

# Dealing with a Troubled Rhodesian Past: Narrative Detachment and Intimacy in Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa* (1996)

**Cuthbeth Tagwirei**

## Summary

This article argues that one of the challenges white Zimbabwean writers have to deal with in their narratives is a troubled colonial past. In Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa, A White Boy in Africa*, there is a plain acknowledgement that Rhodesia had problems of legitimacy, which made the treatment of blacks before and during the war unjustified. Godwin's rendition of the past is therefore informed by this recognition, compelling the author to employ narrative strategies which make it possible for him to embrace certain aspects of the past while simultaneously distancing himself from others. This analysis of Godwin's *Mukiwa* shows how a re-imagined childhood consciousness enables an understanding of the Rhodesian past. Through this narrative strategy, Godwin is supposedly faithful in rendering the past, including its imperfections. Furthermore, the Rhodesian past is depicted as a baneful entity that estranges whites from the Zimbabwean present.

## Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word aangevoer dat een van die uitdagings waarmee Zimbabwe se skrywers in hul narratiewe te kampe het 'n gekwelde koloniale verlede is. In Peter Godwin se *Mukiwa, A White Boy in Africa* word openlik erken dat Rhodesië probleme met legitimiteit ondervind het, wat gelei het tot ongeregverdigde optrede teenoor swart mense voor en gedurende die oorlog. Godwin se weergawe van die verlede is gebaseer op hierdie erkenning, wat die outeur verplig om narratiewe strategieë te gebruik wat dit vir hom moontlik maak om sekere aspekte van die verlede toe te eien terwyl hy hom terselfdertyd van ander distansieer. Hierdie ontleding van Godwin se *Mukiwa* toon hoe 'n herverbeelde kinderbewussyn begrip van die Rhodesiese verlede moontlik maak. Deur sy narratiewe strategie is Godwin skynbaar waarheidsgetrou in sy weergawe van die verlede, die onvolmaakhede ingesluit. Verder word die Rhodesiese verlede voorgestel as 'n verderflike entiteit wat blankes vervreem van die huidige Zimbabwe.

## Introduction

Through a reading of *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (hereafter referred to as *Mukiwa*) (1996), a record of Peter Godwin's memories of a colonial past in which he was actively involved as a fighter on Ian Smith's side in defence of white minority, this article explores how the white Zimbabwean narrative deals with a troubled colonial past through story-telling. As the subject-narrator in *Mukiwa* attests, white Rhodesians fought the wrong war, one which situated them on the wrong side of history. This recognition, which is almost an acknowledgment of guilt on the part of white writers, seems to permeate the war narratives of the first two decades of Zimbabwe's political independence from colonial rule. McLoughlin's *Karima* (1985), for example, demonstrates that the indiscriminate massacre of black villagers by white Rhodesian soldiers near Mt Darwin was criminal. Moore-King's *White Man Black War* (1988) argues that the white Rhodesian offensive against blacks was founded on colonial myths perpetrated by Ian Smith and his cabal. The younger generation of Rhodesian fighters were misled and manipulated into war. Perhaps with the exception of Smith's *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith* (1997), white Zimbabwean narratives exhibit a deep-seated ambivalence towards the colonial past which, through hindsight, places whites who claim a Zimbabwean identity in a precarious position where they have to acknowledge or, at best, atone for the colonial past.

Following the transfer of power from white minority rule to black majority rule, whites in Zimbabwe found themselves unable to freely talk about the past. Both whites and blacks were called upon to forget the past, although in reality only whites were compelled to forget, whereas blacks were urged to always remember a past in which whites dispossessed, oppressed and murdered blacks en masse. In South Africa, on the contrary, perpetrators of apartheid crimes were encouraged to confess and atone for their part in sustaining and perpetuating such crimes, the limitations of such a move notwithstanding. The TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), for example, has afforded apartheid offenders, whites in particular, space to speak about the past in public, something which has not occurred in Zimbabwe where the new nation was founded on a persistent call to "forget the past". Typically, life narratives and fiction have remained some of the avenues for Zimbabwean whites to speak to a troubled colonial past.

Unlike the case in Smith's *The Great Betrayal* (1977), where the Rhodesian past is represented as a glorious time undermined only by the treachery of South African and British politicians, the Rhodesian past is not wholly celebrated in *Mukiwa*. Like Godwin, most white Zimbabwean writers demonstrate ambivalence about their "Rhodesian" past. The Rhodesian past is not reclaimed as what one might call a total package, as is the case in *The Great Betrayal*, in which Smith does not apologise for any

aspect that he considers to be truly Rhodesian. In *Mukiwa*, the past is split into several conflicting parts, some of which Godwin distances himself from and attempts to leave securely behind while simultaneously connecting with others and carrying them into the present. These varied responses enable Godwin to record conflicting details about the Rhodesian past so that the narrative becomes neither a total celebration nor a complete condemnation. The question that seems to inform the division is “should the past stay in Rhodesia or should it go to Zimbabwe?” *Mukiwa*, unlike *The Great Betrayal*, is more complex and expansive. It renders Godwin’s memories from childhood to adulthood in a linear trajectory that is nevertheless disrupted at times by the narrator’s digressions and brief interjections on behalf of the narrated child. In this discussion of Godwin’s *Mukiwa*, I focus on how detachment and intimacy characterise the remembrance of the Rhodesian past in white Zimbabwean memoirs, and how the Rhodesian past is represented as the white man’s curse in Zimbabwe.

## Narrative Distance and the Past in *Mukiwa*

Godwin’s *Mukiwa* opens with the following passage:

*I think I first realized something was wrong when our next door neighbor, oom Piet Oberholzer, was murdered. I must have been about six then. It was still two years before we rebelled against the Queen, and another seven years before the real war would start.*

(p. 3, emphasis added)

From the outset, Godwin adopts two narrative strategies for recording the Rhodesian past: meta-representation involving a re-imagined childhood consciousness; and shifts from the personal pronoun “I” to the amorphous collective “we”. As an example of meta-representation, that is, a representation about a different self’s or another person’s mental representation (Klein, German, Cosmides and Gabriel 2004: 470), the first line not only calls attention to the problems of remembering so far into childhood through the phrase “I think”, it also creates distance between the subject narrator represented by the first “I”, and the narrated child’s consciousness (the second “I”). Already, Godwin’s narrative comprises several selves. “The self, the narrator”, Anderson (1997: 220) explains, “is many Is, occupies many positions, and has many voices”. Rather than proposing entirely fragmented selves, it is useful to follow Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon (1992), who argue that “it is the same I that is moving back and forth between several positions” (28). In pursuit of the current objective, I therefore postulate a reading of three narrative subjects. I shall refer to “Godwin” or “the narrator” as a composite of the historical “I”, the narrating

“I” and the ideological “I”.<sup>1</sup> “The child Godwin” and “the older Godwin” refer to Godwin’s younger and older versions of the self. This is to avoid the use of the more conventional “narrated I” because the two Godwins are as much narrated selves as they are narrating selves. More precisely, they are agents through which that which is narrated, is seen. Each, in their separate capacities, is what Genette (1980[1972]) would call “a focalizer”. Deleto (1991: 160) clarifies that the focaliser is “the origin of the vision or agent that performs the vision”. Readers watch with the eyes of the focaliser. Narrator and focaliser may of course coincide, which is why there is a need to make the above distinctions.

In Leslie’s account (1987, 2000b), meta-representations consist of an agent, the agent’s attitude towards a proposition, and an embedded proposition. Godwin’s first line is thus constituted: [Agent: “I”] – [Attitude: “think”] – [Proposition: “I first realized something was wrong when our next door neighbor, oom Piet Oberholzer, was murdered”]. Klein et al (2004: 471) stress that “[meta]-representation has an important function: It allows useful inferences to be made while preventing false information from being stored as true in semantic memory”. It can be added in the case of *Mukiwa* that through meta-representation, white Zimbabwean writers are able to narrate a childhood past in ways that preserve close or intimate connectedness with such a history while simultaneously distancing them-selves from this same past.

Godwin reinforces the distance between himself and the past in his justification for not remembering things with complete certainty: “I must have been about six then” (6). Incidentally, the Rhodesian past in *Mukiwa* is partly mediated through the consciousness of a narrated child. Smith and Watson (2001) explicate this strategy of life narratives by saying:

[the writer] conjures herself up at the age of five or eight or ten. She sets that child-version in the world as she remembers her. She may even give that younger “I” a remembered or reimagined consciousness of the experience of being five or eight or ten. She may give that child a voice through dialogue. That child is the object “I”, the memory of a younger version of a self.

(p. 61)

In white Zimbabwean memoirs such as Fuller’s *Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight* (2001), Armstrong’s *Minus the Morning* (2009) and Eames’ *Cry of the Go-Away Bird* (2011), we encounter re-imagined childhood foci of consciousness that all enable an ambivalent rendition of the Rhodesian past. The child Godwin, through whose consciousness we get part of the Rhodesian past, is characterised by innocence and naivety. The overall meta-representation in *Mukiwa*, including as it does the (narratively

---

1. For a detailed explanation of the various “I”s of life narrative one can read Smith and Watson (2001).

distanced) representation of such innocence and naïveté, creates distance between Godwin the author and the Rhodesian colonial vices in which Godwin the child wittingly or unwittingly participates.

*Mukiwa* is divided into three sections. The first section is where the Rhodesian past is rendered through the consciousness of a gullible white boy who is bemused by things such as dead bodies, knives and African illnesses, without much appreciation of the wider political implications or events that are taking place in Rhodesia. One area of remembrance in *Mukiwa* is the experience of encountering Africans in Rhodesia. The young Godwin does not necessarily show complicity with colonial injustices against Africans as such. Nevertheless, through his re-imagined consciousness, we can make inferences about the wider existence of such injustices. We learn, contrary to what Smith (1997) tells us, that in Rhodesia “Africans died at any age” (75), unlike whites, who died in old age and could actually prepare for death, as is the case with Old Mr. Boshoff, who has the time to smoke his pipe and make a few instructions before dying while young Godwin “watched him do it” (103). Of course, the young Godwin does not tell us why experiences of death differ between Africans and whites or why only Africans get leprosy (96), but he provides a glimpse into the Manichaeism of the colonial world in his descriptions of the African and the European worlds.

Godwin recalls a Rhodesia characterised by racial discrimination and segregation. The African clinic in Melsetter is “a small ramshackle building, easily overwhelmed by the swell of humanity that swarmed there” (86), whereas the European clinic is “a smart three-bedroomed bungalow” comprising “one or two [patients] sitting in the waiting room paging through old copies of Illustrated Life Rhodesia, Scope and Fair Lady” (103). At Mangula, where his family stays after moving from Melsetter, there is a “bright and carpeted” (189) bar for whites only and “a beer hall” (189) for Africans, to which young Godwin can go even though he is white. We observe the segregation that characterises Rhodesia and the racial disparities that ensue therefrom. Africans are condemned to perpetual servitude, marked at times by inhuman treatment. Godwin remembers that his “days were filled with dogs and servants” (23). Not only are these servants illiterate, they also do not have surnames and prefer to live in tree kennels above the African compound (36). Their customs are scorned and they regularly encounter overt racism from many whites. Although St George’s enrolls a few Africans, the school is not allowed to play sport with government schools (182). Such facts make a mockery of Smith’s claims that Rhodesia had the best health and education facilities for whites as well as blacks. Godwin points out these discrepancies matter-of-factly, without attaching any explicit political significance to the differences. He maintains distance by re-imagining a childhood self whose rendition of the past is informative and detached. Nevertheless, such a strategy enables the revelation of colonial injustices with which white adults are complicit in Rhodesia.

Not once, but a couple of times, the “I” of the narrative disappears briefly and resurfaces with moral validation for colonial prejudices. Throughout the narrative, African servants are referred to as “boys”. Knighty, one of the Godwins’ African servants, is initially introduced as “our cook boy” (14). Immediately after this designation, the author intervenes by saying “in those days we called African men ‘boys’. We had cook boys and garden boys, however old they might be” (14). Through shifts from “I” to “we”, “the readerly gaze is averted or distracted” (Stockwell 2009: 109). It represents a transfer of focalisation from the child Godwin to the larger white Rhodesian society from which the child takes his cue. Although the discourse community represented by “we” is not explicitly stated, its intimation of a class consciousness is evident. “We” is therefore the vehicle through which the child Godwin inter-subjectively participates in the racial prejudices of his time.

Once this cancellation of the personal “I” is achieved concerning the degradation of African men, the narrator adopts the pejorative term “boy” throughout the narrative. Elsewhere, he now makes reference to “Knighty the cook boy” (23, 34), “the garden boy, Albert” (23), “Sixpence the lantern boy [who] was actually a very old man with a bush grey moustache” (66) and Tickie “the school cook boy” (66). The narrator is also ignorant of African surnames, including that of Sergeant Solomon, a policeman he claims as a friend (13). Such mis-identification is said to owe its existence to the fact that “in those days Africans did not have surnames to us. We knew them just by their Christian names, which were often fairly strange” (23). Again, Godwin accounts for the child’s behaviour by telling us about “those days”. Such a parenthetical feature, “a digressive structure [...] which is inserted in the middle of another structure” (Biber, Johnson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan 1999: 1067), serves to specify the Rhodesian discursive threshold in which the child Godwin’s own discourse and sentiments are embedded. It therefore typifies a slippage “between confession and exculpation and redemption” (Harris 2005: 108). By drawing on an associative connection between his childhood consciousness and the white Rhodesian collective consciousness, Godwin is able to come clean about the racial prejudices he unwittingly participates in as a child while also clearing himself of personal guilt.

Godwin’s sustained use of pejorative terms demonstrates his need to structure his narrative about the Rhodesian past mimetically, retaining the sociolect of the day; however, the parenthetical interjection, “in those days”, registers an implicit self-distancing from practices of pejorative naming. Narrative distance in *Mukiwa* therefore simultaneously serves a truth-telling function and an ideological, distancing function. It is clear that the child Godwin is a historical presence through whose eyes the Rhodesian past is rendered, but this persona is at odds with the more mature, ideologically more considered Godwin, whose adult political consciousness makes him

disavow aspects of this past. By imagining the child as bound to tradition, Godwin makes us conscious of his interpellated younger self.

We find similar tendencies in most white narratives, where the earliest reminiscences are cast far into the past at a time when the narrated self is re-imagined as a mere spectator, if not victim, of the colonial circumstances around him, circumstances that apparently overwhelm the narrated self. What informs such representations are notions of childhood innocence founded in Western romantic sensibilities in terms of which the child is regarded as pure and innocent, only to be corrupted by an adult environment that has no regard for childhood innocence. The white narrators are almost apologetic on behalf of the past in which they indulge as children, benefiting unduly from racist policies biased against the African.

### **The Uses of a Re-Imagined Childhood Consciousness**

A re-imagined childhood consciousness in white Zimbabwean narratives has several functions. As already shown, it gives the author licence to depict ugly aspects of the Rhodesian past. Harris (2005) characterises the movement that occurs between childhood and adulthood as Mukiwa's "most significant area of slippage" (108). Through a childhood consciousness, "legitimacy and authenticity are inscribed" (108). Harris further explains that "the naïveté of the [child] narrator puts him beyond reproach, and yet the broader political conditions are made clear to the reader" (109). Childhood consciousness also enables the disclosure of Rhodesian myths about Africa. Within this consciousness, therefore, resides a stock of white Rhodesian myths and stereotypes about Africa and Africans that formed the cultural and political firmament of white Rhodesian society (Chennells 1982). Seen through the child Godwin's consciousness, albeit rooted in a racist Rhodesian settler tradition, Africans appear as drunkards "forever falling into rivers" (83). They are irresponsible, overly spiritual and superstitious. African customs such as that of leaving food at gravesites are ridiculed by the white adults with whom the child Godwin associates.

The child Godwin is also privy to conversations that occur among white adults as they perpetuate stereotypes and myths about Africans. At one gathering of white adults, following the killing of a leopard by one of the white men's dogs, a group of Africans arrive and demand that they be allowed to see the leopard and take its heart, as part of their custom, arguing that it has killed a baby "because of a spell" (49). Lovat, at whose homestead the whites are gathered, refers to the Africans' customs as "bloody voodoo nonsense" (48). Meanwhile, Godwin's father counsels the other whites by saying "we ought to find out exactly what they'll do with [the heart] [...] It's all tied up with witchcraft. God knows, they might end up killing someone" (49). Having ridiculed African customs, Lovat concludes by asking a rhetorical question: "[W]hen are you munts going to get civilized?" Typically, white Rhodesians would also scoff at "the Clocadile

[sic] Gang”, through whom the narrative of African nationalism is introduced at the beginning of Godwin’s narrative. The gang claims responsibility for the murder of a white man, and they are described in *Mukiwa* as “a bunch of bloody ignoramuses [who] can’t even spell the name of their gang, and they want to rule the country” (12). This attitude towards these fighters is consistent with the Rhodesian propaganda machine, which constantly depicted African nationalists as ignorant and morally inept. Godwin’s re-imagined childhood consciousness therefore provides a window through which white Rhodesian myths and stereotypes about Africans can be viewed.

To his credit, Godwin’s narrative enables the reader to challenge the myths that the child Godwin’s consciousness brings back into concrete recall. It turns out, ironically, that the same African fighters whom white Rhodesians are keen to undermine and downplay, proceed to do precisely what the Rhodesians cannot fathom them doing: wage a successful revolution that topples the settler government, leading to the installation of a black government. Godwin’s admiration of ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army) fighters during a contact is quite telling. He explains that “their tactics were different from ZANLA [Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army], how-ever: they were better trained and most had been through conventional infantry courses” (306). After some skirmishes with the guerrillas, Godwin’s corporal shakes his head “in admiration” (307), the reason being that for the first time African fighters do not flee the scene of fighting. The African fighters are not the gullible fighters of the white Rhodesian imaginary. They are well-trained, efficient and brave. Although it is true that during the early days of the war African fighters were disorganised, they later rose above Rhodesian mythical representations that seek to confine them to inefficiency and a lack of vision.

It is also quite interesting that although the Africa of young Godwin’s consciousness is filled with “Matabele thorns and the crocodiles and the hippos” (138), bilharzias, malaria and rabies (159-160), at no point in the narrative do we find a white person falling victim to these perceived threats. It should therefore be underlined that the child Godwin’s image of place is a product of received knowledge rather than experience. His fear of “Africa” is matched by a yearning for the England he perceives through books, pictures and films (139).

Godwin’s narrative also incorporates the voices of Africans challenging myths about Africa. An African pupil at St George’s explains to the child Godwin that the smell whites associate with Africans results from the fact that it is difficult for Africans to wash without running water – a veiled indictment of the colonial administration’s delivery service to Africans. He adds that Africans smell of wood smoke from cooking on open fires. Godwin testifies afterwards: “[T]he smell of Africans that I recognized so well from my childhood was nothing more than wood smoke” (181). The re-



imagined childhood consciousness therefore serves to expose some ills of the Rhodesian past while simultaneously enabling the author to challenge the myths that he accurately brings back into concrete recall. The fact that Godwin chooses not to “whitewash” the racism and “othering” practices of settler Rhodesians shows his commitment to remember against the grain of the Rhodesian past.

## **The Rhodesian Past as Bane in the Zimbabwean Present**

Unlike Book One of *Mukiwa*, in which some ugly aspects of the Rhodesian past are rendered matter-of-factly and in a detached manner, Book Two is opinionated and more forthright in its condemnation of the Rhodesian past. Godwin is downright critical of Ian Smith and the Rhodesian war. The reader no longer has to rely on inferences. In this regard, it can be said that Godwin remembers against the grain of Ian Smith’s supposedly stable Rhodesia. Harris (2005: 103), citing Nuttall’s (1998: 75) definition of autobiography as “a public rehearsal of memory”, suggests that the memoir is never a stabilisation of the past. What one gets from the attempts to stabilize the past through memory is an illusion. Godwin’s *Mukiwa* affords a destabilisation of the Rhodesian past by pointing out its cracks and interstices while articulating the silences that constitute Smith’s (1997) narrative. *Mukiwa* is thus to some extent a counter-narrative in relation to Smith’s story of a glorious and successful Rhodesian past. Unlike Smith’s *The Great Betrayal*, where criticism is reserved for aspects deemed non-Rhodesian, such as British duplicity and African “terrorism”, most white Zimbabwean memoirs are more complex in their remembrance of the past. White Rhodesians’ misjudgments – from supporting Smith to antagonizing African masses during the war – contribute to the precarious position in which they find themselves in Zimbabwe.

Book Two of *Mukiwa* is therefore a different kind of remembering altogether. It takes us into the consciousness of a politically-minded older Godwin who does not hide his feelings about the past. This Godwin, like the child Godwin of Book One, comprises multiple conflicting selves. What this effectively means is that the narrative retains a number of contradictions and inconsistencies, for example the older Godwin’s use of “guerrillas” and “terrorists” interchangeably in references to the African fighters. These nuances are subordinated to a more pertinent objective in this section: an analysis of how the Rhodesian past is rendered as the white man’s curse in the Zimbabwean present. In *Mukiwa*, past deeds, past decisions and past misjudgments complicate the crises of belonging in the present. Godwin remains conscious of white estrangement from both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe throughout the narrative, so much so that in later life he “tried hard to forget about Africa” (386).

In Godwin’s narrative, Ian Smith is a stumbling block to white Rhodesian progress, and consequently makes it difficult for whites to belong in

Zimbabwe. A similar perception prevails in Moore-King's *White Man Black War* (1988), in which Smith is accused of antagonizing the African in both the past and the present, where he makes utterances that are deemed provocative. Smith is accused of being oblivious of "the reality of our situation, the reality of the fact that we are a tiny group hoping to build a future together with the people who were our enemies" (Moore-King 1988: 117). The Ian Smith of the Rhodesian past is a target of mockery, accusation, scorn, anger and hatred in most white Zimbabwean narratives. Often, he is made to shoulder the blame for the wrongs of the past. He is the embodiment of everything that was wrong and went wrong in Rhodesia.

In *Mukiwa*, the adult Godwin's criticism of Smith is direct and unrelenting. He refers to Smith as "the bastard" whose fault it is that Rhodesia is in a mess (Godwin 1996: 262). The Smith of this re-imagined past lacks vision and direction. He has "no bloody idea where to lead [white Rhodesians]" who nevertheless follow him "blindly" (262). As they sit across from each other, during Smith's visit to Gwanda, where Godwin has just finished a combat refresher course, Godwin toys with the idea of shooting him, certain that "the war would be bound to end sooner with Smith gone" (263). Allowing himself to imagine the consequences of assassinating Smith, he inter-subjectively reckons himself a liberation hero in the mould of the Crocodile Gang members, who kill a white man in the name of Chimurenga (the liberation war), and "Blackie" Tsafendas, who was prompted to assassinate South African prime minister Verwoerd by his aversion towards apartheid.

Yet, Godwin does not shoot Smith, despite imagining that his eyes "seemed to be begging me to go ahead and do it, to give him an honourable way out of this fiasco" (263). Smith is not the unyielding character of *The Great Betrayal*, who refuses to give up during the toughest of times. Godwin's Smith is frail and resigned to his own ineptitude. Under his leadership, the Rhodesian past is "a fiasco" (263). The narrator is aware of the futility of war even as Smith asks for more call-ups. Smith's resignation suggests that he is aware of his own failure but cannot find a way out. At this point, Godwin sees himself as holding the key to Rhodesia's future. Godwin reconstructs himself as Smith's opposite. While Smith is morally deficient, Godwin's moral agency swells. Even the photo of Smith on the wall "bores" down on him with mouth "pursed in dour disapproval" (262). Godwin thus represents his past self outside of the disastrous Rhodesia created by Ian Smith. The photo on the wall is an object in the narrative of estrangement from Rhodesia first, and Zimbabwe, second. Had he killed Smith, perhaps Godwin would have been at one with the African nationalists, belonging to Zimbabwe with greater ease.

The veiled criticism against white Rhodesians for blindly following Smith is quite apparent. Godwin observes that "good ol' Smithy" is "followed blindly by white Rhodesians even though he had no bloody idea where to

lead us. This was our icon” (263). True, blaming Smith alone is a gross over-simplification of the past. Smith himself might have taken it upon himself to determine the course of Rhodesian history and does not dispute his identification as “the person responsible for creating this incredible nation” (Smith 1997: 331). However, the reality is that Smith had the support of die-hard Rhodesians who were not prepared to relinquish their dominance in Rhodesia. Godwin reserves some criticism for whites who gang up with Smith during the time of Rhodesia while demonstrating that Rhodesians were at no point a coherent community of whites. Besides the fact that Godwin is against Smith’s policies, his parents support the Rhodesian Party, which believes in a negotiated settlement with Africans. To them fighting in the war is to hold the line while politicians negotiate.

To remember against Rhodesia is to create points of intimacies with Africans, who are marginalised from Rhodesia. In Rhodesia, Godwin finds himself forging belonging among several Africans, from servants at home, schoolmates at the multi-racial St George’s School, revellers at the African beer hall in Mangura, pupils at St Peter’s, workmates in the Rhodesian security forces and African civilians at Filabusi, where he is stationed during the war. Later on, after independence, Godwin finds himself defending former ZIPRA guerillas accused of treason by the new ZANU PF (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front) government. His subjectivity is therefore entangled with several African subjectivities, something that ends in an acute sense of failure and isolation.

Godwin’s personal claims to belong among Africans are undermined by racist policies, individual and group acts of white prejudice and, of course, Smith’s own arrogance. The racist slurs of people like Radetski make Africans suspicious of all whites to the extent that when Godwin makes a satirical joke aimed at South Africa’s racist policies, he finds himself rejected by certain Africans who initially regard him a friend. His search for a middle ground, a “third space”, in which culture can be negotiated (Bhabha 2004), ends in failure. He complains: “[T]here really wasn’t much room in the middle of Africa – all sides ended up despising you” (195). His training at Morris Depot makes him conscious of how he is conditioned to kill the same people who have been his friends. The training “[t]urned you into a fighting machine and set you loose on people who were writing letters to you” (227). This contention is made following a mission by Godwin and fellow police recruits to defuse a potential riot in a black township. Among the rioters is his former pupil, who has kept touch by writing letters after Godwin joins the police. On leaving, Godwin advises him not to wear red, recalling the riot-breaking simulations involving a “man in the red shirt” used as a target during training.

Godwin avows that white Rhodesians are fighting the wrong war. In other words, they are placing themselves on the wrong side of the past, of history, where they will be remembered contemptuously. Following his parents’ resolve that he honour his call-up, Godwin reflects:

I was very conscious of the fact that each of them had spent five years in the services during the Second World War. But they were lucky, theirs had been a simple war to fight. A moral war. A just war. The right war. This war seemed messier and more complicated.

(p. 208)

The war against Nazi Germany is considered by many a just war. By fighting in both world wars, Rhodesians are considered to have been on the right side of history. Being on the wrong side therefore makes whites' cases of belonging in the present problematic. Such is indeed the case in Zimbabwe. The Rhodesian past becomes a bane, a burden that they carry with them as long as the Zimbabwe of the present is imagined through a war discourse that pits righteous nationalists against aggressive whites. Further, the manner in which the war is fought on the white Rhodesian side destroys any hope of either winning it or forging proper relations in the Zimbabwean present. Godwin is incensed that whites refuse to see the wisdom of his advice either to create or retain ties with the African masses. This is for both the short-term goal of ending the war and the long-term friendships. Godwin rues the fact that whites have not done enough to endear themselves towards Africans since the establishment of the colony in general. He notes:

We'd been here for a hundred years. But not many of us came into the TTLs.<sup>2</sup> The odd government vet, the lands adviser and, on special occasions, the District Commissioner. A few missionaries, but they didn't really count. And now me.

(p. 250)

For him, this reveals a fundamental flaw on the part of whites. It shows that whites prefer to insulate themselves against the very people on whom their colonial identities depend.

By endearing himself with Africans, Godwin therefore forges a white subjectivity that is entangled with the subjectivities of Africans. He painstakingly immerses himself in Ndebele customs in order to appreciate the culture of the locals. This is revealed in the claims:

I learnt as much as I could about local politesse, and did my best to observe it. I tried not to rush people to whom time was unimportant, even though I fairly danced with impatience. I tried to remember to show respect to age, even when the old one was dressed in rags and appeared to have no status. I never walked on to the area of beaten earth around a cluster of huts, for this was as bad as barging into someone's house unannounced .... I was, to use PO Moffat's phrase, 'a regular fucking kaffir-lover.'

---

2. TTLs refer to Tribal Trust Lands that were created under British ordinances and Rhodesian laws in order to drive Africans off productive land into congested areas with poor soils and poor rainfall.

Godwin, claims the description “kaffir-lover” because it encapsulates his attempts at aligning himself with Africans since childhood. This is consistent with his acceptance and consequent use of “mukiwa” in references to himself. Although initially meant to be derogative, both labels are appropriated and used to advantage, as Godwin’s claim to belong to Africa. He also supports Chief Maduna’s involvement in the nationalist struggle, albeit passively, when he hides a banned ZAPU newsletter that could incriminate him during a search of his home. In other words, Godwin creates an identity that contradicts the dominant Rhodesian identity. Nevertheless, his white compatriots complicate his case for belonging. Not only do the Rhodesians arrest Maduna, they also treat unarmed African civilians as enemies, burning their huts and publicly humiliating them until the Africans declare “hate us we don’t care”. At this point relations are no longer redeemable.

Godwin consistently stresses the importance of not antagonising African civilians if the war is to end and even records these sentiments in a report that inspector Buxton decides to send directly to the Rhodesian military command in Godwin’s name. His reluctant participation in the war is paradoxically matched by his obsession that whites should employ tactics that can enable the war to end. Smith’s failure to win the war, although it is something he anticipates early, leads him to conclude that the peace following independence “had robbed us of our identity. All around me, as I watched, white society shrivelled and changed” (326). Peace is what Godwin wants but not one that involves continued antagonism in Zimbabwe. His mockery of the “so-called ‘internal settlement’” (319) captures his disillusionment about the Rhodesian government’s commitment to end the war. Muzorewa, “the main ‘internal leader’”, is “a diminutive man that not even the whites took seriously” (319). What is worse is that “even while [white Rhodesians] tried to build him up, they tore him down” (319). Godwin is therefore aware of, and critical, of white insincerity with regard to the internal settlement. In other words, white Rhodesia’s commitment to a lasting solution to Rhodesia is rendered as questionable. It is fraught with deceit and duplicity, an accusation Smith (1997) is only too eager to level against his perceived detractors.

## **Conclusion**

It has emerged that in remembering the past, white Zimbabwean narratives are varied. The differences that characterise individual narratives confirm the view that “there is no canonical way to think of our own past. In the endless quest for order and structure, we grasp at whatever picture is floating by and put our past into its frame” (Hacking 1995: 89). In Godwin’s *Mukiwa*, the Rhodesian past is by no means seen as perfect. Its imperfections are rendered through a re-imagined childhood consciousness that enables the detached representation of colonial ills and injustices. The various uses of a re-imagined childhood consciousness are noted, and

Godwin is seen as representing the Rhodesian past as a bane to white belonging in Zimbabwe. Godwin evinces disapproval of white Rhodesian misjudgments which make it difficult for all whites to belong to Zimbabwe with ease.

## References

- Anderson, H.  
1997 *Conversations, Language and Possibilities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Armstrong, J.  
2009 *Minus the Morning: A Zimbabwean/Rhodesian Memoir*. North Carolina: Lulu Publishers.
- Bhabha, H.  
2004 *The Location of Culture*. London Routledge Classics.
- Biber, D., Johnson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. & Finegan, E.  
1999 *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Deleyto, C.  
1991 Focalisation in Film Narrative. *Atlantis* xiii(1-2): 159-177.
- Eames, A.  
2011 *The Cry of the Go-Away Bird*. London: Harvill Secker.
- Fuller, A.  
2001 *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*. New York: Random.
- Genette, G.  
1980[1972] *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, translated by Jane E. Lewin. New York: Cornwell University Press.
- Godwin, P.  
1996 *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*. London: Picador.
- Harris, A.  
2005 Writing Home: Inscriptions of Whiteness/ Descriptions of Belonging in White Zimbabwean Memoir/Autobiography in Zimbabwe. In: Primorac, R. & Muponde, R. (eds) *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*. Harare: Weaver Press, pp. 103-118.
- Hermans, H.J.M., Kempen, H.J.G. & Van Loon, R.J.P.  
1992 The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism. *American Psychologist* 47: 23-33.
- Klein, S.B., German, T.P., Cosmides, L. & Gabriel, R.  
2004 A Theory of Autobiography: Necessary Components and Disorders Resulting from their Loss. *Social Cognition* 22(5): 460-490.
- Leslie, A.M.  
1987 Pretense and Representation: The Origins of "Theory of Mind". *Psychological Review* 94: 412-426.  
2000 "Theory of Mind" as a Mechanism of Selective Attention. In: M. Gazzaniga (ed.) *The New Cognitive Neurosciences*, (2nd edition, pp. 1235-1247). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- McLoughlin, T.O.  
 1985 *Karima*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Moore-King, B.  
 1988 *White Man Black War*. Harare: Baobab Books.
- Rousso, H.  
 1998 *La Hantise du Passé*. Paris: Textuel.
- Smith, I.D.  
 1997 *The Great Betrayal: The Memoirs of Ian Douglas Smith*. London: Blake.
- Smith, S. & Watson, J.  
 2001 *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stockwell, P.  
 2009 *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

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