

Imagining Post-2000 Zimbabwean Perceptions of Land and Notions on Identities in Catherine Buckle's *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions*

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Summary

The novel *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* (2002a) describes the traumatic experiences that the author, Catherine Buckle, a white owner of Stow Commercial Farm near Marondera, faced during the early phase of the land invasions. The novel portrays Buckle's experiences while under siege and until she is forced to leave the farm by the war veterans. Her experiences are a result of the anti-imperialism campaign seeking to redefine perceptions of land and identities that were introduced by the Zimbabwean government after 2000. This article draws on postcolonial perspectives on imagined and national identities and discussions on the history and cultural significance of land in the formation of personal and social belonging and other identities in its examination of perceptions of land and identities in post-2000 Zimbabwe. I therefore examine the role played by Buckle's representations of her experiences in reflecting the nature of the land invasions and their impact on perceptions of the space of the farm and in the construction of national and social identity. This article also analyses the text's significance in shaping the image of post-2000 Zimbabwe's postcolonial condition and introducing new trends in the country's creative imaginings of the land.

Opsomming

African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions (2002a) is 'n roman waarin Catherine Buckle, die blanke eienaar van die kommersiële boerdery Stow naby Marondera, haar traumatiese belewenisse in die beginstadium van grondbesetting beskryf. Die roman beeld Buckle se ervarings onder beleg uit totdat sy die plaas onder dwang van oorlogsveterane moet verlaat. Haar wedervarings is die gevolg van die anti-imperialistiese veldtog van die Zimbabwe-regering ná 2000 om persepsies van grond en van identiteit te herdefinieer. Hierdie artikel gaan uit van post-koloniale perspektiewe op verbeelde en nasionale identiteit en opvattinge oor die geskiedkundige en kulturele belang van grond in die vorming van persoonlike, sosiale en

ander identiteite, en ondersoek die persepsies van grond en identiteite in Zimbabwe na 2000. Derhalwe ondersoek ek veral die rol wat Buckle se weergawe van haar ervarings speel in die weerspieëling van die aard van die grondbesettings en die uitwerking daarvan op die persepsies van die plaasruimte en op die skep van nasionale en sosiale identiteit. Hierdie artikel ontleed ook die belang van die teks vir die beeldvorming van Zimbabwe se post-koloniale toestand na 2000 en die invoer van nuwe neigings in die land se kreatiewe verbeelding van grond.

Introduction

This article examines Catherine Buckle's representation, in *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* (2002a), of her experiences at Stow Farm, which was invaded in 2000 by armed ZANU-PF supporters and the veterans of the nationalist war of liberation. The article's main focus is to examine the nature of the land invasions and occupations and discuss their impact on the personal and social identities as reflected from the perspective of a white commercial farmer. The article also takes cognisance of the competition between discourses located in the personal and commercial farmer perceptions and the nationalist and grand narrative about the land as it attempts to examine the contestations over land and their impact on the constitution of identities in the represented post-2000 Zimbabwe.

Buckle's representation complicates the trajectory of Zimbabwean fiction focusing on the land. As noted by critics of Zimbabwean fiction, such as Primorac (1996: 13-14), the analysis of Zimbabwean colonial and post-independent literature is fragmented by the use of methodologies that categorise the novels on the basis of language, race and history. Thus, there exists, on the one hand, white Rhodesian fiction that describes how the settlers established Rhodesian pioneer and adventurer identities seeking to tame the colonial jungle and the "uncivilised" African colonial subjects, often using violence. The literature produced during the 1960s and 1970s depicts the racist discourse and ideological perceptions that entrenched white domination over blacks and used the "Rhodesia never dies" trope to spread propaganda about white invincibility (Chennells 1982, 1991, 1995).

On the other hand, there is black Zimbabwean literature produced during the colonial period, such as Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1976), and the post-independent period that includes Hove's *Bones* (1990). The focus of these works includes the portrayal of the displaced psyches and social disintegration affecting the African characters and their communities owing to colonial oppression, land dispossessions and the continued existence of land imbalances in the post-independence era. Nevertheless, there is very little literature by white Zimbabweans that represents their perceptions of and experiences on the land during the 1980s and 1990s. The available literature, such as Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996), is

mostly autobiographical and examines the writer's childhood experiences on the land and how this and the naive colonial white identities are disrupted due to the advent of and participation in the war against African nationalists. Hence, Buckle's novels, written from an avowed identification with the nation and its land, offer discourses that engage with both past and present writings and social memories of experiences on the land in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

The premise guiding this study is the hypothesis by Alexander that

[l]and is about identity as well as production and class formation; it is about aesthetic values and spiritual meaning, as well as being central to the construction of the institutions of state; it fires political struggles and violence alongside the literary imagination; and it is the basis for both building and breaking a host of social relationships. In all these guises, the meanings and value of the land are neither fixed nor uncontested. Land cannot be reduced to a static role in a single narrative.

(Alexander 2007: 183)

Here, Alexander underscores the significance of land in the formation of identities, the creation and dislocation of social relationships and the crafting of social and imaginative aesthetics. Buckle's memoir indeed focuses on the author's experiences as she struggles to hold on to her land under threat from the war veterans. Furthermore, Alexander's postulation that "land ... fires political struggles and violence" is pertinent here, as violence is a major theme in Buckle's fiction. The contestations over land in Zimbabwe have been associated with violence, as is illustrated historically in the wars by the British pioneers in the 1890s seeking to conquer and dispossess both the Ndebele and the Shona of their land. The post-1900 period also witnessed violent forced removals of the colonised subjects aimed at extending the British colonialists' boundaries and control over other parts of Mashonaland and Matabeleland (Alexander, McGregor & Ranger 2000). Violence is indeed at the centre of the colonial project as observed by postcolonialists such as Loomba who notes that "military violence was used almost everywhere, although, to different degrees, to secure both occupation and trading 'rights'" (2005: 97). "A culture of violence also dominates the relationship between the white farmer and African labourers in Zimbabwean colonial history. Here, the whip was used by whites to allegedly transform the Africans into industrious labourers who respected white authority" (Chennells 1991).

Furthermore, Hove's *Bones* (1990) depicts how cruelly Bass Manyepo (Liar), the white commercial farmer, treats black workers such as Marita, the novel's chief protagonist. The colonial experiences and culture on the farm are characterised by violence as the black overseer abuses his position by seeking sexual favours from and oppressing fellow workers. Worse still,

a Rhodesian army officer rapes Marita as punishment for her refusal to give information about her son who has joined the nationalist soldiers seeking to dismantle Rhodesian colonial rule. This use of violence by the colonialists, in an attempt to maintain power, becomes etched into the consciousness of the colonised Zimbabweans. In addition, the colonised subjects' history of past heroic fights seeking to defend the land and their autonomy was passed through generations. It inspired the anti-colonial activism that culminated in the 1970s anti-colonial war, as depicted in Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1990). Therefore, memories of violent translocations and abuse perpetrated by the colonial white settlers and those of the ideological rhetoric that supported the use of counter-violence in an attempt to dislodge colonialism dominated the psyche and national imaginary of Zimbabweans in the 1980s. These memories and the associated valorisation of the anti-colonial war are intricately linked with the post-2000 grand narrative about the land that Buckle's memoir is interrogating in various ways.

This article, therefore, examines the nature and characteristics of the invasions and the impact of the invasions on personal and social identities and on notions of national identity and belonging in post-2000 Zimbabwe as rendered in *African Tears*. It also unpacks the significance of the imaginings in the establishment of a dialogue between, on the one hand, white commercial farmers, and on the other, the supporters of ZANU-PF and other radical black nationalist proponents of the land invasions in the depiction of this country's postcolonial condition. The questions that guide the analysis of Buckle's memoir are: What are some of the characteristics of the land invasions and how do they impact on the white commercial farmers' lives, their farming spaces and perceptions of themselves and the nation? To what extent do the writings entrench and/or expand the old metaphors and other creative qualities of the writings about land in Zimbabwean literature? And what is the significance of Buckle's work in the representation of the early-twenty-first-century Zimbabwean postcolonial condition?

Cataloguing the Land Invasions in *African Tears*

This section examines the nature of the land invasions and their effect on the life and identities of the author. The author's Stow Farm was invaded by war veterans on 1 March 2000 and occupied thereafter until the author and her family left involuntarily for rented accommodation in the nearby town of Marondera, at the end of September 2000. The chapters trace the chronology of the anxiety, violence and displacement that the author and her family suffered. The chapter titles – the introductory “*Hondo* (the War)”; “The Rape of the Land”; “Very, Very, Very Severe”; “The Killing Begins”; “Trail of Destruction”; “Rivers of Blood and Tears”; “Sins of the Fathers”;

“Burning Flesh”; “This Is My Farm”; “Fast Track to Where?”; “The 3,000 ‘Wish’ List”; “Ethnic Cleansing”, “*Tawanda*” and *Siya* (Leave)” – not only outline the aforementioned chronology but also confirm Alexander’s (2007: 13) assertion that “the land ... fires literary imagination”. The narrative, therefore, constitutes a personal witness to the dislocating effects of the land invasions through a factual documentary style, typical of a memoir, which also makes intertextual references to dialogues dominating the national television, radio and news article narratives. An examination of the nature and the impact of the invasions on the writer, her family, workers and the space of the farm is imperative.

Buckle’s narrative depicts the ZANU-PF Government’s sanctioned post-2000 land invasions as fraught with chaos. The author constantly uses a probing narrative style, marked by the use of rhetorical questions and an interior monologue, in an effort to reveal the chaos that is characterised by the disruption of farming activities, looting of produce and the division of large farms into smaller plots. The narrator, Cathy, also questions why the police and the government are not doing anything to evict the “squatters” who invaded her farm. As a result, she writes many letters and articles to the press and the leadership of the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers’ Union (ZCFU) enquiring about and registering her criticism at their inaction in the face of the ensuing chaos and the destruction of the landscape on the farms. This depiction of the chaos is emblematic of the writer’s dialogue with the discourses associated with the ZANU-PF-sanctioned farm invasions and the police and Commercial Farmers’ Union’s complicit inaction. Buckle thus portrays the police inaction as absurd and the new land divisions as disorderly.

It should be underscored that, although the criticism of the land invasions are valid and illuminating in documenting the unfolding invasion and occupations, certain contradictions are evident in Buckle’s thoughts. The chapter “The Raping of the Land” elicits a certain uneasiness. This is because opposing perceptions; the ones focusing on commercial and scientific agricultural practices versus those centred on the nationalist discourses that defined the land as historically and spiritually belonging to black Zimbabweans, become significant in the definition of the impact of the invasions. Buckle’s displeasure at this impact emanates from perceptions resonating with cultural and scientific discourses that valorise scientifically based land use plans and divisions. It thus seems as if Buckle’s criticism of the invaders is located in settler colonial perceptions that define Africans as lacking scientific knowledge of agricultural practices and indifferent to the landscape. Ranger (1999) discusses such colonial discourses in his outline of the history of the conflict between European and African perceptions of landscape and conservation in the sacred Matopos Mountain in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, the new settlers on the Buckle farm are indeed illegal, as the

farm had not been designated for compulsory acquisition by the state as required by law. Furthermore, the occupiers' land practices that include the grazing of cattle on the farm's veld and the cutting down of some of the eucalyptus and indigenous trees (*African Tears*, pp. 19-20), are indicative of a utility-based perception of the land that is typical of subsistence agriculture. Hence, to view their activities as environmentally destructive is to miss the point and is a perpetuation of those culturally based paradigms of power that the postcolonial theory seeks to subvert.

Nevertheless, Buckle's representation of the invasions shows that the government-sanctioned land invasions led to major environmental devastation. Her description of the invasions' effects on the environment unpacks the nature of the discourses on the invasions and the environment that existed during this period. The destruction of the eucalyptus plantation, the overgrazing and random hunting of game witnessed at Stow Farm are indicative of the pattern of environmental devastation occurring in the whole country. Buckle also uses intertextual references from the television and print media, thus linking experiential and media narratives, to describe other environmental devastations occurring in some parts of the country, such as the Save River Conservancy area. As a result, Buckle depicts the government's failure to control the invasions and prevent the resultant environmental destruction.

Buckle shows that the overarching ZANU-PF black nationalist grand narrative on the land is interlinked with the chaos affecting the lives of the commercial farmers and their workers. The land invasions are depicted as violent. The represented war veterans, the main characters in the land invasions, retrieved the militant and anti-colonial discourse from the 1970s anti-colonial war and thus defined the invasions as the final war to liberate the land from White Rhodesian and Euro-American control. They also reproduced discourses of mass militancy and mobilisation from the past as they consolidated their occupation of Stow and other farms. As a result, farm workers were subjected to all-night political re-education programmes. Those deemed sell-outs, such as Jane, a worker at Cathy's farm store, were severely beaten. Therefore, the land invasions are represented as a project characterised by politically motivated violence that resonates with post-colonial violence.

The violence that Buckle documents is partly a conflict about perceptions of national identity, as postulated by Alexander (2007: 183). Different notions of what constitutes national identity, among them whether a community shares the same consumption patterns, imagine themselves as united by a similar experience, share the same geographical and historical background, use the same language or are of the same race, which are akin to Anderson's (1986) views on identity formation, are rekindled on the farms in post-2000 Zimbabwe. In the novel intertextual references to media repre-

sentations refer to the ZANU-PF proclamation that black Zimbabweans have a historical right to the land. This discourse on historical rights is used by the state and the invaders to redefine notions of national identity at political rallies, on the farms and in the various media platforms. As a result, blackness signifies one's organic links with Africa, an "authentic" Zimbabwean identity and an entitlement to the land, while whiteness becomes synonymous with Europe, foreignness and an absence of rights to own land in Zimbabwe (Raftopolous 2003, 2004; Muponde 2004). A white commercial farmer such as Cathy, who struggles to assert her views and sense of belonging through her letters to some news article editors and farmer organisation leaders, is thus identified, in the discourse on land invasions, as a target for exclusion from the land. The alienation of white farmers is vividly portrayed in *African Tears* through the siege of Cathy's farm and the various all-night vigils during which the invaders sang songs urging the Buckles to leave the farm.

The land invasions have dislocating effects. The author captures the psychological displacement and the subsequent fragmentation of the narrator identity very well. She is depicted as overwhelmed by panic; she becomes helpless and jittery from the moment she receives news of the impending invasion of her farm. The hysterical mode that she enters into is characterised by "shaking and sobbing" (Buckle 2002a: 2); ordering her son, Richard, not to go to school, locking themselves in their home, changing the locks and waiting so that "[t]he anticipation, and not knowing what to expect, was more stressful than anything I'd ever encountered before" (p. 3). She experienced further anxiety and stress after a mob of whistling and singing war veterans held her under siege in her farm house. The war veterans also abuse some of Buckle's farm workers. All these anxieties are depicted as disrupting the Buckles' psyches and domestic peace.

The stress and pressure suffered caused a complex chain of displacement for Cathy and her family. In one of her journal entries she wrote: "The mental and psychological stress is phenomenal. The anguish and anger at our increased powerlessness increase everyday" (p. 28). Later on, as depicted in the novel's sequel *Beyond Tears: Zimbabwe's Tragedy* (2002b), the author and her husband get divorced, thus confirming how the invasions also encroached into the space of domestic relations of some of the victimised commercial farmers. In fact, the memoir describes that some of the white commercial farmers, such as Stevens, were murdered and left behind young families, thus underscoring the multiple displacements arising from the represented land invasions.

The author and her family were also displaced physically. Cathy and her family were finally forced to move to rented accommodation in the nearby town of Marondera. The forced relocation is associated with an apocalyptic

tone: “And so, for me, it was over” (*African Tears*, p. 229). The experience is depicted as a family tragedy and one easily empathises with her loss, described as emanating from the fact that the author is white and expendable in the arena of race-based nationalist postcolonial politics. Nevertheless, Cathy has a warm and caring relationship with her farm workers and their children. She gave her farm workers some of the money realised from the sale of her movable property as a severance package and also gave some of the workers’ children toys and other parting gifts. This indicates that some of the postcolonial master-servant relationships on the farms were not as exploitative and dehumanising as the ZANU-PF grand narrative about land claimed in their attempt to justify the land invasions.

Nevertheless, the novel describes wide-ranging physical displacement. A number of white farmers were forced to abandon their farms and to move to cities in Zimbabwe and even to foreign countries, including South Africa. The farm invasions thus bring in a twist of forced local and international migration into Zimbabwe’s early-twentieth-first-century postcolonial condition. This complicated postcolonial condition has subsequently led to the creation of restless, dislocated and fugitive identities in a number of displaced white commercial farmers, their workers and some ordinary black Zimbabweans. Buckle’s memoir, just as her second one, *Beyond Tears*, is a meta-narrative of the fragmentation of her identity. She grapples with a fugitive identity later on in her life. This is revealed in her fears that she was under surveillance by the notorious state intelligence apparatus, as depicted in the first chapter of *Beyond Tears*. Hence, the forced migrations and the associated labelling as a foreign Other, forced Buckle and other white farmers to review their national identities during this period.

Creating New Discourses on Writing about the Land Issue in Zimbabwe in *African Tears*

This section examines the extent to which Buckle’s work entrenches and/or expands on the old metaphors and other creative qualities of the writings about land in Zimbabwean literary studies. It also evaluates the significance of the memoir and her other writings in the representation of the current Zimbabwean postcolonial condition. Buckle’s *African Tears* is the first literary production that focuses solely on Zimbabwe’s post-2000 land invasions. Other depictions of the events occurring on the invaded farms and their impact on the farmers, their workers, the society in general and on notions about national identities are reflected in later publications such as Christina Lamb’s *House of Stone: The True Story of a Family Divided in War-torn Zimbabwe* (2006) and Peter Godwin’s *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (2006). Nevertheless, the fact that Buckle’s memoir incorporates per-

sonal experience and factual documentation is indicative of how imaginings speak to the existing competing discourses on land. Here, white writers have joined the body of literary works that reflects the significance of land in shaping personal and national identities and the complex perceptions of who deserves access to it. This broadens the literary perceptions and trajectories of land in Zimbabwe because the personal experiences of whites, other than those of blacks, which dominated the writings from the 1980s, are underscored in the post-2000 Zimbabwean literary scene. This also demands complex ways of imagining what a national literature and identities could be in this era. This is especially so, when considering that some white Zimbabweans, such as Buckle, have now added their voices to the body of writings representing the idea of victimhood in the face of an exclusionary and oppressive political hegemony, which is an issue that most black Zimbabwean writers, such as Mungoshi and Hove, as discussed above, have been grappling with from the 1970s.

African Tears is indeed a significant post-2000 literary production evaluating and opening a dialogue on contradictions enshrined in the nationalist, ideological and political discourses on land and identity in the current Zimbabwean postcolonial condition. Buckle's writings subvert the ZANU-PF elite's attempts to redefine national identity and rights to resources, such as land, on the basis of race. This is illustrated by her comment that "[t]his was yet another violation of my rights but what could I do? Not only was I a farmer, but also white – I didn't have any rights any more" (p. 145). This confirms Alexander's (2007: 183) notions in which she links the land with, among other issues, identity formation and contestations over its meaning and role in identity formation. The narrative is also an indictment of the ruling party's manipulation of historical memory, where all whites are labelled as having stolen the land from blacks and yet the Buckles as described in *African Tears* (p. 11) had bought the farm ten years earlier after the government had issued a "Certificate of No Current Interest" that shows that the farm was not earmarked for acquisition. One can even claim that if postcolonial literatures from the former colonies of Britain and other European colonialist were created as a means for "the empire to write back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989), then Buckle's representations are indicative of the commercial farmers' writing back to subvert the repressive and exclusionary hegemony of the ZANU-PF elite and their war veterans in this post-2000 Zimbabwe.

Buckle's narrative is also noteworthy in that it introduced a new post-independent and post-2000 Zimbabwe subversive streak on the Zimbabwean literary scene. During colonialism, knowledge, language and other discourses of power lay with the colonialists. Domination was, therefore, established through silencing and marginalising the black colonised subject. Postcolonial Zimbabwe's history up to the present is illustrative of the con-

tinued existence of the remnants of colonial tendencies or a deliberate appropriation of some of the nationalist rhetoric and violence witnessed during the 1970s anti-colonial war. The Zimbabwe National Newspapers, a corporate body that controls the operations of the widely circulated *Herald* and *Chronicle* news articles, and the broadcast media are predominantly state dominated. Buckle's *African Tears* and other texts portray perceptions based on personal experiences that are in dialogue with, and hence offer counter-discourses to the reportage about the land invasions in the state media. This radically adds on to the growing body of literature of dissent describing the impact of the postcolonial nationalist leadership's activities, which is a process set in motion years ago by writers such as Chinodya in *Harvest of Thorns* (1990).

The fact that Buckle's literary work is linked with her news articles and emails is indicative of the rise to prominence of a creative imaginary that conflates fact, fiction, journalistic discourse and the new media to depict the experiences occurring in the represented country. For instance, the story "A Night of Terror in Marondera" (2001) employs a narrative journalistic style to tell the story of how an elderly couple, who had owned their farm for 40 years, suffered a night of terror after a group of men had invaded the farmhouse. Violent scenes of this dramatic nature are a common experience in *African Tears* and her other texts. Buckle's imaginings thus incorporate different creative styles, technologies of publication – print and new media – and assume a human rights and advocacy tone. The author affirms that her memoirs seek to put the events occurring in post-2000 Zimbabwe in the spotlight and that she "wasn't writing or fighting to preserve a way of life but to speak out for the thousands of people who were too scared to do so for themselves" in *Beyond Tears* (pp. 23-24). It is especially this advocacy tone seeking to assist all victims of the post-2000 land invasions irrespective of race and class that marks her fiction as a distinct departure in the literary trajectories of Zimbabwean literary and cultural production. Furthermore, it indicates the emergence of a postcolonial condition in which old and new notions about race, identity and belonging get subjected to scrutiny as the state seeks to manipulate discourses on the ownership of national resources.

Conclusion

Buckle's writings clearly document the tragic experiences that an ordinary white farmer, such as the author herself, went through during the height of the post-2000 farm invasions. The chaos and contradictions evident in the represented land invasions led to the dislocation of some white commercial farmers. Nevertheless, Buckle reveals here resilience as a writer in that her work documents and speaks loudly about the experiences that she actually

went through on her farm. Furthermore, her imaginings engage in a dialogue with the contradictory and excluding state-held grand narrative about the land and the pro-land invasions reportage evident in the various state-owned media productions. Her work is thus significant in that it describes the nature of the post-2000 land invasions and maps the contestations over identities that were witnessed during this era.

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