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„Land, Identity, and Struggle. Confronting  
'Chimurenga' in Contemporary Zimbabwean  
Literature”

The Historical Palimpsest as a Narrative Weapon of Political  
Persuasion.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The ideology of Chimurenga is a tale of the invention of a complex politically usable narrative by ZANU in its bid to construct a postcolonial nation, unite people, gain popularity, and assume political power at the end of settler colonial rule. It was and is premised on doctrine of permanent revolution against imperialism and colonialism. This ideology constituted the leitmotif of ZANU-PF nationalism. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 5).

Chimurenga<sup>1</sup> is the historical, political, and literary narrative of a nation's march through momentous moments of struggle, and towards the envisioned freedom encapsulated within the prophetic espousals of a revered myth. Chimurenga as narrative, cultural commentary, and political ideology is carried through epochs and dispersed amongst all who partake of the nation state of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, and incremental to the concept, is the way in which Chimurenga functions as a portal, one which enables and doctors visions of the past, and the future, binding both views into a vista of imagined greatness. Political mongers, feeding upon the narrative, revel in and propagate the vista of grandness, incorporating themselves within the fabric of telling which constitutes its core.

This thesis aims to confront the ways in which the concept, or ideology, of Chimurenga is reflected within the writings of Zimbabwean authors, and how these in their turn further informed, and inform, the political and hegemonic narrative supremacy. Furthermore, the origins or source of the Chimurenga narrative is exposed and deconstructed, the role played by such seminal academics as Terence Ranger and Stanlake Samkange in its construction is placed at the forefront of this discussion. The concept of Chimurenga will be broken down into the composite parts of Land, Struggle/Violence, and finally Identity. This deconstruction is thematically determined but will nonetheless take into consideration chronological progression to highlight the changes which have become apparent in the way the country's legacy is reflected upon, and how these reflections can be placed within the encompassing space of the hegemonic narrative. The willingness of the Zimbabwean voice to adapt will be a major theme, and significantly, the question will be posed as to how the Zimbabwean author should solve the quandary of complicity, of

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<sup>1</sup>Chimurenga is the Shona word for struggle and/or revolutionary conflict. Historically the term is used to describe the war against the colonial oppressor in 1896/97 referred to as the first Chimurenga, and the war for liberation referred to as the second Chimurenga. The current third Chimurenga is used to describe the land appropriations initiated by Zanu PF at the turn of the millenium."

having taken part in the construction of the hegemonic narrative. Text and context will be a defining feature of this study; the leniency of the diversion into oral pre-texts leading to misrepresentations, and ultimately perverted identities. The author/ informant attempts to extricate him/herself from this complicity, but the question arises as to whether this does not become a process which further implicates the Zimbabwean author in a heightened sense of intimacy, intimacy with the 'Master Fiction'. The attempt to repudiate makes visible an undeniable intertextuality which cannot be entwined because positions have been implicated by both sides. Novel to the discussion is the vision, or imagination of the future, an aspect hitherto absent from Zimbabwean writing because it pre-supposes a re-evaluation of the past, a past which will soon enough incorporate the present ruling monolith. The future has thus been declared off-limits and all seem willing to concentrate upon predictable versions of the past as opposed to predictions of the future. It can be supposed that once the present regime has been demoted to the annals of the past, a decolonisation of the author's mind will take place, and a purging of the past might call into being true and unfettered imagination.

Methodologically this work has been informed, and infused, by a number of critical approaches, first and foremost amongst them that of the historical, including ideas pertaining to the fields of new historicism, cultural materialism, and postcolonial theory. Foucault's theories pointing to the relationship between power and knowledge are integral to the analysis of certain components of the discussion. E.H. Carr's *What is History* serves as a running commentary throughout this thesis, providing a fundamental understanding of historical processes.

The literary works under scrutiny in this thesis have been chosen because they reflect a very panoramic scope of all that exists within the field of Zimbabwean literature, although it is helpful at certain moments, to differentiate between the historically divergent anomaly of the Rhodesian state, and the postcolonial ethos encapsulated within the Zimbabwean nation state. Beginning with Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, and including authors from four generations and three progressive political eras, this work will also include the novel *Far From Home* written by Naima B. Robert in 2011, an author not unlike Lessing, who offers a hybrid perspective on the meaning of 'Land' and the notion of 'Belonging'. Both Lessing and Robert could be, and are, excluded by some from the canon of Zimbabwean literature, because they do not fulfil the requirements of

conclusive national identity, but on the other hand they offer two alternative versions of the Zimbabwean/Rhodesian experience. Robert could be said to project an extreme form of post-colonial hybridisation, and thus be equipped to embellish the spectrum of experience as represented in this thesis with an *anschauung* unfettered by the constraints of ‘belonging’; beyond the practiced and packaged domain.

Writing is a process, historically seen, which runs parallel to the events that take place on the political stage. These dual processes enact a bilateral influential force, one upon the other, not always in equal measure, but continually. Both of these acts at some stage become part of the history which is incorporated into the meta-narrative used to explain the country, the land, and its heritage for that matter. This history is evaluated, and it is worked upon by both forces, once again in unequal measure, but continually. This bilateral process entails the pre-requisite freedom to interpret, the freedom to comment on the past, and finally, the freedom to make predictions about the future. The historic base, in this sense, is pliable, but it is pliable for both forces. Zimbabwean writing displays a major imbalance within the dynamics of this process; creative expression has been curtailed and bonded to the narrative of struggle (Chimurenga). The outcome of this narrative is one which is pending, and squarely placed within the confines of political mythologies. Writing in Zimbabwe thus entails a certain synchronisation; literary expression lagging a step behind scripted truths. Not only is history rendered unstable because it has been mythologised, but also because it can, and has been, re-scripted on a regular basis. The Zimbabwean author is born into this ‘uncertainty’, not knowing of the outcome, victim to what Achille Mbembe has termed the ‘Master Fiction’<sup>2</sup>. The Zimbabwean author does not create truths, the Zimbabwean author is designated the task of echoing untruths:

In certain African national environments affected by the experience of colonial violence (...), political situations develop where state power inscribes itself as a world order, and rulers claim to be deities of sort. Master fictions may be described as discursive blueprints which aspire to generate and underlie all socially produced meaning. (Primorac 9)

‘World order’ in parameters which have been cordoned off from other meanings, or truths, inhibits and subjugates the writer, making him/her complicit in the creation of a

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<sup>2</sup> Terminology coined by Cameroonian literary theorist and philosopher Achille Mbembe to describe dominant versions of narration, the dialectic of power.

mythological plot. Even those who have found ways of circumventing hegemonic plot constructions remain part of the narrative because they are forced to react in ways which reinforce the mythological superstructure. The uncertainty which prevails is exacerbated because the reaction remains part of the narrative, and the plot. The striving for a Zimbabwean identity is superimposed upon the writer. The Zimbabwean writer enacts the ideology of collective struggle (Chimurenga) in his/her creative output, and this struggle belies the inner struggle of the individual self, the artist forced to suppress individual expression. It becomes either the betrayal of the cause or the betrayal of the self, and repeatedly both, because the concomitant dejection brought on by this dilemma has nothing to say. Expressions of the carnivalesque simply reflect the carnivalesque nature of the whole. Knowing the Zimbabwean author becomes near to impossible, invisible as he/she is, submerged beneath the telling and the compliance.

Strangely enough this invisibility includes all who write: the writer at home, the writer abroad, and the writer in exile; in other words even those who have been excluded from the superstructure. The so-called white writers are, as much as their black counterparts, pre-occupied with visions of the past, with a Zimbabwean/Rhodesian experience in reaction to the super-state, utilising individual colonial memory as opposed to postcolonial collective memory. This form of writing, be it autobiographical or confessional, merely reinforces the legitimacy of the Chimurenga narrative, calling to mind the misdeeds of the past.

History, as outlined within the dictum of the state's monopolised truth, is a history on the threshold of revision. The state is a transitory entity, and as such, the history it has institutionalised is unstable. This instability breeds 'uncertainty' amongst those writers committed to alignment because the imagination is overshadowed by the fear of possibly having to renege on imagined truths. This question hovers threateningly over the writing process and prematurely convicts much of that which has been written over the decades. The future will undeniably make its decisions upon the past, a process the author knows all too well, some such as Samkange, Mungoshi and Chinodya having experienced it at numerous seminal points.

"The Mashona believed that the spirits of their ancestors would be able to meet any challenge and so merely said, '*Regayi vatore zwinoyera*', 'let them take that which is so sanctified that it cannot be taken away'". (Samkange 34)



Stanlake Samkange<sup>3</sup>, historian and novelist, uncovers the truth of that which so tethers the storyteller and chronicler of events, not only in Zimbabwe, but in large parts of Africa. That moment when the country's history crosses the path into myth, when written history meets oral history at some interregnum, that moment is the conundrum which clouds all future attempts at reclaiming the past, a moment which makes confusion and 'uncertainty' inevitable. 'Uncertainty' because the novelist and the historian, whether writing as individual entity or in the dual role of historian/novelist, must rely upon sources shrouded by countless layers of re-telling. It is this retelling which the novelist/ historian cannot unravel because there is no record of that which was told before the retelling was finalised, when myth was historicised.

All have partaken in the practice of mythological storytelling: novelists, historians, and finally the state. The state has functioned as a powerful fulcrum, positing the myth directly into state historiography, and thereby sanctioning the establishment of a long sought after national identity, albeit one based upon hearsay. It is precisely this factor which cannot be countered because it is welded into the bedrock of ancient traditions. It has been declared an act of open subversion and betrayal, an act bordering upon terrorism, to raise a voice against this version of the nation. The reason is clear: history can be constructed, or in the least re-written, and in an extreme form of historicising, the ancient oral tradition can be revived and reinstated. Dr. Tafataona Mahoso, writing in the Sunday Mail of 16 March 2003, offers a revealing account of this newly revived practice of oral history, and the intangibility of a historicised spirit world:

So, old Mugabe here is not the person of Robert Mugabe. Rather it is that powerful, elemental African memory going back to the first Nehanda and even to the ancient Egyptians and Ethiopians who are now reclaiming Africa in history as the cradle of humankind (...). Mugabe as the reclamer of African space, Mugabe as the African power of remembering the African legacy and African heritage .... (Muponde, Primorac 226).

This recourse to the spirit world implies the wilful extraction of a national history from the narrative of textbook factuality, handing it back to the ancestral realm of a time before the white man brought written truths, the bible, and enlightenment. Zimbabwean history,

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<sup>3</sup> Stanlake Samkange was a Zimbabwean author, teacher, politician, historian, and philosopher. He belongs to the first guard of black authors who wrote in English. As an African nationalist he deeply believed in a united liberal front against white rule, but also in peaceful opposition as opposed to violent conflict. Stanlake Samkange died in 1988, eight years after Robert Mugabe's ascent to power.

African history is here not so much re-written but re-told as it once was, imparted through spirit mediums. The dream of an African modernism has been sacrificed because it breeds dissent, because it furthers individualism, and the hunger for knowledge with which to work upon the here and now, because it cannot be upheld and subjugated.

Zimbabwean literature is and has been confronted with two major choices: a writing that acts against and away from Zimbabwean identity, or a writing which supports and bolsters the patriotic vision deemed a prerequisite for the creation of a national identity as it is foreseen by Zanu PF. It is a choice which has created a rift within the canon of Zimbabwean authors, a choice which has created the subtext to the meta-narrative; for and against, belonging to and divorced from the land. Writers in exile have, according to state diction, been estranged from the land, have lost their roots and their history. The choice is, simply put, all about which history to write: that which includes, or that of a 'collective memory' which is selective and superimposed. Collective memory is comforting because it delivers the script, and more importantly, it delivers the history. The author who opts to partake of this collective memory has one simple task; to be creative within the pre-given parameters. The task of the historian is one which the state has willingly usurped. Dambudzo Marechera, writing across the threshold of independence, gave vent to the frustration of the author confronted with this adaptation of the national template:

A chasm is exposed within the African image; our roots have become too many banners in the wind, with no meaningful connection with the deep-seated voice within us (...). A new kind of fascism based on the 'traditional' African image has arisen. (Veit-Wild, Flora 319)

Marechera voices the 'uncertainty' that will mark the task of the Zimbabwean author to come, 'uncertainty' because the choice becomes that of either writing against the self and for the good of the collective patriotic goal, or finding ways to circumvent the constrictions on the expression of the individual self.

The periphery in Zimbabwean writing is a narrow and marginal space. It is not a place to hide, and the distance to and over the border into nothingness is a short and precarious one. The Zimbabwean author must therefore make a clear decision, one which entails the use of 'correct' historical sources, and the 'correct' use of these historical sources. The decision can also entail the sacrifice of 'belonging to', of not writing from within the confines of the comforting space of a national identity. If there is such a thing as

Zimbabwean writing, then there is the Zimbabwean writer who writes according to the edicts of that which has been termed ‘patriotic history’<sup>4</sup>. ‘Patriotic history’ provides its proponents with a predictable list of characters, both mythological and historical, and an assortment of legendary set pieces within which these characters are able to play out their roles. In writing, the Zimbabwean author places him/herself squarely in this space; it is a declaration of belonging to.

Solomon Mutswairo<sup>5</sup> has described the role of the Zimbabwean writer, placing it clearly in the services of a collective enterprise:

I can only hope that this account of a few of our heroes and heroines will rouse other Zimbabweans to look further into the rich legacy of our other famous men and women, the myths and legends which have sprung to make Zimbabwe even more our cherished home. (qtd. in Veit Wild, *Flora* 140)

This patriotic plea makes it quite clear what the task of the Zimbabwean author should be, according to Mutswairo and the hegemonic powers which preside over the question of identity. It also outlines which tools lie at the disposal of the purveyor of historical imagination. The unequivocal use of historical pre-texts stultifies the literary imagination, resulting in a literary tradition which coils up indefinitely upon itself. A limited set of stories and legends are told and re-told in monotonous regularity, echoing the incessant war cry ‘Chimurenga’. It is this battle cry which dominates, not only the construction of a national historiography but also functions as the meta-bond for the thematic pre-requisites of the literary postcolonial diatribe. Chimurenga is history in Zimbabwe, and conversely, history in Zimbabwe is pre-occupation with the myth of Chimurenga. The facts have, in the process of ‘becoming’, been mythologised, and the myth has been factualised, thereby making it uncontestable; levered from the realm of dispute inherent to a western understanding of historical processes. Not only is the history of the nation re-told but the concept of historical understanding is re-interpreted. It could be described as cut-and-paste history, reliant upon selective memory, spirit memory, and the appropriate forgetfulness. Imagination is an intrinsic part of this process of forgetting, the

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<sup>4</sup> A form of historicising in Zimbabwe that replaced National History and called for a heightened allegiance to the country, Zanu PF, and finally Robert Mugabe. A telling of the country’s history which relied reaching further back into the past to retrieve moments of greatness which would further embellish the role of Zanu PF and the Shona people as a nation.

<sup>5</sup> Solomon Mutswairo. Zimbabwean author who wrote the first Shona language novel; *Feso*.

rewriting of colonial history, and its transformation into a Zimbabwean version of post-colonial history. It is this history which must serve as the template for literary expression. Must the Zimbabwean author writing today not dream of filling in the gaps, a desire hitherto suspended?

History relies on documentary evidence but the process of producing and preserving documents is often owned and controlled by powerful groups. In Zimbabwe historical events have gone unreported or under-reported. It is this creation of absence in history and memory that informs much of Zimbabwean literature. (Muponde, Primorac 196)

It could additionally be stated that memory always excludes, or includes absence, and that history informed by memory, be it collective or individual, must reflect these exclusions.

## 2 CHIMURENGA

### 2.1 Foregrounding Historical Origins

“Rhodes slept well that night. But when he woke up, it was to be told: ‘There’s an uprising in Mashonaland. The Mashonas cry “Chimurenga throughout the land”’. (Samkange 110)

In *Year of the Uprising* Stanlake Samkange describes, in detail, events leading up to and away from the Shona/ Matabele uprisings of 1896-97. Imagining the figure of Cecil John Rhodes; arch coloniser, industrialist, and head of the British South African Company, at the focal point of events is a revealing construct because Samkange thereby makes use of the writer’s tools to personify the white man’s role in the uprisings. Apportioning blame facilitates the telling of events in a causal structure of action and reaction, perpetrator and victim. A clear historical chronology is unravelled which will serve as a guiding template for a spate of young authors to come. Samkange takes the liberty of investing historical figures, such as Rhodes and king Lobengula, with the authoritative voice of the historical narrator. The opposing sides do not necessarily relate individual versions of events as much as they state their individual culpability within the confines of a superimposed historical certainty. The author provides this certainty, clothing the characters in their respective historical garbs. In this context, the following conversation that takes place between the figures of Lord Grey and Baden Powell<sup>6</sup>, clearly sets the stage for the second Chimurenga of the 1960’s, and furthermore, expels all doubt as to the question of culpability:

‘You know, said Baden-Powell to Lord Grey later, ‘I am going back home to England. Much as I love this country, I cannot live here. I am afraid that the whites here have learnt nothing from this rebellion. There will be another round, I tell you. And when that takes place, I am not sure the white man will win.’ (Samkange 150)

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<sup>6</sup> Lord Baden Powell was a British General who made mention of himself during the Boer War in South Africa which took place between 1899 and 1900. It was in his function as soldier of her majesty’s forces that he fought alongside Rhodes against the Shona and Matabele uprisings in 1896 and 1897.

Albert Grey who inherited the title of 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Grey was the Crown’s emissary in the then Rhodesia. As administrator of the colony he was in permanent official contact with Cecil John Rhodes who managed the business concerns of the Crown’s colony.

Samkange makes a clear historical reference to the irreversibility of the chronology of action and resistance. White colonial figures are instrumentalised, within the fabric of the novel, to impart historical truths and comment upon their complicity. Based upon information extracted from divergent letters, concessions, reported conversations, and oral versions of events embedded within tribal history, a quilt of facts, myths, and interpretations is sewn together, which in its entirety informs future events. This quilt of construed historical legitimacy is implemented by the ruling powers in Zimbabwe to explain away the contingency of violence, suppression, and dispossession under the banner of a resistance ideology conveniently placed in its lap (Chimurenga).

The causality which Samkange weaves into his text finds its reverberation in successive attempts by authors to interpret the events of 1896-97. A prime example is to be found in the novel written by Na'ima B. Robert, *Far From Home*. Written in 2011, 33 years after Samkange's *Year of the Uprising*, we can detect the very same sense of historical determinism whilst Robert relates the events leading up to what has been termed the third Chimurenga:<sup>7</sup>

“Tariro“ Farai interrupted my thoughts, “we will fight the whites when they come. Many others have resolved to do the same. We are young and strong - and we have the ancestors on our side. Do you not remember Babamunini telling us about the first chimurenga, when we first fought the whites? Do you not remember Sekuru Kaguvi, and Chaminuka? That time has come again ...” (Na'ima B Robert 77)

Robert does, much like Samkange had done before her, partake in the process of a historicising which seeks to establish an interrelatedness between the various forms of national resistance. Memory is the binding factor which establishes this interrelatedness, and it is a lived memory which is used to account for the progression of events; Babamunini can remember and thus it must be so. Once again, historical processes are not questioned, but retold verbatim, collective memory functioning as the authoritative force. Memory is not contextualised analytically, it is made to stand on its own, as history told from one to the other.

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<sup>7</sup> The Third Chimurenga is the term used to describe the violent program of land appropriation levered against the white farming community at the onset of the millenium by the war veterans in collusion with the regime of Robert Mugabe.

Commenting on Samkange's *Year of the Uprising* Flora Veit-Wild has contested this form of semi-historical writing, or mythologising:

Lacking an in-depth treatment of the causes of the risings and a genuine and plausible connection between the First and Second Chimurenga, Samkange has to complement his historical facts by heavily mythologising that history to make his message clear ... (Flora Veit-Wild 126).

In defending Samkange's historical practice it must be stated that the mythology Veit-Wild speaks of, is more often than not, the use of oral sources to fill in those gaps which come about as the result of the absence of written sources. Samkange makes ample use of oral history, including it in the fabric of an overall understanding of past events, and combining oral sources with a newly acquired western perspective on historical processes. It is this distinctive colonial amalgamation which informs his work; whether as novelist, historian, or both.

Flora Veit-Wild has argued that Samkange depicts characteristics and convictions in his writings which clearly place him within the confines of a specific generation of writers, and more broadly speaking, generation of future Zimbabweans. Having written *Year of the Uprising* before the birth of the Zimbabwean state, and firmly anchored within the mores of the colonial era replete with its mission schools and attempts at liberal unification politics, Samkange was closer to the white liberal sentiment of conciliation as he was to that of the ideology of Chimurenga, which was to be institutionalised by the revolutionary forces of Zanu and Zapu<sup>8</sup>. (Veit-Wild 136) Despite, or because of this, he contributes extensively to the resistance narrative as if it had taken on a life of its own, an abstraction that has distanced itself from the convictions and beliefs of its author.

Alexander Kanengoni, a former guerrilla soldier in Robert Mugabe's Zanla<sup>9</sup> forces, offers a frontline perspective on the historicising effort undertaken by the leaders of the revolutionary movement, and soon to be future leaders of the re-born postcolonial nation:

He had not realised that the villagers had stopped singing and that Tonderayi, the section commander, was delivering the pungwe's political lesson. So that when

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<sup>8</sup> Zanu and Zapu; Zimbabwe African National Union and Zimbabwe African Peoples Union, the conflicting political and military parties that vied for dominance during and after the liberation war. Zanu, led by Robert Mugabe won the elections of 1980 and have since not relinquished power, having crushed the political adversary led by Joshua Nkomo.

<sup>9</sup> Zanla refers to the Zimbabwe African Liberation Army which functioned as the military appendix to Zanu PF.

he finally heard the section commander talking about the civilisations that existed in the country before the coming of the white man, he was shocked to discover that the history of his people did not start with the coming of the whites. (Kanengoni 22)

Kanengoni, writing in 1997, depicts the time of the independence war (second Chimurenga) which had reached its height during the late 1970s when Samkange had completed his novel on the first Chimurenga, and insulates that form of historicising as practiced by Samkange, adding to it the political goals of the revolution. History is thus instrumentalised to reinforce legitimacy for a certified hegemonic agenda, setting the course for a direction that would rely heavily upon a very distinct mode of ‘looking back’ to explain future actions and events. It is, once again, a matter of determinism which informs the historical outlook laid bare in Kanengoni’s retelling of events. The excerpt continues to delineate the full circle of historical causality, a political ideology in its infancy, but one about to be institutionalised on a far grander scale:

The section commander began with the Munhumutapa and the Rozvi empires during the Great Zimbabwe civilization, and continued on to the coming of the white man and the first chimurenga, and on through the various forms of colonial government up to Ian Smith’s UDI, when the last bridge between blacks and whites was burned down and the only way left to communicate was through violence: the war, the second chimurenga. ( Kanengoni 22-23)

Kanengoni describes the forging of a link between the two Zvimurenga<sup>10</sup> by citing concrete historical facts, adding these to the mythological bonding which Samkange had made use of two decades earlier, reverting to the very same evocation of ancestral memory central within the work of the older author: “Then the section commander stopped and burst into song and the villagers stoked it up with their voices and the flames leapt into the night, evoking the memories of the heroes of the first Chimurenga.” (Kanengoni 23) It is an incendiary passion which invests this moment with a distinctive force, prying historical representations from the confused conglomerate of liberal versions of colonial historiography, and infusing them with incantations of ancient memory. The ancestral lineage of resistance, irrefutable and spiritually ordained, is left wholly intact to establish historical certainty. It differs from Samkange’s view in that it leaves no options open other than the inevitability of armed conflict and loyalty to a

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<sup>10</sup> David Beach; former Zimbabwean historian and lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe coined the plural of Chimurenga.



unitary cause. There is no space for reconciliation, the path of history having ordained the course of violence and retribution.

Kanengoni's main protagonist, Munashe, must inevitably cower under the strength of the argumentation employed by his section commander, remaining silent whilst the memory of the ancestral spirits sanctions the future course of events. The trauma which ultimately leads to his final isolation, and death, is one which is fully posited within the framework of historical determinacy; a silence inevitably imposed upon all divergent perspectives. In the moments before his death Munashe is visited by the spirits of the erstwhile leaders of the revolution who speak up against the manipulation and distortion of historical sources:

It all began with silence. We deliberately kept silent about some truths, no matter how small, because some of us felt that we would compromise our power. This was how the lies began because when we came to tell the history of our country and the history of our struggle, our silences distorted the story and made it defective. ( Kanengoni 132)

Ultimately the spirits, or the spirit world, bring everything to a close, including the search for the truth. Munashe is cured of his trauma and hauled away by the Lion Spirit <sup>11</sup>of his ancestors, all culminating in a mist of spiritual healing, and the realisation that times have changed inexorably. As in a dream the novel and its protagonists drift in and out of conflicting versions of reality; victim to the very real imposition of a history by force.

The three novels display one overriding characteristic: an overpowering sense of uncertainty brought on by the confusion of historical truths, and historicised mythology. As within the states' historiography, the spirit world is made to intervene on behalf of the protagonists, and on behalf of the authors, to impart the certainty which the earthly world cannot sustain, or explain. The spirits are called upon to illuminate the future and the past simultaneously because only they possess the power to look in both directions, the earthbound forced to finding its nourishment in the practice of looking back; scavenging around in well-worn terrain for bits and pieces of used information relaying upon the author a predictable anonymity. Even divergent perspectives on conflict/struggle such as those on hand in Kanengoni's novel hold no surprises in store apart from a sense of

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<sup>11</sup> The Lion Spirit, or Mhondoro; grand spirits that mediate between the great god Mwari and his earthly subjects.

dejection at not having found anything of substance other than an age old myth with which to dispel all evil. Munashe's trauma can be explained when viewed within a chronology of historical markers, leading back to when the white man came and it all began to fall apart.

*Echoing Silences* is, first and foremost, a 'war novel'. We could additionally allot it the predicate of 'trauma novel', with ample displays of associated techniques. Ranka Primorac points to the recurrent technique of the 'flashback', the temporal shift, an interconnection of present and past experience. (Primorac 135) This confusion of the space/time relativity can only be alleviated by the timely intervention of the Lion Spirit and we as reader cannot accompany Munashe into the realm of the unknown; the realm of future and truth.

The three novels mentioned above can be seen as part of a collective response to the three Zvimurenga; each author looking back upon that particular historical/political focal point which would come to define his/ her generation. Kanengoni and Robert describe the events (second and third Chimurenga) from within; the lack of distance to and from the turmoils of war and social upheaval clearly reflected in their writing. Samkange wavers too, when confronting anything other than the past, but the distance between his time of writing and the first Chimurenga makes it easier for him to describe events with a certain amount of historical authority.

The three authors, each in his/her own way, make use of similar historical sources; Kanengoni and Samkange articulating indebtedness to the Zimbabwean scholar and historian Terence Ranger<sup>12</sup>, whilst Robert begins her novel with that symbol of the Lion Spirit with which *Echoing Silences* ends. Kanengoni unravels the prediction which Samkange places into the mouth of Baden Powell, and Robert connects the third and final Chimurenga with its predecessor, thereby legitimising it in a similar vein as the ruling ideologues. Kanengoni's work can be seen as an indictment of the horrors of war, and the untruths that have propelled it, but he does not attempt to question the interrelation between the uprisings. The spaces between the uprisings are left uncommented upon; are

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<sup>12</sup> English born Terence Ranger was a historian, and lecturer who lived and taught in Zimbabwe and Rhodesia. Known for his activities as founder of the Britain Zimbabwe Society and his propagation of the assertion that the Matabele and Shona uprisings of 1896 and 1897 were instigated and led by the so-called spirit mediums, most prominent among them, Nehanda and Kaguvi.

left in silence and darkness, thus it would seem as if there were a direct correlation between the three historical eras. This correlation is the defining point within the hegemonic narrative of Chimurenga, this is its life-giving source.

Terence Ranger has, more often than not, been apportioned blame for having called to life that understanding/interpretation of historical events which would so come to influence writers, revolutionaries and politicians. In a moment of critical self-appraisal Ranger commented upon the irreversibility of the historicism he had set in motion; irreversible because it had long been cemented into the fabric of the 'Master Fiction', and because it was a very attractive and pliable telling of a country's formative past. The inclusion of mythical plots, spirit mediums, and oral history in his version of the past, incurred upon future generations of writers, historians, and politicians, the freedom to interpret events along an exceedingly nationalistic and patriotic path:

When I retired from my Oxford Chair in 1997 I went to the University of Zimbabwe for four years as a visiting professor. In the first year I was asked to second mark final examination papers in African historiography and in the modern history of Zimbabwe. It was a chastening and illuminating experience. In the historiography paper every student denounced 'nationalist historiography' (...) and instanced me as its prime practitioner. ( qtd. in Muponde, Primorac 217)

In reference to the seminal works of the 1960s and 70s, such as *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* and *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia*, Ranger clearly underestimates the power and attractiveness of a historiography which lends itself primarily to a mystification and comfortable over-simplification of the dynamics of resistance which would come to define the landscape of historical and political developments in Zimbabwe. This form of retelling came about at a time when a people in the throes of becoming a nation were searching for a national identity. In response to this Ranger states:

I also located two circumstances under which historical scholarship was crucially important. The first - which I had myself encountered in Rhodesia in the 1950s and 60s and in Matabeleland in the 1980s and 90s - was when people had been denied a history. But you could have too much history as well as too little. You could have too much history if a single narrow historical narrative gained a monopoly and was endlessly repeated. (qtd. in Muponde, Primorac 219)

Ranger, once again, seems to miss the essence of attractivity, and the way in which the historiography he had propagated echoed so many sentiments simultaneously; the desire for a unified identity, the calling to mind of those ancient traditions which were needed to bolster this search for identity, and the battle cry which was needed to signal all future

resistance. The amalgamation of such an abundance of different aspects in what remains an overly simplistic reading of the past could not but succumb to the will of the burgeoning nationalist movements, and the authors and scholars who were either fully, or temporarily, ensconced within these movements. Samkange, and others, were only too glad to take up the historiography on hand; to make a choice on the direction the interpretation of heritage and identity would take, and to begin with the work on this new project: the historical novel, the Chimurenga novel.

## **2.2 History's Lesson Learnt?**

History, or the history of resistance, informs almost every work written by Zimbabwean and /or former Rhodesian authors from 1950 onwards to the present day. Apart from a negligent number of exceptions, differing versions of historical perspectives abound in countless layers of re-telling. The exceptions too, seem to touch upon the traditions and legacy of the past, calling upon history to stand in on behalf of the plot. History in this sense conveys context; foregrounds, because thereby certain events might be rendered plausible.

*The Grass is Singing*, written by Doris Lessing in 1950 during a hiatus in an otherwise tumultuous history, represents just such an exception; concentrating as it does on the endeavours of one solitary white farmer to tame the land, and the relationship of his wife, Mary Turner, with the black house boy Moses. Resistance, upheaval, and conflict, hover just behind the scenes of this novel as silent relics of the past, and as portentous signals about to illuminate the future. The singular moment of a murder which ends the novel casts its light upon the interrelated themes of guilt, revenge, victory, and finally defeat. Moses, who lingers on at the scene of the crime, returning to the body of Mary, describes an insular panorama of quiet destruction:

It came: a prolonged drench of light, like a wet dawn. And this was his final moment of triumph, a moment so perfect and complete that it took the urgency from thoughts of escape, leaving him indifferent. When the dark returned he took his hand from the wall, and walked slowly off through the rain towards the bush. Though what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of his completed revenge, it is impossible to say. (Lessing 206)

The form of resistance which has been brought to absolute fulfilment in this novel echoes the recurrent themes of retribution, revenge, and righteousness. Moses ultimately surrenders himself into the hands of his captors, but in a way that precludes the concession of defeat. To explain this reaction Lessing turns towards a particular historical reading of the country, calling to mind the times of King Lobengula<sup>13</sup>, one of the focal figures prefacing the first Chimurenga. The explanation is revealing for its stereotypification, but provides the reader with the knowledge with which to exonerate Moses of his guilt. The white people who populate Lessing's story look back upon the time of brave king Lobengula who was wronged by the white settlers to explain Moses' reaction at the hands of his captors:

If one knew anything about the history of the country (...) one would have come across accounts of the society Lobengula ruled. The laws were strict: everyone knew what they could or could not do. If someone did an unforgivable thing, like touching one of the king's women, he would submit fatalistically to punishment, which was likely to be impalement over an ant-heap on a stake, or something equally unpleasant (...). Well it was the tradition to face punishment, and really there was something fine about it. (Lessing 13)

Prophetically enough Moses stands upon an ant-heap as he awaits the arrival of his captors. (Lessing 206).

The intermingling of historical pre-texts and fiction begins at this very moment. Moses alone is made a relic of the past, in touch with the mores and codes of a bygone age within the court of King Lobengula, heir to the great Zulu warrior Mzilikazi. It is of course the Matabele king who is remembered and brought to the fore, as opposed to the Shona warriors of old, just as the Zulu kings Shaka and Dingaan<sup>14</sup> are held in reverence south of the border, to the detriment of the Xhosa and other ethnic groups. Moses is unwittingly incorporated into this version of the past. Moses, endowed with the memory of a revered past, is caste within the mould of the compliant wrongdoer; proud and cognizant of an ancient moral codex. History, as it is brought to life within this context, is made to stand defiantly alongside the enactment of accountability. Moses acts according to the template

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<sup>13</sup> King Lobengula: second and last king (1870–94) of the Southern African Ndebele (Matabele) nation. Lobengula—the son of the founder of the Ndebele kingdom, Mzilikazi—was unable to prevent his kingdom from being destroyed by the British in 1893.

<sup>14</sup> Shaka and Dingaan were two Zulu kings who fought notable battles against the boers in South Africa, most importantly the Battle of Blood River which took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1838.

of historical contextuality, and as such, his crime must be viewed as one contained within this context, harking back to the age of Lobengula and the impending uprisings of 1896-97. Had the Turners been attuned to their history they might have been conversely aware of the possible outcome of all that they had unwittingly set in motion; but here history reveals itself in stolen moments, and most formidably in the picture of Moses awaiting his arrest atop of an ant-heap.

Lessing would have been acutely aware of the country's history at the time, at least of that limited version which would have prevailed, and furthermore, acutely aware of the prophetic nature of certain historical sources. Ironically she invests the white farmers with the role of imparting oral history as they recount the legend of King Lobengula to explain Moses' reaction. The black man is left, at the end, to enact this very prophecy. The figures in this novel are victims; first and foremost of their own actions and decisions, and secondly they are made victims of historical certainty by being placed in a particular setting with a very finite historical biography. Thus, according to the myths and legends that abound, they are chained to the determinacy of the past, and this past, in the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean context, displays its very own force. The historical pre-text is made to bear upon the characters of the novel, an influence which renders the outcome predictable; the onlookers certain that the case could not have ended any other way. This causality is informed by a pre-given set of rules; a codex of behaviour that rests upon the experience of this particular country, and what is known of its past:

The newspaper did not say much. People all over the country must have glanced at the paragraph with its sensational heading and felt a little spurt of anger mingled with what was almost satisfaction, as if some belief had been confirmed, as if something had happened which could only have been expected. (Lessing 9)

The implication, stated at the beginning of the novel, is that Mary Turner brought victimhood upon herself because she chose to ignore the rules; the lessons the country held in store for those who were new and strange to it. These lessons have their origins in the bygone age of Cecil Rhodes, King Lobengula, and the first Chimurenga; lessons embedded in the history of a conquered country and its people. Thus, had Mary learnt this lesson, learnt her history, she would have found herself in possession of the knowledge which might have kept her from harm's way. Towards the end of the novel Mary is shown to display the ignorance which lies at the heart of this accusation:

Books! Her wonder deepened. She had not seen books for so long she would find it difficult to read. She looked at the titles: *Rhodes and His Influence: Rhodes and the Spirit of Africa: Rhodes and His Mission*. ‘Rhodes,’ she said vaguely, aloud. She knew nothing about him, except what she had been taught at school, which wasn’t much. She knew he had conquered a continent. ‘Conquered a continent,’ she said aloud, proud that she had remembered the phrase after so long. (Lessing 199)

What becomes apparent is that not only does Mary Turner expose her ignorance of the history of her adopted country, but also that the few snippets of historical information she can recall are distorted beyond recognition. Rhodes did not conquer a continent, even if he had dreamt of an empire stretching from Cape Town to Cairo, and South Africa had already been lost to the ‘boers’<sup>15</sup> at the time of the writing of this novel. The hint could be interpreted as follows: had Mary Turner taken her textbook history to heart, and learnt it by rote however limited it might have been, she would have learnt about the terrible conflicts that had taken place between the imperial forces and the combined might of the Shona and Matabele nations. Although biased and distorted, these lessons might have endowed her with an instructive understanding of the lives of the black working populace of the farm. Perhaps the lesson might simply have been how best to conquer a primitive nation. As it is, Mary ignores all historical prompting and fulfils the prophecy which has been foreseen for Moses. Mary remains singularly ignorant as she lures the victim to his final deed.

Lessing makes sparing but incisive use of the historical subtext, indebted as she was to a sparse abundance of sources. The historical revisionism of later decades, a revisionism that Samkange and others could turn to, had not been undertaken, and the oral history of the conquered land not revealed at the time of her writing. Still, Lessing imparts her verdict upon this sparse and distorted history, a verdict which finds its consummation in the connected tragedy of Mary’s demise and Moses’ probable execution; victims to those lessons not learnt. The causality is twofold: on the one hand it is the ignorance of the Turners which pre-empted their downfall, and on the other it is the accusation of over-excessive violence on the part of scrupulous farmers such as Charlie Slatter who believe

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<sup>15</sup> The Afrikaans term used to denote farmers of Afrikaner descent.

in the rule of the Sjambok<sup>16</sup> which will ultimately lead to the downfall of the Rhodesian state

But Slatter believed in farming with the sjambok. It hung over his front door, like a motto on a wall: 'You shall not mind killing if it is necessary.' He had once killed a native in a fit of temper (...). It was he who had told Dick Turner, long ago when Dick first started farming, that one should buy a sjambok before a plough or a harrow, and that sjambok did not do the Turners any good, as we shall see. (Lessing 14)

The accusation 'as we shall see' which the authorial voice levers against this rule of the sjambok can be seen in a similar light as the comment made by Baden Powell in Samkange's *Year of the Uprising*, a premonition based upon the reflection that certain historical lessons had been taught to cast a light upon the future. The rule of the sjambok would inadvertently lead to defeat on a far wider scale than that which the Turners are made to endure.

Samkange mentions the sjambok too, positing its relevance in a more expansive understanding of the country's history; alleviated as it is by the fact that Samkange's writing took place 28 years later, after the revisionism of Ranger's works:

'White men love whipping men like children,' said Wakapiwa. They use a sjambok, or whip, especially made for the purpose from tough Hippopotamus hide or the male organ of an ox or bull. They keep the sjambok immersed in salt water so that when applied to a man's body it not only cuts the skin open but salts the wound as well.' (Samkange 16)

This excerpt, embedded within a narrative relating the misdeeds committed against black farm labourers, and embellished with an abundance of historical footnotes, is imparted as if it were no more than a revised history lesson. Samkange looks back upon the history of his people in recounting this lesson, whereas Lessing endows the sjambok with the symbolic power to make inroads into the future. The history of the sjambok's motto is one which is omnipresent in Lessing's account; it creates a full circle, a circle which inevitably breaks waves in both directions; forward to the second Chimurenga, and back

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<sup>16</sup> Sjambok: a heavy whip of rhinoceros or hippopotamus hide used by farmers to discipline the labourers.



to the source: the coming of the first white farmers under the guidance of Cecil John Rhodes and his B.S.A.C<sup>17</sup>.

The estrangement inherent in the colonial experience is overtly conspicuous in Lessing's work. The estrangement that propels its protagonists into foreseeable tragedy is one which is exacerbated by utter ignorance and detachment from the country, its people, and ultimately its history. Lessing seems to make the point that the past is the only identifiable feature in the lives of the Turners, Slatters, and the countless number of settlers from Great Britain and South Africa. This estrangement implicates others in its desolation; Moses, and the black labourers cowering under the rule of the sjambok.

The estrangement is also a lack of knowledge; a lack of interest for the knowledge which surrounds them in the form of myths, legends, and plain stories told to children around the ancestral fire. The settlers have their tales of the past too, but they are devoid of meaning because they do not tell of the experience of the country they now inhabit. The settlers are isolated, and further isolate themselves, creating a discernible front because their only purpose is to control that immediate piece of land they inhabit, and all who inhabit that piece of land. This purpose is also coupled to the thirst for more land, and thus after the tragedy which befalls the Turners, Slatter is able to appropriate the land, and the labourers who dwell on it, exposing them to his 'motto of the sjambok'.

There is the commentary of the 'unstoppable' in all of this, the course of history which cannot be apprehended. Although Lessing could not have guessed at what the future held in store for Rhodesia, or the British crown, she hints at an irreversible progression of events, an irreversibility that could not stem the duplication of the events of 1896-97. She creates a white role model of inefficiency and brutality, a role model isolated within the expanse of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean experience, a role model that could be perpetuated and instrumentalised in the retelling of the past. The capacity of these role models, and their contextualisation, to inform what would become the Chimurenga narrative cannot be ignored.

Lessing's work must be posited within this narrative because she too informs it, perhaps not at the time of her writing, but in having offered that which she had written to all who

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<sup>17</sup> The British South Africa Company: mercantile company headed by Cecil John Rhodes. Based in London.

hungered for knowledge; for the written word, and a translation of the experience of what it was to be Rhodesian. If history can be worked upon, and if it is a 'selective system', as E. H. Carr has noted, with the historian choosing the information best befitting his/her interpretation, then Lessing too made a decision on which model she wished to display, and this model of interpretation was one of a singular perspective which could lend itself to reinforcing future narratives concerning the role of the white man in Zimbabwe, and to the legitimisation of retribution. (Carr 105)

Excerpts from the acceptance lecture in honour of having been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature highlight Lessing's belief in the myth-making potential, and overall power, of the written word:

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held today. (Lessing 11)

This commentary does, at certain moments, echo sentiments on display in many of Robert Mugabe's recent speeches; for example the invocation of the spirit world to underpin the ideological construct of the Chimurenga narrative in its more recent incantation. The remembrance of that intangible realm of ancestral space, and spiritual communion, is the guiding element within the Chimurenga narrative. The evocation of a 'god given' heritage is the issue which has the potency to cloud all divergent considerations; it is history, but one that cannot be argued with, cannot be worked upon, other than by those who have been ordained with its creation. The storyteller might claim his/her story from the clearing in the ancient forest, but the spirits will see to it that the outcome points in the pre-determined direction. Mugabe has made reference to this return to the spiritual realm as an undeniable right, and thereby directly legitimising the land appropriations instigated at the turn of the millennium:

Now that land has returned to the people, they were able once more, to enjoy the physical and spiritual communion that was once theirs. For it must be borne in mind that the non-physical or intangible heritage is an equally strong expression of a people, manifesting itself through oral-traditions, language, social practices and traditional craftsmanship. (Muponde, Primorac 234)

The 'clearing in the forest' which Lessing refers to is the space where the communion with the spirit world takes place; it is the space where the ancestors reside, and the space

where knowledge is imparted. It is also the space where ideology is constructed, and history is reinterpreted to suit the needs of the hegemonic narrative. Zanu PF has constructed a pantheon of sympathetic spirit forces to reinforce its motives and actions, elevating its prime architect, Robert Mugabe, to the role of spirit medium and supreme storyteller, grateful for the overabundance of mythological source material needed to forge what would become known as patriotic history; a history which reaches back to a time when the spiritual communion was intact and the great fire still burned. The deification of the spirit mediums, Nehanda and Kaguvi,<sup>18</sup> is a selective form of historicising, one which has elevated the collaborative historicism of Ranger, Samkange, and others, to the height of a supreme and unassailable gospel. Mugabe has thus acted upon Carr's definition of the task of the historian in having made definite choices on the sources needed to compile a particular historiographical version of the past, one which can be made to act upon the present when needed, even if this entails clearing the forest as opposed to finding a clearing in the forest. The intangibility of the heritage and historical sources is the foremost aspect in this version of history, one which renders the translation of the historical narrative into that of the ideological such an amicable one:

Historians and history writing have played an important role in shaping perceptions of Zimbabwe's past and in influencing present conceptions of nationhood, citizenship and belonging. The political economy of historical knowledge production in both the colonial and postcolonial periods has been largely marked by a tendency for those in power at a given time to harness history to legitimise their dominance. (Mlambo 63)

Further complementing Mlambo's statement it would be pertinent to comment that history writing must include all writing in Zimbabwe that has, in some way or another, made use of historical motifs to bolster narratives of oppression. All of these narratives have become, and still are, narrative sources. It is still the past which informs most of Zimbabwe's writing, that past of conflict and war brought upon the land by the coming of Cecil John Rhodes and the Pioneer Column<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Nehanda and Kaguvi, the spiritual leaders purported by Terence Ranger to have spearheaded the uprisings against the British in 1896 and 1897 were elevated to the status of spirit mediums. These were then revered by peasantry and combatants during the second Chimurenga.

<sup>19</sup> The Pioneer column was an expeditionary force put together by Cecil John Rhodes with the aim of settling large parts of Southern Rhodesia. Claims of gold reserves drove the South African participants into then Mashonaland in search of riches.

## 2.3 Ideological Discourse

History, as deployed in the Zanu PF sense, is a strategic system, reliant upon a specific interpretation of the past, and the conscious suppression of unwelcome versions, or readings, of the past. The strategic system of patriotic history attempts to gather the nation around a monolithic understanding of the ties that bind the past to the present. Repetition, incantations, a rhythmic monotony of recurrent beats and passages, is needed to embed this primal understanding within the national consciousness. This repetition, the historical incantatory beat of the storyteller, is that which drives the present idea of the nation ever deeper into the minds of its citizens. The postcolonial nation is an artificial construct in more ways than one, and Zimbabwe is a potent example. History has been reconstituted in accordance with the specific needs of an artificial construct, and as such, it can be deduced that readings of the past are co-opted into this artificiality. The challenge had thus become: how to bring an entire nation to believe in this artificiality, as if it were real. The answer must be simplicity and repetition. The section commander, as he is portrayed in Kanengoni's *Echoing silences*, is needed to impart the sanctioned historiography in nightly 'pungwes', around the dare<sup>20</sup>. The ideologues are present in the Zimbabwean novel, working up a frenzy as if in a dance, invoking the spirits of Nehanda and Kaguvi to reiterate the well-worn recitals. Munashe, the revolutionary soldier, describes the centre of the vigil and the dynamics of ideology as it is woven into age-old traditions, calling to mind the essence of Robert Mugabe's understanding of ancient mores and political action:

It was when he heard the refrain about their blood mingling with that of the living that he felt the numbness in his head. So that by the time it reached the dance, he could see the young woman carrying a baby on her back at the edge of a semi-circle wait impatiently to snatch the song away from Tonderayi and run away with it. And when at last she succeeded, she blazed a crackling trail and everyone followed her, as if she was pursuing the fleeing spirits of the long-gone heroes so that they would all become one with them. (Kanengoni 23)

The clearing in the forest, the ancestral fire, the dance, and the spirits of long-gone heroes, are the components which lend themselves to endless repetition; the components of an endless dance. It reflects the spiritual communion that Robert Mugabe has spoken of, but

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<sup>20</sup> Dare literally means a clearing, a place where the women of the village congregate to cook and socialise.

also the clearing in the forest where Shamans sing; as an invocation of the heritage Lessing has commented upon. Thus, the pungwe or nightly vigil, can be seen as representing the age old tradition which has been revived to bear upon and foster the aims of the hegemonic ritual of an instructive concept as foreseen by Zanu PF. The age old tradition of the dance, and spirit communion, is woven into the ideological superstructure as an instructive story-telling device, whereby the nation is gathered around the hearth to listen to the voices of ancient wisdom. Ideology is the incessant repetition of an oversimplified reading of the past, it is a dance and a drum beat, and the invocation of memory, collective memory bound into a mantra of endless resistance. It breeds upon the past, fosters it to the point of giving it renewed life, brings to life not only the ancient revered past, but also that of subjugation, oppression, and humiliation. All are brought to the dare, the ancestral hearth or clearing in the forest, and are made visible, identifiable. The spirits, spirit mediums, and the living are brought together in visible communion to speak a gospel of resistance. The spirits are not only forced to show themselves, but are made visible within the confines of a hegemonic diction. The Zimbabwean author has repetitively brought the spirits into the clearing to be interrogated, a practice which fits comfortably within the ideological practice of patriotic history. Strangely enough, the spirits always seem to mouth the appropriate recommendations firmly embedded within the Chimurenga narrative: the call to resistance against those very same enemies that abounded in 1896-97, and again during the 1960s and 1970s; the white settler and imperialist aggressor.

Yvonne Vera, in her novel *Nehanda*, infuses the spirit medium with a biographical life stretching from her birth to her demise at the hands of Rhodes' troops. Vera picks her up where Samkange and Ranger have left her, biographically incomplete, and renders her fully visible, to offer up her own version of the past, albeit a version imbibed with the telling of those before her, notably Terence Ranger and Samkange. Vera creates a Frankenstein's` monster of sorts, a construed artificiality employed to impart meaning:

A big fire is lit in the middle of the clearing surrounding the rock, and dark smoke rises into a cloud that soon spreads above them, blocking the sky. The people listen to Nehanda as she seeks the voice of their ancestors who are among them. The fire burns high into the sky. Nehanda rises, and throws everything into the fire that has been taken from the white men except the guns. (Vera 81)

In this context the subaltern is made to speak. The question that arises is: for whom does she speak? Vera's intention must have been for Nehanda to speak on behalf of the

dispossessed and suppressed female voice, but in providing her with this voice and visibility she has allowed for the appropriation of her symbolic worth, and her instrumentalisation as the guiding spirit of the Chimurenga narrative. Her voice has been abducted by a patriarchal hegemony to decry the past, against her will, and most probably, against the will of her author. After having infused Nehanda with the power to voice her very own and distinctive experience of the past Vera must let her go, not only to the reader, but first and foremost to those powers in search of the historical figures with which to stage a monumental play of the past. Thus, Nehanda is abducted once again; only this time by those forces she was purported to have lead over a century ago.

Vera offers a premonition of that power which she has imbibed with the potential for not only reviving a portentous reading of the past, but the power with which to cast a vision of the future before her feet. The premonition is beset with apprehension, and seems to beg the question: which voice will my creation take on as its own?

The spirits were there. They hovered over the birth unseen and placed the gift of the future on the head of the newborn. The child came silently into the darkness and warmth of the hut. After she had been born she did not cry for a day. Mother worried about this silent child whom she had brought into the world, and wondered if her daughter had the power to assert her own presence on the earth. Where would the mother gather the gifts of speech for her child if it was true that her daughter had lost the gift on that perilous journey out of the womb? (Vera 12)

Not only mother, but mother/author, have ample reason to voice their fears because it is known that such voices as those of Nehanda are preyed upon, and have been preyed upon in the past. Whereas Samkange had offered up his Nehanda willingly, having constructed her as a device with which to relate the annals of the past, and Kanengoni has shown her already in bondage to the present ideological forces, Vera fears that moment just after birth because she knows all too well what Nehanda could be forced to say, and thus the question as to whom the voice should be addressed to. It does not matter all that much from whence the voice comes, but to whom and where it goes. A never-ending story has been written, akin to the analogy of the mystic carpet; a fabric within which to weave complementary interpretations of the past. Vera posits the responsibility of waging a glance into the future as an empty promise in the hands of the spirits, thus relinquishing that short moment of power, and denuding the reader of the possibility of that stolen glance forward. Although Vera has been instrumental in the creation of a female voice, she too has created an ideological one, or at least one which can be ideologically

misappropriated. Once the discourse has ended, and ideological certainty imposed, the symbols such as Nehanda are lost to the discourse, becoming political pawns, re-contextualised once again.

Tantamount to the Chimurenga narrative is its persuasiveness, the power to rally the entire nation around its call to resistance, and this call to resistance belongs to historical memory, to the memory of Nehanda's invocation as it is cried out in Chenjerai Hove's acclaimed novel *Bones*: "Arise all the bones of the land. Arise all the bones of the dying cattle. Arise all the bones of the locusts. Wield the power of the many bones scattered across the land and fight so that the land of the ancestors is not defiled by strange feet and strange hands." (Hove 51)

Hove has embellished Nehanda's call to arms, made it the focal point of the novel without once calling Nehanda by her name. He leaves her without form, as the spirit which she is; only voice, or simply the memory of it that hovers above all, echoing that well-worn cry.

Unlike Vera, Hove has deconstructed the historical figure, pruning it down to the core: that simple call to resistance; the ideological crux. Hove seems to have accepted that more is not needed because all know what is meant. Hove has discarded the historical shell and taken the pared down version with which to infuse the narrative with meaning. Thus, that which Vera feared for, is the only essential found in Hove's retelling. Robert Muponde has translated the significance of Hove's work in the following way:

Chenjerai Hove's 'Bones' may as well be a founding text for "The Third Chimurenga": the characterization of the land as teeming with autochthonous forces voiced by the spirits and represented by the sons of the soil, the guerrillas; the white people viewed as outsiders, locusts and vultures; the white farmer Manyepo as cruel. Hove's novel concludes with the basic rhetoric of the nationalists. (Muponde 2)

To add to Muponde's commentary it might be pertinent to note that it is not so much Chenjerai Hove's text which stands at the centre of attention, but more specifically, Nehanda's war cry which has simply been re-textualised by the author. The resurrection motif carried by the plea is a potent one because it reinvigorates the Chimurenga narrative, and this narrative now finds its articulation in the third incarnation of the call to resist and defy (third Chimurenga). It can be alternatively stated: Nehanda's cry to rise again is a potent weapon in the hands of the architects of power because it validates almost any

display of postcolonial resistance, and ultimately violence as a means to gain a righteous end. For as long as the so-called enemies of the state can be clothed in their erstwhile colonial garb, so long will the Chimurenga cry retain its potency to mobilise and inspire.

The dependence of the overriding ideology upon the Chimurenga narrative is a dependence upon the historical sustainability of the core motif of Nehanda's invocation. The structure of belief relies upon the external factor of accountability, of apportioning blame upon those who unrightfully appropriated the former ancestral lands, and of course, upon the success of obscuring the fact that the war has been won, and the revolution fought. The strength of the religious aspect in this ideology depends to a certain degree upon an overall ignorance; upon the defiance of enlightenment and pragmatism. Many of the authors mentioned have made little or no inroads into dismantling the narrative. Rather, they have re-interpreted the narrative, re-invigorated it, or simply supported its resurrection because the search for identity is indelibly linked to the historical certainty of resistance, and this implicates the search within the confines of the ideological discourse. Ideology in the present sense is an interpretation of the past, remodelled into an undisputable historically founded fact, whereas Zimbabwean writing attempts to forge a sense of being and belonging from imagined and remembered versions of the past. The present ideology has been a customer of the former imaginings and memorisation of the past, but has now gained the capacity to reinvent and re-imagine the past on its own terms. The Chimurenga narrative has been successfully abducted and placed within the political/religious/ideological realm, taking on a life of its own and adapting to hegemonic imaginings as opposed to creative/cultural and historical imaginings of the same. Zanu PF has, in a similar vein to what Hove had done, stripped Nehanda's personification down to its bare bones, and implemented these in the form of an institutionalised memorialisation. This usurping of the narrative has taken it from the cultural and creative realm, and placed it within a singular context: that of the political/ideological. The interstices between the political narrative and the literary narrative, the interplay between the two forces, has been unhinged. It is now no longer the creative historical imagining which informs the hegemonic diction, but the hegemonic diction which often informs the creative narrative:

Of course there are veiled, perhaps unintended, complicities in this "third chimurenga" project. And also rivalry to the extent that the writer who a year ago was urging the politician to seize the land, even factories and shops belonging to



white people (...), now finds the politician has not only wrested the source of the writer's legitimacy, but has outdone the writer in shouting the presence of inequalities in society. (Muponde 2)

Muponde's statement can be interpreted otherwise: the Zimbabwean author formerly within the interstices of the interpretation of common historical sources has been outwitted because of his/her own procrastination. The re-imagination of the past as part of the desire to forge a change upon a present imagining of the nation has been re-tracked to suit the needs of what Achille Mbembe has termed the 'master fiction'. The accusation that can be levelled against the Zimbabwean writer is that he/she has not foreseen this eventuality and has as a result been co-opted into the 'master fiction':

The politician has gone further. He has left the writer with two stark choices: the writer must endorse the politicians and war veteran's actions because that is what he was urging in his poems (in the case of musicians, in their songs), or he must condemn the actions as reckless, etc. (Muponde 2)

A condemnation of the politician's path would entail a condemnation of that which the author himself has written and would furthermore entail a rewriting of the past so as to come to a new understanding of the present context, and this might imply a writing against the will of the people, and the will of the nation, at least a significant portion of the nation. We could describe this as a writing back upon oneself as opposed to the simple practice of 'writing back'.

## **2.4 Faultlines**

History in Zimbabwe is a state driven enterprise. The state is in possession of the intellectuals, and intellectual institutions, which bolster and propagate the Chimurenga narrative. Explanation and legitimacy is sought by the state and these are provided by a singular interpretation of the past. The bulk of this interpretation is not exclusively provided by the resident intellectual community, but by intellectuals/ writers of the past who have colluded in the construction of an imaginary landscape that is now being fully realised. Nehanda's prophecy, now in its ultimate fulfilment, also signals the final instalment of the progression towards a fully realised nation state freed from the yoke of the past. The dream dreamt by so many authors; Samkange, Kanengoni, Hove, Chinodya, or Vera, has made its way into the realm of reality. Once a prophecy is fulfilled the

prophet is no longer needed, the bones can be laid to rest, the vision of the future has come and it is vibrantly real:

In the future, the valley will once again regain its colour and its growth. It will bear new lives, which will be born out of the old. There will be a growth there, among the swinging branches, among the sheltering leaves. Her death, which is also birth, will weigh on those lives remaining to be lived. In the valley, where they have prayed all night for rain, is heard the beginning of a new language and a new speech. (Vera 112)

The Chimurenga narrative presupposes a unitary language; the singular speech of freedom, a new speech. The arch-enemy of and from the past, once evicted from the land, will expose those rifts hitherto ignored by the enforced memorialisation of the past. The dominant ideology has in no uncertain terms made it clear that diversity of thought and language are detrimental to the envisioned path leading to that imagined nation as prophetically acclaimed by Nehanda, and the authors who had given her a voice with which to proclaim. The collusion of the creative narrative and historical context to form the incumbent political reality has achieved its goal primarily through the conscious suppression of other contexts and realities. Not writing about, and not talking about, specific aspects of the past has given the present reality, or truth, its defining monolithic nature. The monolith of historical interpretation which has evolved into the current Chimurenga narrative/ideology is based upon a singular solitary truth, a truth once informed by the discourse between the political and creative forces, and now detached from the realm of discourse and context. The major challenge faced by the incumbent post-colonial power is the defence of the monolith. Having carried the ‘burden of history’ to the present stage and placed it at the centre of attention, the resident interpretation of the past has now to be defended against those detractors from within, has to be defended against the urge to uncover historical truths before and beyond those idolised prior to, and after the revolution. The ‘one nation, one truth’ motto propagated by Zanu PF is a fragile construct because it has damned itself into a state of perpetual defence; not against the spectre of Cecil John Rhodes, but against those forces within the country such as the M.D.C.<sup>21</sup> who wish to instigate an alternative political reality by way of reinterpreting the past. A renewed discourse over the past, if it were at all possible, would bring the monolith

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<sup>21</sup> MDC: Movement for Democratic Change, an opposition party formed in 1999 to counter Zanu’s political hold over the country. Led by Morgan Tsvangirai. The party split in 2005.

down, but ultimately the monolith will fall victim to that very same process of historicisation it has practiced over the past decades, the suppression of diametric versions and truths. The historicising effort of Zanu PF rests squarely upon the premise of the attainment of a singular historical goal, and thereafter to bask in the glory of this achievement; but suppression must spurn articulation, and articulation must uncover versions of history hitherto ignored. Foucault has argued against this vision of history and portrayed historical processes as discontinuous:

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject; the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject - in the form of historical consciousness - will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find them in what might be called his abode. (Colebrook 37)

The combined effort on the part of the political and creative forces, in the framework of practiced discourse, to install historical consciousness has conversely silenced those versions of history which would lead to a fragmentation of the Chimurenga narrative. Alternative versions of history could display uninvited facts, expose a diversification of political and cultural agendas. The question of identity has been supplanted by political identity, not a matter of belonging to where, but belonging to whom. Adherence to the political norm entails adherence to the political historiography, a historiography which practices the deification of a limited set of assorted historical figures, predominantly Shona, and without fail, black. These stringent parameters represent a very confined space, and apart from incessant repetition, the literary investigation of the country's past and present becomes an increasingly daunting challenge. Na'ima B. Robert, in concluding her novel, attempts to end on a note of reconciliation and hope, attempts to call the revolution to an end by daring to speak out in favour of a combined effort to reconcile all Zimbabweans in a vision of a shared future: "It must be that, one day, no one will be exiled far from home, but all will be free to return, with open hearts and willing hands, to rebuild a home called Zimbabwe, as our ancestors built the great city of stone, Dzimba-dza-mabwe<sup>22</sup> so long ago. (Robert 344). Robert haplessly reverts to a historical

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<sup>22</sup> Dzimba-dza-mabwe: Shona term literally meaning 'sacred house'. Referring to the ancient site of great Zimbabwe, the ruins now a place of veneration. The ruined citadel is situated on a plateau between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers.

perspective which succeeds in excluding those parts of the present Zimbabwean nation not present at the time the great stone city/fortress was built. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that the ancient stone city was constructed in such a manner as to keep future enemies at bay, an image which reflects the memorialisation undertaken by the state when reflecting upon the past.

The vision of the future on offer here is one of seclusion and exclusion, and fits in perfectly well with the hegemonic prophecies; prophecies hedged within the confines of tribalism and extreme nationalism. Enemies of the state are defined by their proximity, or distance from, those historical moments embedded within the myths and recesses of oral history. These myths have spawned further myths of the nation, and like the stone wall of Great Zimbabwe, exert an exclusionary force, functioning as a warning to those who wish to penetrate the impregnable fortress of the constructed narrative of the past. Tellingly *Dzimba-dza-mabwe* can also be translated as ‘the ruined city’ and as such it is a fractured idiom which informs the present discourse. Myth-making according to this precedent can be compared to an archaeological pursuit; the endeavour being that of creating a whole from the shards of information which abound, and when viewed closely enough the whole will always remain fractured. The whole, as it is propagated within the hegemonic narrative, will always display the hairline fractures of its construction, and as a result offer clues to its impending deconstruction. Rather than tear at the apparent fractures in the ideological construction, the bulk of Zimbabwean authors have placed their services, some unwittingly, in the duty of mending the tears and fractures which line the fabric of the patriotic narrative. Dissent in the form of counter-discourse has taken place, but it has taken place from within the construction of the postcolonial entity, and has made little effort to imagine an alternative historical landscape. It has remained firmly within the context of historical mysticism, has seldom uncovered hidden historical truths; and has made no attempt to write away from the very beginning.

The Chimurenga narrative has created what Foucault has termed power’s ‘abode’, a house which has been pieced together using the ruins of historical sources appropriated from certain segments of the past. This abode extracts and extols belief from within, all who are outside do not belong and as such cannot threaten its existence. It is within this system of belief that the current certainty resides. Zimbabwean literature has aided in the construction of this abode and thus possesses the knowledge with which to dismantle it.

The apparent dilemma is that this can only be instigated from within, and the deconstruction from within is exacerbated by the fact that the author must write from an oppositional point, a point of not being, not belonging, and not believing. This is then the voice which is not heard above the din of Nehanda's prophecy because it does not exist.

Subversion from within has taken the form of a fractured stream of consciousness writing best exemplified by Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight*, a display of dejection and hopelessness which purveys throughout the fragmented response to the external experience. The exercise is revealing not because of what is said but for the way in which it is said. The fragmented, fractured nature of the narrative exposes and reflects the tears and hairline fractures of the dominant narrative; mirrors the misconstruction of the postcolonial experience, and thus remains within the meta-narrative. Marechera's response does not forge a re-imagination of the past as much as it mimics a present futility, giving up on words and spirit. Marechera denies the building blocks of the meta-narrative, but offers hopelessness and dejection as a response. Failing to confront the Chimurenga narrative it flees into the recesses of wordiness and collage:

There is nothing but a hideous dark ahead, a moonless sunless starless world. With its Armoured Insect whose power it is to cast the shadows that dog our steps from the delirium of the womb to the shattered mask of the tomb. The eyes of that holy cockroach in bright black sunlight have mosaic vision, each chink receiving an image which is a fraction of the whole object-man-in view. The sum of these fractions gives a whole image of our thinking and horror. And when this God Insect has had its fill, Malpighian tubules attached to the beginning of the hindgut extract us from the blood and pour us into the gut where the water is reabsorbed through the walls to excrete us solid and whole but in spirit utterly broken. (Marechera 132)

No mention is made of Nehanda, Kaguvi, or the spirit world. No mention is made of Chimurenga, and Zanu, Zapu, or the historical markers others have used to provide the straight and stringent lines of the *bildungsroman*. Marechera opens up a mystified and victimised mind to display the mayhem of the postcolonial subject, a subject who does not differ all that much from the mayhem of the colonial subject. Writing on the eve of independence Marechera offers no hope, his perspective one of darkness and nothingness. Marechera denies the historicism when looking back, opts for the mysticism of the tortured mind as it reflects upon the madness of war and suppression. This could be seen as the trauma novel which does not rely upon the retelling of events but simply displays the wounds of its disorientation and uncertainty. It is a writing which does not

deconstruct, but a form of writing which mirrors deconstruction. Chimurenga is a narrative of war and destruction. Chimurenga is a narrative which relies upon the spirit voice, a voice which has to be translated into words of meaning, otherwise it would sound like pure mayhem, like pure madness. Robert Muponde has described Marechera's writing as an attack on memory; upon the sacred source of the meta- narrative. This attack is, in an extended sense, seen as an attack upon violence and suffering because memory and violence, in the postcolonial experience of looking back, are seen to be interchangeable and interlinked. (Muponde 3). It is, conversely, possible to see Marechera's writing as celebrating memory because memory is the reason for its being, its sustenance. In this sense the equation could read: memory is violence is writing. Marechera is wholly preoccupied with subjective suffering, his plight as representative of the suffering on the grander scale. Marechera describes his condition, lays bare the symptoms of his madness, and as such disarms the supposed potential of his counter-discourse. If it is the sickness which is counter-discursive then it can be readily ignored.

The Chimurenga narrative has been pruned into place by political force and persuasion. Even those elements which have attempted to steal away from the magnetism and ferocity of the meta-narrative have been hauled into the depths of the monolithic response if only for the fact that these elements could not find alternative contexts. Counter-discourse which feeds off the monolith becomes indelibly linked to the monolith, becomes a response, and as such part of the narrative.

### **3 LAND**

#### **3.1 The Historical Pre-text**

Zimbabwean writers writing about Zimbabwe write irrefutably about the land because it is the all-encompassing theme which entails all other considerations: deliberations on identity, struggle, citizenship, and primarily, the history of a people in the throes of a new beginning. Traversing the centuries in search of the legends, myths, and facts with which to create the foundation of this new history became the almost insurmountable task of historians, novelists and politicians alike. The three would accompany each other in their attempts at creating a revised history of the land, using different tools with which to extract the productive truths, but reliant upon each other for insights into divergent narratives. The ultimate goal was, and is, the creation of a narrative powerful enough to unite the peoples of a new and burgeoning nation.

The subtext is one of belonging, and possession, with history providing the concomitant legitimisation for the practices which now abound. The third Chimurenga, the incantation of the revolutionary narrative used to describe the fast track land reform, takes as its premise the historical fact of the inalienable right to ancestral lands embedded within certain interpretations of the revered, and once submerged past. This past, extracted from under the body of the colonial age, serves as the guiding template for the current Chimurenga narrative. Reflections on the past are inexorably reflections on the land, on belonging to the land, and thus having earned the right to retain or regain the land. Opposing forces often use the same arguments whilst referencing alternate historical sources. Zanu PF has indebted itself to the effort made by such figures as Ranger and Samkange, whereas the remaining white settlers might refer to their own memories of belonging to the land; based upon purchase deeds, concessions, and detailed accounts of the struggles for, and upon the land. The Matabele trace their history along the paths leading back to South Africa, and the well documented battles amongst the warring Zulu factions which lead to Mzilikazi's flight into present day Zimbabwe during the first half

of the nineteenth century<sup>23</sup>. The overall historic panorama is one of diametric forces converging upon each other, whilst the present situation poses a picture of one dominant force attempting to subjugate, and even eradicate, the opposing forces which stand in the way of a successful culmination to the ultimate African revolution.

The site of the battle has been, and remains, the land. The land and its history is thus textualised from differing perspectives, at once mythical and magical, and at other times reflective of a cold factuality. On the political level, whether in pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial times, land is textualised as an entity denoting power. Power is extracted, deflated, and shifted according to adjustments made to land ownership, or land usage. Land is passed to and fro between those who hold power, and is taken from those who have been forced to relinquish power, even if it is the limited power which emanates from the possession of a small piece of fertile subsistence land. Power inflates and deflates according to the amount of land owned, and it is the perspective of having, and not having, which determines how land is reflected upon. On the political level land is measured in facts, figures, statistics, concessions, treaties, history, and time. On the literary level land is measured in memory, longing, love, pictures, or tears. Land is a transient entity which seems to sustain its longevity primarily in its memorialisation, in its incarnation as something which has either been temporarily lost, and therefore fought over, or something which has been usurped indefinitely, and thus banished to the recesses of longing. The permanence of loss is the phenomenon which has been well documented in the settler biopic, a form of literary pining which seems to extract a sense of meaning and worth from the land taken for granted during the time of its possession. Land, in the latter interpretation, becomes both a fact and a chimera, moving from the hard reality of possession and production, to the realm of the ephemeral and intangible.

Historical perspectives on the land, the practice of looking back upon who did what with the land, offers up the measure of worth apportioned to its meaning. The historical perspective not only denotes order, but creates it as well. Descriptions of land possession dating back to the 9th century AD provide legitimisation for the present Shona diction encapsulated within the third Chimurenga. Robert Mugabe makes abundant use of the historical pre-text to establish the present order of land appropriation and allocation, albeit

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<sup>23</sup> Mzilikazi: established the Matabele kingdom after having fled present day South Africa due to a power struggle waged against the Zulu king Shaka. Mzilikazi settled in present day Matabeleland in 1840.



with a liberal dose of the mythical narrative to cloud the recurrent issues of disorder and abuse that stem from a singular use of certain historical interpretations:

Without doubt, our heroes are happy that a crucial part of this new phase of our struggle has been completed. The land has been freed and today all our heroes lie on the soil that is declaration. Their spirits are unbound, free to roam the land they left shackled, thanks again to the Third Chimurenga. (qtd. in Derman 2)

Past wrongs have thus been corrected, according to this statement, and a new order established which in rough terms must resemble that order existent prior to the time when the issue of land was muddled, and meddled in, by external forces. An ancient order is established according to the template provided by historical investigations into the times of the Mbire and the great Rozvi Empire<sup>24</sup>, a time of relative unity. Here the historical pre-text not only describes the ancient order which existed for ten centuries, but is instrumental in creating the order supposedly inherent in the present enactment of the Chimurenga narrative.

In the penultimate chapter of *Far From Home*, entitled *History*, Na'ima B Robert imbues the figure of the ex-combatant Tariro with the argument which is tantamount to the Chimurenga narrative: "Restitution, Katie! Righting the wrongs of history! We fought for that land: the land of our forefathers. The land that was stolen from us. The land that gave us our dignity and self-respect that made us who we were." (Robert 338-339). Robert not only allots the land with the power to forge identities but makes it the one definable *raison d'être* of the revolutionary struggle. The success of the revolution thus rests upon the restitution of the land according to precepts embedded within the ancient order of things. In *Origins of Rhodesia* Stanlake Samkange offers a perspective on this ancient order of things which would later not only inform his novels, but also the Chimurenga narrative as it is articulated today:

The Mashona can, therefore, boast that up to the 1830's they had, for several centuries, occupied undisturbed all the land between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers stretching eastwards as far as the sea. This is not to say that there was not, during that time, movement, strife or war. There was. But it was movement and strife of the same people; the population remained basically the same whoever turned out to be winner or loser. (Samkange 5)

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<sup>24</sup> The Rozvi Empire: The Mbire took over the land of present day Zimbabwe around 10 000 AD and established the mighty Rozvi empire. The Rozvi Empire was eventually destroyed by the Nguni tribes during the Mfecane wars.

It is this version of the historical order which further informs the nightly vigil described by Kanengoni in *Echoing Silences*. The combatants, amongst them the traumatised Munashe, are implored to reflect upon their ancient history of grand empires, a history which harks back to a time before external intrusion, and the burgeoning disputes over land. In a trance-like manner this truth is drummed into the heads of the soldiers, and the onlooking citizens, preparing both for the fight to restore the divine order. (see Kanengoni 22-23)

The trance-like incantation of this supposed historical truth, the divine truth of the right to the land, is best exemplified by Chenjerai Hove's version of Nehanda's prophecy in *Bones*:

Arise all the bones of the land. Arise all the bones of the dying cattle. Arise all the bones of the locusts. Wield the power of the many bones scattered across the land and fight so that the land of the ancestors is not defiled by strange feet and strange hands (...). Rise all the insects of the land. Sing the many torturous tunes of the land so that any strange ears will know that an uprising is at hand. (Hove 51)

The prophetic mantra that Hove incessantly weaves into his text finds its origins in the historical by-notes of the first Chimurenga, only to be taken up into the canon of Chimurenga literature, and finally re-routed into the narratives of the political elite; as best exemplified by Robert Mugabe's statement adorning Zanu PF with the role of realising the prophetic proclamation of Nehanda. (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 3)

Hove was aware, not only of the manipulation of the literary narrative, but the discriminate use of the historical pre-text to align political goals with the panoramic vista of the country's history:

“Sometimes, writers can be dangerously naive. One single line of poetry can cause an entire revolution (...). If you believe in the power of words, in the power of language to own and control, you need to acknowledge its fragility too. Words are like an egg. In all their power, they are also fragile.” (Hove 2)

Words, whether encapsulated in the strict confines of historical versions of a country's past, or literary imaginings of those versions, carry partial truths which in their isolation defy the completion of the historical truth. An all-encompassing version could inevitably lead to conciliation because divergent forces could therein discover a shared legitimisation. Hove, Kanengoni, and many others, have voluntarily freed these words from the recesses of imagination and memory, placing them in that void which was then

filled with political longing, and finally political action. The naiveté which Hove speaks of is twofold: it is comprised of hope, and it is infatuated with the illusion of the healing power of words. It is an expression of uncertainty because the postcolonial dream prior to independence grew within an environment of war, violent conflict, and oppression. Its progenitors were, to a large degree, strangers to the lands of their ancestors. The dream which propelled the movement towards an envisioned victory made use of a diction which sang praises to the past whilst looking towards the future. The dream, and its articulation, was riven in two, composite of diametric halves; positing hope and fear in close proximity. The ugly truths of the war, and an aftermath beset with ethnic conflict and political manoeuvring, dispelled much of the hope which had been echoed incessantly in a myriad speeches, and the works of authors besotted of the images of rebirth, and Nehanda's prophecy.

Dambudzo Marechera echoes the fear and confusion as early as 1980, the novel *Black Sunlight* moving perspectives as far from the land as possible, describing the confusion in the heads of those who had so clamoured to the dream of returning to the land, whilst ignoring a reality of emptiness and destitution. Marechera not only echoes the empty promise of the dream, he displays its speech as a negative inversion; rambling and undecipherable. Still, what pervades is the truth that he cannot escape the confines of the dream he too had imagined because it was in the throes of becoming an institutionalised might:

The ghastly emptiness that was always there. The feeling of having died and yet not really died, of how one had been subtracted from all that makes life a living experience. I could have said it was the fear inside me of a world whose changes would never include a change for the better. Like hearing in the middle of the night some phantom figure moving about hammering nails into all the things one had learnt to take for granted (...). Hammering nails into a coffin in which the image of a whole historical notion lay with its arms crossed over its breast. Hammering nails into the dog-gnawed palm of Jezebel's hand. (Marechera 123)

Marechera writes of a historical notion, as opposed to historical truth, writes of an interpretation of the truth, and the dilemma of looking back upon lost truths; a dilemma enhanced by the fact that writers often wrote of a time they had not experienced, and dreamt of a time that lay before them. What existed, according to Marechera, was emptiness, that universe beyond the dream; a state of exile which places the ugliness of the present tense beyond description. Thus the history of the land, portrayed as a glorious life-giving entity, denies the brutal reality of its day to day repetitiveness, the bent-over

toiling of its soil from sunrise to sundown, from beginning to end. The history and dream of the land as portrayed by Hove, Mungoshi, Vera, or Samkange, denies the historical truth of the sheer monotony of the land.

### 3.2 Narrations of Belonging

It is the settler biopic which has often reflected the truth of the land because it looks upon a recent past devoid of the omnipresent and omnipotent dream, entwined as it is in memories of ownership and production. The colonial truth, misshapen and construed, does not fetter the land with the burden of a prophetic historicism as encapsulated within Nehanda's vision. The land, according to this dictum, is there to be conquered, owned, and worked upon. It is a site of memory, binding past to present, reflective of a people's effort to create their own space; through war, toil, and subjugation. The history of colonialism is the history of the land being taken, and the narrative of post colonialism speaks of taking back the land. The interregnum in Zimbabwe, politically termed the UDI<sup>25</sup> years, is in retrospect the attempt to hold on to the land. The settler biopic has become the tome of longing; memorialising the loss of the land and pining for that archetypal site of belonging; the farm. In his novel *Karima*, Tim McLoughlin offers an insight into the workings of the settler's world, the limited confines of a space that had to be fought for in the unknown spheres of the Zimbabwean hinterland. It was only through the war that the settler discovered the land beyond the farm fence. Two forces fighting over the same prize had differing perspectives, different languages with which to articulate this site of belonging:

He had been worn down by the struggle to keep the farm going, and now that he had promising crops, good rains and the chance to pay off the Land Bank he was convinced for the first time in years that the farm would be a paying proposition. This was new to me. I had often heard father talking about the hardships his parents had been through when they first settled near Hartley. They were Viljoens from the Northern Cape and came up here in 1910. (McLoughlin 11)

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<sup>25</sup> UDI: In 1965 the Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith declared its independence from Great Britain in a move termed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. The UDI years thus lasted from 1965 to 1980, eventually conceding defeat to the forces of Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo.

The land of the Viljoens is the central theme of a recent history comprised of title deeds, hardships, and finally war. It ignores the ancient history, and the ancient order of things beyond 1910.<sup>26</sup> Its language attempts to clear itself of guilt, avoiding any mention of ancestral spirits, and the great Mwari<sup>27</sup>; the God who created from the earth and retreated into its soil. The land in this sense is the land of maize and tobacco crops, of reaping dividends, and of earning the right to stay. The right to till the land was supposed by many to be God-given, but in no way did God inhabit the land, or meddle in the concerns of its inhabitants. The ancestors were buried on the farm, but they too did not meddle in affairs, remaining buried and mute. The language used to describe this grand prize sets itself apart from the Shona and Matabele articulations of ancestral heritage: the great kingdoms of the Rozvi and Mutapa, the holy shrine of the great stones of Zimbabwe, and the former palatial splendour of king Lobengula's compounds, but it still serves the same purpose of placing the narrative within the greater context of the Chimurenga narrative. The opposing narratives of struggle, war, possession, and identity, stand head to head within the wider framework, only for the one to mirror the other. Exclusion is no longer possible because the memory of the other exists. The settler biopic sings praises to the land that has been taken and thus it sings too of the landless. It bemoans the land it has relinquished and sets off on a renewed search for an enemy. The land is the prize which is handed back and forth through the annals of history, pitting enemies against each other, and posing the question as to which history of the land should be written. Robert Mugabe has taken on the task of correcting the wrongs of a recent history dominated by his, and therefore the black Zimbabwean's enemy, the white settler:

The revolution is yet to be concluded (...). None of us revolutionaries who won the war for independence will want their careers to end without the repossession of our land. Otherwise, what will we tell future generations? The revolution had been fought on the basis that the land will come with political power. What should the fight be about? Our revolution has not ended. We want it to end and the starting point is land. (qtd. in Meredith 185)

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<sup>26</sup> In 1910 the Union of South Africa is declared. The former British colonies: Cape Colony, Natal Colony, Transvaal Colony, and the Orange River Colony are united, becoming a dominion of the British Empire.

<sup>27</sup> Mwari, translated from the Shona tongue literally means God. Mwari is the supreme creator who rules over the spirit and human plains. Mwari is a benevolent, omnipotent God whose importance can be traced back to the times of King Monomotapa of the Mutapa kingdom.

Mugabe's historicism is a cyclical concept, coming full circle to where it all began, ending with the beginning because the historic beginning of the great stone city posits the divine right to the land at the feet of the Shona people, and not at the feet of the Matabele, or the white settler who interrupted the continuum. Mugabe taps into biblical historicism to legitimise his endeavour. Prophecies are integral in providing legitimacy for the continuation of the revolutionary cause, and it is because of this that Nehanda's proclamation has been accorded such importance. Furthermore, Mugabe delves into Hegelian historicism to excuse excesses, and what he has termed 'ugly history', explaining away the necessities of the ongoing struggle for righteousness and freedom. Sources are to be found in the ignominious past, the colonial and UDI years, to foreground the ailments of the present society:

“Our people still suffer economic disablement as a result of myriad old laws, business practice and prejudices, themselves a legacy of the colonial past that sought a wholesale disempowerment of the blacks. Needless to say this situation is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue.” (qtd. in Meredith 129)

Righting the wrongs of the past as foreseen in this quote fits perfectly into the wider scope of the Chimurenga narrative; recalling the past as a tool with which to cloud present issues of discontent. Once again, as within Chimurenga literature, the past serves as the life-giving source, and does so incongruously, by eradicating the present, in other words life itself. The narratives of domination thus resemble the infatuation with memory so dominant in the works of a large number of Zimbabwean authors. Memories of the past, and memories of the land, serve to place a nation's people in historical perspective. Having belonged to the land points to a future where the land is returned to those ordained as recipients according to the precepts of a glorious past. Memory becomes the divine title deed, a spiritual concession; it is passed on from one generation to the other, propelled and kept alive by the ancestral spirits and their intermediaries, a perpetual reference to that initial moment of belonging. The land in this memorialisation was discovered as virgin land, was not fought over, bought, or tricked into possession, as it was by the Matabele, or the white settlers who came in the wake of the pioneer column.

, in Robert's *Far From Home*, describes this genetic point, the first moment of belonging, the memory of that moment when the land was found waiting; welcoming. It is the moment which must be returned to, and re-lived, to complete the cycle:

Many, many years ago, my forefathers came to this place, this place the whites now call Fort Victoria. They liked what they saw: the vast lands, the abundant trees, enough to build many homesteads, and the rains that came like a welcome visitor every year.

‘This is a good place, ‘they thought. ‘This is a place to put down roots.’ (Robert 8)

Between this moment of belonging, and the prophetic moment of return, there lies the war and many years of not having, and not belonging to, and so it is that Tariro must leave and fight, to someday return and claim that which is rightfully hers. This biblical/ spiritual historicism does not leave visions of the future to mere chance. The future, as a product of the past, remains in sight and omnipresent. A nation will return to the glory of its past, and its rightful citizens will be returned to the land they once owned, according to the memories handed down by the spirits who reside on the land. The spirits thus carry memories of the past, and visions of the future, into present states of struggle. The revolution is thus not a striving for progression, but the implementation of that longing for the past, the fulfilment of an idyll dreamt. This revolution has been customer to various narrations, first and foremost to that of a historical mysticism, but also to that of pragmatics and reason. The cold reason of questions pertaining to ownership, empowerment, and historical determinism, is coupled with a mythical and spiritual historicism reminiscent of the middle ages, a time when people were encumbered by superstition, and the fear of an over-abundance of supernatural figures. These supposedly oppositional forces often find their way into a single argument, or simple statement. At times they are found tracing their paths through entire works, such as those of Robert, Hove and Kanengoni; creating entire landscapes of belonging. The land, beckoning from the vantage point of its historical idyll, is invested with the potential for fulfilling dreams in an endless progression. It is the hyperinflation of expectations chained to the land which must ultimately lead to failure, and many will have to reconcile themselves with the thought of belonging to nothing more than the ancient memory of the land. Anthony Chennells, in his preface to Shimmer Chinodya’s *Dew in the Morning*, comments on the way the land is torn between conflicting expectations:

Land is an important site on which a romantic nationalism constructs a Zimbabwean identity. A modern economy, however, makes different and competing claims for the land. In two decades the virgin soil of the north has become as crowded as are the lands of the south. The land is unable to continue as a source of both economic and spiritual well-being. The novel shows the

discourses of both postcolonial modernity and nationalist tradition unsettling each other, and in that instability our only certainty is that identities and traditions shift constantly as they adjust to new realities. (qtd. in Chinodya xiv)

This preface, written in 2001, highlights the malaise that has bonded Zimbabwe. Postcolonial modernity has ultimately succumbed to the 'discourse of nationalist tradition' and Machiavellian political intrigues. Identities now simply submit to the memorialisation of an imagined past, real identities remaining static because change in a positive sense has not occurred. The dream is recurrently dreamt a step away from realisation, and thus new identities cannot be formed because they remain far from the land. The dream of returning home as realised in Robert's *Far From Home* remains just that for most, a dream.

Shimmer Chinodya narrates the land as the welcoming mother earth willing to bequeath those who till its soil with bounteous wealth and joy:

April holidays in the country are fun. There is a sense of ripeness everywhere. The grass is fully grown. The trees seem to dance in its wavy, brown sea. The village paths are littered with dry maize leaves, nut-shells and sticks of sugar-cane. In the fields the sweat of December bears fruit. The mealies are tall and ripe, the fields strewn with round yellow pumpkins and greenish-blue watermelons. It is hard to believe that such crops were planted by men. (Chinodya 12)

This picture-postcard idyll of the land rewarding its recipients in bounteous abundance is indeed hard to believe, emanating as it does from the narrator's pen, just as the promise of the land emanating from Zanu PF's political sloganeering attempts to cloud the very real issues of the complexities and hardships that must necessarily be associated with working and owning the land. As long as the land remains beyond the reach of the majority the dream can be instrumentalised to entice loyalty and subjugation. The dream can see to it that the land does not reveal its true nature, and the emptiness of the great promise.

The Zanu PF doctrine points to history as running a course, destined to reach a supreme goal, allotting itself the task of grand co-ordinator and therefore in a position to infuse the dream with indefinite life. This dream is a pastoral myth narrated into being by the supreme power in collaboration with the intellectual elite. History, Zanu history, has become a theatrical concept; the glorious past celebrated in laudatory exaltation, and abetted by the efforts of a spate of contemporary artists. Writing about the distant past



thus entails playing squarely into the hands of this theatrical vision. The site of Great Zimbabwe, symbolising identity and greater nationhood, has lent itself perfectly to the deification of the past, and the monumentalisation of the land. The ruins of Great Zimbabwe stand as testament to what the ancestors had achieved upon, and aided by, the land. Not unlike the Egyptian pyramids, the ruins stand as a constant reminder of the greatness of a people, a resilience that additionally serves as a warning to those not included in the retelling of the past. Being absent from the recesses of this history entails absence from the vision of the future. Mugabe has in effect stated as much, referring to a black Africa, an Africa created and fought for by black Africans. The message implied is that Africa must return to what Samkange has termed the 'Mashona Halcyon Days':

The Mashona can boast that they established the great empire of Mwene Mutapa and the Rozwi Mambos whose grandeur and achievements stand unsurpassed by anything Africa had to show at the time (...). The Mashona are a people with a proud past; a people with long and deep roots; a people with a distinct civilization.

But in the 1830's the Mashona halcyon days were drawing to a close. There were stirrings in the south and in Zululand which were destined to break the Rozwi power and peace, and shatter its empires to pieces - pieces that to this day remain to be welded once more into one. (Samkange 5-6)

Mugabe and Zanu have taken up the cue, taken up this boasting of the revered past, and transformed it into a hegemonic diction of heraldic proportions. The piecemeal construction of the grand vision has now reached its zenith, abstract and firmly divorced from the practical considerations which were imminent shortly after independence. The hegemonic narrative has returned to the distant past, to the myths, and to the land of ancestral greatness. The other: the settlers, the colonial imperialists, and the Matabele, remain present only in their exclusion, in the fact of their not being one of those pieces of the recovered past. Mugabe, extracting meaning from Samkange's words, and creating his own context, has placed the great ruins in the following light: "Zimbabwe remains truly African (...). What better place for us to pick up the pieces again than in Zimbabwe, where we still have traceable history of our ancestors in a land still truly black?" (qtd.in Britain Zimbabwe Society 2)

Not unlike the bones of Nehanda marching through the works of Vera, Samkange, and Hove, crying out prophecies, crying of the past; the ruins of Great Zimbabwe are made to denote belonging and identification with greatness. The people are implored to imagine in unison, as a nation. Imaginings of returning, and belonging to the land, the dream

dreamt by all prior to independence, has replaced practicality because the richness of the image has retained its power to entice, and the promise still feasts off its longevity.

A nation waited in suspense as the question of land was dealt with in practical dimensions during the Lancaster talks of 1979<sup>28</sup>, and the authors of the land wrote of the dream of returning, two divergent positions. Zanu has now taken the land, carving it up, whilst still espousing the words of the dream to the dispossessed. The words, crafted by those intellectual artisans who believed in the power of their works, were intended to accompany the dream unto its awakening, an awakening that has, as of yet, not taken place. The future of the land, once a timetable of facts, figures and resolutions carved out during the Lancaster talks, has once again become the dream for those who remain powerless, and for those who have been excluded from the staged recital of the past. Writing in Zimbabwe has become an endless march; away from the history of the aftermath of the first Chimurenga, through the war and the UDI years, and through the disappointment of apparent freedom and restitution, in search of new ways to describe the old dream. Belonging has been set aside, postponed, the search for identity still indelibly grafted to memories of the past, waiting on fulfilment, or as Robert Muponde has stated in reference to works by Vera, Marechera and Hove:

The land assumes the lineaments of a living personality (...), and the omnipotence of an all-pervading deity (...). It is difficult to remember without it, and bodies are described, shaped, and destroyed depending on the content of their memory of land. Their fate is inscribed in the manner in which they relate to the land and its memory. (Muponde 1)

There is thus no Zimbabwean other than the one who resides in the past, the one who is defined by the memory of the land. Without this ancient memory one does not exist because no shadow is cast which can reach back to the times of the Rozvi and the Mutapa. There are no Zimbabweans other than the few who have now captured the land and can say of themselves that they exist because they now inhabit the land of their ancestors, and that these have been appeased. The endless march into the future, promised by Vera's Nehanda, a trail of birth and rebirth until the Promised Land is reached, is also an endless promise, endlessly distant. Unlike Tariro, most remain far from home, the spectre of hope

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<sup>28</sup> The Lancaster talks of 1979 took place directly after the second Chimurenga, or war of independence, paving the way for peace talks and free elections. The delegates convened at Lancaster house were the British government, the Rhodesian government of Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Robert Mugabe's ZANU, and finally Joshua Nkomo's patriotic front, or ZAPU.

mythologised to the point of unrecognisability, intertwined within the strands of 'Chimurenga speak'. If, as has been proposed, Robert Mugabe has been imbued with the spirit of Nehanda, then a rebirth has taken place which must be ultimately shied away from because its message is one of war and bondage for those who cannot trace their roots back to the ground rock of Dzimba-dza-mabwe.

### **3.3 The Desire of the Estranged Body**

In Zimbabwe one is currently forced to think of the term exile in a twofold sense: being in exile and/or being in a state of exile. There is the body which has been physically forced into exile, and there is the body, and predominantly the mind, which has been forced into a state of exile; an estrangement from accustomed surroundings, the body still present.

There is no such thing as voluntary exile in Zimbabwe, because leaving is always accompanied by force, and the estrangement that occurs within known boundaries is always a matter of historical and political force. Historical forces exert power from the distant past, whilst political power uses the historical text to lean forcefully upon the present. Exile is, in most cases, a matter of being caught on the wrong side of historical interpretations. Exile is about having become non-existent within historical interpretations, the historical self being the main determinant: if one can exist culturally in the past then one could be said to exist in the present state.

Political power has the capacity to work upon historical narratives, causing shifts within these which can either eradicate the historical self or simply make it null and void by ignoring it. Louise White has spoken of historical silences to denote those wilfully excluded from the narrations of the past:

Not everyone is included in historical texts, let alone when those texts are joined together to make a narrative of the past. But the very messiness of the lived past, the very untidiness of the closures, means that all that has been omitted has not been erased. The most powerless actors left traces of themselves in contemporary accounts, just as the most powerful actors crafted versions of events that attempted to cover their traces or to leave traces of their reinvented personas.... (qtd. in Mlambo 67)

Zanu's historicism referentially points to historical origins dating back to the eighth century and by so doing, although historically eskewed, lays claim to a progenesis of the

Zimbabwean nation state, deciding upon all matters pertaining to identity and belonging. The land is returned to the politically loyal, first and foremost, and to the historically relevant; those who can lay claim to a lineage which is visible. History is thus made instrumental in exacting revenge upon the unwanted, rendering them non-existent (the settler, and the landless slum-dweller), or historically irrelevant and only partially visible, as is the case with the Matabele and other ethnicities.

The land question is one which concomitantly decides upon identity, a situation reflective of prior times: he who has is, and conversely, he who has not is not. Land has once again become the deciding factor in identity formation, land denoting power, and land emanating from power. Land becomes an extension of the power base, becomes its own reward, and accords visibility to a blessed few. The methods used are in no way new to Zimbabwean society and this once again reflects the way in which the historical pre-text is instrumentalised. In pre-colonial society rewards emanating from the land were used to bolster power, and to extinguish the power of unwanted segments of society. This practice of economic ostracisation reaches far back, into the time deemed by the present powers to have been peaceful and indicative of unity; the glorious past:

Early analyses of Zimbabwe's prehistoric states have depicted them chiefly as farming communities that adopted iron to modernise their agriculture and cultivate more extensively than their predecessors. They were also pastoralists who placed a lot of faith in livestock. Cattle occupied a central place in their economies because they were important indicators of wealth and a means of maintaining clients. Through a system of distributing herds to loyal followers on the basis of usufruct, or *kuronzera*, some cattle-owners were able to transfer their wealth into power. (Mlambo, Raftopoulos 35)

It could be argued that this practice of 'kuronzera' is as much an example of residual memory as that of the ancestral memory Zanu PF has spoken of in the past. It is not only the ancient memory of the land, but the ancient memory of what can be done with the land other than cultivating it. Land, and its bounties, have always been the currency used to fuel the greed for, and the retention of power.

The Chimurenga narrative, in setting out the details of the struggle for the land, has aligned itself to a specific historical interpretation, one allowing for the fact of exclusion and alienation inherent in the ancient practice of *kuronzera*. The longing for the land is also the longing for power and wealth, the power and wealth embedded within the ancient memories of having and belonging. The text of the land points towards a visceral division;

the longing for that which has been lost pitted against the fear of having that which can be lost. The state of exile is passed back and forth, not only between the oppositional forces pitted against each other in true battle, but between the opposing narrative forces pitted against each other in a battle of interpretations. Both lead irrefutably to estrangement and exile, real estrangement from the land, and estrangement from the text. Nehanda's prophecy, as articulated by Hove, Vera, and Samkange, is a war cry, one which can not preclude the potential for politicisation and historical manipulation. Nehanda's war cry cannot escape the ongoing narrative because it has become a frozen icon assertively embedded within the text of Zimbabwean post colonialism. The prophecy, extracted from historical fact and placed within both the political and literary narratives, has gained a life of its own; unstoppable and irreversible:

What sky will not listen to the thunderous voices of the ancestors? What cloud will not shed its tears to cool the earth when commanded by the thunderous voice of the ancestors? Rise all the insects of the land. Sing the many torturous tunes of the land so that any strange ears will know that an uprising is at hand. Rise you the colourful birds of the rivers and the hills. Sing all the tunes of the land so that any stranger will know that this land is the land of rising bones. Rise all the children of the land and refuse to suckle from strange breasts. Then all the strangers will know that the power of the land is more than the power of any other miracle that can cheat the eye. (Hove 51-52)

Hove has made a meta-narrative of Nehanda's cry, the complexity and intensity of which must lead to further estrangement. The children of the nation are implored to ignore the voice of their master, to sing revolutionary dirges as they march along the path to freedom. The dead are afforded the power to command all, heaven and earth, leading the march towards the fulfillment of the ultimate dream: that day when the 'children' will have won the battle for the land and appeased the ancestral spirits, Nehanda amongst them.

Nehanda, the mother, does not beckon her children home, even those unborn, but sends them out into a desolate and strange world with the task of returning victorious. Nehanda, the mother, sends her unborn children into battle, the inheritance of a promise on their lips. Some, like Mugabe, return victorious; many die on that strange soil which cannot be called home, and others like Munashe, find death only after having wandered restless and lost into the arms of the waiting spirits. The body becomes whole only on return, when the prophecy has been fulfilled, and therefore the majority are condemned to battle on against an enemy which reconstitutes and renames itself. The colonial might, now in the

guise of the MDC and the decimated settler minority, must be vanquished until no trace of unrighteousness exists, not even in thought.

Vera's Nehanda mother sends her children forth with the following words:

The newly born come into the world bearing gifts. They walk and speak. They have eyes that hold memories of the future, but no one is surprised: they have received their sight back. The newly born come into the world with freed souls that are restless; they seek ways to outwit their rivals. They speak in voices that claim their inheritances. But those to whom they speak have filled their ears with insects. The sky which has betrayed them sends spears of rain into their midst, and they pick them up and cover the plains. (Vera 113-114)

Into which world Vera sends her newly born is not quite clear. Written in 1993<sup>29</sup>, *Nehanda* speaks of betrayal, a promise unfulfilled. Nehanda can see into the future and offers a glimpse of what her children have done with the 'inheritance'. The squandered promise lies shattered upon the soil that has once again been usurped by those wielding power. The narrative could be conversely interpreted as one conveying the power to fulfil the prophecy in the hands of Zanu PF. There is the potential for historical and political rebirth in this prophecy, the potential for endless battle against an endless line of foes. The reincarnation myth set in motion by the singular historical reading of the past as practiced by Ranger, Samkange and Maurice Vambe<sup>30</sup>, and literally taken up by Hove, Vera, and Kanengoni, to name but a few, has undeniably bolstered and fed the political and mythical aspirations of Robert Mugabe and Zanu PF. The children of Nehanda are born again and again, in timeless succession; some like Mugabe to apparently front the march towards ultimate freedom, and others like Kanengoni's Munashe to fall along the wayside, exhausted, confused, and betrayed. Some, such as the nameless protagonist in Marechera's work, evolve into enemies of the state in their confusion. Estrangement also estranges from the source of power. Marechera's figure questions but finds no answer other than the emptiness and restlessness of his wandering mind:

It seems to be a perpetual condition of my state that I should periodically attach and detach myself to the wandering humanity out there and call each attachment a profound and living thing. It does not even have to happen by design. No single heart is safe from the passions of an accidental glance. This perpetual naming of

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<sup>29</sup> Significant date because ten years of ZANU rule have transpired and the initial euphoria in decline. General elections were held in March 1990; a unanimous victory for Robert Mugabe's ruling elite.

<sup>30</sup> Maurice Vambe; historian, author, political commentator, and presently lecturer at the University of South Africa.

parts. Wrenching my mind out of joint. Tearing the skin off my knees. All night through, that black angel, butting me with the steel of a divine brow, kneeling me between the legs with the nightmare impact of past and future clashing at once like lightning bolts erupting suddenly, she has, that black dream, arched her body taut like a full drawn bow...catapulting me like Prometheus into the eerie depths. (Marechera 130)

It is the weighing of past and future on Marechera's protagonist which drives him into the inner recesses of his own mind, as if caught between two opposing forces attempting to tear him apart. Marechera refers to the dream as a black dream, ironically lampooning the dream of an African victory on African soil, whilst admitting to defeat at its hands. The dream is adorned with the sexuality of a divine temptress, unconquered and unconquerable because of its seductive promise. Marechera ignores the land, keeps it out of his work, because it is an integral part of the dream and would seduce him into echoing the words of Nehanda's vision. Marechera prefers conceding defeat before reaching this point.

Interestingly Marechera references Doris Lessing's work to point out the disintegration of a mind struggling to assert itself, struggling to piece itself together. Marechera supposes estrangement to be the state of mind which is inherited at birth, or rebirth. One is not born to oneself but to the expectations tethered to the 'black dream'. Marechera's characters are born into a battle with themselves, without the solace of the certainty of the Lion Spirit as a backdrop to suffering and dissolution. Marechera's characters are born into madness because madness abounds. It is the estrangement from the land, estrangement from the dream, which leads to madness, the characters condemned to wander the earth in search of themselves:

Where the moon and the sixpence still twinkle over the violet Pacific nights. Where the sound and the fury still blows over the deep south. And golden notebooks tell of the tensions that travel through white-hot wires from Cape Town to Dumfriesshire (...). And time and place do not root our dreams in certainty. This noise and turmoil of a mind thinking out its thoughts. Akin to a marriage between fear and freedom. Each hewn down to the level of the other. The vast longitudes of history are pressed and tightly hammered together till the lives in between cannot utter a shriek. (Marechera 130)

Marechera's nameless protagonist, nameless because he is uprooted and belongs neither here nor there, gives vent to anger and dissolution. He references Doris Lessing and W. Somerset Maugham, amongst others, in a frenzy to get to the truth of his malaise, estrangement and exile from the self. Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* relates the

disjointed and troubled life of Anna Wulf who attempts to string the chapters of her life together in diary form, a personal history which describes an inner journey. This inner journey ultimately ends in madness, but the history is written and the madness is described, an external order reflecting internal disorder. Marechera thus attempts to leave a marker, creating points of reference with which to find his way back, or creating a path for others to find their way.

The reference to W. Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and the Sixpence* describes another journey; the physical journey away from a past existence into one promising fulfilment. The promise is ultimately documented in the form of paintings by Charles Strickland, discovered after his death in that place of exile he had voluntarily sought out for himself. The paintings describe the external world more than they do the internal world of the diary. The paintings represent the idyll, the promise of utter beauty, the escape. Marechera identifies the futility in both the journey of the mind into the inner space, and the journey into exile, because ultimately there is no escape, not even that of total madness. Death too, in the Zimbabwean understanding, offers no recluse because it is there that the ancestors reside, awaiting affirmative action:

The Eumenides are not behind the curtains but are the grains of dirt on my spectacle lenses. And that makes it worse; enlightens the syntax of cerebral longitudes (...). Diminishing the gravel mound of pity until the worm-eaten corpse is exposed to what winds and sun care to blow and shine. Goes on piling perplexity upon complexity, fact on fact, disaster on calamity, until the mind hollers ENOUGH. But there is not enough in death's design (...). The mortuaries stuffed full of the multitude's hope. (Marechera 131)

Marechera unleashes a frenzy of words to uncover the dichotomy indicative of the postcolonial condition. In Zimbabwe this condition is furthermore exacerbated by the fact that the strands of the political and historical past are carried across borders into death and back again. There is no escaping the political condition, the revolutionary march. Those who do not march, or cease to march, such as Munashe, are condemned to wander alone, to and fro, across the border into eternity and back again. Marechera continues, expounding upon the internal and external domains of existence, the inside and outside of that house. The house could be Zimbabwe, the ruins of old re-established, or the house of the mind. The house of the ancestral spirits exists within and outside of the mind, its boundaries within the fundamentals of ancient tradition, cultural history, and the works of the storytellers, and as such visible only in the corridors of the mind.



Marechera makes a concerted effort to escape from the various abodes and fails, because everything is seen and known. Marechera succumbs to the realisation that there is no escaping either the houses of the mind, or that postcolonial structure which has been named after the ancient ruins:

Even this house with its plague of intellect and protest. Insiders! They are out there, an eternal skyblackening swarm of locusts parachuting out of the sky in unmarked planes. In here - within these walls - they articulate the necessity and the pity (...). There is nothing but a hideous dark ahead, a moonless sunless starless world. With its Armoured Insect whose power it is to cast the shadows that dog our steps from the delirium of the womb to the shattered mask of the tomb. (Marechera 131-132)

Marechera dissects Nehanda's prophecy, interpreting it to mean something threatening, encroaching ominously upon the unsuspecting children of the land. The bones of the insects have risen only to descend upon the waiting land, led by the 'Armoured Insect', or grand ancestral spirit. The reference to Hove's Nehanda leaves the heroine nameless, as does Hove, laying onus upon the destructive might of the prophecy:

We did not inherit this land for ourselves but for the children whom we have inside of us. Look at the clouds of locusts. Eat them if your mouth waters for them, but this cannot be eaten since it is a bad omen. The locust that our ancestor says we cannot eat comes alone and runs away when we run after it. But this swarm cannot be on its own. It has its own messages which I tell you are not good (...). This is not a swarm to appease the eye of any ancestor. It is a swarm that would eat the children to death, goats and sheep to death. It is a swarm that cannot be measured. (Hove 48)

All is passed on; the land, the ancestors who reside upon the land and above it, the dream passed from the ancestors to the living, and from generation to generation, and finally Nehanda's cry which echoes from mind to mind and resides within and between the lines of all that has been written. The cry becomes an ominous and omnipotent plague covering all; the land, the children to come, and all the lines of poetry yet to be written.

Yvonne Vera places the insect into the ears of those who wield power, blackening and drumming out the sounds of the words they wish to speak under a flood of insect cacophony:

The newly born come into the world with freed souls that are restless; they seek ways to outwit their rivals. They speak in voices that claim their inheritances. But those to whom they speak have filled their ears with insects. The sky which has betrayed them sends spears of rain into their midst, and they pick them up and cover the plains. (Vera 113-114)

Brian Chikwava's novel *Harare North*<sup>31</sup> highlights the comedy of superstition and ancient beliefs, drawing up the plight of a nameless protagonist fleeing into a cultural enclave in London, taking his land with him into the physical state of exile. The exiles leave Harare and at the same time take it with them, co-joining culturally divergent experiences to create a home away from home. Although common to the exile experience the practice does not work because the unaccustomed intrudes upon the known in such a way as to uncover the delusion the exile seeks. The exile is forced to find others with whom to share the reminiscence of the past, but for some the memories have faded, only to be replaced by the predilection for newly acquired tastes, leaving the exile alone with distant memories:

I have bring Paul and Sekai small bag of groundnuts from Zimbabwe; groundnuts that my aunt bring from she rural home. Sekai give the small bag one look and bin it right in front of me. She say I should never have been allow to bring them nuts into the country because maybe they carry disease. Then she go out and buy us McDonald's supper. (Chikwava 6-7)

Chikwava's unnamed exile's attempt at reconciling home with the new experience is repudiated because the groundnuts not only symbolise home but also the past. The past is represented as something threatening, a carrier of disease into the present experience of comfort and prosperity. Home, and the past, are thus dismantled step by step, markers of the past being replaced by symbols of the western world. The unnamed hero not only searches for the past in the present experience but also in the store of recollections he has brought with him. The feeling of home is thus dependent upon the capacity to recall, and recall correctly. Memories of home run the risk of being tarnished by the passage of time:

They have wireless phones; she can have go into another room and leave us to watch TV properly, but she don't do that Sekai. She just want me to hear she conversations, especially when she start talking about them Green Bombers, the youth movement boys back home; the boys of the jackal breed. Sekai go on and on about how they is just bunchies of uneducated thugs that like hitting people with sticks. Me I don't say anything as she say all this stuff because I can tell that Sekai don't really know about things going on in Zimbabwe because she have been in England for too long. She buy all the propaganda that she hear from papers and TV in this country. (Chikwava 8)

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<sup>31</sup> Harare North is the name used by many exiles and immigrants when referring to London, because of the abundance of Zimbabweans who have either taken refuge there or simply immigrated.

The dispute that arises between Sekai and her nameless countryman is that between first-hand recollection and second-hand reporting. The nameless hero's memories of a recent past are juxtaposed upon Sekai's newspaper version of the truth. The disparity between the local and distant truth, or otherwise stated: between the visible and the invisible truth, is that the visible truth represented in the local newspaper is anchored in the present tense. Apart from that it has the potential of reaching millions because of its visibility, and thus the power to transform the hero's distant recollections. Home is therefore transformed in the exile's mind, a transmutation of supposed truth into perceived truth. The memory of home is translated into a picture of home, rigid and undeniable. The newspaper and television coverage replaces the coverage of memorialisation as the invisible disappears:

To the right of station entrance one newspaper vendor stand beside pile of copies of *Evening Standard*. On front page of every one of them papers President Robert Mugabe's face is folded in two. I can still identify His Excellency. The paper say that Zimbabwe has run out of toilet paper. That make me imagine how after many times of bum wiping with the ruthless and patriotic *Herald* newspaper, everyone's troubled buttock holes get vex and now turn into likkle red knots. (Chikwava 1)

The nameless hero still recognises the konterfei of his president but must resort to his imaginings when embellishing the image with his own truth. The message could be read as follows: at home President Mugabe was able to exact revenge upon his citizens because of the absence of toilet paper but in England he is rendered harmless, trying to grasp at his erstwhile citizens. The Zimbabwean Herald, as opposed to the British Evening Standard, is an altogether different purveyor of the truth. The Zimbabwean Herald<sup>32</sup> can be seen as an integral mouthpiece used to voice the Chimurenga ethos, aiding in the construction of the bulwark of patriotic history. The nameless hero is, thus seen, out of harm's way, but also divorced from any attachment to the past other than his recollections, and therefore also from the land. The hero has lost his name to the past because it clearly has too much to say about that which has been left behind and nothing about the state of exile which must serve as an interim. Not only is the hero bereft of a name, but the reader is robbed of the possibility of calling and placing him. The sense of loss inherent to the exile's world is thereby heightened and the possibility of returning without leaving a trace of the interim behind is brought into focus. Chenjerai Hove, acquainted with the state of

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<sup>32</sup> Government owned national newspaper, stationed in Harare. The Herald is known to function as a medial mouthpiece for the interests of the ruling elite.

the exile in both senses, has commented upon the loneliness and loss of the estranged body: "If you can't name and individualize yourself, you're totally annihilated from the face of the earth. If you can't name yourself, you won't know yourself - you're a stranger to yourself. If you can't name yourself then you can't name your destiny." (Hove 2)

Interestingly Hove's statement draws attention to the irony pertinent to the exile's condition. The naming of a person places him/her in contrast to others, individualising the body, and at the same time placing the body in a state of communion with others. It is belonging to others whilst belonging to the land which poses the antithesis to the exile's condition. The exile has no need for a name because it cannot be recognised, and as a result, cannot be placed. The mind's estrangement as portrayed by Marechera, once again making use of the nameless hero surrounded by names, points to the impossibility of calling to oneself, and being called to by others. Although one would presume that visibility in a state of otherness is heightened, the truth is that the exile is rendered invisible because of his/her otherness. The sense of self disappears because the relativity is not at hand; others who have grown up on the land in unison, calling to each other, placing each other.

There is a sense of defeat and failure in the comedy of both Chikwava, and Marechera. The truth is lampooned and shown up for the farce that it is, but for the nameless hero it is the only real truth that exists. Placed out of context, the hero no longer exists, other than in the recollection of self, a self called to by others, a self at home. If home equals land, and there is no home without land, then we come to the crux of the matter: without land there is no identity, and without identity there is no resistance. Nehanda would lead her children into battle for the land, releasing them into existence, into the living part of herself:

In the future, the whirling centre of the wind, which is also herself, has collapsed, but that is only the beginning of another dimension of time. The collapse of the wind, which is also her own death, is also part of the beginning, and from the spiralling centre of the wind's superimposed circles another wind rises, larger and stronger. Hope for the nation is born out of the intensity of newly created memory. The suffusing light dispels all uncertainty, and the young move out of the darkness of their trepidation, into the glory of dawn. (Vera 111)

Newly created memory could be read as the invocation of a revised history, a history of the people returning to the land, and belonging to the land. Newly created memory would ultimately end the state of estrangement that has befallen an entire nation because it would

signal the beginning of a people's return to the land, and unto themselves as they were in the beginning; of and upon the land. The efforts of the political elite and the acclaimed writers of the country run parallel when it comes to the attempted re-imagination of the past. The divergence, on the other hand, lies in the understanding of the past. The past, as seen by Zanu PF, is not only a signifier of greatness, but a weapon with which to extract allegiance, loyalty, and obedience. Those who did, or do not, adhere to the official version of the past were, and are, removed from its retelling, sent into exile, estranged from themselves. Zanu PF, under the guidance of Robert Mugabe, has usurped the only true form of resistance; the re-imagination of the past as an instrument with which to assert control over the future.

Historical interpretation is a site of contestation and the battle has been won by those forces which have managed to create a bond between the memory of the past and a vision of the future. The re-enactment of the past has not only become a display of power, but has clearly forged its presence into the future because all ongoing debates lag behind, diversity resulting in unresolved questions. Zanu PF has, in the name of the people it defines, resolved the debate. Zanu PF has enacted the right to historical choice, and with Robert Mugabe at its head, is endowed with the ability to extract mythical and authoritative truths from the bones of the past. These bones can then, in the style of the sangoma<sup>33</sup>, be thrown to the ground as a vision of the future. The only element of chance in Mugabe's historical reading is the process, the throwing down of the bones; a display of blatant force. The great stone bird and the ruins of Zimbabwe are the historical facts which cannot be denied because the past is made visible. The first and second Chimurenga are historical facts reliant upon memory, and here it is that Robert Mugabe is able to select from various sites of memory, including the works of authors such as Hove, Chinodya, Samkange, Ranger, Vera, and Kanengoni; works which have made the historical facts of the first and second Chimurenga visible.

In the words of E. H. Carr this process of interpretation could be summed up as follows:

But no sane historian pretends to do anything so fantastic as to embrace 'the whole of experience'; he cannot embrace more than a minute fraction of the facts even of his chosen sector or aspect of history. The world of the historian, like the

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<sup>33</sup> Traditional healer, or herbalist, in the Southern African region. Also known as a witchdoctor, with the proficiency to predict the future by a reading of the bones strewn from a leather sack.

world of the scientist, is not a photographic copy of the real world, but rather a working model which enables him, more or less effectively to understand it and to master it. The historian distils from the experience of the past, or from so much of the experience of the past as is accessible to him, that part which he recognizes as amenable to rational explanation and interpretation, and from it draws conclusions which may serve as a guide to action. (Carr 103-104)

The phrase 'experience of the past' is a momentous signifier because it not only qualifies the role of history, and the historian in the Zimbabwean context, but also qualifies what it is the authors of the country have delivered into the hands of the ruling elite. Robert Mugabe was thus left with the succinct task of distilling these experiences, and forming their retelling into a dogma of momentous proportions. Mugabe has taken the interpretations of the artists and historians, withholding the promise of returning them, whilst the latter have been left with the task of searching for a new history in old ruins, and they are inevitably still locked in debate. Thus it is that Mugabe acts according to very real sense of the sangoma, that of a 'cunning man'.<sup>34</sup>

Commenting upon Zanu's practice of patriotic history, the following sentence from "What History For Which Zimbabwe", a report on the Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Days, places Mugabe's historicising in stark perspective, and somehow belittles the efforts of those attempting to discount the practice of interpretation: "Patriotic history is a much narrowed down version of nationalist history. It focuses on the three 'revolutions'-1896, the guerrilla war and the 'third Chimurenga' of land distribution. It divides the nation into 'patriots' and 'sell-outs'". (Britain Zimbabwe Society 1)

This is undoubtedly an oversimplification, but it is also undoubtedly effective in that it creates a clear division amongst those against and those for the postcolonial nation. With the help of a phalanx of writers and historians Mugabe has not only named the nation, he has set the rules which define the moment of belonging, thereby making the nation and its people his, setting them upon the march into a future of his choice, taking as his cue the spirit of Nehanda who sends her children into the future to wage a war for the land they had lost. Nehanda too was able to predict the future by digging her fingers into the soil, into the land, and the soil foretold of a victory for its children:

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<sup>34</sup> The sangoma was referred to as a cunning man because of his ability to look into the future, gathering knowledge from diverse sources such as the reading of the bones. The sangoma thus held the power to manipulate on hand of the knowledge in his possession.

The mist turns to water and moves down her face and neck, and the darkness is returned to her. In the comforting darkness, the spirits guide her into a sacred place inside the cave. She digs the soft earth with her fingers, and finds a clay pot filled with red soil. The soil has been taken from an anthill. The pot carries images of the future. (Vera 110)

Mugabe and Zanu PF have inherited this dark cave, the past rendering its citizens blind, and bestowed upon themselves the sacred task of leading those appointed to witness the glorious future, into the light, and into sight. If the third Chimurenga is to render unto the people that which it has lost, that which returns life; the land, then it must be seen as the fulfilment of a life-giving prophecy. Those who deny this path deny themselves the gift of sight and are thus doomed to wander lost, unable to name themselves, and the land upon which they walk aimlessly.

This is by no means an arbitrary and cynical reading of history. It could be said to bolster ulterior motives, but in its use of the Chimurenga narrative it relies heavily upon historical sources to make inroads into the future, connecting the divergent poles of past and future to create a historical lineage of a nation coming into being. The methodology used is that of the master historian piecing together information from an abundance of existent commentaries. The Chimurenga narrative has therefore to be continually adapted in a process of ongoing interpretation, indebted as it is to the often accidental nature of national and international politics. Once again E. H. Carr delivers the underlying commentary:

Just as from the infinite ocean of facts the historian selects those which are significant for his purpose, so from the multiplicity of sequences of cause and effect he extracts those, and only those, which are historically significant; and the standard of historical significance is his ability to fit them into his pattern of rational explanation and interpretation. Other sequences of cause and effect have to be rejected as accidental, not because the relation between cause and effect is different, but because the sequence itself is irrelevant. (Carr 105)

Beginning with Ranger and Samkange, a very definitive sequence of historical motives was employed to explain not only the past, but to explain the burgeoning future to those still to come. The historical map which was subsequently to serve as guiding template to authors and politicians alike could not be readily undone, or revised, because it had been deemed appropriate and useful.

## 4 “VIOLENCE” AND “STRUGGLE”

### 4.1 Gods, Spirits, and Spirit Mediums

As the Zimbabwean nationalist movement developed during the middle part of the 20th century, Nehanda came to represent - in songs, in verse and in myth - the inevitable but long-awaited victory of the Shona over their oppressors. Novelists, poets and political activists extolled her spirit and actions and implored her to come back. (Oboe 4)

The novelists and poets have grown old, or died, and the political activists have grown old and become the political leaders who have been directing and instigating the ongoing struggle for the past three and a half decades; and still Nehanda has not brought consummate victory - a marriage of political motives and the spiritual hopes of a nation. If, as has been proclaimed on behalf of Robert Mugabe, that he has been possessed of the spirit of Nehanda as she, in her turn, was possessed, then the chain of reincarnation or spiritual rebirth must inevitably lead to ultimate victory. The Shona people, after having wrought victory over the colonisers, over Ian Smith and his white farmer collegiate, over the Matabele, are now compelled to bring about an almost improbable victory over all dissent; a victory against the western imperialists in the guise of the MDC, the few remaining white farmers holding onto their land, and finally the western governments attempting to force through their ulterior motives of a colonial re-enactment. Mugabe holds the spirit of Nehanda prisoner to the incumbent historicism; posed to defiantly utter her famous cry, a war-cry apt to herald the beginning of a new succession of battles fought for righteousness and freedom. Nehanda passes from woman, to spirit-medium, and finally spirit. Nehanda passes through wars; the first two Zvimurenga, and finally that ultimate war for the grand prize, the war for land, the third Chimurenga.

Nehanda and Kaguvi have been elevated to the pantheon, not only by the ruling elite, but by those writers who, not unlike the freedom fighters, discovered in her a guiding spirit, a beacon of hope with which to illuminate the future, and perhaps a force with which to create the future. The point that had been missed was the fact that Nehanda was destined to become both a literary construction and a political fabrication used to propagate and legitimise intense acts of violence. Writers such as Vera and Hove would supply her with body and voice, whereas historians such as Ranger and Samkange would force her into



the forefront of an ideological construction by bringing the historical into focus, or alternatively stated, out of focus in the sense of a construed historical reading. The historical palimpsest created by the euphoric interpretations of Ranger and Samkange would give renewed impetus to the revolutionary fervour, before and after independence.

During the second Chimurenga, every combatant in the renewed struggle against the white regime was inspired by Nehanda's prophetic words and hung on to them for reassurance and strength. The leaders of the liberation army actually saw themselves as her rising bones, the actualization of her prophecy... (Oboe 4)

The legend, or myth, of Nehanda's role in the first Chimurenga became the legend and myth which would further propel the war for liberation, or second Chimurenga, and has finally been reinstated as the legitimacy spending force of the current third Chimurenga. Attempts at a revision of this eskewed historicism have largely been ignored by the political and literary elite because Nehanda is, above all, a cultural, traditional, and religious certainty, and as such she cannot be revised or dismantled. Nehanda cannot be rewritten because she has already been made to speak, and has already been active as a guiding spirit. The historical figure posing behind the myth, not unlike the historical Jesus standing in the shadow of the Christian saviour, has become a negligent and irrelevant figure. Stanley Samkange, for example, one of the first to bring the historical figure of Nehanda to life and transpose her into the realm of myth, would probably not have been aware of his role of midwife to a political phenomenon as powerful as that of Nehanda because it could not be foreseen that Zanu PF would make such dominant use of cultural and religious factotums to legitimise various forms of institutional subjugation. On the other hand, writers of the stature of Samkange, Hove, and Vera, would have been well aware of the potential of traditional cultural artefacts for shaping the opinions and convictions of a people steeped in tradition and ancient mores. What the writers failed to anticipate was the cynical willingness of a movement to misuse and instrumentalise traditional symbols, whereby beliefs could be shackled to almost any cause. Nehanda, Kaguvi, and the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, serve as sites of reinvention, now hostage to the empowerment of Zanu PF; as these sites are reinterpreted to symbolise the might of Shona domination.

Unity under the auspices of a dominant force must be perpetually reinvigorated, reinforced, and reinvented. Nehanda has been drawn up in many guises, but the kernel of her message has been subjugated to a singular interpretation, and this interpretation has

been moulded into a singular political utterance. The essence of this truth is that the end will justify any means, and that the means by which this end shall be attained has been demonstrated on numerous occasions in Zimbabwe; be it the liberation war or second Chimurenga, be it the war for land or third Chimurenga, be it Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina<sup>35</sup> protracted acts of violence perpetrated under the guidance of Nehanda's evocative prophecy, a prophecy allowing for an incalculable expression of hegemonic might. The revolutionary songs sung prior to, and shortly after the liberation war, pay testament to the foresight embedded within interpretations of the mythical factotum:

Grandmother Nehanda  
you prophesied,  
Nehanda's bones resurrected,  
Zanu's spear caught their fire  
which was transformed into Zanu's gun,  
the gun which liberated our land.  
(qtd in *Journal des africanistes* 4)

These words, sung by the Zanu PF Ideological Choir, delineate a course by way of interpreting the mythical ground source. The key term is liberation because it is the entity which has made an endless spiral of the violence doled out by the hegemonic forces. Zanu PF alone has the capacity to decide upon when that moment of liberation has been attained. Ironically that force has a voracious appetite for the creation and re-creation of opponents. Not only do Nehanda's bones rise to exact revenge upon the enemies of the people, but her enemies rise in unison with her, in an endless enactment of the last stand. As long as there is war and violence, the legitimacy for the ruling elite's claim to solitary empowerment is guaranteed. The prerequisite is the creation of an ample number of enemy forces with which to legitimise displays of violence and overriding power.

Every word written in support of, or against this power, enforces its need to exist. The voice in support provides legitimacy and diction, whilst the voice against provides for the sorely needed enemy, be that the voice of dissent from within, or the drumming voice from outside the walls; the settler voice, or the disjointed figures such as Marechera.

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<sup>35</sup> Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina. Two epochal bouts of violence in the political history of Zimbabwe; Gukurahundi describing the program meted out against the Ndebele population between 1983 and 1987, with the ultimate death toll reaching roughly 20000, and Murambatsvina describing the purging of the slums of Harare. Both were measures taken to eradicate or weaken the fundament of the erstwhile opposition forces; in the first case Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and the MDC which garners most of its support from the urban areas of the large cities.

The author giving voice to the need for change also voiced the pillars of the present politic into being. The authors have created palates of landscapes, and therein is included the landscape of the incumbent version of political life, based upon the legends and myths of old. The landscape of dissent is also delivered and with it the accompaniment of reaction on the part of the ruling elite. Marechera made a concerted effort not to be conscripted or scripted, steering away from anything that reeked of African traditionalism, mocking the bones of Nehanda without mentioning her name, preferring the sound of other names: Shakespeare, Stravinsky, and Socrates. Names and voices from far away, and far off in time, names uttered in the language of the old world have the capacity to place the speaker in a state of opposition, an exile, and a fearful copy of the figure inside. This author is then also remembered for that which has not been said, that which has been intentionally ignored. This author is remembered for the other voice that has not spoken, that has been suppressed. This author stands beyond the walls of the house, looking in upon the mind looking outwards, attempting to see the world, and understand it. It is a deafening silence which reveals both; the voice spoken, and that unspoken. It is also an echoing madness because the one cannot deny the other, although waged in battle. Both voices are utilised and abused though, and often it is the unspoken voice which is used to replenish the truth.

It is Marechera's ignorance of Nehanda which brings the truth of her existence into being. It is Marechera's Nehanda who cries out louder than all others because she is screaming for recognition, calling out above the din of all that which is being written above and beyond her. Marechera's attempts to write over Nehanda's presence brings to mind her absence, and thus she is recalled as a vision, a ghost waiting to possess others so that they too can fulfill her prophecy and reap havoc amongst her detractors. Marechera evokes an emptiness possessed only by madness, and the need to write of this madness, leaving the spirit beyond that void she is waiting to possess, if only as subject. Marechera identifies her as part of the past he wishes to flee, a past that carries the claim to his madness. Nehanda speaks from beyond the void she cannot possess, spirit and the persona of author in disunity, one struggling for possession whilst the other does everything in its might to deny it. Marechera's unspoken Nehanda, and the spirit world, represent and speak out the efforts of the ruling force to inhabit every fibre of consciousness of the conscientious citizen. Nehanda is compliance; a willingness to be possessed emanates from her. Nehanda is blindness because that which is seen becomes that which is seen by the

possessing spirit, the host blind to the present enactment of truth, blind to an individual vision of the past.

In *The House of Hunger* Marechera transforms the recurrent Maria, a lover figure in *Black Sunlight*, into a skeletal reminder, and vestige, of the past:

The door had not opened, but I could see her clearly. She was mere bones, a fleshless skeleton, and she was sitting on a tree-trunk. I was the tree-trunk. I do not know how long she sat there. She was weeping; clear tears, silvery and yet like glass, coming out of the stone of her eyeless sockets; and her small gleaming head rested in the open bones of her palms, whose arms rested lightly on her knees. And she held between her front teeth a silver button which I recognised: I had years before bought her a coat which had buttons like that. It was the sight of her forlornly chewing that button which filled me with such great sadness that I did not realise that my roots had been painlessly severed and that what was left to do was to bind my wounds and once more - but with a fresh eye - walk the way of the valley. (Marechera 129)

Marechera describes being possessed by the past, often in the guise of women who meander through his dreams: Susan, Blanche, Nicola, Maria, and Marie. Here it is Maria who returns, in skeletal ghost like ruse with hollow eyes, to haunt the host that carries the memory of her. The narrator defies this possession; severing roots, and uprooting himself, and thus having freed himself from the possession, regains his true sight. In *Black Sunlight* it is, amongst others, the blind Marie who recurrently haunts the thoughts of the nameless narrator as he recounts themes of violence, cursing Marie for the solace of her blindness:

I would sneak up to Marie and yell suddenly in her ear. I hated her for being blind because her blindness made her safe from the things I was not safe from. I hated her for judging me by my voice and for always probing me with her fingers making something catch in my throat. The whole house then would, with the lives in it, shrill like a weird concerto. (Marechera 22)

The narrator in Marechera's novel is traumatised, gouging on incessant memories, and conversely, trying to banish these from his mind. What he discovers beyond those memories is the gaping and beckoning, void of his madness. It is also the madness of his own making and choice. The narrator has in the course of his development as an African product chosen to repudiate the past of nationhood and traditionalism, choosing instead the confusion and emptiness of a futile resistance against all he has hitherto known. He creates and recounts his past in shards of personal memory but comes to the realisation that the piecing together does not make a whole because he has almost succeeded in the

destruction of the totemic past that surrounds him. His personal memory is coloured by the historical violence of which the personal violence is a minor part. His madness is the result of the attempt at escaping both the personal history, and that history of the national space he no longer feels a part of. It is the analogy of the house, and the haunting, which best exemplifies the condition of Marechera and his nameless narrator. Not succumbing to the possession by the 'mhondoro'<sup>36</sup> creates an emptiness that strives to fill itself to no avail. The author strings together words devoid of historical context and surrounding, whereas the narrator is made to recount the disjointed memories that do not make a whole. It is the absence of historical surroundings which renders the narrator, and the accompanying characters, disjointed and incomplete. It is the absence of historical lineage which make them seem lifeless. Marechera defends himself against possession by the mhondoro, but writes as if he were possessed; feverish and unfulfilled, trying to outpace the madness and the emptiness, and only succeeding in writing himself into further madness and emptiness.

Marechera resists that which binds together much of the telling and the writing practiced in Zimbabwe; history, concentrating upon the personal history of his own malaise. Marechera resists the traditional understanding of history; that which is passed on, retold, carried inside; that which is used to explain the world to oneself and oneself to the world, that which forges into the darkness of the future. Marechera denies prophecy, preferring madness because it renders the prophecy null and void, describing scenes of violence because violence is always immediate, present, creating individual memory, a fingerprint upon the mind:

This change in me. More than all the darkness the bright sun could think of. The house grim and alert with Marie's blindness. My own flesh could think in it. This precision of a camera. Decapitated. Howled till the whole house rang. A thin sound swung down. Brusquely cut short. Cut in half by the red hot bullets. The headlights of a car swung across the house and the minister fumbled for her keys and not finding them tried the door and walked in surprised that it was not locked. Her headless body faltered at the third step. The head flew out the open doorway. Thudded against the gate. (Marechera 96)

Marechera, in collusion with the narrator, describes the destruction and mayhem which engulfs the characters occupying the symbolic house he has created from two

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<sup>36</sup> Mhondoro. Literally meaning lion in Shona refers to the Lion spirit. The Mhondoro spirits are the spirits of deceased Kings and Chiefs, also termed as clan spirits in the traditional cosmology.

perspectives: at once within the walls as part of the action, and then again apart, casting an eye upon the action from a vantage point which is detracted from 'plot' and 'place'. Marechera thus denies contextuality, and the history of the house, which is not only a present construction, but also contains the ruins of the past. The author repeatedly depicts scenes of violence in which reality is dissolved, and the entire contextuality which had provided his life with meaning is abandoned. The path towards madness is also the path away from history, away from identity and belonging, and the necessity to declare loyalty and adherence. Madness is singularity, the abandonment of context and past, allowing for the creation of alternative landscapes. Madness is, conversely, a declaration of opposition, futile opposition, and ultimately defeat. The defeat inherent in the illusion of freedom strengthens the hegemonic centre because its opposition can be identified as insufficient and singular:

Utterly outside himself. The ice and the snow. The heat and the sands. Utterly outside. Himself. Shriekily held down by Susan. To remember. Perhaps snatch a victory. But the armed lorries of language. Their articulate cartridges. With axes to confirm them. Reason and knowledge the bodies in the mass graves. Meaning killed by utterance. By the sunsets in a single mind's derangement. More things in the mirror than should be reflected back. (Marechera 100)

It is in this commentary that the author concedes defeat at the hands of the instrument he too must use; language. While attempting to escape the confines of that space allotted by the limited set of tools at his disposal, Marechera denies the beauty and significance of his art by simultaneously trying to destroy it simply because it is the same art which is used to create landscapes of violence, nationalism, and suppression. Reason and knowledge do not predominate within the house that has been created by the mythological might which bolsters the Chimurenga narrative. Marechera's alternative is the descent into madness, the dissolution of the contents and coherence of the mind.

Robert Mugabe's version of the historical ground rock illuminates the power of the language as pure utterance, devoid of meaning, but imbued with the threat of violence inherent in the web of mythological historicism: "The MDC will never form the government of this country, never ever, not in my lifetime or even after I die. *Ndinya kupikirei ndinomuka chidhoma* - I swear my ghost will come after you." (qtd. in Meredith 177)

It is this foreboding, the threat of the prophetic, which too informs Vera's *Nehanda*, and Hove's *Bones*. It is also present in Kanengoni's work, and that of Samkange. The threat

lies within the domain of mystery; a domain not accountable to reason, occultist, but known to all as something which will reveal itself as pure retribution, brought upon the heretics of the nation. Marechera identifies the violence embedded within the diction of the nation state and its history, a template of words institutionalised to wreak havoc upon imagined and real enemies.

In *Harare North* Brian Chikwava displays the power of language and its capacity to encroach upon the enclave of the exile:

She know nothing. She don't even know Comrade Mugabe. The president can come out to whip you with the truth. Truth is like snake because it is slippery when it move and make people flee in all directions whenever it slither into crowds, but Sekai don't know. Comrade Mugabe is powerful wind; he can blow snake out of tall grass like it is piece of paper-lift it up into wide blue sky for everyone to see. Then when he drop it, people's trousers rip as they scatter to they holes. (Chikwava 8-9)

Making use of the adopted patois of the exiled body Chikwava's narrator exposes the very real threat of retribution clothed in mythical garb. President Mugabe makes use of his 'omnipotent powers' to rouse his divine truth, transforming it into a weapon with which to exact revenge upon his enemies; be they in close proximity, or in the enclave of Harare North. The mythological aspect of the violence doled out upon the president's enemies owes a definitive debt to the fostered legends of the first and second Chimurenga. Nehanda's spirit, working from within the imagined host of the president's body, poses an imaginary threat to those who suppose themselves to reside within the realm of distanced safety. Nehanda speaks through the mouth of 'Comrade Mugabe', who in his turn speaks through the minds of his frightened citizens, causing the imagination to create a real threat that engulfs all in its wake.

Chikwava combines humour with the horror of the mythical truth, whereas Vera supplies it with poetic form, and therefore beauty and spiritual weight. The violent threat of Nehanda's vision, as foreseen by Vera, is not questioned. The threat is coated within a language of poetic beauty, unanswerable to reason and rationale. What brings about this moment of dreadful beauty is that crime of crimes, perpetrated by the imperialist forces during the first Chimurenga; the hanging of the revered spirit mediums Nehanda and Kaguvi. It is this moment of violent and rational intrusion into the spirit world which suffices to prolong indefinitely the stranglehold of superstition and mythological

suppression upon the Zimbabwean mind. This violent moment functions as historical centre, gathering all future historical certainty around itself:

A large cloud of fire leaps into the midst of death. The sky is filled with hissing flames. The fire carries a canopy of dark impenetrable smoke. Yellow and blue flames shoot angrily into the blue sky, tarnishing the heavens. Billowing smoke comes toward the people, carried by the wind. The burning consuming shapes send harsh smoke through the air, which carries the smell of dry grass. The radiance grows larger and larger into ever widening circles, glowing, rippling into the horizon. The flames of the fire disappear in a cloud of smoke, then return with a renewed fury. Shadows vanish from the earth. (Vera 117)

Vera portrays Nehanda's fury as an illuminating moment, driving shadows from the darkness of the earth, whereas for Chikwava it is the illuminating truth which causes all it exposes to scurry away in fear, bereft of cover. The historical certainty of Nehanda's body, and the definitive facts surrounding her death, are hollowed out of her prior existence and meaning, only to be replaced with the dream which sought to possess her. It is this dream which is dreamt with recurrent fervour, providing Nehanda and her various guises with indefinite longevity. Vera comments upon the dream, and her possession by it, in the following excerpt:

Nehanda came out of me like a dream. It has the feeling of a dream when I look at it now. And that suited it, because it concerned a myth, a legend. It was a story of spirituality, of ancestors, a mystic consciousness and a history (...) so it was much better to write it almost intuitively, out of my consciousness of being an African, as though I were myself a spirit medium, and I was just transferring or conveying the feelings, symbols and images of that (...). I wrote it from remembrance, as a witness to my own spiritual history. (qtd. in Oboe 5)

Vera accords herself the capacity to look back upon a spiritual and historical timeline, one which traces its path back past her own existence into the recesses of time in which such legends and myths find their source. Vera calls it remembrance, and spiritual history, and is thus unable to disentangle the truth and historicity of her being from that of the myth of Nehanda's transformation into the guardian spirit of women, revolutionaries, and state violence. She interprets this spiritual history and its making as such: "The legend, the history is created in the mouth, and therefore survival is in the mouth. That's what I wanted to capture in Nehanda". (qtd. in Oboe 2)

It would have been pertinent had she added the pen, denoting the power of the written word, the power of her written words. Chenjerai Hove was acutely aware of this power, and its potential for abuse, as power is transformed into ever more power and transferred



into the hands of those hungry for it. He spoke of his words being lost to the curators of this power, those knowledgeable of the malleability of the spiritual history Vera had defined. (see Hove 1-2).

Brian Chikwava, reporting on the art of writing and politics, points Robert Mugabe out as the master writer of the present master fiction, thus identifying him as the progenitor of Zimbabwe's present historical impression. Chikwava interprets history to mean an ongoing process, victim to the fickle moods of whoever happens to be holding the pen. The collusion of politics and art is a point of great relevance because it foregrounds the creative process integral to the historicism practiced by Mugabe, and abetted by a spate of artists. Chikwava must be included in this group because he, advertently or inadvertently, emboldens the president's spiritual potency:

Largely because of this sole tool at my disposal, I have also come to think that, at a certain level, the art of story writing has a lot in common with the art of politics; (...). For both practices you also need a good nose for the language that suits your story and, above all, a powerful imagination. With that in mind, a glance at Zimbabwe tells me that this is a bad story that needs more than thorough editing; it needs a complete rewrite. Whether we will see a good rewrite depends not only on the writer of this story, Robert Mugabe, but also on whether the opposition, his critics, can put on the table new ideas that will take the story in another direction. (qtd. in African writing online 1)

Chikwava correctly identifies the mechanics of the historical process as practiced in Zimbabwe, but remains impervious to the accompanying role the writers of the country have played, and play, in reinforcing the historicism of that which he has termed a 'bad story'. Not only does the story require a rewriting but it will become necessary to re-evaluate the historical sources, and the way they are deployed, whilst commenting on the history of the country, or more importantly, constructing it. The layout of the historical vista in Zimbabwe, a minutely structured layout, has left nothing to chance, and all that could be seen as having been mere accidental quirks of the past, are promoted to the realm of spiritual/mythical certainty. In E.H.Carr's *What Is History* Marx is called on to comment upon this form of historicism:

World history would have a very mystical character if there were no room in it for chance. This chance itself naturally becomes part of the general trend of development and is compensated by other forms of chance. But acceleration and retardation depend on such 'accidentals', which include the 'chance' character of the individuals who are at the head of a movement at the outset. (qtd. in Carr 101)

It can be debated whether or not Robert Mugabe's character be a figment of chance, considering the weight of historical facts which went into its making, but this excerpt does highlight the fact that it is not foreseeable that Mugabe will relinquish the power of the spiritual and dreamlike hold he has on the telling of his country. This telling is wholly dependent upon the fact of his being able to speak through the dream, to his people, and convince them that he is capable of working through that dream, and included therein is a vast potential for violence and destruction. Mugabe is well aware of the fact that he can destroy that which he has so elaborately built.

The answer now cannot come to mean that form of writing which is akin to retreat and dissolution, as Marechera had practiced, but a confrontation with the missing chance, or accidental nature, of the historical process in Zimbabwe. The possibility of thinking of and writing up alternatives to the foregone enactment does exist, albeit as a promise to the future.

## **4.2 A theology of Revenge**

“The president is a svikiro (spirit medium) which will never die. He might die physically, but his spirit will remain with us, just like Mbuya Nehanda and Chamunika. We will continue fighting the British and other imperialists using his spirit ...” (Chivaura 1)

This statement by Vimbai Chivaura, English lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, displays the depth of the religious and mythical conception, or misconception, that has come to dominate not only everyday life in Zimbabwe, but also the realms of education, academia, and finally the arts, which have placed the motives of resurrection and revenge in close proximity to each other, and made of them a central tenet.

Revenge, in the Zimbabwean context, takes on the form of a biblical answering to the wrongdoings of the imperial aggressor; whether in the guise of the imperial forces and Cecil John Rhodes, the UDI forces, the MDC, traitors, and finally the last remaining white landowners. According to this ‘theology of revenge’ the natural equilibrium in Zimbabwe was disturbed by the coming of the first white man at the head of the pioneer column. Historically speaking it could be said that this moment could be seen as the central driving force of all that has happened, and still happens in the country, and therefore any reaction

on the part of the government and its supporters to perceived wrongs must be viewed in this context. Beginning with the war for independence (second Chimurenga), moving on to Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina, and finally coming to the land invasions (third Chimurenga), any means applied in rectifying the sins of the past are deemed appropriate in light of that ultimate vision of freedom encapsulated within the Chimurenga conceptualisation. It is this path which has been revitalised by the regime of Robert Mugabe, extricated verbatim from the prophecy of Mbuya Nehanda, and practiced with a vengeance during the war for independence. Robert Mugabe has spoken of a state of mind, but it is also something that has long become systemic, something that has ingrained itself into almost every vacant space in Zimbabwean life. It is a theology that is to be believed in because it too can exact revenge upon those who do not believe, or belong, and the belonging depends solely upon one's belief. Mugabe has spoken in this vein on numerous occasions, venting anger at those he has burdened with the blame for his country's miseries: "Our present state of mind is that you are now are enemies because you really have behaved as enemies of Zimbabwe. We are full of anger. Our entire community is angry and that is why we now have the war veterans seizing land." (qtd. in Meredith 175)

Mugabe, once again, leaves nothing to chance, the edict being that there must be a cause and an explanation for all that happens. This theology has been historicised and evangelised by numerous artists and academics, but it is in its most persuasive format when coming from the man who identified it as a very potent weapon of empowerment, empowerment in the sense that existing power is able to replenish itself from its self-perpetuating source on a regular basis. The theology of revenge underpins the source of power in that it provides the concomitant explanatory justification. Its origins lie buried beneath layers of historical misconceptions, and in the mythology that had reigned before the advent of the bible, and the white man's religion. On every traditional homestead lie the ancestral graves, and these not only symbolise the true worth of the land, but represent the link to that other world from which the call for retribution emanates. It is the spirit world, which according to the ancient beliefs, and more specifically Mugabe's Zanu PF, calls for revenge. It is the spirit world, and all those who reside within her realm, who have been wronged and must be revenged. Robert offers a glimpse into this mind-set in

her description of the land removals of the 1960s<sup>37</sup>; one of the historical milestones which would lead to wide-scale resistance throughout the country, and eventually to the liberation war. The loss of land, and all that went with it, was the overriding cause of the second Chimurenga, and more importantly, it is the driving force behind the variety of governmental pogroms meted out against imagined and real enemies today:

The removals spread through our area like a *veld* fire, destroying everything in their path. Nhamo, Rudo, all of them, were herded on to trucks where they were driven, grieving, to their new homes on the Native Reserves (...).

As they were driven away from their ancestral lands, leaving behind the bones and shrines of their forefathers, their children's umbilical cords, all their sweat and dreams, my people mourned. (Robert 111)

This moment, imprinted as memory upon the minds of all who left to wage war from across the Mozambican border and in the Zimbabwean hinterland, and upon the minds of the parents left behind, is the integral moment which harnessed the full might of the spiritual convictions of a people to the aims of the liberation struggle.<sup>38</sup> The vibrancy of spiritual/ mythological beliefs was implemented to infuse the struggle with a dimension that could not be countered by the opposition forces, a spiritual might that oversaw the contingency of battle. This was a dimension that both combatants and ordinary villagers could relate to, devoid of political complexities and ideological technicalities. The ethos of revenge was driven by the spiritual world which hovered above the fighting and the day to day lives of the villagers, resettled upon barren and unforgiving communal lands around which the fighting took place. The simplicity of the message was glaringly clear; the lost spirits of the ancestors had to be assuaged, the land regained.

Alexander Kanengoni, the erstwhile soldier, offers an insight depicting the pain of loss and deprivation, which, when coupled with the ancient beliefs of the village elders to form the memory of anguish, would fire the anger at the base of the war, an anger that has still not found its appetite appeased:

As they crossed the dry river, Munashe felt an unexpected surge of his old anger as he looked at the tired communal land, and wondered how anybody - how his

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<sup>37</sup> A reference to the forced removal of blacks from their ancestral lands. Entire villages were relocated to mostly arid and unproductive lands, far removed from their known surroundings.

<sup>38</sup> ZANU forces were predominantly stationed in Mozambique, staging insurgent attacks from across the border. ZANU forces received substantial support from Samora Machel's Frelimo forces which had gained independence from Portugal in 1975, after a protracted guerrilla war.

people - could be expected to eke a living out of such denuded and barren earth. And then through the window he saw a dust-devil spiralling from the naked land, lifting tufts of thatching grass from the huddled huts and tossing it into the arid sky before being swallowed up by distance (...). The blue Ngezi hills to the east stood like bewildered sentinels watching over the ravages of a land without rain. His sense of pain and loneliness was as familiar as his feelings about the war. (Kanengoni 62)

Kanengoni refers to an 'arid sky', an allusion to the fact that not only have the skies failed to unleash the bitterly needed torrents of rain, but that they are not the skies of home, and that the communion with the ancestral spirits has been severely hampered by the enforced resettlements. An essential aim of the second Chimurenga was to reunite the people of the land with the wandering spirits of the ancestors left behind as families were forcibly removed from the land they had lived and worked upon for centuries. So-called political commissars were entrusted with the indoctrination of young combatants and villagers alike. In the nightly vigils Kanengoni refers to, soldiers and villagers were brought together in the communal compounds, educated not in political intricacies but in traditional historical claims, and mythology. The elders already steeped in such information could be implemented to further the aims of these *pungwes*.<sup>39</sup>

There he sat on a rock in the sun, his legs dangling in the water, and watched a group of recruits sitting through a tedious political lesson under a *muonde* tree not far away. The uninspired commissar was highlighting the collective bitterness that led the black man to take up arms and fight the white man: he who came in 1890 and pushed the black man into the dry and arid parts of the country blah, blah, blah, and Munashe thought what an over beaten path! Shit. (Kanengoni 79)

The incessant repetition of the well-worn historiography had little to do with political awareness, but rather the incantation of a historical mantra used to instigate or heighten the anger and fury many of the recruits had forgotten, or could not relate to. Others, such as the commissar, and the elders of the occupied villagers were well aware of this history because they had either lived it, or been imbibed with it. This form of vigil, or *pungwe*, is trumpeted out on a far grander scale today; blasting through radio speakers at home, in offices, in cars; propagated in classrooms throughout the country, printed on the front pages of national newspapers, played out on television screens in every available

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<sup>39</sup> The *pungwes*, literally meaning sunrise in the Shona language, were late night ceremonies held for the purpose of connecting with ancestral spirits but were, in the war time context, informal meetings where combatants would indoctrinate the villagers in matters of historical interpretations and simplified political mantras.

household, and finally posited upon the pages of the various novels that have confronted the country's history.

Mugabe, the political commissar par excellence, erstwhile teacher and revolutionary leader, was of course expertly schooled in the art of the historical lesson. As a former teacher trainer he knew all too well of the incalculable worth of the historical diatribe, repeated over and over again as if it were a religious message, not unlike that imparted by the spirit mediums. Mugabe has, impervious to alternative historical realities, used and abused every opportunity to propagate his historical message, as if he were standing in front of a class of recalcitrant students, reprimanding them for not being attuned to their own past. The missionary zeal of this historicism has managed to sustain, and reinvigorate, Zanu's power for more than four decades, and it is a lesson which is not only dependent upon the exertion of force, but more importantly, has incorporated the nation within the parameters of a confined historical narrative. Predominantly, actions and words falling in the political spectrum must be ascribed to an acute understanding of cultural domains. The historical lessons accompanied by institutionalised bouts of brute violence can be viewed within the context of a traditional belief in the simple formula of the unerring path: those who remain true to the dictum of the path will be rewarded and those who stray from the trodden way will be victimised to the point of repenting their wrongs, and beyond. The 'kuronzera' motif of sanctions and rewards revived to suit the needs of the political establishment.

Revenge is an ever present motif in contemporary Zimbabwean literature. The spiritual and earthly domains are drawn into one incantation of the Old Testament's dictum of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. There is seldom an example of the turning of the other cheek unto the enemy. Mbuya Nehanda is the focal point of a revolutionary theology that has come to dominate political, religious, historical, and everyday life. Enemies abound in this cosmological set-up, and the contemporary artist has made a profession of addressing these enemies; those installed by the state, weather worn but reliable, and on rare occasions, the present state itself.

In Zimbabwe, the brutal realities and surrounding mythologies of war are deeply etched into the national psyche. This contention can be comfortably aligned to the historical telling of the country, and as such it is the historical perspective which so dominates a large number of narratives, even to the point of actually becoming the narrative as in the

case of Stanley Samkange's *Year of the Uprising*, and conversely, Tim McLoughlin's *Karima*, which attempts to contextualise the second Chimurenga from differing perspectives, black and white.

McLoughlin's retelling of the liberation war attempts to take into consideration widely divergent perspectives: the young soldier fighting to defend Ian Smith's UDI construct, the white farmer hoping for the defence of his treasured land, the black peasantry living in the Tribal Trust Compounds<sup>40</sup>, praying for liberation and peace, and finally the freedom fighters, or 'Terrs', fighting for the ancient claim to the land. Within this tangle of perspectives McLoughlin allows his narrator to dwell upon the difficulty of establishing a reliable narrative based upon a singular incident. The story of *Karima* epitomises the archetypal historical moment which has drifted into the annals of mythological historicism as a result of the unreliable narrative. The narrative itself becomes the site of contestation, and if the present state of affairs has imparted one seminal lesson then it is how such battles of narrative supremacy are fought, and ultimately won. McLoughlin binds the themes of white guilt and reactionary justification to his narrative, but it becomes quite clear that the narrative is doomed, torn along the dividing line of the righteous and the damned:

This is a good reason for not telling the story of Karima. I wouldn't get it right. Throughout the incident I felt trapped in a role which was a burdensome duty, yet I don't know how else I could have behaved. The story as told by another might show on the contrary that I was no victim but offended against humanity in a serious way. The obvious victims are those who suffered. Those who survived and are guilty might argue that the truth of the story is not known. Certainly it has been contentious right from that Sunday morning at Karima when I first met the old man Takurayi. I did not believe his version of what happened. The newspaper published an army account of the events, then the Justice and Peace Commission contested the truth of that. (McLoughlin 15-16)

John Viljoen, District Commissioner and part-time narrator, attempts to piece together a narrative of disparate parts, shying away from the responsibilities of the authoritative voice whilst consecutively colouring the narrative strands with a singular and personalised taint. Although shrinking from the task of speaking out for others Viljoen

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<sup>40</sup> The Tribal Trust Compounds were tracts of land, similar to Indian reservations in North America, of sub-standard quality when compared to the ancestral lands from whence the majority of Black Rhodesians had been evicted from. During the second Chimurenga these tracts of land were fenced in, thereby creating a divide between ordinary citizens and the so-called terrorists.

becomes the vestibule for a horde of summarised memories, hearsay, newspaper accounts, military affidavits, and finally the troubled recollections of his son Richard; forced into a battle fought on many fronts. Viljoen claims that the story, as it is told, is not his, and in so doing invests the unfolding account with a life of its own. The true account, or historical fact of what had happened could have, under differing circumstances, been made to stand up for itself, but the truth is that the historical fact has been shattered into divergent perspectives on one and the same incident.

Viljoen is an isolated and estranged narrator caught within a narrow compound of responsibility and guilt; at odds with his wife and a son who would have been more aptly equipped to place events in historical perspective. Despite all of this Viljoen is McLoughlin's choice because his weakness as a narrator, and dithering upon moral and political issues, reflect one essential fact of the time in question; the absence of the master narrator, he who takes overall responsibility for the telling of that singular account. McLoughlin relates the dynamics shortly before independence, the interregnum in political certainty, a time caught between the two extremes of colonial supremacy and postcolonial dictatorship. The interregnum can be seen as having been wedged between two dominant narratives, devoid of the competence needed to assuredly comment upon its own history and making, because in essence, it was never anything more than a partial and fleeting telling of events. It is this feature McLoughlin so aptly, if inadvertently, foregrounds. Viljoen allows the story to glide out of his hands at the onset, disappearing into the waiting crowd of fellow narrators:

If I was to tell the story of Karima it would differ from what follows. But I am not the story-teller, just one of the many characters in the narrative. Given the chance I would tell a much briefer tale. I only know part of what happened and there is no need to fictionalise that. I wouldn't want to do more than describe what I saw, what I thought, and how those around me responded. (McLoughlin 7)

Viljoen denies the role of narrator, misunderstanding its nature, whilst allowing his uncertainty to dominate the narrative. The settler biopic must cede narrative defeat because it lacks the master historian, and master storyteller, and because it harks back to a time centered upon the defence of a discarded era. Ian Smith's Rhodesia managed to exist in a state of denial, waging war in defence of the denial, and against the truth of a far greater narrative, one which sought to, and succeeded in recollecting the ethos of the first Chimurenga. John Viljoen is as much a partial narrator in denial as is Rhodesia a partial and fractured account of impending defeat. Not only is the war lost in the bushland



of the future Zimbabwe, but in the narrative battle fought between Nehanda's apostles and the remnants of a colonial might in retreat.

The settler biopic unwinds under the shadow of the master narrator, looking back upon the time in which he was still honing his skills in Mozambican exile.<sup>41</sup> The settler biopic provides the grand storyteller with a legitimacy he cannot draw from those writing in support of his master narrative because it depicts the past from the perspective of the perpetrators, those who fought to keep the righteous owners from their land, those who interred innocent citizens in Tribal Trust Reservations, and placed the future master narrator in solitary confinement.

Unlike the Apartheid system in South Africa, Ian Smith's Rhodesia simply echoed a sentiment, content to exist in defence of the treasured vestiges of a recent past<sup>42</sup>. The colonial culture, nurtured since the days of Rhodes and Baden Powell, did not transform into something entirely new, but carried on in defence of the 'sun-downer'<sup>43</sup> culture that had been practiced for decades. The settler would cast his eye not upon the entire land, but upon the sky above the land he owned, hoping for the rain which would nurture the tobacco crops needed to sustain the life he lived. This fenced-in mentality, or farm consciousness, could not compete with the spiritual bearings of the second Chimurenga, lacking the communal narrative of the future Zimbabwean nation, and even lacking in that communal ideology fostered by the 'boers' of South Africa. Both McLoughlin and Lessing depict these scenes of isolation, albeit within different historical time-scapes; McLoughlin describing the last years of the liberation war, and Lessing the rather placid era of the 1950's.

The white farmer learned to live close to shifting rain clouds and to feel for the parched earth, to synchronize ploughing, sowing, fertilizer, reaping with the moods and patterns of life and death forces he could predict and see from his

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Mugabe left then Rhodesia for Mozambican exile in November 1974 shortly after gaining control of ZANLA (Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army), only to return in 1979, shortly before the Lancaster House agreement.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Smith, a farmer and former fighter pilot, as leading member of the Rhodesian Front borrowed extensively from the font of South Africa's Apartheid system, predominantly its segregation laws. The UDI government did not rely upon an in-depth ideological base and could not boast of a collegiate of resident intellectuals.

<sup>43</sup> The 'sun-downer' would refer to informal get-togethers, mainly on white-owned farms, where the white community would literally celebrate the setting sun with an assortment of alcoholic beverages, preferably gin and tonic. Its origins lay in colonial times as a favoured pastime of the settler community.

verandah. His prosperity or ruin depended on the astuteness of his gaze, the smell of rain in his nostrils, backed by the hunches of his boss-boy. (McLoughlin 107-108)

What the settler lacked was the foresight to predict the 'life and death forces' which would accumulate some distance from the focal point of the farm verandah, the bush country which would hide the 'terrs' from sight. The settler biopic memorialises a singular vista; individual consciousness.

Doris Lessing portrays the failure of a communal spirit and culture, apart from monthly shared drinks at the local sports hotel or sun-downers taken upon someone's stoep; a ruin in the making trying to vend off the inevitable:

When she was gone, she thought, this house would be destroyed. It would be killed by the bush, which had always hated it, had always stood around it silently, waiting for the moment when it could advance and cover it, for ever, so that nothing remained. She could see the house, empty, its furnishings rotting. First would come the rats. Already they ran over the rafters at night, their long wiry tails trailing. They would swarm up over the furniture and the walls, gnawing and gutting till nothing was left but bricks and iron, and the floors were thick with droppings. And then the beetles: great, black, armoured beetles would crawl in from the veld and lodge in the crevices of the brick. (Lessing 195)

Lessing depicts the loneliness before the fall, a slow and creeping decay which encroaches upon the rickety white bastion in excruciatingly labourious steps, but it is nature which enacts revenge in this view, taking back the land, and restoring it unto its virginal state. Lessing makes no mention here of the arduous but violent upheavals which have wracked the past, and are about to wreak havoc in the future, the great prize ultimately an empty promise. Moses, in that final scene, acts out a quick and brutal flash of blinding violence before the curtain too falls upon his pending capture:

And this was his final moment of triumph, a moment so perfect and complete that it took the urgency from thoughts of escape, leaving him indifferent. When the dark returned he took his hand from the wall, and walked slowly off through the rain towards the bush. Though what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of his completed revenge, it is impossible to say. (Lessing 206)

This form of revenge, similar to that exacted upon the remaining white farmers and members of the political opposition, has only one possible outcome: the wholesale destruction of the remnants of old hegemonic structures, and thereafter, a return to the primordial state. This destruction has no constructive component, or revolutionary ethos. The spirit voice of Nehanda emanates from its core, either in the guise of the written word,

or uttered by the tongue of the man who has claimed her mantle. Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* lays down the foundation with the following proclamation, one of many:

“Spread yourselves through the forest and fight till the stranger decides to leave. Let us fight till the battle is decided. Is death not better than this submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. There is only this moment, and we have to fight till we have redeemed ourselves. What is today's work on this land if tomorrow we have to move to a new land? Perhaps we should no longer bury our dead. (Vera 66)

Long after the foot soldiers have returned triumphant from the forests to reclaim their right, destruction is still meted out upon all who are deemed enemies of the grand vision, by the man who has appropriated the sacred words of those who have become spirits. The dead heroes are buried on Heroes Acre<sup>44</sup> and not on their ancestral lands, and it is Robert Mugabe who presides over this sacred honour, presiding over the fate of future spirits, and ultimately the ancestral realm. Mugabe presides over both the spiritual and earthly realm, creating a bipolar and carnivalesque monologue. The script to this monologue has been patched together using traditional religious motifs, war rhetoric, and the poetic invocations of artists born before, and after the revolution. Mugabe has transformed the revolution into a biblical message, and has made of himself the prophet who must deliver the message unto the people. What had once been a tangible and lucid cry for the rectification of past wrongs performed upon the land, has become an abstract, translucent, and intransigent diatribe on the retention of sacred power. Violence is justified in biblical terms, as a way of cleansing, as a way of returning to a source. It is the violence of the Old Testament, of Moses and Noah, the violence of a revolution which sweeps away all in its wake in fulfilment of the God given prophecies. Mugabe has become God and prophet in one, speaking unto himself, acting upon himself, and in defence of himself. The enactment, replete with its displays of premeditated violence, is meant to bring about idolisation, regardless of, or in spite of the true vista of destruction it has spawned.

Mugabe, wresting himself from the chanced beginning of his historical creation, grasped the pen which would create the masterful narration which now reigns omnipotent in mythological certainty, filling the void which was created by the missing narrator, by the

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<sup>44</sup> Heroes Acre is a burial site in Harare reserved for the heroes of the Zimbabwe nation, predominantly Shona politicians, deceased heroes of the second Chimurenga, and war veterans. It is also a favoured site for the staging of ceremonies by the ZANU government.

deference to chance, waiting upon history to run its course. If, as Chikwava has asserted, history is a process, then it is Mugabe who has arrested this process and made it wholly his, leaving nothing to chance, and relying upon the past because it is glorious, and because it is known, fit to be controlled, a mechanism by which to exact revenge<sup>45</sup>. The ‘story’ as Chikwava describes history is, I believe, solely dependent upon the writer, Mugabe in this case, and all, including the critics, are subjects to and of this writing. It is the past which is hurled at the enemy forces with vindictive force, as an ultimate truth, the certainty of which cannot be argued with, holding no place for compromise or forgiveness. Mugabe has long ascertained what is needed to retain, revitalise, and reiterate power; not content to rely upon its blunt credentials, but working upon its characteristics as if it were a stone to be chiselled into form. Its main characteristic is its reliance upon a singular historical perspective, the hardening of opportune facts into the tapestry of the hegemonic narrative. It is the forceful creation of a collective imagination, imagining past glories as a re-enactment, not only as the carnivalesque poverty of tribute, but as a very real re-enactment of the past. The collective imagination at some stage becomes knowledge, pushing the past before it.

Once history has been written, or rewritten, a course plotted, chance is denied, abolished. It is a masterful assault upon the memory, imagination, and knowledge of a nation’s citizens, as much as a magician or hypnotist would practice it. The national ‘make believe’, penned upon the minds of the country’s people, must reach the point whereby the present reality seen from an objective perspective disappears. Comrade Mugabe<sup>46</sup> knows that when this moment has been achieved he too can reside in that convent of the past, content in the certainty that his image will immediately be grafted upon the newly created collectivism of thought, thus retaining his power, his stranglehold. Induced blindness upon the outer realm sets the mind to cast its eye inwards upon that great house

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<sup>45</sup> “...at a certain level, the art of story writing has a lot in common with the art of politics; both are best practiced when one has a willingness to let other people into one’s creative world as critics, so they can make a difference by helping you rejig your ideas. For both practices you also need a good nose for the language that suits your story and, above all, a powerful imagination. With that in mind, a glance at Zimbabwe tells me that this is a bad story that needs more than thorough editing, it needs a complete rewrite. Whether we will see a good rewrite depends not only on the writer of this story, Robert Mugabe, but also on whether the opposition, his critics, can put on the table new ideas that will take the story in another direction.” (Chikwava 1)

<sup>46</sup> Robert Mugabe, after gaining power in 1980, was often referred to as Comrade Bob or Comrade Mugabe by a large portion of the white community in reference to his Marxist leanings.

which has been minutely structured, stone upon single stone, until it resembles the ruins of old rebuilt. This national script awaits final completion within the throes of the third Chimurenga:

In nationalism the nineteenth century's sense of time is challenged. No longer a secular, sequential process in which progress unfolds, time becomes an element in which the sacred national saga of ancient glory and recurrent defeat can be played out in iterative and, it is hoped, climatic fashion. The past intrudes on the present to offer typologies and prophetic instances. Vast stretches of mere chronological time can be elided. Past and present instances are significantly juxtaposed like images in some symbolic text. Historical time and mythological timelessness are woven together in a seamless garment of national imagining. Time is not only the individual's possession but the shared reality of the collective. Literary production conducted in the context of nationalist feeling accordingly revives and translates texts from the dim past not for antiquarian reasons but to allow them to exist again in the timeless spirituality of the nation's continuous being. (Brown 95)

Although written as a commentary upon Irish nationalism, in the context of Irish literary production, this excerpt astutely describes the near to diabolical nature of Zimbabwean nationalism, and its accompanying mythologism. When applying the theory to the nationalist enactment of a historical process as practiced in Zimbabwe some amendments to progression, and the empowerment of the authorial voice, have to be made.

The typology on display in the Zimbabwean context has long passed the point of mere intrusion. The past has veritably superseded present realities, instances of cleansing violence as in Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina, having swept away ugly vistas of obstructionist reality, leaving in its wake a singular perspective. The third Chimurenga represents the final instalment in the aforementioned process, peddling the promise of land as the final vestige of a nationalist rectification. Land as reward signals a return to the past, a time in which this entity was used to barter political favours.

As opposed to the Irish context, the Zimbabwean authors who once doctored the grand narrative of ancient pasts coupled with the dream of a glorious future have long lost their authority, and in some cases, the pen. The work thus completed, can now only be repeated in the sense of a mantra, there being no more need for translations; the past having surely alighted upon the present state of things.

Marechera's retreat from the light, from authorial power, and into spiritual madness is its own commentary, one that describes the symptoms of its condition. Marechera does,

despite the adversity of his condition, provide an impression of the sheer force pitted against the singular mind of the artist wishing to describe that which surrounds him.

In *White Gods and Black Demons* Daniel Mandishona describes the brutal cleansing of the shanty towns in and around Harare, a purge which was christened Murambatsvina. Mandishona provides no names to the persons and events he describes, preferring to let the violence and destitution take centre stage:

She tells you how the bulldozers destroyed the flea markets and the townships near her house, how they made thousands homeless. You heard it on radio; saw it on television. They called the bulldozers the tsunami - a destructive force that razed down everything in its path. There were harrowing pictures in the newspapers; little children standing in the swirling dust amidst the rubble of ruined homes. Sucking their thumbs they looked bewildered and lost. It was a man-made disaster of incredible proportions. (Mandishona 28)

Initiated in 2005, operation Murambatsvina is adequately likened to a tsunami in that the force exerted upon the unsuspecting slum dwellers came in sudden shock waves of swift and brutal strength, after which remained pure desolation, that emptiness which remains once life has been removed from a particular setting. The farm is taken back by nature, the emptiness covered with renewed life, but the emptiness left in the wake of Murambatsvina remained a testament to the power and destructive might of the ruler's ire. The political cleansing, which the operation undoubtedly was, sought to raze potential hotspots of dissent to the ground, and of course demonstrate the consequences which would arise as a result of dissent amongst those portions of the population not yet incorporated into the collectivity of thought needed to ultimately unite the nation. Mandishona underlines the agreement that 'brute force' and violence is a very potent method of persuasion, and far from reforming, dissent often fragments into negligible pockets of resistance as the following excerpt demonstrates:

The women scream, shout, wail, and then wilt under the onslaught. The violence is over as quickly as it began. Torn banners and shoes lie scattered on the tarmac, a forlorn reminder of the power of brute force. A child that has been separated from its mother during the mayhem stands crying on the pavement. (Mandishona 29)

Mandishona, once again, offers a perfect picture of effectivity; violence doled out as a lesson, a show of force which wishes to persuade, and to educate. It is not the violence of war which attempts to eke out a consummate victory in the face of an equally, or almost equally equipped foe, but rather the brutish force of an incumbent power as it attempts to

persuade a citizenry of its erring ways. The theology of revenge in this context carries an educative message at its core; its theological stance captured in the newspaper pictures of abandoned children in the midst of man-made mayhem and television commentaries on the bulldozers working as a ‘tsunami’ upon the dregs of the city. Clearly the message must ring: he who follows can be assured of my protection, and my love.

The written word birthed within the shadow of this might does not seem to have the power to indict, its functionality might be compared to the newspaper and television captions; demonstrative, descriptive, literary bubbles giving impetus to a well-worn fact: there is no commentary outside of power and might, all that is, (Marechera included), is incorporated into the grand narrative. There is no commentary which can do away with this power because the commentary has been complicit in the birth of this power, and as such, directly related to its growth. As alluded to by Muponde<sup>47</sup>, power has overtaken its own commentary, made it to a very real component of its own will.

### **4.3 This War is about the Spirit**

In the following transcript of an interview conducted with a former Zimbabwean freedom fighter, the true dimension of the spiritual component within the war effort becomes apparent, keeping in mind that this is a minor instance within the wider concept of a ritualistic approach to war, retribution, and violence. Comrade James Dhewha offers an insight into the role Nehanda, and spirituality in a wider sense, played during the second Chimurenga:

SM: Tell us about the rituals?

Cde Mangwende: We were sent to go carry Mbuya Nehanda into Zambia before the start of the war. It was said that for your struggle to be a success, Mbuya vanofanirwawa kutakurwa voburitswa kuTsokoto because she does want to see blood. So our seniors such as Tongogara sent us to carry the task. Actually, they tried to send some other people but kwakanzi aiwa kune mukomana mupfupi, mutema. Imhondoro yaidaro and I was still in Lusaka. So I was called and given the responsibility to go carry Mbuya Nehanda.

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<sup>47</sup> In an e-mail interview with the Nordiska Afrikainstitutet Robert Muponde claimed that the writer had been surpassed by the politician when it came to decrying “inequalities in society”. (see Muponde 2)

I didn't know anything. I actually said 'chi chinonzi Mbuya? I said Mbuya ani? Who is that? I was told kuti Mbuya vanemudzimu. I was a bit surprised because I didn't know much about zvemudzimu. I was then told what I was supposed to go and do....This war is about the spirit mediums, ndeye vakuru saka zvanzi iwewe we will give you some comrades in your section so that you go and carry Mbuya. (Huni 3)

This interview, conducted recently, does not touch upon an anomaly within the conduct of war during the second Chimurenga, but rather makes all too clear the extent to which spiritual beliefs, traditional mores, and ancient mythology, played a dominant role in the struggle for independence. The reincarnation of Nehanda is harnessed to the war strategy in an enactment of the role accorded her by the historians and literati during the formative years of the 1960s and 70s, when historical facts cowered to the attraction of the allegorical and the mythological.

The leaders of the war effort: Tongogara, Chitepo, Mugabe<sup>48</sup>, and others, strategically realised that the historical lesson had a far greater capacity to mobilise than endless deliberations on strategy, and the politicisation of the fighting troops. Indoctrination was practiced close to the hearth, in an intimate setting around the dare, and within the intimate context of homespun lessons about historical battles, and the spirit mediums who lead them. Somehow it was settled that it would be Mbuya Nehanda who would shoulder the responsibility of channelling all patriotic/nationalistic fervour into the war effort. As such, the incarnation of Nehanda was carried, in the style of a guiding spirit, to and fro, from one front to the next; posing not only as emblematic icon of the war, but as a leading spiritual and de facto military figure baying for the blood of her white enemies. A repetition of certain historical versions of the first Chimurenga are reflected in the above account of the ritual carrying of Mbuya Nehanda.

An interesting aspect of Nehanda's role, as it is portrayed in the interview, and by extension, in the literary portrayal of her figure, is that although the former comrade has confessed to not knowing of her existence (historically), he does, without critically questioning his stance, carry her cumbersome weight on a gruelling journey through the Zimbabwean bush and on to the Mozambican border. It can be construed that his education, not unlike that of Munashe, would have been conducted on that journey. It is

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<sup>48</sup> Josiah Tongogara and Herbert Chitepo were both, like Mugabe himself, leaders of the military rebel initiative against white ruled Rhodesia. Tongogara and Chitepo both died under mysterious circumstances.



the interwoven text of the mythological and the supernatural, coupled with the very real horrors of a brutal war, which echo portrayals of the war, and the figure of Nehanda, as are to be found in the writings of Kanengoni, Vera, Hove, and much later, Robert and Mandishona.

Comrade James Dhewha, further on in the interview, specifies the exact role of the spirit medium in the liberation war, whilst still showing no signs of doubt, decades after the event:

SM: Cde. Mangwende, what exactly was the importance of spirit mediums during the liberation struggle?

Cde. Mangwende: Mbuya Nehanda vekutanga as she was being killed by whites said mupfupa angu achamuka....

(Singing) 'Mbuya Nehanda kufa vachitaura shuwa! ` We had to compose such songs as we followed what Ambuya had told us. So you see, there was gwara remusangano mixed with gwara that we learnt from people like Mao. All this was supposed to be mixed nechinyakare chedu to become our word of command.

This gave us the guidelines (...). This created a political soldier who knew why he or she was fighting the struggle.

We had booklets such as Mwenje, we had the party constitution and the spirit mediums to guide us. (Huni 5)

The spirit war fought upon the plains of memory and driven by ancient beliefs in the God-given right to land and freedom, took as its guiding template those versions of the first Chimurenga which were modelled from, and upon, traditional precepts, with scant regard to historical hindsight and the accordant loyalty to detail which might have resulted in a sober historicism, unencumbered by romanticisms and deluded mythologisms.

This war spirit was thus resurrected and has re-emerged in its present guise as a spirit driven conflict waged against a negligent group of white farmers, a fractured opposition, and finally, a population divided along the lines of identity on the one hand and a shamanic belief in the power of the Shona spirit pantheon on the other. The spirit war is a poet's war, composed according to concordant rhyme and meter, a thing of beauty structured to make its indenture upon the minds of the future citizens of the new Zimbabwe. The spirit war could be said to have been an orchestration, and although the war is over, the orchestration continues. The collectivism Mugabe wishes to attain, that encapsulated within the Zimbabwean terminology and propelled by the Chimurenga ethos, will only find its consummate realisation once the envisioned whole has been

spiritually purged of all non-believers. The spirit mediums will sniff out the traitors and 'sell-outs' as they had done on countless occasions during the second Chimurenga; until Nehanda's appetite has been assuaged.

After having placed the spirit-mediums in that context in which they are presently held and understood, Terence Ranger would, after the war, attempt to justify and explain their significance within the parameters of the second Chimurenga; searching for an understanding of the spirit war in the receptacle of traditionalism and further inflating the legend which had been so detrimental to the historical trajectory of cultural, political, and sociological phenomenologies:

Nationalist intellectuals and anthropologists and historians in search of the Shona past 'discovered' the spirit mediums - and some talented and entrepreneurial mediums responded by inventing a version of history which boosted the prestige of their own possessing spirits. But peasant interest in the mediums had very little to do with intellectual nationalism. And this leads me to the third point I wish to make. Spirit mediums were significant to peasant radical consciousness precisely because that consciousness was so focused on land and on government interference with production: above any other possible religious form the mediums symbolized peasant right to the land and their right to work it as they chose. Hence mediums had already become important as articulators of radical consciousness even before guerrillas entered the rural areas. (Ranger 188-189)

Ranger, in an attempt at justifying the historical template he had drawn up with the so-called 'nationalist intellectuals' writes of the search for, and discovery of the Shona past, replete with her spirit mediums, and posits responsibility for the resultant historicism and its consequences firmly in the hands of the peasantry, and the spirit-mediums themselves, downplaying the formative role the 'nationalist intellectuals' and political forces had played in the revitalisation and re-interpretation of the so-called peasant religion.

Comrade James Dhewha, in his interview with the Zimbabwean Daily Mail, spoke of not having heard of Mbuya Nehanda, and a political indoctrination which sought to imbue him with the construction of the historical palimpsest. Alexander Kanengoni too, spoke of a political indoctrination which was carried out upon the minds and consciousness of the peasants and guerrillas. Peasant and guerrilla consciousness was historically moulded into form, identities created to fit snugly into that collectivity of imagination, belief, and thought, which would eventually set the course for Shona domination as it had been foreseen by Zanu PF and Robert Mugabe. The historical identification with the exploits of the Shona spirit-mediums, Nehanda and Kaguvi, gave precedence to the future

direction of political indoctrination; along religious, ethnic, and cultural lines. The source and estuary of this theatricalisation remains the same; the attempted establishment of an undisputed Shona might.

## 5 IDENTITY

### 5.1 Forging Uncertainty

History once told, as it is in the present fashion of an obstinate monolith, condemns the author to complicity on the one hand, and disempowerment or exile on the other. If history were to be equated with a massive stone building, not unlike the ‘dhaka’<sup>49</sup> which made up the citadel of Great Zimbabwe, its defining purpose would be that of either excluding, or including, and both of these entities would be woven into its fabric. The author as creator of this historical construction, this monolith, takes on the dual role of perpetrator and victim; becomes either prisoner or exile, subaltern to his own creation, and/or the instrument by which the monolith is emboldened. As such, uncertainty is forged because there is no escaping the intimacy of the history by which the author is defined. That history, now so often emboldened, resides in every negligible detail, covers all of that which can somehow be brought into relation with the past. This history, once created to signal a new beginning, has engulfed all who partook of its being, answerable only to one higher instance. All who are cast in its shadow must seek therein their definition and work in the narrow confines of its restrictive bearings.

The author/historian, in light of the momentous changes brought on by the second Chimurenga, made definitive decisions upon the panorama of the country’s history, opting for a particular telling of events which would light upon a certain set of historical conclusions as opposed to others. Samkange made the decision to reflect upon the events of the first Chimurenga from the perspectives of Nehanda and Kaguvi; the perspective of the victim destined to arise as the eternal reincarnation. Alexander Kanengoni would relate certain historical facts of the second Chimurenga from the mouth of the tortured Munashe; the fictional universal victim who creates a narrow tunnel through which the troubled past is hauled into a politically carpentered vision of the future. Vera’s Nehanda peddles in prophecies, binding these together into a scorching vindication of the past, the light of which illuminates her victorious pathway into a future where all repeat the verses

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<sup>49</sup> The dhaka were traditional mud huts enclosed within the stone walls of Great Zimbabwe. The word *dhaka* *literally* means mud, or clay.

of one song; the famous war-cry in which the future becomes a choral certainty not to be argued with, an undeniable historical fact. Na'ima B. Robert weaves the historical lesson around the political soundbites of the past, the third Chimurenga posited as the final instalment of a process of national rectification, cementing the present historicism into the national psyche; a 'one nation, one people' philosophy which has successfully freed itself from the unwanted foes and dissenters of the past. Marechera's apocalyptic vision, and his denial of past and present, creates a horrific example of the solitary position pitted against the vast uniformity of the collective imagination, an invitation to the comfort of complacency as opposed to the tortured diffusion of the singular intellect dashed against the stone monolith of the supreme narration, the lost soul in his self-imposed exile:

The scarred hand of exile was dry and deathlike and the lines of its palm were the waterless riverbeds, the craters and fissures and dry channels scoured out of the earth by the relentless drought (...). These hands that now were so broken, they had once tried to build and build and build a future out of the bricks of the past and of the present. These hands that had never touched the cheek of a child of my own, they were now utterly useless in the slow-burning furnace of the drought whose coming had coincided with Maria's going away from me. (Marechera 125)

The repetition of defeat becomes individual memory shattered against that which stands monumental in the face of the author's natural longing, the creation of a personal history of defiance. Marechera's concession of defeat is an endless pining song. It articulates under the shadow of the collectivism bricked together by a fostered intellectual elite duped into the construction of the national imagination by the narrator whose presence has stolen itself into the fabric of every retelling. The master narrator would cast all in the image of his making, narrating the author into an instrument with which to bring all within his magnetic sphere of historic persuasion.

Identity, in this process, is not the individual process of sifting through the personal building bricks of the past, that which Marechera had futilely attempted, but rather a process of identification with the resurrected ruins of a collected past, including all that was glorious and glorious in defeat. It is because of this that Mugabe has spoken of 'ugly history', alluding to the almost divine right of the master narrator to make choices upon those historical moments to be included in the supreme narration, at once banishing all who wish to tell of this so-called history. 'Ugly history', in the moment of its telling, spells exile, seclusion, a moment of non-being, madness when describing a moment that does not exist in the present sense of things. Thus, the thought transformed into written

word is that moment of choice between belonging, and the moment one casts oneself away; into nothingness, into the space where one is not heard and not understood, a void of purposeless utterance.

Mugabe extolled the writers, and the people of the nation, to remember that which he deemed good and meaningful and to forget all that which was not needed for the constitution of the national psyche. Accordingly, the 'ugly history' has been laid to rest, having served its purpose, and therefore it has to be erased from the national memory because it is no longer conducive to a sanctioned view of the future.

Recent traumatic memory is suppressed, or in the least, stowed away. This traumatic memory might, at some later stage, be useful in the alignment of strategic interests, but for now it is kept hidden from collective memory. Distant traumatic memory on the other hand, such as the first and second Chimurenga, are well anchored in the collective imagination because these instances serve the purposes of the ruling elite and its historical interpretation. Identity construction in the light of this selective process becomes a mass phenomenon, built upon the remembrance of those heady days of newly won independence when almost all sang the same song, danced the same dance, and dreamt the same dream. Memory, at that early stage, had to be resurrected and worked upon, the 'ugly history' still a figment of the future. Authors at this stage did what authors do best, they dug, revealing the bones of the past, blind to that moment of orchestration which lay ahead.

These authors were, shortly before and after independence, acutely aware of the significance of their task. They revelled in the creation of a pristine narration, tearing down the citadels of a history no longer needed. These authors were also instrument to the history they were creating, placing themselves in the service of a juggernaut that would find its way into every crevice of the lives lived within the boundaries of the nation they had worked to define.

The revised history presupposed the recreation of identities, identities massed together into that collective memorialisation which now abides.

Identities were, from this moment on, forged within the memory of resistance, pain, heroism, and after numerous defeats, ultimate victory. This one grand memory bound those to one another who succumbed to the collective might of this remembering. It was

not the memory of individual choosing, although it remembered individual suffering, but rather the remembering of grander visions; mass suffering, mass heroism, shared defeat, and shared victory. Unlike individual memory it resides out in the open, plain to see, and shared by all. Individual memory hides its images from the collective view, ever shameful of the intimacy, and fearful of the secrets it has hidden in the myriad tunnels of its winding path back. Individual memory in the context of mass heroism does not translate into singular identity, but disappears beyond the borders of the euphoric, banished from view as in the case of Marechera, and the Hove who came to repudiate his complicity.

The vastness of the revised history would come to cower massively over all it had chosen to include in its narration, casting a shadow upon any inkling of otherness, upon any singular attempt to place a voice beyond its realm. Resistance would become a shared memory, something which would bind and bond together, it would become a harking back to Nehanda's prophecy imploring future generations to rise in unison, to remember in unison the words that had created them.

Zanu historiography places the past in the present to the detrimental extent that identities cannot be formed in the immediate context, but are created from distant echoes as if they were ancestral spirits caught in an endless spiral of re-creation, victim to the whims of the master historian. In appropriating the pen Robert Mugabe immediately understood that no man could exist beyond the realm of history, and in the revised rendition of the country's history identities were created to reciprocate and proclaim the past, a din which would render all dissent obsolete because it could not be heard, and because it could not be read. The Chimurenga narrative, as a narrative of resistance, creates memory, mass memory which creates mass identity, pliable to the logic of a gifted narrator and historian. The initial individual memory of suffering prior to the second Chimurenga has been replaced by the enforced memory espoused by the third Chimurenga narrative. The diction of mass resistance is meant to invigorate mass memory and thereby invigorate the process of identification with the past. Preoccupation with the present malaise could potentially lead to the creation of unwanted and unsanctioned identities, beyond the realm of sanctioned history, and upon the verge of an alternative diction. Thus, history has to be spoken over and over again, its language ingrained within the minds of the listeners who are therefore reminded over and over again from whence they came, who they are, and what they are to remain.

The president is on the television news, rallying the masses somewhere deep in the bedrock of the Revolution. Down with the British, down with the Americans. Bush and Brown, those terrible imperialist twins, must leave us alone. Our history is written in blood, we will never sell our birthright. This is the Final Battle of Control. This is hundred percent Total War. The path to true Independence is strewn with obstacles.

But we will never be a colony again. (Mandishona 8)

Mugabe is once again allotted the role of guest narrator, drumming upon the 'bedrock' that had long since been weathered into place. The attempt to bitingly belittle his efforts at consolidating control simply reiterates his presence, and his command of the facts: Robert Mugabe is there, Robert Mugabe has the facts, and the facts have Robert Mugabe to work upon them, and to utilise them. This symbiosis is, for the time being, impregnable because the command of the historical telling of the nation has the potential for eradicating the unwanted, for transforming dissent into non-history, or non-being. Once moved beyond the fringe the author and his utterance becomes negligible, because the written word then exists beyond the accepted historical boundaries, cut off from the past. The author attempting to write beyond the legitimised bounds of the past succeeds only in writing himself beyond place and being. This author cannot facilitate the creation of new identities because he has forfeited his own.

Every human being at every stage of history or pre-history is born into a society and from his earliest years is moulded by that society. The language which he speaks is not an individual inheritance, but a social acquisition from the group in which he grows up. Both language and environment help to determine the character of his thought; his earliest ideas come to him from others. As has been well said, the individual apart from society would be both speechless and mindless. The lasting fascination of the Robinson Crusoe myth is due to its attempt to imagine an individual independent of Society. The attempt breaks down. (Carr 31)

The author cannot disown the responsibility of his/her words, the responsibility of having dismembered one dominant version of the past by which people would organise and live their lives, and replacing it with an interpretation that would not only transform the nature of domination, but would abet the creation of identities numerous enough to bolster the incumbent ethnic and political supremacy for decades. A spate of Zimbabwean authors played midwife to a composite narration which not only created a national identity for generations to come, but also saw to the piecemeal construction of a cultural monolith obsessed with the past and the realignment of the 'other', or enemy, as outsider.



If the unearthed historic past was to serve as a blueprint for a new Zimbabwean identity then the interregnum had to be denied, the enemy banished, the revolution decried as unfulfilled. The dream of the future has to be aligned with the known co-ordinates of a mapped historiography, thus rendering lived identity/ present being a transient entity, still becoming, and running the risk of perhaps not becoming at all. Living beyond the realm of the sanctioned past would entail living beyond the realm of the sanctioned future, a non-being moving nowhere. Identities are caught in a state of limbo, marching bones on the way to becoming something that was dreamt into being by the spirits, and those entrusted with the dream. Zimbabwean identities are forged in a furnace of war and retribution, fought for, and fought over. Any attempt at stating: “this is who I am”, is an act of open treason, a breaking from the ranks to proclaim: “I will not be dreamt by this dream”, but rather: “I will dream myself into being.” This proclamation, in the Zimbabwean context, is a fallacy, because there is no being outside of the dream, and because the dream has still to be dreamt until its completion, or perhaps indefinitely. There is no final being, no fixed identity in a landscape which resembles neither the past nor the future; the heroic landscape of the revolution fulfilled. Until then it will be as Chenjerai Hove had described it decades ago; on the eve of the finalisation of the second Chimurenga:

I saw footprints of the shiney bones. Then I felt the urge to find where they had been hidden. I walked endless sunny days in search of the smell that would lead me to where all the bones were gathered. Where are the scents from all the breaking pods of the trees, where are they so they can lead me to the bones of my people? Tell me, you who carry the weight of the earth so that I can know and never forget. Sing to me the songs of the endless bones so that I may not be ashamed to follow the echoes of that endless song. (Hove 65)

A people waiting to be, in remembrance of what it had once been, and dreaming of what it is about to become, but never is. The Zimbabwean, at the present stage, is forced to look back in order to retrieve at least some semblance of being, assured of an answer from the not too distant past, as opposed to the nothingness of the present view into that endless void of an ephemeral future: “The calabash, which holds memories of the future, carries signs of lasting beauty. Forgetting is not easy for those who travel in both directions of time.” (Vera 3)

Vera, referring perhaps to all those scenes that have troubled the nation, placing an implacable burden upon the shoulders of a people in awe of the future and deeply scarred

by the past on uncountable occasions, makes use of the image of the calabash<sup>50</sup>, an entity which can be filled and emptied, a timeless and tireless symbol representing not only nature but man's impression upon himself, others, and his surroundings. The contents of the calabash are emptied as a prophecy until the signs have aligned themselves with the grander vision of the future, and then once again filled with the miscellaneous requirements for prediction. The calabash is a universal sign, nature bent to man's will, but ultimately exacting revenge by its telling of man's downfall. The calabash is history and vision, taking what man knows of himself, and the earth, to create signs of his continuing journey.

Vera's midwife welcomes not only birth, but also death, in that she functions as storyteller and soothsayer. The story she relates is that of the future which is about to welcome the unborn Nehanda. The knowledge of the past, wisdom and history, is employed to interpret the signs caught within the interstices of the living and somnambulant present. Nehanda is thus born together with the entire template of the future; a portentous afterbirth. Nehanda is born into a future which already exists because its signs have been read. Every human existence is born with the future, a future which not only moulds the developing identity, but is in turn touched by this moulding, adapting to the form it had helped create. The past plays its role in the form of remembrance, becoming vision once the view has been directed towards the unknown.

“Was it a sign? What did you see? Here we stand in the middle of the river. Tell us what you witnessed.” The women reached toward the story-teller and shook her shoulders with impatience, as though to wake her.

There was panic in their voices.

“The sign was in the form of a human being. A stranger, but a human nevertheless.”

“Your sign was a human being? Indeed, this is a tale that calls for another telling. When did human beings...with two legs... turn into signs? (Vera 10)

The women converged around the dare, and the unborn girl child Nehanda, represent two historical timeframes; the historical past, and the historical future. Nehanda's future will

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<sup>50</sup> The calabash or dried out bottle gourd is a member of the squash family indigenous to certain parts of Africa. The fruit is dried and hollowed out to be used for various purposes: as a cooking and eating utensil, musical instrument, or simply as a receptacle. Symbolically the calabash is associated with a wide range of themes such as birth, death, or sexuality.

become the historical template from which Robert Mugabe's Zanu PF will draw its master narration; Vera's telling of the prophet one version of identity around which others will gather in an attempt to remodel themselves according to the outlines of heroism and fortitude.

Nehanda's heroism begins at the prenatal stage, as a sign, foretold as she too will, at a later stage, foretell. It is a form of historicism which treats the future as given, already in existence before it is inhabited. The future holds no surprises and is peopled by those in possession of the tools needed to mould it according to given precepts. This is Mugabe's historicism; a void to be filled with contents already at hand, a void to be peopled with identities trained in preparation for the exigencies of a pre-meditated version of the future. Robert Mugabe's future is already history before it has happened, a future that has been heralded since the days of the first Chimurenga, since that moment when Nehanda spoke of her bones rising, and an entire nation marching to revenge the wrong that had been done on her. Robert Mugabe's future has happened over and over again, and its history has been written down on recurrent occasions.

The nurtured identities have grown old in expectation of the future, followed by generations that have become strangers to its intimacy. The third Chimurenga has coincided with the advent of a new generation, weaned on its rhetoric, but also victim to coercion, bereft of a war for freedom, a war against the grand oppressor. The third Chimurenga is The War for the next generation, a phantom war fought against the phantom oppressor; its sole purpose that of instructing a new generation in the narrative details of the historical future. The third Chimurenga is a war against forgetting, it is the re-enactment of a historical pageant; a war of narration garnered with the tangible trauma of loss and violence, the loss of land, and the loss of bodily autonomy. The third Chimurenga conversely also promotes the forgetting concomitant to the trauma of present loss and bodily harm, thus averting the minds of fledgling identities towards the historic past on the one hand, and the preordained historic future on the other. In this effort literature/narration is conscripted to force-feed the burgeoning generation on repetition; the past's mantra packaged as discovery; the uncovering of perspectives. The past is a singular story quartered into various perspectives, depending on the role of the narrative force; be it one of dominance, or be it that of the 'other'.

Becoming the 'other' in the Zimbabwean context has depended upon the shifts in political and historical weight on the one hand, but also upon two forces of narration working against and upon each other. Mugabe's dominant narrative structure, and content, has placed the white man, and the white man's narration, in an extremely limited and confined space. Narratively it has become the space of apologetics, and looking back in injured pride. The white man's narrative depends solely upon immediate memory, relates in traumatised flashbacks the extremity of loss and deprivation. The white man's narrative relates not from the historical perspective, because this would factually belittle its cause, but from the perspective of a disjointed and jaundiced personalisation.

Whereas Mugabe's narration leans upon a skewered historicism, the settler narrative relies upon a shared personal lie; a tale in the classic sense. The recent historical past enforces the lie, makes it a necessity, because the truth would function as opposition, negating the meaning and contents of the past. The settler interregnum, and the war fought against independence, is retold against the master narration; in its shadow, and as such, as a mirror image of the incumbency. As opposed to the master narration, the white man's narration largely ignores the future because it does not have the richness of the historic past to draw from, and because the future would distract the reader/observer from the trauma of loss needed to justify the narration. The loss of power, the loss of the land, the loss of country, and as such, the loss of identity, are factors which have narratively evolved into a summation of negatives, a narrative which bespeaks a steady dissolution. It does not tell of the dream of becoming, but of having been and having had. The white man's narrative tells of its own disappearance, coinciding not only with bodily disappearance, but with the dissipation of personal memory as time progresses. This diary of dissolution describes the piecemeal disappearance of a former identity construction without the allowance for something new because it is too pre-occupied with that loss of self; negating being, always centered in the 'had' and the 'had been'. The past tense, and the longing, underpin the narrative to the extent that it becomes a telling from beginning (arrival), to nothing (loss, and disappearance). The identity deconstruction in the shadow of the dominant narration conversely provides growing space for the nemesis. The repetition of the dominant monologue, a grander historical fabrication, further robs the settler biopic of its narrative space, leaving only the shadow to remain.

## 5.2 Memory is the Tale of a Shadow Cast

Tracing the outlines of the shadow cast back towards its source is the memorialisation of a life spent. Its onus is upon the past, telling from the vantage point of longing. The source is, more often than not, the innocence of childhood, the backdrop is the family, and the surroundings within which the tale is embedded, is the farmstead. Thus, the tale begins with innocence, innocence forced into pre-given identity and ending with the forfeiture of identity; simply the enemy, the shadow, the other. Land is stolen, then stolen back, but it is not the historical land which traces its way back to the roots of Dzimba-dza-mabwe, but the defining space of a collective being; the farm, the surroundings within which the collective identity IS. If history begins with the coming of Cecil John Rhodes and the Pioneer Column in 1890, then it ends with the loss of the second Chimurenga, the loss of the right to hold onto an illegitimate claim. By definition, being because one has depends solely upon holding onto what it is one has. After loss, memory begins, and then begins to erode. The narration is a battle against this forgetting, creating shadows.

In *Mukiwa* Peter Godwin begins with the child, the farm, and the family; placing the sense of loss within a structured surrounding, and thereby providing that space which is lost with substance and weight. Other than in the works of Vera, Hove, or Chinodya, where the land is always present, waiting to be inhabited, lived upon land here is a transient object. Land, once it has been lost, is no more because it is no longer in a state of possession, and because possession so defines having been, that it is linked to the loss of self. The writing back towards innocence is the attempt to recall the self, albeit an innocent self, conjuring up a sense of endlessness embedded within the sanctity of belonging. The innocent child carries no responsibility, the innocent child has no other ambition than that of 'being' and 'becoming'. The essential factor, the 'becoming', is sparingly sketched, relying upon innocence for the ignorance of the mature ugliness of complicity. The child does not remember, the child is remembered, and as such has the transformative effect of relaying innocence upon the narrator. This narrative sleight of hand, turning back the clock in favour of a nursery rhyme perspective on the past, returns towards the present occasionally to cast a view upon the vacated space, and upon the desecration the 'others' have committed. The settler biopic juggles the unreliability of the diarist with the sensationalism of the television journalist, creating alarmingly explicit

snapshots which rob the viewer of the possibility of analysis. Peter Godwin's former self places the reader in reach of the smells and sounds of a fond memory, and places these alongside the recollection of a murder; inciting the foreboding of an intrusion upon the inner sanctum of innocence. The perpetrator/victim dichotomy is blurred beyond recognition, victim to the lack of historical sobriety:

Until Oom Piet's murder I lived an insular existence at home in Silverstream. My parents both disappeared early each morning, my mother on her rounds of African clinics, my father to oversee the factory or travel around the extensive estates, which were a hundred miles long from end to end. They were both fairly remote figures to me. My father was tall and barrel-chested and he had a great walrus moustache. Behind his back, the boys called him mandebvu, which means beard in Shona. Sometimes they called me piccanini mandebvu because I was his son. They seemed to like my father because he was fair, and because he seldom shouted, unlike other bosses, who often did. (Godwin 23)

Godwin's former self as narrator, the innocent child, begins this memory with an intrusion, as if the intrusion were responsible for carrying the memory out into the open. The murder of Oom Piet points to the beginning of the end of an idyll as if what had reigned before had always been harmony, peace, and blessed isolation as opposed to a succession of wars, violent appropriation of ancestral lands, ritual murder, and racial genocide.

The boundaries of farm and family are punctured by the intrusion of dark forces, forces that loom disproportionately large to a child's mind. The inner sanctum of the child's world as a construction of the spirit is torn apart and that part of the unknown, and possibly unwelcome part of the world, is brought onto the farm in the form of a murder. The literary construction of the child narrator as an innocent victim of this intrusion remains to the end, and reaches beyond the boundaries of the novel, eyeing the reader with fearful eyes.

The innocence and naiveté of Godwin's child self are integral factors to the settler identity, an identity construction left in place by the white minority after independence, and relied upon by Mugabe in his diatribes against western imperialism. The dichotomy in the figure of the archetypal settler runs along the fissure which divides the character into the composite halves of innocence and complicity. The settler then chooses to forget this virginal moment of intrusion, the moment when the pioneer column forged its way north in search of gold. Land was the coveted prize once the promise of gold had dissipated, and land in its summation became the origin of an additional identity

construction, that of the Rhodesian. Thus the settler came to redefine himself according to the land he inhabited, according to a possession that had formerly never been viewed as possession. The Rhodesian identity was not bound explicitly to the state, and survived independence largely intact, but was by and large dependent upon the possession of land, upon the fences that made this insular existence possible. Rhodesia existed within the settler's head, a way of connecting with other fenced in compounds, and fenced in lives. Defining cultural facts were minimal, and rudimentary, and time was spent working the land and making it profitable. Cohesion was the defiance and denial of the memory of shared complicity, either in the historic moment of forced intrusion, or the shared memory of a war fought and lost in defence of the defining factor of possession, but this was not conscious cohesion. Ignorance of the world beyond the compound of possession was a necessary denial of competitive identities beyond the black farm boys and girls, possessions which belonged to the microcosm of the farm. This ignorance was, or is, a denial of the historic beyond the limited span of personal memory, a denial which binds the settler evermore to the land he owns, or had owned. The Rhodesian driven from his land is driven into a memorialisation of the personal past which seeks to subvert the now dominant historical text through the innocent denial of the grander historical surroundings. The 'other', the 'terrs', come into existence only once they have bodily pierced the sanctum, becoming the enemy, and a threat to personal history.

In those early days before the real war started we didnt call them terrorists yet. We didnt really have a name for them at all. The constables called them totsis, which in English means thugs, I suppose. I had no idea what they were really. I thought they were robbers, African highwaymen perhaps. (Godwin 12)

Godwin describes an affront to the innocence of the child, an attack upon the inner world of a fledgling existence blissfully ignorant of terrorists, and the alarming scope of the history that these would bring to bear upon the closeted world of the farm. The intrusion of history is countered with further innocence, and the incapability of comprehending the scope of the intrusion. Godwin hides his denial behind the child's view, using it as a shield with which to take up the brunt of the attack posed by the past, and as a foil with which to drive the narrative away from the questions of complicity and responsibility. This anti-history brings history into play, a looming emptiness which begs to be filled, posing further questions. History, in this narrative, fills the space uninvited, and in opposition to the personal memory which has waged an attack against its very existence. The historic perspective gathers up the child, the farm, the parents, and places these in the relative

order of a far grander telling of events. The historic perspective reaches down to incorporate the island world of the Rhodesian settler into the master narrative, thereby signalling the encroaching demise it was bound to suffer once the first farm had been intruded upon in the wake of the 'land invasions'. The settler biopic, and settler memory, must concede defeat to the master narrative, becoming a negligent part of it, and thereby sacrificing the settler identity. This identity is lost once confined to the past as opposed to the farm, a reading that will make of the settler the 'other' intruding upon the land which belongs to no one.

In *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs* Alexandra Fuller undertakes a revision of settler identities, a motley collection of misplaced and hastily constructed biographies seen, once again, from a child's perspective, and against the backdrop of a cursive sketch of the country's history. The author, nevertheless, posits a very succinct summation of the settler identity on its fleeting path into historical oblivion: "Now how can we, who shed our ancestry the way a snake sheds skin in winter, hope to win against this history? We mazungus. We white Africans of shrugged-off English, Scotch, Dutch origin." (Fuller 22)

Fuller's remembering incorporates the heroes of the first Chimurenga, and the history of the war for independence, but still it is the personal history of longing and loss which predominate, the mass of historic tragedies beyond the farm fence summarily recapitulated as asides to the 'diarism' of her narrative. Mention of Nehanda, Kaguvi, and others, pale against her memories of a childhood spent flitting across African plains. Family, homestead, and the dogs, vie for attention with historic upheavals brought on by two Zvimurenga, and in this narrative battle the memory of an African childhood sidelines the wider historical implications of the two major wars fought against the white man. Fuller views the land as an unforgiving invitation, identities formed almost by chance, dependent on how the spoils of battles fought were appropriated and divided amongst the victors. Fuller does admit to the transpositional nature of her experience, relying upon the child narrator to recall multifaceted aspects of the past. Memory is duly employed as recollection in the service of the mature self, a piecing together before a wider audience lest something should be forgotten and lost, something integral to the finite self. The author does not deny the greater historicism, but rather lets it wither alongside the vibrant personal biographies of the past, biographies which exist in differing spatial and time zones. The settler identity, as a loose affiliation of disparate parts, must rely upon the



personal when foraging in the past, lacking in the historical weight and cultural artefacts passed down through the ages as verification of the communal, of togetherness. The settler must rely upon the war, and memories of the family and the farm, when traversing the historical divides of nationhood in search of him or herself.

Dad and I go to bed with half the dogs. The other half of the pack set themselves up on the chairs in the sitting room. Dad's half deaf, from when he blew his eardrums out in the war eight years ago in what was then Rhodesia. Now Zimbabwe. (Fuller 19)

There is a sense here that memory will do what the war could not, stemming the waves of time and grand historical moments set to sweep aside the fragile construction of the 'other' world, a world which was meant to have been home, a world which was won and then lost, thus truly becoming home. The individual histories contained within the settler community would not gel into one vision, unlike that extolled by Mugabe for his people, but rather have now somehow created a communal memory of the past in which the longing and the loss have done more for the bonding of individual identities than years fighting the 'terrs' in the bush of what once was Rhodesia. Mugabe too, has now made of them a community, albeit one destined to reside only in nurtured phantasies of revenge, or the memorialisation of those who have lost their land, and inexorably a sense of self, during the throes of the third Chimurenga. Mugabe speaks of the shared machinations of a contriving community working behind the guise of the black mask. Mugabe has created a phantom enemy force against which to wage war, conveying upon it a historical impetus it no longer does, or ever did possess.

It is much deeper, whiter and wider than these human superficialities; for it is immovably and implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces wittingly or unwittingly the repulsive ideology of return to white settler rule. MDC is as old and as strong as the forces and interests that bore and nurtured it; that converge on and control it; that drive and direct it; indeed that support, sponsor, and spur it. (qtd. in Meredith 192)

In the interplay of historical hindsight the settler biopic fits well into Mugabe's expansive vista of a sanctioned historiography, justifying the tenets of the third Chimurenga by calling attention to the yesteryears of white domination. The 'diarism' of white settler grievances has brought the ignominious past back to life and invested its former proponents with the retributive role of a communal foe. This opportune moment has in part been bolstered and verified by the personal memorialisation of the land. The child narrator cannot detract from the fact that it is the longing for, and the looking back upon

that which has been lost, which has not only infused the incendiary rhetoric of the third Chimurenga with needed fuel, but also the incontestable innocence of the child's view of the settler community which so incites the accusation of cowardice levelled at those who take refuge behind those memories. The contestation over the past pits the traceable recent memory of the African childhood against the state's monumental historical project of mass remembrance, with allowances for forgetting on both sides, an amnesia essential to the construction of tailored identities.

Mugabe has upheld the final and inevitable dissolution of the settler identity, has incorporated it into the master narration, and has to a certain extent prolonged the 'diarism' of longing which sought to bemoan the death of an age and its people, only to hail its final demise at the hands of a supposedly unified black Zimbabwean nation.

Memory, in the settler diarist vein, transforms the erstwhile colonial usurpers into the victim 'other', countering the resultant demonisation practiced between the bookends of the national historiography; the child fallen victim to the unpredictable and angry mob. The child, untouched in its innocence, seeks solace in the time of its becoming, thus transforming the historical surroundings into an idyll of care and comfort, a womb of soft and soothing sensations shielding its contents from a threatening intrusion. The child does not remember, but is remembered becoming that which later remembers itself as something other, memory the transformative moment in the creation of identities. This memory does not attempt to span a tangent into the future, but rather attempts to transform the past and thereby those who have made their way into the present. The settler escapes the historical narration of the past, shedding skin once again, leaving the child behind to tell the others into being. The personal past is doctored, converted, contrived, and made to act upon the present as an antidote, a counter-narrative which supposedly opposes the domination of the sanctioned historicism of the state. As a counter narrative the approach fails because its focus is solely upon longing and loss as opposed to that which is. This approach fails to establish a reliable narrative, hampered as it is by its reliance upon personal memory, and the fact that this memory is not able to reach back to the illustrious past of the Leopard Hill Kopje<sup>51</sup> and the founding of the grand stone citadel. The following excerpt taken from Tim Woods' *African Pasts* illuminates the dilemma faced

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<sup>51</sup> The site of a pre-colonial, Iron Age settlement; predecessor to the Zimbabwean nation. Seen as the origin of the Shona people, this settlement was atop a hill known as Leopard Hill, kopje literally meaning hillside.

by the narrative based on personal memory when pitted against the supreme might of the grand historical structure:

Thus, 'the insertion of counterhistory calls for an epistemological foundation that can challenge history's authority to narrate the past; that is, if one seeks to offer a counterhistory within literary narrative, then one must still subvert history via a discourse that is equally, if not more, stable'. (qtd. in Woods 22).

The settler narrative thus fails to upend the domination of the supreme narrative of Mugabe's historical and mythical nation. The settler narrative, as the expression of a limited caption within the greater frame of Zimbabwe's literary and historical output, inevitably fulfils its part in complementing and finalising the master narration, not as juxtaposition, but as the relativism of an alternative by-word. Its importance depends entirely on its usefulness as a historical footnote, providing Mugabe with the opportunity of saying no to all it purports to be, providing Mugabe with the war he so bitterly needs, a phantom war, an endless repetition of the motif of the stolen land.

## 6 CONCLUSION

If, as I have stated, Robert Mugabe has appropriated the pen, taking up the story from that moment when landscapes of grand heroics, and shareable myths, had been posited within the national psyche and cultural arena, assuring himself of the role of grand narrator, holding the pen as if it were a conductor's baton; dictating direction, dictating form, dictating content, and finally, dictating the past; then the spectre of the beyond must be approached. Imagining the past according to the national dictate has been the allotted role of the Zimbabwean author, but it can be surmised that imagining this imagination delving into the future to regain voice and pen must constitute the secret and submerged desire of that author.

Brian Chikwava has commented upon writing the story of Zimbabwe, a project that is of course open ended, but to date still a story that is being dictated, its open-endedness still victimised by the eulogies upon the past; Nehanda's bones still marching towards vengeance, towards a replication of the past:

Largely because of this sole tool at my disposal, I have also come to think that, at a certain level, the art of story writing has a lot in common with the art of politics; both are best practiced when one has a willingness to let other people into one's creative world as critics, so they can make a difference by helping you rejig your ideas. For both practices you also need a good nose for the language that suits your story and, above all, a powerful imagination. With that in mind, a glance at Zimbabwe tells me that this is a bad story that needs more than thorough editing; it needs a complete rewrite. Whether we will see a good rewrite depends not only on the writer of this story, Robert Mugabe, but also on whether the opposition, his critics, can put on the table new ideas that will take the story in another direction. (Chikwava 1)

What remains unstated in this quote is the fact that Robert Mugabe has rewritten the story on numerous occasions, writing over the blemish he has latterly termed 'ugly history'; creating a historical panorama which offers a vast vista of the past, the brush never too far from the canvas. The restorative efforts of the grand narrator have always concentrated upon a fully restored resurrection of the ancient past, fully aware of the fact that history is not made, but written, and thus assured of the fact that 'ugly history' can ultimately be unwritten. Alternative versions, as Chikwava implies, are simply written into place; critics thus becoming the old colonialists of yore, and thereby embedded within the dominant view of the past, unable to move, powerless and voiceless. The critics, having

been emasculated by Mugabe's reading of the past, have scattered into conflicting interpretations of themselves and the past to which they have been confined, and have reverted to criticising each other, and the grand mission of re-historicising the nation. Thus, this task will, at some unforeseeable stage, be relayed upon the shoulders of those authors who have still to be imagined, free of the shackles of the past, free from that house of madness and hunger Marechera had described, and ultimately, free from the dictates of the authorial vision of the grand narrator.

The future is undeniably that place, or 'dare', when speaking in Zimbabwean terms, that can ultimately work upon the past. It is the space where the voice can be re-attained, and the pen re-appropriated, because it is the space Nehanda has, as of yet, not reached. With each reappraisal of the past Nehanda has been halted and re-drawn before being, once again, sent off on her endless march accompanied by those bones of the past that have been allowed to remain with her. The future, within any historical text, within any historical reading, remains the final product of the dominant historical effort. Once the form of the historical effort has been transformed so too does the future succumb to these alterations; and still the future remains unread; a history beyond the reach of the historian, a crucible made of hope, imagination, dreams.

It is in hope that the author can employ imagination to dream up the future, a form of subversion that has not taken place above and beyond those dreams that have been officially sanctioned. Returning from Mozambique to share in the dreams of a nation that had abounded prior to, and shortly after independence, Robert Mugabe was able to envision a future other than the one which has now become context and palate for his re-writing of the past. This fact kindles hope, the fact that Robert Mugabe has failed in his effort to create a future which would and should have provided him with sufficient adulation, without the need for continual reliance upon the past to forcefully divert the national gaze. Robert Mugabe has scripted his own reliance upon the past, and as a consequence, upon the mythological historicism as practice, a necessity borne of the need to reassert the myth of greatness as a hologram upon the failure which presently exists beyond the historical palate. The 'ugly history' will, at some stage, be recovered from the bog under which it has been written, and in its turn will re-write the narrator as subject, subject to his own landscape.

As I have stated in this thesis, and Robert Mugabe has corroborated on numerous occasions; a moment of chance, a choice of possibilities, a semblance of eventualities, or a literary parade of alternatives do not belong to the historical landscape which is, was, and will be Zimbabwe, seen from the present vantage point.

Robert Mugabe's history is one which deals in inevitabilities, certain outcomes, and unavoidable facts. Even the altered course of the historicising effort was due to inevitable changes in the way Zimbabwe needed to respond to political facts. Robert Mugabe has assembled the factotums of the past, aligning them with his subjective interpretation of the historical path, a path that not only runs back to the halcyon days of Dzimba-dzimbabwe, but makes forays into the pre-meditated future. In Zimbabwe political reality does not rely upon historical data, political reality realigns historical data to suit its needs. The arduous pursuit of the author, having to take into account ever-changing historical landscapes, has resulted in a writing plagued by uncertainty, a writing which has withdrawn into the recesses of madness (Marechera), spiritual mysticism (Vera), historical plagiarism (Samkange), placard historicism (Robert), and guarded cynicism (Chikwava).

Doris Lessing has employed the alternative historical palimpsest, prior to Zanu's tinkering, to cast a prophetic vision into the darkness of the unravelling theatre. Moses upon the anthill, awaiting his captors, must cower unto his own understanding of the past, an understanding moulded, burnt, and burnished within the factories of age-old tradition, culture, and history. The outcome had been imprinted upon Moses' mind, an imprint caused by the weight of ancient knowledge. Kanengoni's Munashe was far removed from the traditions, culture, and history of yore, subject to the political commissar's guidance and historical certainty. Munashe had to be educated, attuned to a history redefined. Vera's Nehanda was taken from her bedding of historical facts and made to walk through dreams and into a future that was concocted in a calabash of mysteries. Robert's Tariro is made to fight a righteous war, emerging victorious to reclaim the land of her ancestors, a victory planned in detail by the architect, eulogizing the last instalment of the Chimurenga narrative. Tim McLoughlin's John Viljoen dithers upon the fringe of the narrative, caught between the fronts of war and narration, uncertain as to what tale to tell, and how; hovering on the verge of becoming a victim to an altered historicism, about to disappear: "In disqualifying myself from telling a story about Karima I do the same for the rest of

us who were involved because that very involvement has debilitated our sensitivity to the facts.” (McLoughlin 15)

Debilitated sensitivity due to an overburdened proximity to the hub of hegemonic control, be it the historically doomed and closeted regime of Ian Smith prior to Mugabe’s victory, or the unpredictability and undeniability of Zanu’s historicism, pointedly describes the underlying malaise. The question is, essentially, how to tell a story when the ending is either undetermined or predetermined. Either way, the writing is thus directed towards uncertainty because the pre-determined outcome awaits a pending decision; confirmation or repudiation. There are thus two courses to be run; identification with the ethos of the Chimurenga narrative, and all it entails, writing according to pre-given precepts, or writing into darkness and away from knowledge, into the recesses of the forbidden future. Each course is determined by the present hegemonic narration, being either reaction to, or accommodation with, the ordained message. Imagination is deployed to either restructure the trodden past or to create palates and landscapes of dissolution, upending the mind to spill its contents in a jumbled heap, undecipherable. Unfettered imagination could choose any direction, creating a universe of hope, or alternatively, a dystopian future resting upon experiences of the past. This imagination could be free to not rely upon the victories of the past and the victorious march into a future populated by spirits and bones.

History is a site of argumentation and augmentation, a site of confrontation, where contending views of the way things are seen are measured against each other. Decisions are made upon which viewpoints should reside at the forefront of knowledge. These decisions though are contestable and prone to revision, a rewriting which takes into account matters that have been learnt, and changes that have occurred. Nothing is hidden, history once rewritten does not banish or destroy that which has gone before, but exists as a further extension of that which has been learnt. History is a stage upon which all are invited to partake in the discussion of what looking back and looking forward has revealed. If the accidental component were to return to a reading of Zimbabwean history, the moments of chance which explain momentous occasions, then the legends and myths would be returned to the legendary and the mythical. Even Marechera, although in disarray, does not allow the accidental into his writing. It is the ugly spectre of History, which like a glue, holds all together and determines its sense, or non-sense:

Through the open window. The fucking window, a slashing wind blows. Through the open window. Within this pale womb with its beard, a brutal story writhes. Night imprisoned in the room stayed with me all day long. Laughter's broken glass, through the fucking window. Is the view. The endless glittering view of gigantic humid trees shutting out the sun. A thin mould of history covers the walls. Covers the blood, flesh and bones. A black skin, thin and minute. Covers the darkness in the room. (Marechera 1).

Marechera refers to the black skin which covers his blood, flesh, and bones. This skin too is history, and not by chance does it cover the substance of the body, the substance of an entire nation. The black skin would relate the history of its subjugation, during the first two Zvimurenga, and then would serve as parchment for Zanu's tale of a victorious march towards ultimate freedom. History, as Marechera beholds it, is all encompassing and stifling, hiding from view all of that which imagination could otherwise deliver. Marechera admits that there is no writing beyond that history which clings like a mould to the walls. He makes the attempt nonetheless and writes himself into exile, and oblivion. A history recreated and reappraised will cast an alternative view of the narrative, but only once the existing parameters have been altered.

This thesis has undertaken a critical inspection of the Chimurenga narrative as it is reflected in the nation's writing. This narrative has been singularly historicised, even institutionalised, and thus it is the backdrop, or canvas minutely structured, upon and against which all is written. It lacks chance because all is seen, and it does not invite imagination because all is known. Writing before and between the final instalments of the hegemonic narrative has been an exercise in adapting to historic norms, writing along the borders of sanctioned predictions. Writing has become an exercise, a repetition of the mythical yarn spun by the likes of Samkange, Ranger, or Maurice Vambe. This exercise is now overseen by the intellectual elite of Mugabe's Zanu PF, kept on course to uphold a political vision of the future.

Zanu's historicism, having robbed the author of the future, has created a defence against its intrusion. The future has become a fortified mountain cave, inviting only those into its hidden depths who are willing to envision its contents as they have been envisioned by the master narrator. Writing becomes a senseless exercise once it steps inside and loses its sense once it attempts to write beyond and away from the entrance of that mythical cave. Imagination in this sense has no other duty than imagining a future already imagined, and damned to its endless repetition. A future Zimbabwe has not been



attempted, one written from under the veneer of hegemonic ritualism, unencumbered by the mythical factualism of patriotic history. A future Zimbabwe does lie in a reading of the past, but it must profit from a cumulation of readings emanating from a diversity of vantage points, above and away from the discernible monolithic structures anchored within the national memory, the national psyche, and the cultural domain.

History is perpetual motion, perpetual discourse; it is the commentary of the uncovering of the past, history is revelation and re-evaluation as opposed to the shadows cast by grand myths and legends, shadows that deny the very sources of the mythological and the legendary, those moments of chance, and the accidental, decried as counter-revolutionary. The true counter-hegemonic narrative must reach back, far beyond the factotums of Kaguvi and Nehanda, and not as has been practiced, investing these with counter-hegemonic apparel, mystifying the mythological beyond historical recognisability.

These cultural factotums must be returned to a focused and rational historical setting from whence they can once again be appropriated by the pen, and for the people, to justifiably tell of the people. To be free, the nation must be retold, by poets and people alike, progressing forward, and because of this progression towards the future, gaining insight into the distant past. Historians, diverse in nature and not in awe of dominant narrations, will comment upon and accompany this progression:

It is this sense of direction in history which alone enables us to order and interpret the events of the past - the task of the historian - and to liberate and organize human energies in the present with a view to the future - the task of the statesman, the economist, and the social reformer. But the process itself remains progressive and dynamic. Our sense of direction, and our interpretation of the past, are subject to constant modification and evolution as we proceed. (Carr 121-122)

The terms evolution, dynamics, and progress are anathema to Zanu's grand historicism, a historicism that not only looks to the veiled and distant past but is, in its dynamics and functionality, very much anchored in that past. It has, through coercion, persuasion, and practiced euphoria co-opted the nation's poets into the practice, a practice they had, in part, nurtured. Marechera poses the overriding question, and then escapes into himself: "what has not been done in the name of some straitjacket?". (Marechera 101)

But then again, every straitjacket has to be tailored.

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## 9 ENGLISH ABSTRACT

The quintessential aim of this thesis is to explain and confront the interrelation between the bulk of contemporary Zimbabwean literature and the construction of the ‘Chimurenga narrative’, a singular version of the telling of the country. Furthermore, this thesis proffers the argument that all writing practiced within Zimbabwe must be placed within the confines of the ‘Chimurenga narrative’, thereby highlighting the authors’ complicity in building what was to become a monolithic historicism instrumentalised by Robert Mugabe and Zanu PF to exert a narrative stranglehold upon the country and its citizens.

Making use of Achille Mbembe’s term ‘master fiction’ to illustrate Robert Mugabe’s narrative domination of the telling of Zimbabwe highlights the way in which the historic past is remoulded and modelled to not only create a heroic vision of the future, but to cloud present realities not conducive to the retention and propagation of hegemonic control.

Extensive use of the historian E.H.Carr’s seminal tract *What is History?* is essential to the aim of this thesis in that the role of the historian, and the technicalities of the historicising process, do much to explain how the ‘Chimurenga narrative’ has been nurtured and propagated to cement and prolong hegemonic motives.

History, be it the oral history of yore, the postcolonial revisionism of the 1960’s and 1970’s, or the romantic historical notions furthered by the nation’s prominent authors, is the narrative tool that has been instrumental in the construction of national identities aligned to patriotic credentials. The historical palimpsest, a historical rendition recreated according to ancient myths and legends, has heroicised compliance and obedience, writing the nation’s people into place.

The mythological historicism practiced by the historians Terence Ranger and Stanlake Samkange established the foundation upon which a wide spate of authors honed their skills in writing up the past. The heroic spirit mediums Nehanda and Kaguvi were placed at the forefront of a semi-fictional rehearsal of the country’s past. Purported counter discourse was incorporated into the ‘master narrative’ and utilised to invert and diffuse probable counter-narratives. Robert Mugabe has made astute use of the fiction of post colonialism whilst retaining essential components of the colonial era to suppress and

subjugate. The postcolonial romanticism propagated by the majority of the country's authors has bolstered and abetted this ulterior path. This thesis does, in finite detail, demonstrate how these authors created that power-enhancing moment, when the past was hauled into the present to create a tapestry of heroic narratives, only to relinquish the telling of the country unto the future 'master historian'.

## 10 DEUTSCHE ABSTRAKT

Zentrales Anliegen der vorliegenden Arbeit ist es, den Zusammenhang eines Großteils der zeitgenössischen Literatur Zimbabwes mit einer charakteristischen Literaturform des Landes aufzuzeigen und zu analysieren, nämlich jener der Chimurenga, einer einzigartigen Erzählweise.

Mehr noch: Diesbezüglich verfißt die Arbeit das Hauptargument, dass jegliche literarische Tätigkeit in Zimbabwe immer im Rahmen der Narrativität der Chimurenga („Chimurenga Narrative“) lokalisiert werden muss. Weiters wird der Aufbau dessen, was sich als Monolithischer Historismus herausstellen sollte, angesprochen sowie die damit verbundene Komplizenschaft von Literatur und Politik, näher die Instrumentalisierung der Autoren durch Robert Mugabe und dessen Zanu PF-Partei, wodurch gewissermaßen ein erzählerischer Würgegriff auf das Land und seine Bürger ausgeübt wurde.

Unter Anwendung von Achille Mbembes Terminologie der „Master Fiction“ wird die erzählerische Dominanz Robert Mugabes hervorgehoben: Es wird deutlich, wie die historischen Höhepunkte Zimbabwes in einer Weise neu geformt und modelliert werden, um nicht nur eine heroische Version der Zukunft entstehen zu lassen, sondern auch, um die gegenwärtige Realität zu verschleiern, wodurch die Aufrechterhaltung und Verbreitung der hegemonischen Kontrolle begünstigt wird.

E.H.Carrs zentrales Werk „What is History“ wird begleitend hinzugezogen, um zu verdeutlichen, wie die Rolle des Historikers sowie die technischen Details des Historisierungsprozesses einen Beitrag für die Erklärung leisten, wie die „Chimurenga Narrative“ verwendet wird, um Machtmotive einzubetten, zu nähren und ihre Wirksamkeit zu prolongieren. Geschichte, sei es die mündliche Überlieferung längst vergangener Zeiten, der postkoloniale Revisionismus der 1960er und 1970er Jahre oder die romantischen Geschichtsvorstellungen, die von prominenten Autoren der Nation propagiert werden, ist das literarische Werkzeug, welches dafür eingesetzt wird, nationale Identitäten zu konstruieren, die mit patriotischer Grundhaltung und den damit verbundenen Wertesystemen ausgestattet sind. Das historische Palimpsest, als eine historisierende Wiedergabe und Interpretation von alten Mythen und Legenden

konzipiert, hat erreicht, Nachgiebigkeit und Folgebereitschaft zu Heldentaten hochzustilisieren und den Bürgern der Nation ihren Platz buchstäblich „zuzuschreiben“.

Durch den Mythologischen Historismus, wie er von den Historikern Terence Ranger und Stanlake Samkange praktiziert wurde, erfolgte eine Grundsteinlegung, auf der eine Reihe von Autoren ihre Fähigkeiten entfalten konnten, die Vergangenheit zu dokumentieren. Die Geistermedien Nehanda und Kaguvi wurden dabei im halbfikionalen Bühnenstück um die Vergangenheit der Nation an die vorderste Front gestellt. Es wurde dabei ein angeblicher Konterdiskurs in die „Master Fiction“ implementiert, dies jedoch nur, um kritische Stimmen zum Schweigen zu bringen.

Die literarische Analyse führt zu der Deutung, dass Robert Mugabe von der Literatur des Postkolonialismus gekonnt Gebrauch machte, indem er essentielle Bestandteile der kolonialen Ära beibehielt, um Unterdrückung und Knechtschaft zu untermauern. Die postkoloniale Romantik, vertreten von der Mehrheit der Schriftsteller des Landes, hat diesen Weg gestärkt und begünstigt.

Die vorliegende Arbeit zeigt detailliert auf, wie die Autoren die Vergangenheit für die Gegenwart vereinnahmten und aus diesem machtstabilisierenden Moment einen Bildteppich an heroischen Erzählungen webten und aufrollten, über den zukünftig die Figur des „master historian“ schreiten sollte.