Introduction to Special Issue

Memory, Heritage and the Politics of Transformation: The Place of "Colonial" Texts in Post-2000 South Africa and Zimbabwe

Cuthbeth Tagwirei

Writing in 2005, Paul Maylam ponders the question of how Cecil John Rhodes has continued to inspire awe and reverence despite his sworn imperialist commitment. During that time, Maylan felt that "monuments to Rhodes have not aroused such strong feelings in South Africa as they have in Zimbabwe. In a way, he has become a rather meaningless figure, as is reflected in the decaying state of some of the [Rhodes] memorials" (47). Ten years later, on 9 March 2015, a University of Cape Town student poured a bucketful of human excrement on the statue of Cecil John Rhodes complaining that its presence at UCT served to glorify white imperialism. Protests at UCT spread to Rhodes University with students calling on the university authorities to consider changing the university's name. Renewed efforts by some political activists in Zimbabwe to have Rhodes' grave removed from Matopo Hills in Zimbabwe also ensued weeks later. Similar calls by Zimbabwean war veterans citing that the presence of Rhodes' grave on Matopo Hills was a bad omen, in 2013, were blocked by the state on the grounds that Rhodes' legacy was part of the country's history. These agitations have once again opened debate on white privilege in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the place colonial figures hold in the postcolonial state and the multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways through which people relate to the colonial past. Questions of national identity, national heritage, transition (and post-transition?) in both countries have also been brought to the fore. For example, what place do "colonial" texts have in the postcolonial state? Conversely, what place do they occupy in the cultural system of a country? How do renewed calls for symbolic reparation undermine and/or enable literary discourses on national reconciliation and healing? What kind of testimonies do they bear? What dialogues do they make possible? What forms of silence do they attract? Perhaps we also ought to ask in response to sections of the South African media: Are Rhodes' days truly numbered?

JLS/TLW 32(3), Sep./Sept. 2016
ISSN 0256-4718/Online 1753-5387
© *JLS/TLW*
DOI: 10.1080/02564718.2016.11977
UNISA

This special issue arose in response to the aforementioned debates on the significance of "colonial" texts in what are generally regarded postcolonial contexts in both the temporal and theoretical senses. One of the key contentions, a thread running throughout the special issue, is the place (political, discursive, cultural, institutional, etc) the texts of individuals who belonged to the class of former colonisers occupy in environments where, for some time, talk of national reconciliation has been the preferred discourse. In both South Africa and Zimbabwe, the end of colonialism was followed closely by overt, structural, schemes of rehabilitating former colonisers. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 in Zimbabwe, for instance, ensured that whites maintained a 25% quota in the House of Assembly. Such an arrangement allowed Ian Smith, who came to represent intransigent colonialism in the last days of Rhodesia (Godwin & Hancock 1995), to sit in the same room with the people he had hunted down for close to a decade as terrorists. The Smith-led Rhodesian Front became The Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe, in a clear message that the political terrain had changed. Similarly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (TRC) provided the space for Apartheid offenders to atone for their crimes and "become" South African in the process through what Lollini (2002: 64) referred to as "the hypertrophy of judgements". The tropes that guided the public displays during the TRC included "guilt", "truth" and "forgiveness", which could easily have been imagined in that order. In Zimbabwe, "reconciliation" collapsed first, more visibly in 2000 when the government openly encouraged the invasion of white-owned farms and proceeded to gazette a majority of such farms for redistribution to blacks. Among the reasons proffered for this new development was that whites had failed to become Zimbabwean. Their loyalties were to Rhodesia, something which critics of Zimbabwean literature came to associate with white narratives.

The special issue refers to "colonial texts" in deference to the ambivalence which has hitherto characterised the writings by whites after colonialism. While there may be no debate on how Rhodes is described in 2015, there is a bigger contention on several other texts, whose links to empire are real or imagined; and whose colonial character is by association or choice. Tagwirei's "The Nucleation of White Zimbabwean Writing" engages with such questions. Its focus is on how the literature by whites in Zimbabwe is regarded in literary, political, educational and media circles. Having drawn attention to the several ways in which white writing is constructed as Rhodesian and/or Zimbabwean, the article concludes by pointing out the importance of levelling the cultural field, for instance removing Rhodes from his place of pride, in order to make visible hitherto obscured narratives. Hove's contribution, "Dialogues of Memory, Heritage and Transformation" teases out the entangled histories of South Africa and Zimbabwe which both share a colonial founder, Cecil John Rhodes. Hove unravels the almost

parallel symbolisations that have taken place in the two countries in the aftermath of colonialism and how these efforts have been targeted at replacing some colonial symbols while leaving others in place. His discussion of white-authored texts from both countries reveals the awkward positions white writers, writing after 2000, face as a result of changing environments in their countries.

Demir's reading of Agaat exposes the power "loss" holds on white subjects and how it defines their place in a South Africa coming to terms with racial co-existence. As Demir argues, narratives of loss were neglected in favour of a reconciliation discourse during TRC. Narratives such as Agaat broaden the discourse to include the intricate spaces former colonisers now share with the formerly colonised. It is clear from Demir's argument that "colonial" memory is more complex than provided for during TRC. Javangwe's post-2000 reading of Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa* raises similar points. The essay reflects on the uses of space in the narrative, a central feature in processes of identity construction, memorialisation and heritage-making. Although the essay focuses particularly on how Rhodesian discursive spaces permeate the works of white writers in Zimbabwe, the lessons it provides in understanding how memory is deployed in the aftermath of colonialism are valuable.

If at all "loss" is an undisputable condition of South African and Zimbabwean whites in general, then symbolic reaffirmation, at least, is enabled through story-telling. White Zimbabwean literature experienced its boom in 2000, onwards, following the reclamation of land from whites and government intensification of belligerent discourse against whites. There arose an urgency to reclaim white selfhood through narratives. Such is the subject of Leon de Kock's "Narratives of Self and the Valence of Stories in Postapartheid Culture." De Kock insists that stories by whites enter a dialogic space where they find themselves contesting for superiority with other stories by blacks as well as whites, particularly in a postapartheid culture where telling stories has been given symbolic and political currency.
Moreillon and Muller observe how, in the 2000s, South African white authors have taken to speculative fiction as an alternative rendition of the socio-political realities of South Africa. Arguing against a narrow reading of the genre as mere allegory, they challenge readers to see the complexities of whiteness amidst the conflicting historical and mythical heritages that constitute its past, present and future manifestations. Their examination of Human's *Apocalypse Now Now* and *Kill Baxter* leads them to the conclusion that whiteness in the post-2000 era negotiates new spaces which interweave multiple heritages. Whereas Moreillon and Muller characterise the South African white's place as a place of entanglement, Shamiso Misi, discussing the place of whiteness in post-2000 Zimbabwe, opts for Du Bois' (1903) "double consciousness". Misi points to the impossibility, whites face, of full integration into black controlled spaces. As her analysis of Eames' *The Cry*

of the Go-Away Bird reveals, whites in Zimbabwe have to contend with the reality that their place is not for them to choose. It is an assigned place, resulting from new narratives of colonialism.

The only essay which directly deals with the Cape Town event which motivated this special issue is Barnabas' "Engagement with Colonial and Apartheid Narratives in Contemporary South Africa". It evokes the ideological function of heritage and discusses some of the views for and against the removal of Rhodes' statue from public spaces. The article argues that anti-Rhodes protest at South African universities are steeped in a deeper anti-colonial struggle for the simultaneous recognition of certain heritages and the disarticulation of others. Memory and forgetting are seen as intertwined, both serving explicit political and cultural uses in present day South Africa.

While the essays in this special issue are self-contained, it will benefit the reader to take stock of the theoretical and thematic threads they share, as well as the comparisons between the post-2000 landscapes of South Africa and Zimbabwe.

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Cuthbeth Tagwirei
University of Johannesburg
cuthbetht@uj.ac.za