

Reading the Zimbabwean National Anthem as Political Biography in the Context of Crisis¹

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Summary

The aim of this article is to render thinkable the idea of reading the Zimbabwean national anthem, *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe*, as a political biography. Biographies are people's lives narrated by others. However, the act of writing the lives of the nation in the form of an anthem, and then projecting these experiences as epitomising the lives of the individuals within the nation, is in fact marked by a disjuncture. This happens because by their very nature, acts of narrating individual or collective identities should always be viewed as approximations of that lived reality. Furthermore, national anthems as wish lists are based on some selected themes deemed of national importance by others and not everybody. This problem is at the heart of reading the Zimbabwean national anthem as a political biography. This article argues that if it is remembered that the lyrics of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* were composed by a literary figure, and selected and adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe, amongst other compositions, then there is reason to believe that there are, from that competition, some versions of the national anthem that were turned down, whose lyrical content Zimbabweans may never come to know of. Read from this "subversive" perspective, the Zimbabwean national anthem is a political biography "complete in its incompleteness" or incomplete in its completeness.²

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1. Since the year 2000 when the land grab began, Zimbabwe has continued to suffer from various crises manifest in violence against the political oppositional voices and the depreciation of the dollar against international currencies. While the Zimbabwe national anthem keeps on being such at events such as Independence Day on 18 April every year, the content of the lyrics of the song that emphasises peaceful coexistence is ridiculed by situations of continued violence of Zimbabweans against Zimbabweans.
 2. The formulation that a text says more in what it does not say than in what it says suggests that there cannot be any text that can claim to be total, whole, or complete. For further elaboration of this concept see Macherey (1978).

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie hoofstuk is om die gedagte van die Zimbabwiese volkslied, Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe, as 'n politieke biografie denkbaar te maak. 'n Biografie is iemand se lewe deur iemand anders vertel. Die handeling van skryf oor die lewe van die nasie in die vorm van 'n volkslied, en hierdie ondervindings dan te projekteer as epitomisering van die lewens van die individue in die nasie, word trouens deur 'n disjunksie gekenskets. Dit gebeur omdat, uiteraard, narratiewe handeling van individuele of kollektiewe identiteite altyd gesien moet word as approksimasies van die geleefde realiteit. Verder is volksliedere as wenslyste gegrond op 'n paar uitgesoekte temas wat deur sommige, nie almal nie, as van nasionale belang beskou word. Hierdie probleem is die kern van die lees van die Zimbabwiese volkslied as 'n politieke biografie. Hierdie artikel voer aan dat, as daar in gedagte gehou word dat die lirieke van Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe deur 'n literêre figuur gekomponeer is, en uit ander komposisies, deur die Regering van Zimbabwe gekies en aanvaar is, daar rede is om te glo dat Zimbabwiërs moontlik nooit sal weet wat die lirieke was van sommige weergawes van die nasionale volksliedere wat in daardie kompetisie afgekeur is nie. Gelees vanuit hierdie "ondermynende" perspektief, is die Zimbabwiese volkslied 'n politieke biografie "volledig in sy onvolledigheid" of "onvolledig in sy volledigheid".

Introduction: National Anthem as Political Biography

During the processes of constituting themselves as sovereign nations, countries rely on cultural symbols such as flags, songs and human artefacts to forge a "national" discourse that is meant to be politically binding to all. National myths embedded in both the verbal, aural and visual sites are in fact repositories of a people's histories and cultures. These official mythologies are not only "saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings" (Anderson 1991: 9) that actually sometimes do coerce individuals in times of crisis or happiness even when anthems, often "ask for sacrifices" (Anderson 1991: 144) from the masses, to defend the nation against external or internal threats. The call to defend or celebrate national achievements is always marked from start to end by recitals of the rituals of singing the national anthem to authenticate the histories of the country. It is in this sense that as a useful spiritual resource, an anthem becomes a political biography of the nation insisting through institutionalised forms of memories never to forget those histories. However, the acts of remembering, and of memorialising one's cultural identities when fixed in print through anthems, resemble myths of origin that claim a transhistorical knowledge of the self that emphasise the language of "beginning", "first", "founder", "ancestor" ... corresponding to the "reverent point of view of a descendent" (Bakhtin 1981: 13). The irony is that at the core of national anthems that insist on speaking with a single national voice, there are contested histories that partialise national memories. This leads to the instabilities within the images of collective

cultural authority, rendering them ambivalent, but enabling these voices to be heard in different sonic possibilities by a multiplicity of audiences.

Thus, national anthems as political biographies are forced by the nature of their coming into being to refuse channelling national history into a groove; anthems as political biographies are forced to adopt pluralistic perspectives by their very nature which is defined by the “terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the order, the sensibility of sexuality, the blindness of bureaucracy ... the common sense of injustice ... (Bhabha 1990: 2). In other words, anthems are verbal concretisations of a nation’s longing for durable form (Brennan 1990: 45). But national anthems aim also to capture the “irresistible romance” (Sommer 1990: 71-98) that speaks not only as political biography but imagines themselves as foundational narratives and as being beyond contestation even though the composition of anthems is predicated on the “absencing”, “bracketing out” or suppression of potential alternative narratives of the nation. This Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of national anthems is very pervasive in the creation, composition, selection and projection of the Zimbabwean national anthem, *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe*, as the country’s political biography.

From Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica to Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe

In 1980, Zimbabwean authorities adopted *Ishe komborera Africa* from the tunes and lyrics of Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica created by Enock Sontonga, a black South African.³ However, the Government of Zimbabwe decided to have its own anthem that would reflect the history and realities of Zimbabwe’s past, present and future aspirations. In 1994, a national contest was held to create the lyrics and compose the new anthem. The reasons for the government’s desire to authorise its own anthem originated in national pride, a recognition that *Ishe komborera Africa* was a more generic song, when what was needed was a song that could act as a national biography, addressing the specific history, culture and views of Zimbabweans. Most importantly, the issue of ruling the country through constant invocation of “patriotic history” was more pressing in the 1990s for a government faced

3. Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica was originally composed and sung by Enock Sontonga, a black South African, in 1896 and the song became the anti-apartheid national anthem in South Africa and the rest of the world struggling against colonialism. Zimbabwe adopted its tune and lyrics and translated them into *Ishe Komborera Africa* in 1980, before the country created its own anthem, *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe*, in 1990. In this paper, we argue that this new anthem amounts to the nation’s political biography.

with a restive population. According to Ranger (2005) the desire by the Zimbabwean authorities to project a “patriotic” history instead of a national history was, in fact, the beginning of the attempts by the same officials to narrowcast, instead of broaden the democratic values of a country emerging from the woes of a protracted history. For Veit-Wild (2006: 194-204), the choice of Solomon Mutswairo’s – author of a foundational national text, *Feso* (1957) – words for the song, confirms the writer’s collusion with nationalist politics.

Solomon Mutswairo,⁴ considered by many as the father of Zimbabwean literature, won the competition for creating the lyrics of the new song, while Fred Lecture Changundega composed the music for the song. It is this version of the anthem put together by Mutswairo and Changundega that was adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe as the national anthem that came to be known as *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* (Raise High Our Zimbabwean Flag). The composition of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* by a well-known literary figure therefore reveals that after all, national anthems are created by human beings to reflect upon their history, memorialise that history and capture the future aspirations of the nation. This complicates the notion of biography, for it makes it evident that *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* is *the* textual version whose creation was based on the selection and ordering of some artistic facts. This fact alone makes anthems amenable to suspicion because consciously, or otherwise, the lyrics of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* are based on the suppression of some facts that could have been included but were not.

In order to appreciate the literary power of the imagination that went into the creation of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe*, we first need to analyse the anthem’s lyrics, and second, we need to understand the power of musical rhetoric and voice in splitting the taken-for-granted meanings of any anthem as political biography. The lyrics of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* are themselves simple, but they evoke themes related to Zimbabwe’s natural ecology, political history as memory, challenges of anthem as political biography and the act of memorialising this history that ensures it is “readily acceptable” to all and sundry. Zimbabweans sing:

Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe/Lift high the banner, the flag of Zimbabwe
Yaka zvarwa nemoto weChimurenga/The symbol of freedom proclaiming victory
Neropa zhinji ramagamba/We praise our heroes’ sacrifice
Tiidzvirire nekumhandu dzose/And vow to keep our land from foes

4. Solomon Mutswairo composed the lyrics of the present Zimbabwean national Anthem, *Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe*. He is the author of *Feso* (1957), the first novel in the Shona language of Zimbabwe.

*Ngaikomborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe/And may the Almighty protect and
bless our land
Tarisai Zimbabwe Nyika yaka shongedzwa/Oh lovely Zimbabwe, so
wondrously adorned
Namakomo, nehova, zvinoyevedza/With mountains, and rivers cascading,
flowing free
Mvura Ngainaye, minda ipe mbesa/May rain abound, and fertile fields yield
crops
Vashandi vatutswe, ruzhinji rugutswe/May we be fed, our labour blessed;
Ngaikomborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe/And may the Almighty protect and bless
our land*

*Mwari ropafadzayi nyika yeZimbabwe/Oh God, we beseech Thee to bless
our native land; The land of our fathers bestowed upon us all
Kubva, Zambezi kusvika Limpopo/From Zambezi to Limpopo
Navatungamiri, vave nenduramo/May the leaders be exemplary
Ngayikomborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe/And may the Almighty protect and
bless our land⁵*

There is, in these lyrics, a discernible thematic movement from themes of appreciating the natural beauty of the Zimbabwean landscape (eco-criticism), through to the rewriting of the history of Zimbabwe, emphasising the multiple memories it engenders (history as memory) by using syncretic literary discursive strategies of the secular and the sacral that evoke certain symbols through which to “naturalize” or “memorialize” Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe as a political biography and then an artistic constitution of Zimbabwe (P’Bitek 1982).⁶

The Natural Ecology⁷ of Zimbabwe’s National Anthem

One of the distinctive features of Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe is its conscious evocation of the natural flora and fauna of Zimbabwe. The country abounds with beautiful mountains, and rivers; the name Zimbabwe itself brings to mind the house of stone whose creative design and accomplishments are attributed to the Shona people of Zimbabwe. The mountains (*[ma]komo*) are the abode of the ancestors of Zimbabwe and they

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5. Shona lyrics of Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe, and Raise High Our Zimbabwean Flag, the anthem’s English translation.
 6. Bitek argues that art more than legislated laws can shape and influence the political/cultural conduct of human beings.
 7. There is need to promote the analysis of the natural ecology of countries as depicted in fiction. This is important to create environmental awareness but also to appreciate nature for its own good in the artistic mode.

served as hiding places for the freedom fighters during the second liberation struggle of the 1970s. Mountains and rivers are part of and make “nyika”. In the various Shona idiolects the word “nyika” means “country” as well as land. And, land is the clearest theme around which the nationalist leaders articulated their mobilising strategy to remove colonial rule. “Nyika” as land is in the anthem connected to rain. When rain falls in abundance, the land gives in abundance, and the workers are provided for in abundance. Zimbabweans sing: “*Ngai naye mvura, ngayi naye minda ipe mbesa, vashandi vatutswe, ruzhinji rugutswe.*” In nationalist historiography, land is embodied as female; it produces “mbesa”. Using Jameson’s (1991: 87) assertion that all Third World texts are “national allegories”, it is then possible to argue that the nature of anthem as allegory of a political biography is rooted in the recognition and perception of land as that which constitutes the centre of productivity, and the precondition for reproductivity. Or, as Vambe puts it, the intensification in the use of the language describing land in Zimbabwe’s anthem after the year 2000, assumes that people have a common and single way of relating to this land. In effect, this misunderstanding, implied in the “language of oneness between Africans and the land attempts to forestall debate about different perceptions that Zimbabweans have on the emotive theme of the land issue in the country” (Vambe 2007: 91).

However, in discursive terms, in Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe, the link between land and rain provokes other alternative readings of the significance of land in the political biography. In the anthem, rain (“*mvura*”) falls on land (“*minda*”) to give abundant crop (“*ipe mbesa*”) so that workers’ (“*vashandi*”) yields are increased (production) and the workers multiply (reproduction) and that the masses have more than enough to eat (“*rugutswe*”). This is an articulation of a communitarian vision in which the land is the means of production. This communitarian vision is also welded to a “socialistic” vision espoused in the “*Chimurenga*” in which the goals of the struggles were identified as giving land to the people, so that they could make a living out of it. This vision was consummated in the controversial land programme that started in the year 2001. The irony, though, is that that land has been underutilised since 2000, and that most of the infrastructure on the farms has been vandalised, thus rendering the discourse “*mvura, ngayi naye minda ipe mbesa, vashandi vatutswe, ruzhinji rugutswe*” difficult to defend.

In fact, Lan (1985) could be right when he links the discourse of rain and land in the anthem as constituting a founding Shona mythology in which it is believed that the Shona people’s ancestors had the power to conjure rain to fall, and therefore they have unquestionable right to the ownership of land. But the problem with Lan’s reading is that it portrays Shona people as if all were enjoying equal access to land. There is no room to imagine class, gender and generational differentiations in terms of access to land among the Shona. Consequently, a mythopoesis that has the potential to exclude

other ethnic groups from laying claim to land, is created by both the anthem's lyrics and Lan's ethnographic interpretations of land and identity in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This mythology also has the potential to project Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe as a political biography that valorises Zezuru discourse on identity, land, rain and ancestors.⁸

History, Memory and the National Anthem

The ideological and spiritual artery that links the language of land, rain and ancestors to the original grand project of self-determination and self-rule is glorified in the triumph of the armed struggle, the lowering of the Union Jack and the hoisting of the Zimbabwean flag. Zimbabweans sing:

Yaka zvarwa nemoto weChimurenga/The symbol of freedom proclaiming
victory
Neropa zhinji ramagamba/We praise our heroes' sacrifice
Tiidzivirire nekumhandu dzose/And vow to keep our land from foes

The painful memories of the roads to independence are revealed through blood (“*neropa*”) of all progressive forces that shed it, and those who fell from the fire (“*nemoto*”) of the gun during the struggle. Historical facts are then transformed into irascible memories that must inform our future political conduct every time Zimbabweans raise the flag to celebrate independence on 18 April each year. While in the anthem, positive history is that which is borne out of, and sanctified by blood, there are also memories that the enemy can still be nursing the wounds of defeat to want to come back and bring the Zimbabweans into servitude. Hence, although the country is politically free, vigilance is called for against enemies or “*mhandu dzese*”.

The act of protecting the independent nation is everybody's responsibility. However, the irony is that the anthem makes it clear that the enemy is not only the defeated white colonisers; it is an eerie thought that even those Zimbabweans who might differ from what the nationalist leaders believe Zimbabwe should be, can be branded as enemies too. And, this is the discourse that has characterised the political landscape of post-independence Zimbabwe where any attempts to suggest an alternative way of conducting politics is described as subversive and tantamount to treason and those who oppose are easily persecuted. To this extent, the anthem can be said to

8. Lan's book *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985) reveals the semiotics of Shona cultural symbols. However, the book oversimplifies Shona cosmology and sometimes mistakes myth for fact.

See also Solomon Mutswairo's *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* ([1975]1995); a novel that justifies ethnicising the ownership of land in post-independence Zimbabwe.

provide within its “unconscious” self the grammar for political conduct where rapacious leaders can politically manipulate and abuse the national anthem.⁹ Nonetheless, due to the unstable discourses of the nation within the lyrics of the anthem, the song attempts to protect itself from potential abuse by political charlatans when the “national” voice in the anthem implores the political leaders from every political party in the country to be transparent, tolerant (“*vave nenduramo*”) as well as to uphold the rule of law and good governance. Again, Zimbabweans implore their leaders when they sing:

Navatungamiri vave nenduramo/Ngai komborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe.

Leaders are wished well, but in the same tone warned against deviating from the course of political moderation. It could be argued further that this statement mainly reads as a political allegory; saying one thing to mean another. In other words, when this line from the stanza is sung today in Zimbabwe where there is political bickering between ZANU-PF and the opposition parties, within ZANU-PF and also within the opposition parties, then one senses that the anthem as political biography brings into the open the crisis within the national anthem’s romantic idealism. Some of the ugly realities that the anthem perpetually wishes should never have happened are the Gukurahundi Operation in Matabeleland that left almost 20 000¹⁰ lives lost, the acceptance of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP)¹¹ that threw the workers out of employment, the inter- and intra-party feuds that define Zimbabwean electoral politics.¹² The most recent national debacle

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9. After the 2005 presidential elections in which President Mugabe narrowly beat the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) contender, acts of violence were committed against individuals by members of ZANU-PF and MDC. This continued violence is a slur on Zimbabwean politics.
 10. Between 1981 and 1986 there was a civil war in Matabeleland province of Zimbabwe. The government of Zimbabwe sent the North-Korean-trained fifth brigade to snuff out the dissident menace. In the war, approximately 20 000 lost their lives. See The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 2001: *Breaking the Silence Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988*. Harare: The Legal Resource foundation.
 11. Between 1992 and 1994, Government adopted the World Bank prescription of Structural Adjustment Programme which led to more than 400 000 people losing their jobs. Later on the government abandoned the SAP as it started losing credibility in the eyes of its electorate.
 12. As Zimbabwe moved to the 2008 Presidential Elections there were clashes between the police and MDC-led mass demonstrators. Ironically, there were

against which the anthem of Zimbabwe will perpetually expose the democratic deficit in post-independence Zimbabwe is the infamous Operation Murambatsvina carried out by the government between May and July 2005. In this tsunami, the government of Zimbabwe turned against its own electorate, destroyed their sources of livelihood in a manner that left more than 700 000 people homeless (Tibaijuka 2005). This unsavoury political scandal ran contrary to the spirit of the anthem of Zimbabwe that urges tolerance and political moderation in the line: “nava tungamiri vave nenduramo/ngai komborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe”.

The Content of Form¹³ of Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe

National anthems aspire to be described as the pure representation of the ways of life of the nations whose histories they engender. However, the fictive imagination that constructs them is informed by the realities of those who create them. These realities are defined – in the case of Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe – by the secular and sacral imagination of Solomon Mutswairo. The metaphors and images he uses to capture the lives of the masses of Zimbabwe come from traditional sources as well as the most recent histories of Zimbabwe. The language of the national anthem is thus rendered syncretistic in spite of the authorities’ wish for an authentic Zimbabwean national anthem. The authenticity of Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe is thus its capacity to accommodate different discourses, registers, and aspirations existing side by side, in a “stable” relationship, but often, when pressed hard for interpretation, in conflicting ways.

To appreciate the sacral aspects in Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe as political biography we have to imagine that Solomon Mutswairo’s lyrics bear a close resemblance to those of Enock Sontonga’s *Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrica*. More important to observe is that Solomon Mutswairo himself belonged to the denominational Church of the Salvation Army very active in rural Chiweshe that was his home. The Salvation Army contingent is known and remarkable for its religious displays in which they march raising their flags as symbol of their conquest of human evil by human good. The triumph of human good over human evil in the Salvation Army’s performances are used by Mutswairo in the secular realm as the political triumph of

also internal conflicts in ZANU-PF that threatened to tear the party apart in the face of a decisive election.

13. This is taken from the title of a book by Hayden White (1987), *The Content of Form*. Massachusetts: Johns Hopkins University Press. The title of this book acknowledges that form can burst the content of works of art in ways that enable readers to come up with multiple readings of a text in any given creative context of interpretation.

African nationalism over the banality of evil embodied in the modernist project of colonialism. Words like “*nduramo*” – goodness – that Mutswairo uses to describe his wishes for what African leaders should be, belong to the biblical registers. In the anthem, God (“*Mwari*”) is implored to glorify and bless (“*ropafadzayi*”) the country of Zimbabwe. Vambe suggests that literary syncretism is the condition of possibility of national anthems since in their aspirations towards the genre of political biography, anthems are able to “hold and balance in a single nationalist vessel the paradoxical projects of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ ... [which] it does not see as antagonistic to each other” (Vambe 2004: 29). Acts of combining various “speech types” from the Christian and traditional registers that Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe performs, renders the anthem continually open-ended and promotes both the polysemy of the metaphor as well as the fixity of representation of the symbol. And, herein lies the instability of the voices within anthem as political biography that are “never set in motion along a temporal path or in an evolving sequence: they are, rather spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel” (Bakhtin quoted in Chennells 1999: 56).

In fact, during the armed struggle, the fact that African peasants in Zimbabwe prayed for deliverance from colonial authorities and for the independence of Zimbabwe in some way was viewed as an inevitable manifestation of God’s will. It cannot be undone without violating Zimbabweans as well as God’s sanctity for the oppressed to seek unfettered freedom. Appeals to God, thus, can be seen as touching the philosophical understanding of history, life and survival within the varied human communities of Zimbabwe. The syncretistic aspects within the national anthem are further underscored by appeals to the ancestors of Zimbabweans. Zimbabwe is a country that had been inhabited by African people long before the advent of colonialism. The country is “*nyika yamadzitateguru*”. The ancestors perpetuate themselves through their descendants whose obligation is to defend the sovereignty of Zimbabwe. The extended meaning of the reference to “*madzitateguru*” is that they have to look after their descendants, for if the descendants are overrun and put into servitude, then the ancestors are also chained to a history of servitude.

This is a philosophical understanding of anthem as political biography within African communities in which ancestors manifest and live vicariously through their offsprings without whom there can be no history to tell about the ancestors and the descendants. It is a philosophy that acknowledges that in African cosmogony, people do not die; they are referred to as the departed who can always be invoked to come and help their descendants during historical moments of national crises whether these are induced by external or internal forces.

The secular and sacral imaginations within the national anthem do not contradict each other. They are in fact derivative of each other and metaphorically emboldened by each other. This occurrence in the national anthem cannot simply be explained by the faith of the composer of the anthem. Rather, the secular and the sacral imaginations are in African thought and philosophical knowledge systems coterminous with each other, and depending on social circumstances; one can transvaluate the other to suggest new meanings to social phenomena. Syncretism of the literary registers, discourses and genres is the condition of possibility of the national anthem. If “bio” refers to life and “graphy” is the written form, then it can be averred that national anthem as political biography has its semantic and ideological wished-for horizon to accommodate diverse views within the single polity that is Zimbabwe. But the politics of remembering history, and cultural values, in this political biography, that is the national anthem, cannot be plotted on a unilinear understanding of the contradictions of the lives of the nation. Some symbols and their meanings are preferred and given prominence. Those that are “neglected” as in the case of the versions of the national anthems that did not see their lyrics and sonic possibilities realised in post-independence Zimbabwe may not die; these unwanted versions of anthem as political biography are consistently attempting to manifest themselves in acts that put them in confrontation with dominant views within the anthem. The bearers of these versions are often persecuted as is happening in Zimbabwe today because these suppressed versions left out from the anthem almost always strike the wrong note in their quest for self-realisation. To understand how political biography such as a national anthem operates, we need to read the words of Guha and Spivak, two subaltern scholars of Indian descent who state that in their experiences of postcolonial contexts “any of their members in the insurgent community who chooses to continue in such subalternity is regarded as hostile towards the inversive process initiated by the struggle and hence as being on the side of the enemy” (Guha & Spivak 1988: 14).

Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe and the Politics of Memorialising History

In Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe, verbal counterinsurgency is performed through the processing of memorialising history by selecting certain cultural symbols, essentialising them as the Zimbabwean sensibility and then naturalising them as the only possible modes of existence which Zimbabwe should live by. National anthem defines itself further as political biography through acts of accommodating, absorbing and encircling other discourses so as to prevent them from authoring competing and enduring cultural symbols. This follows from the reality that human beings live or express

their beingness, greatness and even depravity through cultural symbols. In conscious, and sometimes not-so conscious ways, Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe embeds and elevates certain symbols by fixing them for all times, which counts as the process of *memorialising* Zimbabwean history.

For example, the name, the word Zimbabwe, means “house of stone” and manifests in the creativity of the African ancestors in the country. This creativity was threatened with encrustation by the colonial culture that actually authorised texts that denied that Africans can be able to produce such historical structures of monumental greatness to humanity. The inconsistency registered by memory in the memorialising artefacts to pass them as history is demonstrable in the perceptions defining the sacrosanctity of human blood that is shed in contexts of political contestations. African “blood” that is shed in liberating the country from colonialism is considered more important than black “blood” that was and is continually being shed by nationalist elites when defending their stay in power. By selecting one type of shed blood to honour, the authorities force the national anthem to choose which people to honour as heroes and which people should be described as sell-outs. The hiatus at the centre of the national anthem modes of remembering and memorialising the history of suffering is naturalised in a narrow discourse that speaks of *Chimurenga*, when in fact there have been several *Chimurenga* fought at the same time against different power blocs in colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe.

In Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe, liberation struggle is expressed in the singular noun *Chimurenga*. This *Chimurenga* is plotted in a linear fashion starting with Africans fighting colonial settlers in 1890, and in 1896-1897. The second *Chimurenga* immortalised in the national anthem as political biography of Zimbabwe is the armed struggle that took place from 1975 and gave independence to Zimbabwe in 1980. In official circles the third *Chimurenga* began in 2000 with the taking away of land from white farmers (Mugabe 2001). Although this overarching chronology is valid, the representations of the phenomena of struggle without their own contradictions obscure complex inter- and intra-party conflicts between Europeans and Africans and amongst Africans themselves. The linearity of official historiography on African struggles in Zimbabwe also attempts to take away people’s interests from the intra-ZANU-PF and Movement for Democratic change (MDC) conflicts in the postcolonial era.

Put differently, memorialising the history of struggle is one of selective ordering and constructing into the national narrative, those aspects that are deemed to bring people of different social, ethnic and racial backgrounds together for the fulfilment of a supposed common vision. To say this is not to belittle Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe. Rather it is to constantly remind ourselves that national anthems are artistic and historical creations, and that they are *naturalised* to make them appear as the collective vision of the nation. Indeed, Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe is a collective histori-

ography of Zimbabwe. Solomon Mutswairo, though late, lives through his creation that was adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe as the national anthem of the new nation of Zimbabwe. However, as with any such political biography, literary or historical narrative, national anthems remain “incomplete” in their completeness. This is what makes their claims contestable.

Conclusion

This article claimed that *Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe* can be understood as a national political biography. It was argued that national anthems are artistic and historical texts that present pictures of collective national consciousnesses and imbed a narrative of common aspirations. National anthems such as *Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe* emphasise physical geographies in the symbols that they make use of in order to highlight the location and the situation of the people for whom they are composed. Through these symbols, some physical, others spiritual, the histories of Zimbabwean struggles for independences and the wish for a better future are told. The spiritual symbols represent the memories of a nation. *Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe* remembers the pain that Africans went through to achieve freedom and warns leaders not to abuse these historical memories by manipulating politics. However, as a political biography, the Zimbabwean national anthem aspires to conditions of authenticity. The signature of the realness of this political biography is depicted as the heroic feat of Zimbabweans in the armed struggle.

To limit the contents of the rucksack that is a political biography to armed struggles undermines the readers’ quest to appreciate and reveal varied struggles that Zimbabweans know. It ties the Africans’ conception of historical time to the telos introduced by colonialism. This then gives the wrong impression that *Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe* is only concerned with “victorious” armed struggles. Other versions of political biography that could have been brought to surface but were not are then occluded. Tied to a narrow conception of national consciousness, the ideology of *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe* is silenced from saying certain things. Both the author of the lyrics of the anthem and the authorities of Zimbabwe find themselves limited and forbidden from saying certain things by the narrow nationalistic ideology within which they wrote and composed the anthem. Because the anthem as political biography contains these gaps and silences, it is always incomplete.

However, the fact is that in *Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe*, the language of the secular realm exists side by side with and inside the interstices of the language of the sacral. Literary syncretism is in fact an acknowledgement of the possibilities of ideological plurality in the new nation.

Since Simudzai Mureza wedu weZimbabwe was adopted amongst some that had been submitted for the national competition, we shall never know what it is which was in the other versions that was considered but discarded. Perhaps we need not know. Perhaps it is sufficient to know that as social constructs, national anthems such as Simudzai Mureza weZimbabwe are “complete” in their “incompleteness” (Eagleton 1976: 35). In short, in a context of national crises such as Zimbabwe is in, rereading the national anthem as political biography can enable readers to interpret the song’s lyrics differently. The readers can also listen to the rhetorical voice of the non-signifying aspects of the musical voices in ways that can ensure retrieving alternative and surplus meanings¹⁴ – those which a national anthem as political biography cannot completely hem in and control.

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14. For a thorough discussion of the concept of surplus meaning in the rhetorics of music, see Vambe, M.T. & Vambe B. 2007. Musical Rhetoric and the Limits of Censorship in Zimbabwe. In: Vambe, M.T. & Zegeye, Abebe (guest editors) *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa* 3(1): 48-78.

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