

Postcolonial Shona Fiction of Zimbabwe

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Summary

The aim of this article is to apply a version of postcolonial theory to understand the representations of struggles for land in the Shona novel of Zimbabwe. Since the year 2000 there has been an intensification of the use of language that describes land in Zimbabwe in terms that suggest that people have a common way of understanding and relating to this land. This language of oneness between Africans and the land attempts to forestall debate about different perceptions that Zimbabwe has on the emotive theme of the land issue in the country. While politicians insist on a unitary way of viewing the land, Shona authors are at the forefront of demonstrating that within the political centre of the discourse on land, Africans are struggling amongst themselves not only to have access to this land, but also to name it in different ways. A postcolonial reading of Shona novels that explicitly deal with the theme of land refuses to totally endorse the nationalist sentiment that projects Africans as having even levels of access to the land under the controversial land reform. Rereading the “classic” Shona nationalist novel *Feso* (1956) alongside *Vavairo* (1990) and *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) brings out moments of “slippery political significations” (Shohat 1996: 322) in which on the one hand Africans are agreed on the necessity to invest the land in their hands, while on the other hand manifesting intense struggles over the resource, with the consequence of further marginalisation of some Africans in the process.

Opsomming

Die doel met hierdie artikel is om 'n weergawe van postkoloniale teorie toe te pas ten einde die uitbeelding van stryd om grond in die Shona-roman van Zimbabwe te begryp. Sedert die jaar 2000 was daar 'n verskerping van taalgebruik wat grond in Zimbabwe in terme beskryf wat suggereer dat daar 'n gemeenskaplike manier is om die grond te begryp en verwant daaraan te voel. Hierdie taal van eenheid tussen Afrikane en die grond poog om die debat oor verskillende persepsies wat Zimbabweërs oor die netelige tema van die grondkwessie in die land het in die wiele te ry. Terwyl politici aandring op 'n unitêre manier om na die grond te kyk, sukkel Afrikane onder mekaar om nie net toegang tot grond te hê nie, maar ook om op verskillende maniere name daaraan te gee. 'n Postkoloniale interpretasie van Shona-romans wat uitdruklik oor die tema van grond handel, weier om die nasionalistiese sentiment te onderskryf wat voorstel dat Afrikane onder die kontroversiële grondhervorming gelyke toegangsvlakke tot grond het. 'n Herinterpretasie van die “klassieke” nasionalistiese Shona-roman *Feso* (1956) langs *Vavairo* (1990) en *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) onthul oomblikke van “slippery political significations” (Shohat 1996: 322) waarin Afrikane aan die een kant

saamstem oor die noodsaaklikheid daarvan om die grond in hul eie besit te kry, terwyl hulle aan die ander kant intense stryde oor hierdie hulpbron voer – met die gevolg dat sommige Afrikane in die proses verder gemarginaliseer word.

Introduction: Postcolonial Theory and Indigenous-Language Literatures

In Zimbabwean literature in general, and the Shona novel in particular, a postcolonial theoretical reading of fiction has not seriously taken root. Several reasons, all of which cannot be rehearsed here, account for that reluctance. One reason is the undue importance assigned to the sociological approach in Zimbabwean literature, a process that has constructed an overbearing image of that theory as the only one with the capacity to explain Zimbabwean literature. Another reason is that critics of Zimbabwean literature, who are Zimbabweans, are intimidated by the fear of using postcolonial theory that they perceive as implying that we are in a new period, and that the relations of colonial productions have been abolished. This fear is unfounded though, because it cannot be argued in a sustained manner that 1980 did not mark a new era in Zimbabwean politics. Besides, the “post” in postcolonial theory is not so much about periodisation. As a new way of reinterpreting old relations within and after colonial politics, postcolonialism focuses on the legacy of colonialism’s modes of thought among the Africans. What postcolonial theory promises is a refusal to retrieve from literature moments of African historical urgency that are constructed as intact, because within its scopic regime national culture is a fluid cultural arena. A postcolonial reading of the Shona novel would thus suggest that there is no conflict-free zone in the culture of the ordinary people. As such, literary creations such as Shona novels are neither the cultural sites where the values of the blacks are totally deformed and distorted by the colonial order nor are they the cultural spaces for the recuperation of an unproblematic and “authentic” African voice of resistance.

Shona Literature, Subalternity and the “turn” to Gramsci

Postcolonial theory has relied on Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of “hegemony” and “subalternity” to explain literatures emerging from the colonial encounters in Africa and the diaspora. The concept of hegemony that Gramsci introduces in political theory has relevance to cultural and literary studies. In contrast to the “dominant thesis” which implies that the ruled have no power to overhaul their social existence, the notion of hegemony makes us aware that for all the coherency we wish for within the subaltern movements, they are not united; the strategic alliance amongst themselves as well as with those in authority is always shifting as the ruled press for

their own interests (Gramsci 1971: 52). At some moments the subalterns align with dominant political formations. At others, they seek autonomy. These complex and mobile combinations of cultural and ideological elements in the subalterns are not surprising: the subalterns do not wish to remain in a condition of subalternity. They aim to take control of state power and thus become the dominant force. In this process the subalterns reveal uneven levels of consciousness. Those subalterns who are dissatisfied can remain in a condition of rebellion against their fellows with whom they have had a relationship of alliance and potential cleavages. But the new subalterns would be considered new enemies to be vanquished either through force and consent by their erstwhile comrades. The rewriting of history, literature or even sociology from the point of view of the subaltern is therefore not a given in which there is always mutual consensus. While the subalterns can authorise emancipatory discourses, it is also true that any of their members in the insurgent community who choose to continue in such subalternity are regarded as hostile towards the inversive process initiated by the struggle and hence as being on the side of the enemy (Chakabarty 1996: 14).

Postcolonial theory has been used to explain the paradoxes within creative writing. Postcolonial theorists look for the sense and direction of life in the “dailiness of routines, and habits” in order to bring out previously muted areas and relations within the life of the oppressed to begin to speak (Chambers 1988: 607). A conceptualisation of the ruled as possessing a coherent vision at all times, or representing them as always resisting some domination, fails to open up the questions of how they engage, deflect and appropriate power (Cooper 2003: 24). It narrows the resistance politics of the subalterns because it underestimates how in real life the ordinary people embrace economic opportunities developed under colonialism which they did not want to give up even as they observed some forms of oppression in the opportunities that they wanted to contest. In literature, therefore, a refusal to acknowledge that subaltern narratives could graduate into variations of the master narrative could undermine our knowledge of the concept of “subalternity” constructed by the dominant classes in society as well as by those who are doing the struggling to move out of oppressive relations. The consequence of such an oversight is that the agency of the subalterns is arrested since their history is grooved into a position of “powerlessness” or subalternity. How this incapacitates knowledge of ways in which the subordinated could seize control of the means of imaginative production and thus construct alternative public spheres is signalled by Dipesh Chakrabarty (1996: 239). He states that too simple a rejection of the forces of modernity within which the ruled seek empowerment could be politically suicidal. These insights from postcolonial theory can be used to decipher struggles in Shona literature from Zimbabwe to test the extent to which creative works confirm or even reject these theoretical assumptions bringing any understanding of literature and representations of struggle into crisis.

Feso: A Fractured National Consciousness

A reading of *Feso* (Mutswairo 1956) within the framework of postcolonial theory subverts the conventional interpretation of the novel that puts more premiums on the assumed stable narrative of national resistance. Contrary to Chiwome's evaluation of *Feso* as a "double romance of tradition on one hand, and love and adventure, on the other" (Chiwome 1996: 57), the novel belongs to the genre of fabulist allegory. This genre fractures narratives within the text, creates fissures within the materiality of metaphor and in the process registers torsions that dislocate mastering discourses within national memory. In *Feso*, two Shona tribes who are at war with each other are depicted as a counterpoint to the myth that African past was coherent, an endemic state of affairs without its own contradictions. By portraying Chief Pfumojena as a bully, and one who attacked neighbouring Shona clans as well as molested those of his Vanyai people he did not agree with, Mutswairo gives pre-colonial Shona past historical agency and a dynamism that subverts negritude mythopoesis that presents Shona past as unaffected by changes inherent in social life in any society.

The convenient imagery of Guruuswa and Pasichigare that sustained the moral economy of the values of African cultural nationalism in the historical encounter between blacks and whites in the 1970s is in *Feso* subjected to critical scrutiny through the war between Chief Nyangombe of the Vahota people and Chief Pfumojena of the Vanyai people. It is material that in the novel Pfumojena is defeated by the combined forces of Nyangombe and the political "dissidents" running away from Pfumojena's misrule. The fall of Pfumojena in *Feso* is inevitable. He violates the moral sanctity of those he rules. The appeal by the old man from the Vanyai people to the ancestral powers of Nehanda to intervene only serves to dramatise the capacity of nationalist ideology to appeal to the past in order to ratify actions deemed appropriate for the survival of the clan in the historical present. This appeal to Nehanda reveals the extent to which tradition can reinvent itself in the modern world. This praise poetry uttered to placate and mobilise Nehanda to the side of the victimised Vanyai people implies that Africans are abused by colonialists and then forced to live like dogs in their own country of birth (Mutswairo 1956: 35-36).

This poem which is part of Shona clan poetry and its existence within a largely allegorical novel is itself a successful attempt to mainstream African cultural idioms. Mutswairo so effectively uses the black voice of resistance to land alienation implied in the phrase "venhaka dzedu ... voshaya nzvimbo dzokurarama" (p. 56). The persona protests against wholesale arrests of black people by colonialism, and their subsequent imprisonment and death en masse like 'nhunzi or fleas. White settlers feared the allegorical potency of *Feso* and they banned the novel from African secondary schools because militant black nationalists appropriated this poem and

recited it at public political meetings. In other words, in the historical context of black nationalism of the 1970s, *Feso* was being used by fighters for freedom to consolidate the goals of the struggle, nationhood and black national consciousness. Then *Feso* as narrative discourse walked hand in hand with nationalist politics. By situating his voice of protest and critique of colonial modernity within the cultural forms supplied by Shona oral tradition, Mutswairo reaffirms the reinvention of black oral tradition within the discourse of modernity in a context in which the novel is now being deployed to oppose colonial policies.

That being said, it, however, ought to be pointed out that the privileging of the nationalist narrative in *Feso* has often resulted in obscuring its potential fractures. In the novel, the social positions of black women are stereotyped. Chipochedenga is abducted from her father Pfumojena. Chipochedenga's subsequent marriage to Nyangombe confirms the meaning of her name – gift from God – to be won as a prize by chief Nyangombe. On the other hand, Rumba's social position as Chipo's minion does not change. Furthermore, the moral economy of the image of Nehanda in cultural nationalism as a female fighter is in the poem undermined by the fact that she is addressed in masculine terms such as "*baba mutswene*". Although Shona oral tradition suggests that Nehanda was possessed by a male spirit, what is implied in that construction is that women cannot achieve success in their own right unless they are associated with great male ancestors. This paradox in the resistance narrative suggests that the author's ideology is ambivalent about the capabilities of womanhood. In the 1960s and 1970s, *Feso* was bound to fascinate cultural nationalists because the novel "spoke" the language of African black males as the main actors in the drama of the conflict between blacks and whites in Rhodesia though clothed in the "female body". The author may also not have foreseen the potential of his novel being reinterpreted as a critique of post-independence delays in redistributing land to the black majority in whose name the struggle was waged. These fractures in the national consciousness that *Feso* seeks to promote suggests that Mutswairo's resistance politics is split and exists within colonialism against which he writes in a paradoxical relationship of "dependency and antagonism" (Gilroy 1993: 101). It could be argued that this complex syncretic mode of existence of *Feso* is its modernity and that as such one cannot sustain a line of thought that projects the novel as having been completely manipulated and distorted by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. In fact, the story of *Feso* is based on Shona oral tradition. This story found its way into the written mode when Mutswairo wrote his first novel. During the liberation struggle, the story of struggling against domestic tyranny was performed at political mass rallies by the leaders of the struggle. There is thus a cyclical movement from orature to written and back to oral performance that marks the public life of *Feso*, the novel. This unstable condition of *Feso*'s existence both inside and outside the violent ambience of colonialism and also inside and outside orature and the written distinguishes it from

the content of the form of Charles Mungoshi's novel *Ndikokupindana Kwamazuva*.

Vavariro and the Enigma of "Arrival" in Postcolonial Zimbabwe

The novel *Vavariro* by Raymond Choto does not confirm all the aspects of the triumphalist ideology of war and peace narrativised in *Mhandu Dzo-Rusununguko*. The title of *Vavariro* identifies as its provenance the quest to understand the main aims of the war and measure them against the results of the war in 1980. After independence these objectives seem trampled and obliterated by the new leaders who in the novel now grab the new farmland vacated by the white settlers. In its literary processes of mapping out the contours of this enigma of the arrival of independence *Vavariro* enacts or performs a double movement of obeisance and resistance to the homogenising tendencies of the ideology of nationalism and the discourses that have emerged to define that nationalism. *Vavariro* is a novel about the Zimbabwean liberation war fought intensely between 1977 and 1979. In the story is Comrade Tumirai who has brought a group of Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) guerrillas to fight the Rhodesian Front soldier from the backyard of elder, Mr Charira's, village. The mutual relationship that is to grow between the guerrillas and the village peasants is anticipated from the outset of the novel. This relationship is in the novel depicted through the exchange between VaChimoto and his wife, the nameless, Amai VaSekesai, where they are gloating over a potentially successful season (Choto 1990: 7). In the exchange husband and wife are celebrating the coming of rain after a long wait. The metaphysical hunger that Amai vaSekesai alludes to is as physically induced by drought, inasmuch as it is a spiritual quest for political independence. That the "literal" rain is transformed into a veritable symbol of the guerrillas who have come to fight for independence (another form of rain and life) is captured in the very sense that VaChimoto could not finish his response to his wife before the guerrillas wearing heavy military fatigues pass through his field (p. 7).

It is the similarity between the military gear that the guerrillas are putting on to the green colour of VaChimoto's green maize that identifies the guerrillas as the "true" sons of the soil. Raymond Choto also takes this occasion of commenting on the sudden disappearance of the guerrillas, their speed and movement to resuscitate the myth of the invincibility of the guerrillas. Amai VaSekesai confirms this reading of the novel when she is surprised that the guerrillas who were in front of them one moment suddenly are no longer there the next moment (p. 9). Part of the author's success here his ability to capture the myths of infallibility of the guerrillas that sustained the peasants' conception of them. In this construction, guerrillas are depicted as

daredevils who could not easily be intimidated by the enemy. This understanding of the guerrillas by the peasants also reveals the capacity of the same peasants to construct new narratives of the war. Through word of mouth or orature, the novel's depiction of the guerrillas on the one hand refuses to represent the war through a single image. On the other hand, the peasants are infantilised as they are depicted as people ready to accept the impossible without questioning. The reality is that guerrillas were not fortune-tellers. Neither were they able to divine who was a sell-out and who not. In the novel it is Jeri, the leader of the *mujibhas*, who tells the guerrillas what they want to know about whose sons have joined hands with enemy forces. As Jeri tells Tumirai, some blacks like Peter Bango and John Zeme have become the white man's police force while Jimi Makomo and Tomu Gore serve in the white man's army (p. 20).

By the time the guerrillas enter elder Charira's village, they are, through Jeri, familiar with the social roles that villagers are playing in the struggle. As for whether the guerrillas could disappear, Charles Pfukwa, an ex-combatant himself, writes that this notion has a rational explanation in that guerrillas had no vehicles so they had to rely on speed and high mobility. The reality according to Charles Pfukwa is that the guerrilla force was highly mobile. Its high level of mobility meant the enemy could never catch up with them. Reduced mobility meant a high risk of exposure and detection by the enemy. Staying too long in one area enabled the enemy to unleash its fire force and inflict heavy casualties. For every air raid there was always a scapegoat, a sell-out to account for the loss of comrades in a surprise attack even where it was due to poor strategies and tactics on the part of the guerrillas. So, to avoid unnecessary casualties, mobility was a key tactic in guerrilla strategy (Pfukwa 2007). Guerrillas were human beings; they could misjudge their actions resulting in heavy casualties of both the guerrillas and the ordinary men, women and black children.

In *Vavariro*, Raymond Choto portrays the guerrillas as always winning the battles against the heavily armed Rhodesian forces (1990: 39). In one of those encounters between the two opposed forces, an elated *mujibha*, Kufa, celebrates the military superiority of the small group of guerrillas against the fire power of a legion of Rhodesian forces (p. 41). Kufa's language evokes the epic heroism of Africans reclaiming their identity and dignity through their own historical agency. In depicting the military exploits of the guerrillas in an exaggerated fashion, Choto is consciously undermining those of Zimbabwean writers and their critics who portray blacks under colonialism as victims totally emasculated from taking up arms against the colonial system. It also seems that Choto is aware of a brand of postcolonial criticism of Zimbabwean literature in particular and African literature in general that represents black experience under colonialism as distorted beyond recognisable identity and that inscribes blacks as people without any space of resistance available outside domination. If this reading is correct, then it could be said that by creating the image of the guerrillas as an effi-

cient force, Choto is rejecting the victim paradigm, counteracting it with a “conceptual apparatus that acknowledges de facto modes of resistance” (Weate 2003: 17) among the blacks of Rhodesia.

It would seem that Raymond Choto in *Vavariro* depicts guerrillas as all-time winners in order to disprove those works of art that respond to colonialism by emphasising the victimhood of blacks. The very same depiction of the guerrillas in the battle in terms dictated by the imagery of Hollywood films ironically becomes a form of imaginative and cognitive roadblock to an understanding of the contradictions among the guerrillas, between the guerrillas and the masses and, equally so, the petty jealousies and generational conflicts within the masses themselves. An overemphasis of the military prowess of the guerrillas detracts the novel from giving the reader a detailed analysis of the war aims. Privileging the depiction of military resistance at the expense of the ideological development of his characters in the novel results in the author failing to account adequately for potential and alternative modes of resistance that blacks resorted to whenever they felt that military resistance was not an option or inappropriate. Expanding on this critique of the depiction of guerrillas in superhuman terms is Rino Zhuwarara who observes that in creative works such as *Vavariro*, guerrillas are transformed into automatons. Zhuwarara sees this kind of depiction as actually, and ironically, diminishing the humanness of the guerrillas. As he notes, “[A]nyone familiar with the actual Zimbabwean struggle will know that the liberation struggle was a slow, painful, and sometimes discouraging process fraught with perilous contradictions and costly mistakes. The creation of history is far more complex and more protracted than the Hollywood version” (Zhuwarara 1985: 142) offered in *Vavariro*. In his desire to heal the wounded racial psyche of blacks by depicting a romanticised image of guerrillas, Choto’s novel confirms a trend in Shona novels that has come under severe attack because it projects the relationship between the masses as smooth, and without its own internal contradictions that threatened to derail the progress of the struggle (p. 28).

At one of the *pungwes* (night virgils) in the novel, the guerrillas are seen conscientising the masses. The mood that is captured at the *pungwe* in the novel is one of mutual trust, rapport, and of understanding each other even when the villagers are meeting the guerrillas for the first time. No room is left to doubt as was the case in the actual struggle where the enemy forces sometimes masqueraded as the real guerrillas. This characterisation of the relationship of the masses with the guerrillas as unmarked with ideological tensions “present[s] a political readiness and a collective sanctioning of the need to engage in an armed struggle by the entire population” (Sibanyoni 1995: 55). This ideology of political voluntarism being promoted in *Vavariro* helps the author to sanction the creation of a viable myth for the legitimation of the nationalist government that comes to power in 1980. The problem with this depiction is that it occludes the fact that during the actual

struggle guerrillas used both coercion and persuasion to recruit the masses to their side. Because *Vavariro* ignores this reality of the struggle, the novel fails to ward off the lure of the dominant nationalist ideology, and its discourse represents the margin inhabited by the masses as constituted by values and identities undistorted by the colonial powers.

It seems for Choto, in *Vavariro*, the return to the source could not realise for the masses because according to the novel these peasants are the repositories of the values of the black people, which can be retrieved intact and used in a new and changed context of the struggle. In other words, within the relations of the masses with each other and their new force introduced by the guerrillas, there are inevitable infractions that sometimes resulted in guerrillas being wiped out when sold out to the Rhodesian forces by the very masses in whose name the guerrillas fought the war.

It could be argued that in *Vavariro*, Raymond Choto is being deliberate in highlighting the image of the military success of the guerrillas. One could suggest that a romanticised and exaggerated image of the guerrillas is in *Vavariro* being offered in order to compare it with the image of the military success of the guerrillas. One could also suggest that a romanticised and exaggerated image of the guerrillas is in *Vavariro* being offered in order to compare it with the very diminished and minimised benefits of the struggle of the ordinary men such as VaChimoto after independence. From this reading, *Vavariro* partially revises its allegiance to the ideology of nationalism that it paradoxically promotes and critiques. This resistance to the betrayal of the peasants is in the novel registered during the confrontation between the peasants who have occupied Derek's farm and Comrade Nhamoyetsoka, the new member of parliament (Choto 1990: 150). After the war when Derek, the white farmer, has been killed, the African peasants from Charira's village move in to occupy the farm once owned by Derek. The violent uncoupling of the myth of collective national interests during the war (p. 79) is dramatised in the inevitable confrontation between Nhamoyetsoka, in league with his two comrades against the popular will. The peasants think and know themselves to be the main heroes of the struggle. They were beaten by Rhodesian forces, sacrificed their cattle, and in the process lost their sources of wealth (p. 55). Whole villages, Mr Charira, his wife and cattle, were wiped out by the Rhodesian armies. The beatings, the terrible loss of African or peasants' lives and the decimation of their domestic animals by Rhodesian soldiers are meant to present the sheer brutality of the Rhodesian (in)security forces who had to resort to murder of unarmed peasants when they feared to confront the guerrillas. The callousness of the Rhodesian forces depicted in *Vavariro* shows the emerging struggle between the peasants and the new leaders at the end of the novel. The novel accentuates a sense of betrayal of the aspirations of the masses who sacrificed much but are now being sidelined by the new elites. At the end of the novel ex-combatants carve up large swathes of land and push out the peasants from formerly white-owned land. This is ironical because the war to recover lost

land was waged to give land to the peasants after independence. The ex-combatants in *Vavariro* display their arrogance towards the masses when Nhamoyetsoka threatens to bring the police to evict the peasants from Derek's farm. Since he is now MP he thinks he can abuse his position with impunity. Social mobility is also written in the unspoken discourse of material accoutrements that Nhamoyetsoka possesses in the form of a Mercedes Benz and that he has become member of parliament of the people he no longer has links with. Nhamoyetsoka also shifts from referring to the peasants as "*makomuredzi*" to "*pane vanhu*" – the anonymous noun – and raps it all by suggesting that the peasants are breaking the rule of law in settling on the farm that the MP claims has become his. For him, "*vanhu vari kugara papurazi pano zvisiri pamwero*" (p. 150).

But the peasants momentarily stick to their guns and refuse to move off the farm. They actually remind "their" MP that the war was fought so that the peasants in the overcrowded rural areas could be resettled. In the verbal war between peasants who have settled themselves and their war leaders, the peasants register momentary victory. However, they are subsequently bundled away from the new farm by the police sent by Nhamoyetsoka, their wartime commander (pp. 150-151). What Raymond Choto successfully captures here is the struggle to control land, which is now between the peasants living in the overcrowded sandy areas and the black elites. That the novel was released in 1990 long before the land takeovers that characterised the period 2000 to 2003 in Zimbabwe suggests that the land question was one of the unresolved issues of independence. In a sense then, the peasants' resistance against the new elites demonstrates that postcolonial Zimbabwe is politically volatile with new struggles waged along class lines. The irony in *Vavariro* is that the peasants' open resistance to the new rulers cannot be maintained for long because the new elites deploy the police that violently throw the peasants off the new farm. After haggling with the police the peasants are thrown into a huge truck and whisked back to their land of sandy soil (p. 151). This conclusion of the novel suggests that the masses were betrayed by those that they fed during the struggle. In fact, Tumirai is being cynical when he thanks VaChimoto for helping the guerrillas to win the war and enjoy the fruits of independence (p. 156). Tumirai is now at the end of the novel happily married and lives in the very low-density suburbs, with a phone in the bathroom! For VaChimoto this is a sign of opulence, the kind of which he does not fully approve (p. 156).

What VaChimoto attacks is not the good life per se, but independence that has been transformed into a life of privileges for a few like Tumirai. The end of *Vavariro* does not depict an open revolt by the peasants against the politics of deception and betrayal of the goals of independence by the new elites. Although this might be misunderstood to mean that the peasants have bowed down to the pressure of betrayal, the reality is that the novel uses the discursive technique of the questioning mode to measure the distance

between the war promises and the reality of unfulfilled aims of that war after independence. VaChimoto is exposing the hypocrisy of the liberation leaders such as Tumirai when VaChimoto reminds him that it was the guerrillas who told the masses that after the war they would be allowed to settle on white-owned farms. The irony is that the peasants are chased away from the farms in whose name the liberation struggle was waged. This is done by their former commanders: “[T]isuka tanga tava kugara kupurazi kwa-Dereki” *asi takazobvako tomhanya*” (p. 154). With this last remark, Va-Chimoto passes moral judgment on the ideology of nationalism and reveals that the leaders cheated the masses when they created a binding mythology of collective aspirations of the black people.

***Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) and the Paradox of Land Reform in Zimbabwe**

Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo is the latest creative offering in the Shona language. The novel, presented through a series of letters, is about the land issue in post-independent Zimbabwe. The story revolves around a young girl called Sekai. At home she is sexually discriminated against as she is denied an opportunity to receive schooling. Her father thinks it's a waste of time sending a girl child to school. His warped reasoning is that if Sekai becomes successful after school she will be married and subsequently benefit her potential in-laws. The father's conservatism which is inferred by the Shona patriarch's ideology of female silencing and subordination is revealed by Sekai when she writes a letter to her aunt.

Zvanzi Sekai Ngaadzoke izizvi a zorima. Vati ndiani marume angazazorora simbe isingagoni kubata badza. Baba vati kana Sekai achida kupinda chikoro achapinnzwa nomurume wake.

(Mutasa 2005: 13)

Male chauvinism is redolent in the assumption that women have no identity if they are not married to a man. *Sekai* does not tell a story of the absencing of women on Zimbabwe's cultural landscape. As a strategy of containment in fiction it suggests the total exclusion of female characters in male-anchored fiction. On the other hand, silencing of women is a different strategy that operates through the acts of belittling women, giving them negative or marginal roles. Mutasa's novel is written against silencing of women, the author recognising that silencing of the female voice can be achieved through not centralising the role that women play. In this respect *Sekai* is written as a rebuild of the ideology of contracting the female voice. Mutasa deliberately puts Sekai at the centre of his creative consciousness. Sekai is taken to school against her father's wish by her two aunts, Tendai's mother from Mbumbwa and Rose's mother from Makomba. Not only does this act

demonstrate female solidarity, but it acknowledges that women are considerably dominated in a patriarchal society. In school, Sekai is a smart girl (p. 4), and is under fire in school debates. One of the debates centres on the issue of land reform in Zimbabwe. During one of those debates, Sekai is sent home to convince her schoolmates that land reform was a necessity and that women could begin to own land in their own right.

Madzimai Zvisina kuti mudzimai akaroorwa here kana kuti kwete ngaapiwe pokurima kana achida. Izvi zvinoita kuti tiise upfuni mumako oruzhinji.

(Mutasa 2005: 19)

Sekai articulates the aspirations of the ordinary people – as suggested by her friend Zakaria – as to put land as one of the means of production into the hands of the majority. As Sekai puts it,

Vakomana navasikana kanatakatarisana nenyaya dzeupumi munyika chatinoda ndechokuti imi muvevo noupfumi uhwu mumaoko enyu kwete kumirira kusumudzzira upfumi hwavamwe vanhu.

(Mutasa 2005: 18)

More importantly, Sekai emphasises the need for trained personnel to make land reform a success; this explains why she chooses to do a degree in agriculture and environmental studies in America. When she returns, she acquires land and becomes one of the few prosperous farmers in Zimbabwe. But other women are not as lucky as Sekai. They remain marginalised in land redistribution acquired by young men and some ex-combatants, all who are bent on getting hold of good farming land for themselves. The young man Tironyo is determined to prevent old women from getting land: “*Kuno ndokwemakomuredhi*” (p. 34). The irony is that Tironyo was only a baby when the war of liberation was fought in the 1970s and could therefore not have participated in it since he was very young. Yet, these are the youths who are empowering themselves in order to disempower poor women in need of land. The contradictory narrative of female ownership of land is resolved when Sekai tells people that they now have the land, “*Minda*” *Sekai akadaidzira*.

“Minda tave nayo”, Ruzhinji rwakadaidzira.

(Mutasa 2005: 103)

The strength of the novel at this point in the narration is its capacity to openly support the government-sponsored land reform. This close link between *Sekai*'s narratives of affirming nationalisation confirms Stuart Hall's (1994) view that the relationship between the ordinary people such as Sekai in the novel and the black rulers is not always adversarial. In Hall's words, the rulers can rule if they are able to satisfy some of the aspirations of the

ruled. Hear Hall: “[T]here are lines of alliance cleavages” (1994: 460) between the ruled and those who rule them. In other words, David Mutasa’s novel is complex in that it recognises the fact that ordinary people have interests that might coincide with those of the Zimbabwean nation. But the problem is that it is probably fair to say that in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo*, Mutasa is motivated by the closure to answer back to the critics of the Zimbabwe land reform. There is sufficient evidence in the text to support the view that the authorial ideology is very close to the official stance in government circles on the land issue. For example, the desire to be impartial, “*Musapa Minda Muchitarira bato rake*” (p. 36), is undermined by the fact that the land issue is still being debated in racial terms (p. 49). Sekai’s narrative of a graduate-cum-farmer silences the reader’s curiosity in wanting to know the contradictions of the land reform. By virtue of her education, Sekai has entered into the elite class of those with money and resources to farm. Nothing about the poor women in whose name the war was fought is said in terms of how much land they benefited from the land reform. Seku Gwariro can be a “successful” farmer, but is not a full-time farmer. He works in South Africa, and gives instructions on how to run his farm from South Africa. Sekuru Gwariro’s case demonstrates the problem of absent landlordism. The result is insufficient enforcement of his plans. In other words, to get land is one thing, to possess capital, expertise, fertiliser, etc. is another. This important dimension of the land reform has not been adequately explored in the novel. In fact, it has been silenced by the constant refrain, “*Tana tapinda mumapurazi ticharima todaya yaka wanda tobva tatengesa*” (p. 25). This assumption that it is problematic to shift from being peasant farmers to being commercial farmers to some extent, reflects ideological innocence on the part of Sekai. Tambaoga, the Zimbabwean singer, once sang: “*Kana mvura ikanaya chete gore rino tinoto zadza matura*”. The irony in his song is that viable farming cannot rely solely on God’s will or seasonal rainfall. There has to be planning in terms of creating dams. This dimension of planning and its problems has not been explored. It has been silenced through the use of a nationalistic discourse of celebrating the taking over of land.

Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo has a welcome, creative effect, imaginatively opening the struggles over control of land in Zimbabwe. The novel is blighted by the fact that it insists on a pastoral revolution unmarked by serious internal problems. This is far from the truth. In fact, omission of the contradictions arising from land reform as textualised in Mutasa’s novel sometimes consciously silences other discourses of the nation that could tell the story of land reform in a different and non-partisan way. Although a multiplicity of voices has been used in the novel, all have been made to reach consensus on the desirability of the land reform. This is in itself not the problem. The problem arises when the events in the novel attempt to sustain a monomyth that the problems in implementing land reform in Zimbabwe are solely ideological. The political issues related to reform have

been marginalised and it is these that matter. The point is that although land reform was inevitable, its goal has been limited to owning land. Unless land is put to productive use, reform is undermined. Unless there are careful planning and provision of farming inputs, land reform will not address issues of famine. Unless there is a marked cultural revolution that undermines male chauvinistic attitudes women will remain shackled to the land as labourers and not controllers of wealth.

Conclusion

Previous studies that commented on the Shona novel depicted the literature as a cultural site from which to see how the lives of the Africans were totally distorted by colonial forces. This picture of cultural paralysis of the Shona can be modified when postcolonial theory is applied to the understanding of Shona literature. Postcolonial theory opens up contradictions within the novels, showing that the lives of the subalterns are too complex to be reduced to one long night of suffering. Africans suffered under colonialism and after it. But the same Africans fought against colonialism and are still fighting the new oppressive culture of the black elites. An application of postcolonial theory to Shona literature yields new ideas of defining resistance.

Feso is nationalist text par excellence. It emphasises the collective struggles that blacks have engaged in since 1890 to wrestle land from colonialism. After 1980, the year Zimbabwe got independence, internally the national crisis suggested in the ways ordinary people occupied white commercial land in the early eighties that although the nation is a giver of identities it suppresses others in its processes of consolidating its hegemony.

Vavariro anticipated the bitter struggles over the control of land between blacks and whites and amongst blacks.

The intensification of the language of racial and class struggles over land is further dramatised in the novel *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* which can be taken as a fictional depiction of wars over land that took place between 2000 and 2008. These struggles centre not only on the fight between blacks and whites but also amongst blacks themselves. The novel introduces the dimension of a class struggle in the struggle for land in Zimbabwe. This is a radical depiction of the land question in the country in which history books have portrayed the land issue in Zimbabwe as a racial one only.

In short, using a postcolonial perspective to appreciate the Shona novel thus introduces critical innovation and complexity in the understanding of the Shona literature.

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