 2000 and 2004 compared to more than 190 blacks, mainly supporters of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change.<sup>19</sup> While I was waiting to interview the Secretary-General of GAPWUZ, the General Agricultural Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe, I started chatting with another staff member. She told me how she had attended a seminar in South Africa and felt disappointed that people did not seem to know that a large number of farm workers had become displaced as a result of the farm occupations. She felt there was more attention for the dog of a white farmer than for farm workers. And she referred hereby to a photograph that appeared in March 2002 in both local Zimbabwean and international newspapers of the dead body of a white farmer named Terry Ford covered by a blanket with his dog guarding over it.<sup>20</sup>

The marginalisation of the farm workers' voices can also be blamed on their more general lack of power in Zimbabwean society. Organisations representing white farmers such as the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) or Justice for Agriculture (JAG) attributed very important roles to the media and followed conscious strategies to influence the media. They acknowledged having been hospitable to journalists and to have frequently hosted foreign correspondents, particular short-term parachute journalists. One representative told me that it has been a lot easier to show foreign journalists around on the farms than Harare-based correspondents. As he said: "They can come and we can get them out onto the ground to see for themselves exactly what is going on. And they don't live here. They aren't as vulnerable as other people".<sup>21</sup> Further elaborating on the arrival of foreign correspondents, the representative continued:

We usually get contacted before they arrive in the country and the first stop is here. At the same time, there are still quite a lot of journalists who might be here for two weeks and it's only the last couple of days that they hear about us and get in contact with us. Very sad and they end up doing a lot more work in those two days than they have done in the previous twelve days. So yah, my advice

to those journalists out there is that we're here, make contact with us. If you are not prepared to come into the country, we do have this database with statistics and a lot of footage, a lot of the camera work has been done and is ready.<sup>22</sup>

Both organisations also felt they had a role in correcting the misinformation carried in government propaganda. The CFU frequently advertised in the media in Zimbabwe to “present the facts about land reform”, and at the height of the farm occupations, they released almost daily ‘farm invasion updates’ which were circulated through e-mail internationally and were also published in local private newspapers such as *The Daily News*. They have a well-structured website and a Communication Officer who focuses on issuing press releases. JAG uses a similar strategy and circulates email newsletters up to this time. At the launch of the organisation, they also employed a Public Relations Officer who used to work as a Press Officer for the CFU. Compared to CFU and JAG, the farm workers’ union GAPWUZ has a much weaker media strategy. The organisation does not employ a Communication Officer nor does it have a website or access to e-mail. Although they had reasonable contacts with local journalists, they did not have a network of foreign correspondents.

Whereas I demonstrated in the previous section that the Zimbabwean story in itself was attractive to journalists, this section aimed to show how various farmer organisations have actively sought to highlight their plight and been hospitable to foreign journalists.

### **Personalisation**

Another reason for the significant amount of media coverage on Zimbabwe has been the fact that the story could be personalised. Galtung and Ruge (1965: 65) argue that “the more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item”. For Galtung and Ruge, this applies in particular to Western media coverage of ‘geographically and culturally distant’ nations. It is more likely that the affairs of these nations will be portrayed in the Western media as the activities of one of two senior political figures or even only the head of state.

In the case of Zimbabwe, Mugabe provided journalists with the ‘same old’ story of a promising African leader that had still gone corrupt, despite high hopes with some at Independence in 1980. Journalists often used the metaphor of ‘The Jewel of Africa’ to describe how wonderful Zimbabwe had been before Mugabe had turned it into a nightmare. The narrative of the transition from ‘food basket to basket case’ was often invoked in order to stress that Zimbabwe was the tale of a success gone bad. The sudden degeneration of a country as a result of the actions of one individual provided a particularly powerful story for British newspaper audiences. Obviously, Mugabe should indeed to a large extent be blamed for the current situation. However, by presenting Robert Mugabe as the ‘bad guy’ solely responsible for the crisis in Zimbabwe, the media failed to contextualise the situation and to take into account other more externally related factors which have also contributed to the catastrophic economic situation in Zimbabwe such as for example the implementation of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies in the 1990s and related to that the limited amount of interest of Britain and the international community in financially supporting land reform.

### **Re-appropriation**

In the previous section, I have highlighted how the situation in Zimbabwe has been represented in the British media and for which reasons. In the next section, I will argue that the dominance of the white farmer story in the British media assisted the Zimbabwean government in fixing the



meaning of the crisis in Zimbabwe as a bilateral problem between Zimbabwe and Britain over land. It allowed President Mugabe to construct Britain as its former colonial power who was using the media in order to discredit and derail Zimbabwe's land reform programme. In this respect, Terence Ranger (2004: 221) has argued that "during the presidential campaign in 2002 it often seemed that Robert Mugabe was campaigning against the man he called 'Tony B-Liar' rather than against Tsvangirai". This opposition between Zimbabwe vs. Blair became even more apparent in ZANU PF's 2005 parliamentary election campaign.

The dichotomy that the British media used in order to frame the situation in Zimbabwe in terms of black and white was quickly appropriated by the Zimbabwean government to confirm their suspicion that Britain's main interest was to protect its colonial interests in the country. The Zimbabwean government-funded daily newspaper *The Herald* reported that ZANU PF Minister Olivia Muchena said what was worrying was the intensity with which *CNN* and *BBC* were trying to drum up opinion against the democratisation of the country's economy in a bid to protect their imperialist interests. And the newspaper quoted her as follows:

"They [*CNN* and *BBC*] are against us for having gotten to the root of economic empowerment and democratisation on the economic front so they have to vilify President Robert Mugabe and Zanu-PF, and glorify whites as the chief producers of food," she said.<sup>23</sup>

Britain in particular was also seen as an active supporter of the opposition party MDC. The fact that the MDC was generally supported by the international community and that some of its members were white was considered by the ruling party ZANU PF as proof that Zimbabwe would be a colony again if the MDC would get into power. MDC was presented as an inauthentic, non-Zimbabwean party, full of Rhodesian interests, its members having no legitimacy to rule Zimbabwe because they had not participated in the liberation struggle. On numerous occasions, ZANU PF has tried to prove this point. In their efforts to legitimise their exclusive right to govern Zimbabwe, they have interestingly often drawn upon examples from the foreign media. Footage shot in 2000 by *CNN* showing white farmers signing cheques to the MDC has been regularly shown on Zimbabwean television and frequently appeared in ZANU PF election campaign advertisements. During an edition of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's programme *NewsHour* in June 2004, the *CNN* clip was used together with an excerpt from a debate in the House of Commons between Michael Howard and Tony Blair. In this particular debate, Blair inelegantly remarked that the British government was working with the MDC:

Michael Howard: Is that not an excellent illustration of the need for Britain to demonstrate clear and firm leadership, in the G8 and elsewhere, in working with the international community to help to achieve the objectives of peace and stability to which we are all committed?

The Prime Minister: On the latter two points, *we work closely with the MDC* on the measures that we should take in respect of Zimbabwe, although I am afraid that these measures and sanctions, although we have them in place, are of limited effect on the Mugabe regime.<sup>24</sup>

I would agree with Phimister and Raftopoulos (2004) that the international character of the crisis in Zimbabwe has been very important, and often ignored in academic analysis. In a recent article, Phimister and Raftopoulos argue that Mugabe's rhetoric of anti-imperialism has been very successful in gaining the support and solidarity of other African leaders in the region and Pan-African groups in the Diaspora such as the December 12 Movement in the United States, the

Black United Front in the United Kingdom and the Aboriginal Nations and People of Australia.<sup>25</sup> It has provided an effective cover-up of the injustices committed by the Zimbabwean government against its own people. Phimister and Raftopolous (2004: 386) also point out that in his efforts to define the crisis in Zimbabwe in terms of a rectification of colonial injustices, Mugabe “has been helped at every stage by clumsy Western, particularly, British intervention. The initial damage done in 1997 by ‘new’ Labour’s arrogant denial of any responsibility for past colonial injustices in Zimbabwe”. Phimister and Raftopolous here refer to a now famous and widely publicised letter written by the previous Secretary for International Development Clare Short to the Zimbabwe Minister for Agriculture, Kumbirai Kangai in which she stated the following:

I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonised not colonisers.<sup>26</sup>

Britain’s previous Minister for African Affairs in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Amos, also sought to break away from Zimbabwe’s definition of Britain as former colonial power. In an address in South Africa, she stated that:

At the heart of our foreign policy, therefore, is co-operation, not colonialism. We do not seek to recolonise Africa, or Iraq. Colonialism is about the imposition of values by force, the exploitation of resources by force, the domination of one race by another. Those days are gone. The fact that it is me standing here as a British Minister – a descendant of those colonised – is surely demonstration of this. [...]. The operative dynamic nowadays is “sharing”, not “dominating” or “imposing”.<sup>27</sup>

These examples serve to show how Britain has been at pains trying to communicate with Zimbabwe. It demonstrates how it does not want to be reminded of its identity as former coloniser of Zimbabwe. Perhaps this failure to deal with the past resembles what Paul Gilroy has recently named Britain’s ‘postcolonial melancholia’. In his book *After empire: melancholia or convivial culture?*, Gilroy (2004: 96-97) writes that:

[...] the totemic power of the great anti-Nazi war seems to have increased even as its veterans have died out. The evacuation of Britain’s postcolonial conflicts from national consciousness has become a significant cultural and historical event in its own right. Those forgotten wars have left significant marks on the body politic but the memory of them appears to have been collapsed into the overarching figuration of Britain at war against the Nazis, under attack, yet stalwart and ultimately triumphant.

Drawing upon psychoanalytic perspectives, he argues that Britain’s firm stance against Nazism has resulted in making itself feel righteous and innocent, thereby enabling itself to forget about its many wars of decolonisation in Africa. As Gilroy notes: “Being forced to reckon with the ongoing consequences of imperial crimes makes them uncomfortable in equal measure”.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have shown how the British media, and specifically *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, through strategies of simplification, ethnicisation and marginalisation have sought to frame and represent recent events in Zimbabwe in terms of a racial conflict between black and white, and more importantly, how the Zimbabwean government has successfully managed to

exploit these discourses on what they termed as 'Britain's kith and kin'. This has enabled them to present and frame the crisis in Zimbabwe as a bilateral disagreement over land with imperial power Britain which resulted in a significant amount of solidarity and support from neighbouring countries and black movements in the Diaspora. The continuing struggle against Empire also made it possible for the government to cover up its human rights violations against mainly black opposition supporters.

This clearly demonstrates how recent events in Zimbabwe have been struggles over meanings and definitions of the crisis. The media was a crucial arena in which these battles took place. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the 'crisis' in Zimbabwe, it is therefore essential to closely analyse these representations and their reappropriation by the Zimbabwean government.

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<sup>1</sup> The electronic news database Lexis Nexis was used in order to select the relevant articles in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. A search on 'Zimbabwe' and 'Zimbabwean' was carried out for the period between January 2000 and June 2004. Subsequently, articles that discussed the issue of Zimbabwe as the main topic were identified and copied manually into an Endnote database. 1,200 articles were selected for *The Guardian* and 1,370 for *The Daily Telegraph*. All articles were coded with a particular keyword such as media, land, cricket, food, 2000 parliamentary elections, 2002 presidential elections. This allowed me to classify articles according to author, date, title, newspaper and topic. It also enabled me to conduct a full-text search in the entire database.

<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of media representations of Zimbabwe in the British media, please refer to my forthcoming PhD thesis *Media, politics and land in Zimbabwe* (working title) in the Media and Film Studies Programme, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, School of Oriental and African Studies.

<sup>3</sup> See: Reporting the World, 2001, *Is coverage of Africa racist? And why are we ignoring the DRC crisis?*

<sup>4</sup> See: BBC News online, 26 July 2001, *Zimbabwe acts against BBC*.

<sup>5</sup> BBC1 had three *Panorama* editions devoted to Zimbabwe: *Panorama: Mugabe: the price of silence* (10 March 2002, reporter: Fergal Keane); *Five days in May* (15 June 2003, reporter: Fergal Keane); *The secret of the camps* (29 February 2004, reporter: Hilary Anderson). BBC1 also had Sean Langan reporting from Zimbabwe: *Sean Langan in Zimbabwe* (14 and 15 January 2002). BBC2 had three *Correspondent* programmes on Zimbabwe: *Zimbabwe: The promised land* (19 August 2000, reporter: Mufadzi Nkomo); *Zimbabwe burning* (3 March 2002, reporter: John Sweeney) and *Zimbabwe: Hounded out* (16 February 2003, reporter: Iain and Kerry Kay). BBC2 also had a *This World* edition devoted to *Zimbabwe: The Food Fix* (16 November 2004, reporter: Farai Sevenzo).

<sup>6</sup> See: Asserson and Williams, 2004, *The BBC and the Middle East. Analysis of documentaries. Fourth report, March 2004*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> John Sweeney's programme *Zimbabwe burning* was broadcast on BBC1 on 3 March 2002. Footage viewable on the BBC website: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1850000/video/\\_1852133\\_carbootedit\\_vi.ram](http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1850000/video/_1852133_carbootedit_vi.ram) (last accessed: 20 February 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1997, *Breaking the silence: building true peace: a report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988*.

<sup>9</sup> Zielenbach, 2000, The widow of murdered Zimbabwean farmer David, Maria Stevens, tells how she's finding the strength to cope with the loss of her husband and her feelings towards her troubled country. In: *Hello!*, Nr. 612, 23 May 2000, pp. 98-102.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with foreign correspondent, 15 September 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with foreign correspondent, 15 August 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, 15 August 2003.

<sup>13</sup> See front page of Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* on 30 March 2000 or: BBC News Online, *Zimbabwe farmers plan legal battle*, 6 September 2000. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/913414.stm> (last accessed: 20 February 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Blair and Thornycroft, Chinhoyi, White farms 'cleansed' by Mugabe mobs, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2001.

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<sup>18</sup> House of Commons, *Minutes taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee*, 18 April 2000.

<sup>19</sup> For statistics on 2000, see: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2001, *Human Rights and Zimbabwe's June 2000 Election*, p. 40-41. For statistics on 2001, see: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2002, *Political Violence Report December 2001*, p. 12-13. For statistics on 2002, see: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2003, *Political Violence Report December 2002*, p. 17-19. For statistics on 2003, see: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2004, *Political Violence Report December 2003*, p. 12. For statistics on 2004, see: Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2004, *Political Violence Report November 2004*, p. 13. All reports are available on the website of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum: <http://www.hrforumzim.com>

<sup>20</sup> See for example BBC News Online, *Arrest in Zimbabwe farmer's murder*, 19 March 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with representative farmer's organisation, 22 August 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with representative farmer's organisation, 22 August 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Blacks urged to establish own media bodies, *The Herald*, 15 August 2002.

<sup>24</sup> House of Commons, *Hansard Debates text*, 14 June 2003.

<sup>25</sup> See also: Raftopoulos, 2004, Nation, race and history in Zimbabwean politics.

<sup>26</sup> The letter was reprinted in the Pan-African magazine *New African*. See: Short, 2002, *How it all started*.

<sup>27</sup> Speech by Baroness Amos, *Setting the record straight*. to the National Press Club in Pretoria, 31 March 2003.

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