Colonial Heterotopia as Metanarrative in White Rhodesian Writing: A Post-millennial Reading of Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa.*

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Summary

The concept of space, both as metaphor and metonym, is critical to the under-standing of the politics of identity construction and expression in white Rhodesian writing. The presence of conceived white spaces and symbols continue to be valorised and celebrated in white Rhodesian writings despite the new political dispensation ushered in 1980, suggesting a deep-seated imagination that continues to inform and nourish white colonial identities. Such imaginations of space can, it will be argued in this article, be interpreted as metanarratives that strive towards self-preservation strategies of white identity and discursive privilege. Foucault's concept of heterotopia is used in this discussion as a suitable conceptual framework both to apprehend and destabilise Rhodesian imaginations of privileged spaces in the post-millennial era.

Opsomming

Die konsep van ruimte, as metafoor sowel as metoniem, is noodsaaklik vir 'n begrip van die politiek van identiteitskonstruksie en -uitdrukking in wit Rhodesiese letterkunde. Ten spyte van die nuwe politieke bedeling wat reeds in 1980 ingelui is, word die bestaan van gekonsipieerde wit ruimtes en simbole steeds in wit Rhodesiese letterkunde gevaloriseer en gevier. Dit dui op diepgewortelde ver-beelding wat wit koloniale identiteite steeds in stand hou en voed. Hierdie artikel voer aan dat sulke verbeeldings van ruimte vertolk kan word as metanarratiewe wat selfbehoudstrategieë van wit identiteit en wydlopige bevoorregting nastreef. Foucalt se konsep "heterotopia" word in die bespreking ingespan as geskikte konseptuele raamwerk om Rhodesiese verbeeldings van bevoorregte ruimtes in die post-millennialistiese era te begryp én af te breek.

Literary representations by white Rhodesians have largely imagined the possibility of an exclusive white Rhodesian identity and nation. This thrust found metaphorical and metonymical expression in the artistic construction

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and physical production of distinctive cultural and social spaces that were exclusively for whites, while black Africans were closed out. Chennells (2005: 133) characterised Rhodesian literary productions as an "ethnic narrative" that foreclosed the possibility of a meaningful existence for any other cultural groups or identities in the colony. Zhuwarara (2001) made a similar observation when he alluded to the settler "laager mentality," which both physically and metaphorically created distinct social and cultural worlds between the white settlers and the African colonial subjects. These useful insights into Rhodesian writings are important in conceptualising the production of exclusive Rhodesian spaces as self-legitimising discursive strategies, which, as Chennells argues, were meant to shape a "discrete white Rhodesian national identity" (2005: 33). What I will argue here is that the concept of space(s) is critical to the definition of identities and their expression, and also key to the understanding of the nuanced political/ ideological nature of processes of identity construction. To help unravel this concept of space(s), especially as it obtains in the Rhodesian geo-cultural and social realm, as complex metanarrative that can yield equally complex personal and national identities, I will make recourse to Foucault's idea of heterotopia.

  Simply put, for Foucault the idea of heterotopia refers to "the way in which different spaces can come into contact with other spaces that seem to bear no relation to them" (Danaher, Schirato & Webb 2000: 113). Intrinsic in the concept of heterotopia is the element of "difference", of seeming to "bear no relation" between juxtaposed spaces. On the perceived difference is built the notion of exclusivity of the space/culture that is deemed superior and/or normative, and the demand for deference to that conceived superior space/ culture. I have in my other work posited that white Rhodesian identity and politico/cultural edifice is built on the premises of "difference and deference" (Javangwe 2011a). What the concept of heterotopia helps us do is to fathom that notions of difference, of exclusivity, of deference, are, in the Rhodesian colonial context, at least as exposed in the fiction, contrived and riven with contradictions. The exclusive Rhodesian spaces can be best made sense of as metanarratives whose real meaning is found in the self-aggrandising historical mission of imperial England. A metanarrative, as Lyotard (1984) posits, is a "narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge, a grand story that is self legitimizing". The exclusive spaces, both physical and metaphorical, that are constructed in Rhodesian white writings are therefore superstructures (grand narratives) built to enhance the deeper strivings of an imperial civilisation. The paradox on the ground is when both settler and subject are disposed to wonder if there are any rigid epistemic boundaries between their two worlds, and where exactly they belong, and whether the hypocrisy is worth the effort as exposed in Lessing's (1949) seminal novel, *The Grass is Singing*.

To get to the deeper meaning of the Rhodesian desire for exclusive spaces, it is vital to state that the whole colonial philosophy in the first instance was fundamentally premised on the delusional assumption that the land to be occupied was vacant. If the hinterland was not physically "vacant" of human subjects, it had to be discursively made so, a concept I have elsewhere called "discursive displacement" (Javangwe 2011b). This was necessary to justify imperial aggrandisement, and invariably, the doctrine of "terra nullius" was invoked. The doctrine, as first applied in the case of Australia, meant that the land belonged to no one, that indigenous people were technically not present and therefore could not make any legitimate claims (Danaher et al 2000: 85). But because the indigenous groups were a physical reality, various mechanisms of closing them off, physically, culturally as well metaphorically, were devised. These included controlling the indigene's movement throughout the colony, restricting them from entering the space of the colonial power through such stratagems as tribal trust lands, pass system, concentration camps, apartheid policies, protected villages and laagers (Danaher et al 2000). In this way, the space of the settler was conceived of as sacrosanct, as retaining its pristine imperial state. But alas, the fiction and life memoirs in Rhodesia betray ruptured images of strange worlds coming together, in the process exposing the realities of the colonial situation, as shown in Godwin's *Mukiwa − A White Boy in Africa.*

The Rhodesian nation, by marking its identity indices through difference, creates what can be called the "space of the adversarial" (Boehmer 2005: 21). Difference marks the other not as part of the whole, but as that which is always situated oppositionally to the significant entity. This situation allows for that which is marked as different and insignificant to consolidate, both in terms of cultural and political consciousness and physically, so as to confirm its difference. At this stage, the insignificant other will confound the master by refusing to acquiesce to the modes of identity designated for him, rather choosing to take pride in his discredited world culture and features. This process is often typified by a tendency to conceive of the identity of the insignificant other as recoverable, and for purposes of reconstituting the self, from the original culture.

The Colonial Social Body Politic in the Context of Foucault's Concept of Heterotopia

The nature of the colonial project is best defined through its intrinsic striving for not only territorial control, but also the assignation of the colonial subject to symbolic socio-cultural spaces that are different from those of the settler. The cultural dichotomies of "them" and "us" are a necessary function of the colonial conquest, and the ultimate objective is to create that negative "other" space in the colony that nevertheless is critical in reflecting the

vaunted normative image of settler ethic. Nil (2009) refers to "tropological striation" in his commentary on "habitus, heterotopia and endocolonialism", in what he calls "Spanish literary fascism". His argument is that "colonial centers deploy 'technologies of tropological striation', rhetorical and linguistic mechanisms whose function consists of the symbolic, discursive appropriation of places" (2009: 251). The appropriated place is the colonised territory, and the process of appropriation entails generating oppositional tropes that firmly entrench settler culture as the norm. Godwin's *Mukiwa* operates within these parameters of the norm versus the abhorrent, which nevertheless must co-exist and reflect each other, as implied in Foucault's ideas of heterotopia. As the subject narrator, Peter, reminisces on his childhood, he observes that "my days were filled with dogs and servants" (23). It can be argued that, beyond establishing distinct physical identity categories of the one who is human (the subject narrator/settler) and the other who is subhuman/animal (servant and dog), a conceptual space has been created/demarcated where the normative is defined in opposition to its others. In the deep structure of the narrator's statement, there is an inference to the existence, in the colonial context, of a discursive and cultural lacuna that the settler's others are assigned to. That discursive and cultural lacuna stands apart from the white settler ethos, which is the norm. However, the norm, according to Foucault (1999: 50), is not "natural law" but rather derives its meaning from the "exacting and coercive role it can perform in the domains in which it is applied." The norm occupies a privileged position and consolidates its value by sanctioning those conceptual and metaphorical spaces that the colonial order so considers to be aberrations to its own existence.

   The imagination of these oppositional conceptual spaces is maintained when Peter further denies the servants meaningful identities where they can have surnames, and hence historical subjects with genealogies. The servants are known as Knighty the cook boy, Violet the nanny and Albert the garden boy. The further submission that "in those days Africans did not have surnames to us" and that their "Christian names were fairly strange" (23), firmly designates the discursive and cultural space for the different "other", the conceived denizen of the ahistorical space of the colonial context. Such exclusionary references, rather than deleting the abhorrent, the nameless, the abnormal or subnormal, the negative, in the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia only serve to confirm a necessary existential situation of co-existence with the approved, the named, the positive and the normal. And in the colonial context the designation of these conceptual heterotopias were enacted through various metaphors.

   The definitive framework through which new forms of heterotopia in the colonial context can be apprehended is found in the metaphors that construct the cultural chasm between "Them" and "Us". From the narrator's perspective, there is a cultural dearth in the existence of the colonial other,

and this marks the difference of the first order between them and us. For him, "Shona folktales and proverbs […] weren't like the English tales I'd read" and were "oblique and puzzling" with "all sorts of irrelevant diversions and asides" (124). Earlier on, another white character in the narrative, Lovat, had also highlighted the perceived cultural deficit amongst the colonial subjects by remonstrating: "When are you munts going to get civilized? We send you to school. We teach you to read and write. We vaccinate you against disease. And you still want to eat a leopard's bloody bollocks" (51).

The conceptual cultural gap in the existence of the coloniser's "others" is magnified in the social rot, barrenness and economic stagnation in the territorial areas demarcated for the natives in the colony. Mutema Tribal Trust Land is a typical African reserve that captures both the physical and metaphorical poverty and backward-ness of the colonial subjects. The physical destitution is curtly highlighted when focus is given to its African residents who have gone to seek employment in the white designated areas of Chipinga and Chimanimani. Timber cutters in Chimanimani are described as "rustic pirates, barefoot and usually shirtless" (115), while African servants at old Boshof's funeral are said to be "dressed in ragged formality: ancient jackets and trousers torn at the knees for men" (111). In contrast to this depiction of conceptual primitive stagnation, the Birchenough Bridge is imposed in the midst of Mutema to announce the normative cultural space of the self. Emphatically, the narrator asserts that the bridge is "not just another ridge, [but] rather an apparition from a different, more modern world" (135). In the context of heterotopia, it can be argued that the magnificence of the Birchenough Bridge and the culture it represents is only possible because of the presence of an absence, a negative development, in the African reserve that is juxtaposed to it.

Colonial Symbols as Heterotopia

One other critical way of keeping the colonial "other" apart from the normative settler space in Rhodesia is enacted in the way colonial authority strived to preserve the values of the imperial centre unadulterated. Colonial symbols were constructed to deploy not only meanings of total control of the new territory, but to recreate the space of the "authentic" civilisation, that is British political and cultural institutions as they existed back in England. In Godwin's *Mukiwa,* the small village town of Melsetter (now Chimanimani) is the centre of this re-created British value system. The settler community in the area dutifully congregated around a "central square" at whose centre stood a "pioneer memorial" (57). The settlers visited the memorial square "as part of [our] history" (57). Hence in terms of Foucault's thesis of heterotopia, the symbolic pioneer memorial is effectively a process of

grafting British history on the new territory in a way that flagrantly supplants and peripheralises that of the native. Or even worse, it can be argued that the logic of a "pioneer memorial" is located in the presumption of a virgin entry into uncharted space, into an absence, a situation that allows for the re-creation of what the coloniser considers the normative ethos. But this presumption is met by a stark reality of a contradictory nature, the existence of a value-laden native space replete with history and political and cultural institutions. The narrator, Peter, concedes to this reality when he makes reference to a spirit-possessed eleven year old girl who narrated in detail a land dispute between two native tribes stretching back to the 18th century (30). What Peter's encounter effectively does is to situate African tribes and their history in the same geographical locale that he and his settler group are now claiming, thus stubbornly defying the space-clearing gesture of settlers whose intention is to reproduce the familiar from England. Thus the space that the settlers seek to appropriate, through symbol, is always juxtaposed to the unfamiliar, at every time contested, reflected and refracted in what they conceive to be an absence. This conflict of conceptual spaces, which ideally constitutes Foucault's heterotopia, where the negated stubbornly asserts its presence in opposition to the conceived normative, is captured by Boehmer (2005: 21), who acknowledges "the power of extreme difference to disturb, distort, or overwhelm dominant expression." In the ultimate, deployment of symbols from the metropole in the colonial outpost remains an attempt at authoring and authorizing familiar discursive narratives on the new space. It is an attempt to tame and term the unfamiliar so that it eventually corresponds with the familiar.

Settler schools, both in name and function, operated as colonial heterotopias where the familiar ethos of the metropole continued to be reproduced in the new territory. The school which Peter Godwin attended, St George's, was founded in the early 1890s, just as the Rhodesian colony was taking root. The school became a citadel where English values and notions of a superior British civilisation and identity were propagated. The narrator informs us that the school "jealously guarded [the history of the white man in Rhodesia] and kept an obsessive observance on [English] tradition" (175). The foundational logic of the school, and others that came after it, such as Prince Edward School and Queen Elizabeth School, was that English tradition and history were the standard for civilisation and that these symbolic spaces served to "maintain civilized western standards" (183), while the traditions of the native population stood for primitivity in its various shades. The school as colonial symbol insisted on unlikeness, on a distinctness that becomes the defining element between colonial culture and the colonised's values. In the concept of heterotopia, this distinctness is manifested at the levels of culture, race, ethnicity, language, myths, tradition and history.

The Body as Site of Heterotopia in the Colonial Context

Further to Foucault's original ideas of heterotopia, there have been a host of useful insights that help in making the idea much more pertinent to Rhodesian white colonial discourse. Away from the traditional normative/ abnormal, acceptable/deviant spaces dwelt upon by Foucault, Meininger (2013: 32) pushes the conceptual horizons by suggesting that "the new heterotopos is not a concrete geographical space somewhere on the verges of or segregated from 'normal' society" but a "relational space". This view is underscored by Villadsen and Wyller (2009), cited by Meininger, who posit that the "new heterotopic space is deterritorialised. It does not refer to places that are demarcated by visible borders (e.g. psychiatric houses, prisons, probation centres etc), but it consists in relations between people who live on the margins and people who live in the centre of civil society" (2013: 31). Now, this gets us to the heart of colonial encounters, where relations between the centre (settler ethos and being) and the periphery (colonised cultures and being) are in constant interaction. The interaction involves the conceptualisation of both the physical and metaphorical space of "we" and the space of the "other". This, to pursue Meininger's (2013: 31) argument, is a new site of heterotopia, which opens up "a space of encounter in which difference, prejudice and resistance invoked by the mutual strangeness can be faced up to in personal relationships."

In Godwin's *Mukiwa*, the white body constitutes a space that stands, both ontologically and metonymically, in stark contrast to that of the native, within the colonial context. This ontological and metonymic difference is critical to the definition of white identity in the colonial setup. The white body is the standard, the normative that must not be contaminated by its proximity to the native body that is not only strange but a source of contagion. The trope of disease is deployed in order to dislocate or dis/ease the native body, so that it appears in contradistinction to that of the normal, the white body. The native body is thus defined as the space of aberration, of pathological disorder, that "other space" outside the conceptualisation of the normal white body. The autobiographical subject of the narrative, in reference to the natives in the Chimanimani area where his family has settled, bluntly states that "the most interesting of all [diseases] was leprosy Only black people got leprosy" (96). Constructed in this terse statement is an identity of the black body as an afflicted space that is not only different but also removed from what constitutes the normal human body, which is here represented by the narrator himself. By invoking the pathological disorder of leprosy in connection with the black man, the very ontology of the native body is shaken in a way that suggests that it should be kept at a distance, quarantined. Historically, as revealed by Foucault's (1999: 43) medico-legal exegesis of the disease in the Middle Ages, those with the condition of leprosy were excluded from "normal", healthy, society as a way

of instituting "a rigorous division, a distancing, a rule of no contact between one individual (or group of individuals) and another". What is fascinating is that, when this dis/eased body is conceived of in terms of heterotopia, that inflicted space that the native occupies and carries around in the colony, it strikes out as an enduring reality whose presence continues to demand interaction with that which is regarded as the normative. The dis/eased African body reflects and refracts the existential suspicion of the normative group's own mortality, and/or vulnerability to tropical maladies in the colonial context. It is just as Johnson (2013: 790) argues, that heterotopias "are defined as sites which are embedded in aspects and stages of our lives and which somehow mirror and at the same time distort, unsettle or invert other spaces."

In Godwin's narrative, closely related to the native's bodily disequilibrium suggested by leprosy is the trope of death. Very early in the narrative, the subject casually announces that "in fact, I was proud with my familiarity with death" (3). Among Foucault's examples of heterotopic spaces is the cemetery. But the movement away from "boundaried" concepts of heterotopia such as the cemetery has enabled conceptualizations of such phenomena as death within the same scope of heterotopia. Death as a concept, both in its relation to the cemetery and in its signification of the space marked with absence of life, is an aberration of the positive force that life is. It resides on the other side of life as a negative space and a constant reminder of the susceptibility of the living to bodily demise. As already hinted earlier on, Meininger (2013: 26) regards new heterotopia as "a social space consisting in a continuing dialogue between "normal" and the "abnormal", the "familiar" and the "strange"." Life and death are here in constant dialogue, but for the narrator, the space of death is only familiar to the extent that it is associated with the native body. He was familiar with the dead bodies of Africans that he encountered as his mother, a Government Medical Officer, did her routines, as white deaths were rare. This point is further stressed by the subject narrator when he observes that drowning was a common cause of death in his district, and casually adds that "Africans were forever falling into rivers, usually on their way from beer drinks" (83). Thus the narrator's body, which symbolises the settler's secure body space, is markedly different from that of the native's body space that is not only dis/eased but haunted by death.

The cultural discourse that pertains to death as the space of absence, of lifelessness, is also extended to the other white groups resident in the Chimanimani area, and by extension to the Rhodesian geography, such as the Afrikaners. The settlers of British origin appropriated the physical territory as their own, and proceeded to strive for a cultural demarcation that set the English men/bodies as the norm as opposed to other white men/bodies. As such, the Oberholzers, an Afrikaner family and victims of the first Chimurenga insurgency that later on gave birth to Zimbabwe's

political independence, are destabilised through the metaphor of death. According to the narrator, they are a little known family, except for their poverty, and only become known through Mr. Oberholzer's death at the hands of the equally "little known" African nationalist resistance group, the Crocodile Gang. In this narrative stroke, the Afrikaners, as represented by Oberholzer, are disentrenched from the approved space of the normative to the negative space of the other which they share, albeit uncomfortably, with the colonised Africans. The only other death of a white person in the Chimanimani is that of old Boshof, another Afrikaner, whose habitation of the negative cultural space of the other is hinted through his deathbed act of having his tobacco pipe lit by an African servant. Another white group in the colony, the Portuguese of Mozambique, are disparaged as "quite strange" in that, though "they were Europeans, they could not speak English" (153). They are ethnicised as "sea-kaffirs or Porks" (153), which assigns them to some peripheral space closer to the African natives and outside the normative white space whose conceptualisation is English in nature. What is clearly constructed here, and indeed a critical conceptualisation of new heterotopias, to borrow from Hetherington (cited in Meininger 2013: 32), is the encounter with the "other" and with "otherness." And yet also critical to our understanding of the concept of heterotopia is that, "that other space" signified by the strange, infected and/or dead body of the native/non British is a destabilising metaphor that continues to unsettle the familiar, healthy and/or "normative" white/British body in the colonial context.

Spiritual Realm as Heterotopos

A much more intriguing platform where the concept of heterotopia plays out in the colonial context is in the spiritual realm of both the coloniser and the colonised. The spiritual worlds of the two groups continually challenge, subvert and speak to each other in as much as they appear to be worlds apart. On the immediate surface the deemed powerful, normal, civilised, Western spiritual values seem to have appropriated a vantage position from whence it can afford to assign the indigenous belief systems a peripheral space. Black spiritualism, as signified by African Apostolic worship, is thus dismissed as "a combination of traditional African animism and selected morsels of Christianity, mostly from the Old Testament" (29). Clearly the potential of African spiritualism is not recognised, and if anything, it only receives redemption from its pretension towards Christianity through the Old Testament. What is emphasised is the distance from Christianity, which is "civilised", a factor that relegates African spiritual practice to barbarism. Peter buttresses this attitude by further observing that the Apostolic religion involved individuals getting into a trance in which they would become spirit mediums embodying a departed ancestor. Nevertheless, the paradox is

located in this very act of possession where possibilities of demarcating distinct spaces beyond the pervasive interference of those who are culturally favoured with power become possible. Possession in this way provides a backspace for identities under siege from the dominant other, and in this backspace such African identities continue to contest and subvert the hegemonic narratives of self and belonging.

The ambivalence that inhabits the spiritual realms of the colonised and the coloniser is introduced through acts of destabilisation that spiritual possession visits upon previously assumed stable identities. The spiritual world of the coloniser is destabilised the moment Peter transgresses into the "othered" spiritual world of the African through possession. In that trance he speaks in vernacular Shona, a language that he had hitherto not spoken. It thus can be argued that for that brief moment he lived the subjectivity of the despised "other", albeit in a subconscious state. The two spiritual realms are therefore never completely apart from each other, and elements of difference and exclusivity are tampered with, as one is critical to the definition of the other. More revealing is the fact that Godwin's mother continued to acknowledge the potency of African spiritual beliefs through offering supplications for safe passage at the Tokaloshi corner. By subscribing to the Tokaloshi myth, the colonisers submitted themselves to the control of African spiritual mythology, a factor which also shaped their identities on the African geographical terrain.

Conclusion

Foucault's concept of heterotopia enables us to see how colonially demarcated exclusive spaces are implicated in hegemonic relations that designate colonial subjects as peripheral. This is notwithstanding the contradictions implied by the fact that colonial space derives meaning from its juxtaposition to that which it denigrates and despises. The contradiction lies in that the apparently different space of the coloniser at all times interacts with that of the colonised. Therefore, aspiring toward exclusivity is only a physical and discursive strategy to impose dominance over the colonial subjects.

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