

The Zimbabwean Liberation-War Novel in Shona: An Analysis of the Symbolic Value of the Guerrilla as Legitimizing Discourse of Nation

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Summary

The article discusses the Shona war novel published in the early 1980s as an avatar of human-factor content for the fledgling nation. It particularly draws corroborative evidence from selected Shona war narratives published between 1980 and 1985, a time when Zimbabwe attained political independence. While this novel has largely received negative criticism, the article advances the contention that it was/is legitimizing discourse of the new nationalist government at independence in 1980. The nationalist government needed state-centred narratives that would sanctify its rulership, and obviously the liberation war provided an undisputed source for such narratives, and this trend remains unchanged up to this day. In this regard, the Shona war novel manipulates history for nation building and national identity formation purposes as well as the fortification of a heroic tradition. It achieves this by creatively blending history, myth and legend in a manner that defines the past, present and future trajectory of nation in terms that negate withdrawal and resignation. This makes it inseparable from the painstaking search for and enunciation of ennobling human-factor content and values. Without appropriate human-factor orientation, both the integrity of the nation as well as efforts aimed at nation building would be a far-fetched possibility. The article also points out that the Shona war novel played such a role because its production was controlled by the state-funded Literature Bureau.

Opsomming

In hierdie artikel word die Shona-oorlogsroman bespreek as 'n openbaring van die menslike faktor vir die jong Zimbabwiese nasie. Stawende bewyse word verkry uit geselekteerde Shona-oorlogsnarratiewe wat tussen 1980 en 1985 gepubliseer is – die tyd toe Zimbabwe politieke onafhanklikheid verkry het. Terwyl hierdie tipe roman grotendeels negatiewe kritiek ontvang het, word in hierdie artikel aangevoer dat dit die legitimerende diskoers van die nuwe nasionalistiese regering met onafhanklikwording in 1980 was en nog is. Die nasionalistiese regering het staatsgesentreerde narratiewe nodig gehad om sy bewind te regverdig en die bevrydingsoorlog was 'n onbestrede bron van sulke narratiewe. Hierdie neiging bly tot vandag onveranderd.

Die Shona-oorlogsroman manipuleer die geskiedenis ten gunste van nasiebou, die vorming van 'n nasionale identiteit en die versterking van 'n heldetradisie. Dit word vermag deur geskiedenis, mite en legende kreatief saam te smelt, wat die verlede, die hede en die toekomstige baan van die nasie op so 'n wyse omskryf dat dit onttrekking en onderwerping negeer. Dit maak dit onskeibaar van die nougesette soeke na en verklaring van veredelende menslike inhoud en waardes. Sonder die korrekte gerigtheid op die menslike faktor bly sowel die integriteit van die nasie as pogings wat op nasiebou gemik is maar net 'n vergesogte moontlikheid. Hierdie artikel beklemtoon dat die Shona-oorlogsroman hierdie rol vervul het omdat die produksie daarvan deur die staatsgefinansierde Literature Bureau beheer is.

Introduction

The article deliberately avoids the fashionable tendency to dismiss the Shona war novel, as is largely the case with current critical scholarship in Zimbabwe. Instead, it derives impetus from the need to underscore the early 1980s liberation-war novelistic renditions in Shona as vessels of the founding human-factor content for the neocolonial nation, but without being completely neglectful of the weaknesses of this genre. The exegesis of liberation-war historical novels in Zimbabwe's African languages has to a large extent ignored the symbolic and human-factor value of the narrative discourse in question. Again, the article attempts, in a few instances, to show the interface of the Shona war novel and historical fact because critics such as Chiwome (1998) and Furusa (1998) have only been concerned with dismissing these narratives as celebratory, falsifying history and guilty of historical verbicide. They have not attempted to draw out the link that exists between the Shona war novel and history. While a concern with historical verisimilitude is indispensable because "truth is the property of the national cause" (Fanon 1967: 39), this article contends that these novelistic renditions attempt to recreate history using images and cannot be separated from the embryonic processes of nation making, nation building and identity formation from an official perspective. In order to fully appreciate the orientation and sensibility of these narratives, it is crucial for critics to apply a set of investigative parameters such as authenticity of the historical material presented in novels, the intention of the author as well as the social function of the texts (Fleischman cited in Muwati 2009: 36). Particularly, if critics take into account the intention as well as the intended social function of the early 1980s Shona war narratives, it would not be impossible to find something positive about them. For instance, in an interview with Itai Muwati in Harare, Vitalis Nyawaranda, who is one of the Shona war writers explains his intention and motivation as follows:

The romantic sensibility is because that was the mood of the time. It served a purpose. We were writing in context. The idea of optimism was popular during the era of independence. We were entering the golden age. We had lost our jobs. We wanted to promote the euphoric mood. People had yearned

for change and writers were caught up in the mood – celebrating, not recording history.

(Muwati 2009: 275)

The creative fusion of history and the articulation of celebration through myth, fantasy and legend discursively portray the national human-factor identity based on values such as courage, determination, resilience, hard work and sacrifice. The human factor, which Adjibolosoo (1998: 11) describes as “a spectrum of personality characteristics and other dimensions of human performance that enable social, economic and political institutions to function and remain functional over time”, is indispensable to the survival and integrity of nations. It is impossible to find a nation that avoids absolutising its history/history of struggle and victory as a basis for its human-factor content, even though this can be manipulated for narrow interests. The novelists, who are the modern version of storytellers, make use of the story, because as Achebe (1987: 124) explains, “it is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters The story is our escort”.

It is important, particularly at this time when the Zimbabwean liberation war history and all other celebratory discourse of the 1970s war have come under cantankerously vituperative criticism from several scholars and organisations in and outside Zimbabwe, “to go back and fetch what [might possibly be forgotten]” (Stewart 2004: 3), that is, the nation-building role of history and the role the 1980s Shona war historical narratives played in this regard. These narratives operationalise and marshal the heroic image of the guerrilla as symbolic resource and legitimating discourse of nation and nationalism. This is similar to Kriger’s (2003: 62) elaborate observation that “to build power and legitimate power, the ruling party turned to the guerrillas and also appealed to its heroic participation in the liberation struggle”. This is not surprising given the fact that the legitimacy of nations derives from narratives which rubricate the fundamental human-factor principles that provide direction, inspiration and vision.

Discursive Apotheosis of the Guerrilla and the National Human Factor

The Zimbabwean liberation war, properly understood, is “a history of the people who suffered and died, and of those who survived to witness the birth of a new Zimbabwe. It is a history of all the people of Zimbabwe – the big and the small, the rich and the poor – with no particular concern for those who were or are in leadership positions (Dumbutshena in a foreword in Auret 1992: vii). This realisation makes the liberation war a redoubtable bastion of the Zimbabwean present and future, and a source of vitalising

human-factor values. This is precisely so because the war made it possible for the people of Zimbabwe to have a sense of their own history, without which there “would have been no real identity” to talk about. Without a “real identity a people is doomed to a life of ‘shame and embarrassment’” (Ephraim 2003: 7). Clearly, the operationalisation of the battlefield image of the guerrilla is such that the war becomes a source of regime (new nation) legitimacy and national human-factor content. The advancement of the heroic paradigm of the liberation war leads to a discursive apotheosis of the guerrilla. This also translates to human-factor identity since Zimbabwe, then emerging from a costly war, needed indefatigable, courageous, patriotic and committed individuals.

In the novels analysed in this article, the guerrilla, especially the commander, embodies the philosophy of struggle and victory and is a paragon of sustainable human-factor values. Other guerrillas are seen through this personality. In other words, history is seen through the life and experiences of one great leader. He embodies the general group invincibility and patriotic culture as hero. At the same time, the guerrilla leader becomes an unforgettable role model who combines patriotism and fearlessness. It is easy for young readers in particular, to identify with this great and larger-than-life force as he is the author’s voice of history. This makes him more of a role player than an ideal fighter in a dehumanising war, an aspect that reflects the influence of Shona oral storytelling traditions. It could also be the reason why most critics derogate the Shona war novel because they fail to appreciate its fusion of history and oral forms.

For the young readers in schools, where the majority of these Shona novels are prescribed as set books, the liberation war becomes a memorable and inspiring project in Zimbabwean history. Kriger (2003: 65) vindicates this view in her reasoning that representations of guerrillas were symbols of “the indefatigable collective will of Zimbabweans to be the makers of their own history” and of “the glory of the final victory in unity”, and “were an inspiration to especially the youth to emulate the heroes’ ideals, values and actions”. While this is one of the benefits derived from such representations, the conspicuous danger is that such a sensibility has the potential to promote what can be termed “the cult of the leader and of personalities” (Fanon 1967: 11), particularly in the aftermath of independence. Diallo (2007: 161) is again uncomfortable with the tendency to conceive “almost everything through the leaders and the elite. [To him, this] is the method of elitist historiography”.

In Makata’s Shona war novel, *Gona reChimurenga* (1982), the three guerrillas at the centre of liberation-war history are depicted as immortal. The body’s capacity to defy death and withstand violence in a context characterised by the overwhelming practice of killing or being killed rebounds with echoes of extraterrestrial toughness and resilience. This image, as already insinuated, becomes a part of the founding identity for nation and nationalist politics in general. Mabhunu, the author’s voice of

history, is the leader of two guerrillas who subjugate the Rhodesian fighting machinery in a vast area covering the Tribal Trust Lands and white commercial farming areas of Murehwa and Macheke. They are engaged in a number of battles but do not show any signs of exhaustion until at the end when the other two guerrillas die at the hands of the Rhodesian forces. Even as the battle rages, the greatness of the guerrillas is inescapable and irrepressible: “*Ipapo ndainge ndoridzira kunakirwa ... ndaibva ndanyemwerera*” [At that time, I was firing for entertainment ... and the whole experience would make me smile] (Makata 1982: 71). The body is secure in a dehumanising, “bloodthirsty and pitiless atmosphere” (Fanon 1967: 202). The fact that all Rhodesian soldiers are vulnerable as seen in the manner they all die as compared to only two guerrilla deaths justifies the resilience and toughness of the latter. The toughness of guerrilla bodies in the novel is further amplified by the ability to run through a patch of burning grass without getting burnt. The image of bodies that are immune to fire burns, as already explained, expresses the supposed immutability of liberation-war nationalism. If one takes into account the symbolic value of the image of guerrillas, it is clear that such representations mark a visceral reconstruction of identities of “*amadoda sibili*” (real men) in a context where African manhood had been physically and discursively pulverised under colonialism. In his speeches, Mugabe often expresses this view of the body as *amadoda sibili*, which metaphorically and historically is an affirmation of African dignity and identity based on struggle and the ability to overcome.

Given the above representations of the guerrilla in early 1980s Shona war narratives, it can be argued that the healthy state of the body as well as its ability to withstand death at the hands of the Rhodesian army as well as commanding liberating violence against the “enemy” is used to legitimise the new nation by representing nationalism as a humanising and dignity-affirming political brand. Hence, the guerrillas were part of the powerbuilding- and legitimating exercise, a role they have continued to play up to this day. Such heroic participation is envisioned in the images of guerrillas as indefatigable and larger-than-life. The indomitable presence of the guerrilla body in the narratives, which makes it a force to reckon with, becomes the syntax of nation and regime legitimacy.

Pesanai’s *Gukurahundi* (1985) uses fictional images to remember and commemorate ZANLA history, particularly the ZANLA military strategy known as *gukurahundi*. *Gukurahundi* was one of the military and political strategies that ZANU and ZANLA adopted when Mugabe took over the leadership of the party towards the late 1970s. According to official ZANU history, *gukurahundi* was intended to decisively demolish the colonial machinery leading to the “year of the people’s power” which was presented as 1980. Werbner elaborates on the official ZANU position on *gukurahundi*:

Gukurahundi, as Mugabe named it, was the culmination of the people's war, the year when the storm of the nationalist struggle brought the victory of majority rule; the Lancaster House agreement, ending the war, was signed in December 1979. That was the Gukurahundi of nationalism, with its promise of moral renewal in the image of spring rains.

(Werbner 1991: 162)

In a 1979 New Year message articulating the *gukurahundi* plan Mugabe said:

Let every settler city, town or village, let every enemy farm or homestead, let every enemy post, nook or hiding place be hit by the fury of the People's Storm Let us call this year therefore the Year of the People's Storm – Gore reGukurahundi. Let us proceed from the Year of the People to the Year of the People's Storm and storm right through to victory and the creation of a nation based on people's power.

(Mugabe 1983: 27)

This triumphant assurance of victory informs *Gukurahundi's* (1985) remembrance of liberation-war history. The sensibility derives from history even though the method of expression is grounded in creativity and other Shona storytelling traditions.

Thus, *Gukurahundi* (1985) is a novel that emphasises guerrilla military brilliance more than anything else. Gulliver automatically becomes the author's voice of history by virtue of being a guerrilla leader. Together with his group of eight guerrillas, Gulliver participates in a war in which the adversaries (Rhodesian forces) are presented as a motley group of tactless fighters. The writer celebrates the guerrilla fighters' unrivalled military greatness in a hyperbolic style that resonates with far-reaching echoes of confidence and assurances of an unimpeachable victory. The author blends myth and fantasy in order to underscore important human-factor content. Of the nine guerrillas only two die, and they are accidentally shot by their fellow guerrillas, a very rare phenomenon in Shona historical fiction on the liberation war. In this narrative, it is a creative and tactful move by the writer to pre-empt the Rhodesian forces' military abilities as can be seen at the end of the novel when the guerrillas take stock of their heroic accomplishments. Readers come to this conclusion since besides these two no other guerrilla dies at the hands of the Rhodesian forces.

This belittles the Rhodesian army that fails to slay or capture even one guerrilla throughout all the battles. In describing events after the battle that claimed two of their cadres, the author records the high number of casualties suffered on the Rhodesian forces' side:

Pahondo iyi pakashayika macomrade maviri asi hapana anoziva kuti mabhu-nu akafa mangani. Asi chokwadi ndechekuti zuva rakatevera

kwakauya rori mbiri dzamasoja dzaiva dzakavharwa netende kuzotakura zvitunha.

[This battle claimed the lives of two comrades but no one knows how many soldiers perished. But the truth is that on the following day the Rhodesians brought two lorries covered with tents to ferry the bodies of their dead men.]

(Pesanai 1985: 37)

The above images that commemorate the military successes recorded under the *gukurahundi* operation also become part of the independence celebrations and the welcoming home of the guerrilla fighters as heroes. Correspondingly, they are intended to commemorate both independence and nationalist history by projecting an epic image of the guerrilla as a liberator. As in Shona oral traditions where the victorious armies become legends, writers also sought to create legends out of the liberation-war fighters. The new political dispensation called for such historiographical symbols which would in turn function as national symbols as well as symbols of regime and nationalist legitimacy. This is similar to what Kriger explains as:

In common with other newly created nations, Zimbabwe has had to confront the international challenges of establishing a national identity and political legitimacy. It is difficult to imagine a nation and state that could enjoy legitimacy and a shared national identity without access to national symbols The war had claimed an estimated 30 000 to 80 000 lives and had contributed to liberation from colonial rule, thus making it an important emotional symbol and source of legitimacy

(Kriger 1995: 139)

The symbolic value embedded in the absolutisation of guerrilla heroism as the only legitimate reality in the liberation war should be understood against the background that nations are essentially narrations (Bhabha 1990). When seen in this light, historical fiction in the early 1980s when Zimbabwe attained political independence sought to create a foundation for a “modern” Zimbabwe based on myths of greatness and heroism. This view is consistent with Dawisha’s (2002: 5) reasoning that “nations are created, nourished and sustained through the telling and retelling of their pasts. This process includes the myths, the heroisms, the unsurpassed achievements; the many obstacles that are confronted and overcome”.

While on the one hand guerrillas are presented in glowing terms, on the other hand, Rhodesian forces are caricatured. For instance, the author reports their actions in a manner that is humorous. He creates *ndyaringo* (court jests) using history. *Ndyaringo* is a genre of Shona oral art that is based on humour and the need to entertain listeners. This comes out in the following incident:

Pasina kana nenguva yose pfuti dzakatanga kurira dzichibva kudivi rokumavirira. Nyere dzakatanga kurira dzakananga mudenga chaimo Dzabva mudenga dzakarira kumabvaziva, dzobva uku dzakazorira dzatarira kuchamhembe kunova ndiko kwaiva nechikwata chavarwi vorusununguko vaya Nyere idzi dzaipfuura nomudenga chaimo zvokuti chero munhu aisumudza ruoko ari pasi dzakanga dzisingasviki. Dzobva kudivi ravanaMax dzakazoti hwa.

[Instantly, gunshots were heard from the western side. Bullets were fired straight into the sky. From there they were directed to the east and then to the south where the freedom fighters were based. The shots were very far away from the ground such that even if one raised his hand, he would not be hit. After they were fired in the direction of the guerrillas, they went silent.]

(Pesanai 1985: 6)

From this episode, the author assumes the all-powerful voice of narrator. He makes his position and attitude towards the Rhodesian forces very clear. The image of the Rhodesian forces as tactless is idealised in order to project the *gukurahundi* strategy as impeccable. The same image caricatures an army whose presence resulted in an unprecedented loss of lives in the history of Zimbabwe. In the excerpt above, the Rhodesian forces are not just being wasteful but they are also exposing themselves through random firing as it becomes easy to tell the source of fire. In other words, they are alerting the guerrillas whom they have not seen at all. After observing the Rhodesian forces' folly, Gulliver and his men change direction. The time of the day is presented as 01:20. The contrast between darkness and the fire from the bullets makes it easy to tell the source of fire. The folly of the Rhodesian forces empowers the guerrillas and makes their mission relatively easy. Overall, contacts with the Rhodesian forces are very easy thus fulfilling the meaning of the title, *Gukurahundi*, which essentially means the sweeping away of all the undesirables.

In another battle, Gulliver and his platoon of guerrillas outwit the Rhodesian forces, killing all of them in the process. The collective impact of the eight weapons reflects the formidability of the group, who in all their contacts seldom miss their targets. Their marksmanship is surely extraordinary. Rhodesian forces are completely overwhelmed by guerrillas' firepower such that they fail to return even a single shot. Phrases like "*hapana mumwe wavo akambonzi pferenyu*" [none among the guerrillas received even a scratch] (p. 32) and "*hapana kana chakabva kuchikomo kuya*" [nothing came from the direction of the hill [Rhodesian forces]] (p. 34) underscore the writer's vision and version of war. They go on a beer drinking spree celebrating their victory. Guerrillas become instant heroes.

In another instance, Gulliver counts about seven Rhodesian forces as he guns them down one after the other. It appears as if they have helplessly presented themselves for slaughter. The dead bodies of the Rhodesian soldiers typify what in the eyes of the author is a permanently atrophied

colonialism and a triumphant and unassailable nationalism. For the Rhodesian soldiers, history becomes a “slaughter bench”. The author reports that

Pakarepo gomana richiimba zvaro rakatanga zvaro kuvanonga mumwe nomumwe. Vaakaverenga vaairova vachinyatsoparuma pasi vakaita vanomwe.

[While singing, the big boy brought them down one after another. Those whom he counted falling down were seven.]

(Pesnai 1985: 37)

While singing, the giant brought them down one after another. Those whom he counted falling down were seven.

In this one-sided encounter, the dead bodies of the Rhodesian soldiers could have been more than seven. The guerrilla fighters’ survival in the bush is a direct result of their military agility and their ability to withstand fatigue, violence and pressure. They do not need any luck in order to survive. The bodies become super-bodies invested with sole proprietorship of masculine agency and can therefore preside over “all other masculinities and police other genders” (Muchemwa & Muponde 2007: xx). Clearly, the narratives recreate liberation-war history within the context of contesting masculinities, that is, Rhodesian masculinity versus guerrilla masculinity. Guerrilla masculine power “unmans” the Rhodesian fighter whose helplessness becomes a vital cog in boosting the ego of and even shaping the political thinking and behaviour of the former. Since the identity given to the body is crucial in informing definitions of nation and nationalism, the “giant” image of Gulliver, both in terms of military greatness and body size, is a euphemism for the superiority of the nationalist movement, idea or ideology and its readiness to assume responsibility for the affairs of the nation. It is part of “the hegemonic rhetoric of heroism” (Attree 2007: 59).

Sungano’s *Kuda Muhondo* (1985) is the only Shona historical narrative on the liberation war in the early 1980s to dedicate a few pages to liberation-war historical experiences in the rear. In doing so, it abundantly remembers those historical images which foreground ceremony, pomp and happiness more than suffering, fatigue and trauma. It varnishes and camouflages the difficulties that recruits experienced in the rear camps. The narrative dwells mainly on physical training in the camp, an obvious aspect of the military profession. It masks the physical pain and emotional trauma that was consistent with the taxing military exercises in the rear spaces as this was often a new experience for recruits, some of whom had romantic accounts of the war at home. Thus, the selective remembering of and the subsequent canonisation of the rear as glorious can be said to be in line with the political mood that officially characterised the 1980s when Zimbabwe attained political independence from Britain.

Conditions prevailing in the training camp are presented as conducive to the creation of a formidable fighter that Kuda eventually becomes. Food is

said to be abundantly available in the training camps. The impression created is that the recruits led healthy lives. Abundance of food fundamentally becomes a metaphor and political myth for prospects of future abundance, greatness and the capacity of the military idea to transform the nation politically, socially and economically. Fighters feel comfortable and secure. The picture of the liberation war that is presented is that it is a process that restores and guarantees human freedoms, that is, a humanising and dignity-affirming mission. The bouncing and healthy lifestyle of the recruits is reflected in Kuda's recollections on life in the camp: "*Ndakatora chikafu changu chaive chakawanda uye chiine nyama nomuriwo ...*" [I collected my food ration, which was quite plenty and comprising meat and vegetables ...] (Sungano 1985: 37). The writer's images of abundance do in fact play down the painful experiences of recruits in the camps as shown in the works published in the late 1980s and beyond. A former combatant, Carine Nyamandwe, revealed in an interview with Phiri (cited in *Women of Resilience: The Voices of Women Ex-combatants*, 2000: 2) that "meat was not available". In any case, food could not have been in abundant supply as Kuda Hondo claims because the camps survived on donations and handouts from well-wishers.

Hypothetically, one can hazard to say that the image of camp life in the narrative is a miniature manifestation of the image of the new nation that the nationalists claimed they would create. The nationalist parties ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU formed the first black government even though ZANU (PF) was the victorious party. While some events in the narrative are supported by history, generally the tendency in the early 1980s was to idealise the nationalist movement, the war and the guerrillas. Seen from this perspective, it can then be said that the jubilation that defines Kuda's life in the camp potentially becomes an ideological statement on the nature of nationalist patriotic consciousness and "patriotic history" because he is one of the numerous characters in Zimbabwe's African-languages historical literature who joined the war for love of the nation. At the same time, such novelistic images become part of the "stories about the origins, identity and purposes of a nation [in that they] constitute an integral part of the ideological foundation for national identity and nationalism" (He 2007: 44).

While a few oral accounts support the image of history as shown in *Kuda Muhondo* (1985), the overarching impression is that camp life went beyond physical training and good working relations between recruits and their trainers. In a summarised version of Simon Muzenda's views, Bhebe (2004: 216) further explains that "living conditions in the camps were difficult and contrasted sharply with the way members of the Central Committee lived and conducted themselves in expensive hotels in Maputo". Nonetheless, the novel *Kuda Muhondo* (Sungano 1985) opts for, or at least chooses to remember the simple and easy-going side of the war in the rear camps. Through such images, it can be argued that the Shona war novel becomes an instrument that functions to legitimise the new nation in the post-war era.

This preponderantly state-centred vision is also a result of the fact that the Shona war novel is published in association with the Literature Bureau, a government-controlled organisation.

While showing that the liberation war was complex, Matsikiti's novel *Makara Asionani* (1985) underscores the resourcefulness and bravery of the guerrillas. It is a novel that deals with the issue of the Selous Scouts in the liberation war. The Selous Scouts was a special branch created by the Rhodesians in order to tarnish the image of the guerrillas. They used similar tactics as those employed by guerrillas thereby making it difficult for peasants to distinguish between genuine and pseudo-guerrillas. They succeeded in doing this because most of them had trained in Mozambique or were captured guerrilla fighters who were later conscripted into the Rhodesian army. Stiff, quoted by Kriger, provides the following information about the Selous Scouts:

A small but important force that was associated with the army was the Selous Scouts. They were used as pseudo guerrilla gangs and by the end of the war numbered 1,800; they were chiefly Africans among whom were some ex-guerrillas. In the words of their creator, their objective was "to infiltrate the tribal population and the terrorist networks, pinpoint the terrorist camps and bases and then direct conventional forces in to carry out the actual attacks. Then, depending on the skill of the particular Selous Scouts" pseudo group concerned, their cover should remain intact which would enable them to continue operating in a particular area ... perhaps indefinitely.

(Stiff quoted by Kriger 1992: 111)

Makara Asionani (1985) therefore slightly differs from other Shona historical narratives on the liberation war mainly in its depiction of the complexity of problems that dogged guerrilla armies even though it retains the celebratory vision.

The subject of guerrilla infiltration which the narrative handles is corroborated by accounts from some of the participants in the war of liberation. Chung, one of the participants in the war, reminisces:

One of the interesting findings from my participation in Zimbabwean politics in the 1970s was the discovery that many students and freedom fighters had entered Zambia through the support of the Rhodesian secret service, the CIO. Their task was to infiltrate ZANU and provide information back to the Rhodesian regime.

(Chung 2006: 83)

Mabhunumuchapera, the commander of a recently graduated contingent of guerrillas from one of the rear camps in Mozambique heads for Mhondoro, their operational area, without knowing that his detachment partly comprises Selous Scouts led by Muchadzidza. Muchadzidza and his group had

gone through the entire guerrilla training in Mozambique without being detected by the authorities. Moorcraft and McLaughlin (1982: 49) attest to the fact that the Selous Scouts comprised members “most of whom were black”. The rebel guerrillas (Selous Scouts) escape on the way and proceed to Mhondoro as an advance party to tarnish the image of the genuine guerrillas. But they first inform their masters who had sent them to Mozambique that they are back. They do this by contacting a white commercial farmer who then drives them to Harare, the headquarters of the secret service. This is also similar to an incident reported in Ellert (1989: 13) about “one man who deserted [his group] and headed to the Chirundu police post where he reported to the police inspector that he was an undercover Special Branch agent. He indicated where he had hidden his AK-47 rifle and kitbag before guiding the Rhodesians to the river crossing place”.

In Matsikiti’s novel, *Makara Asionani* (1985), it is the rebel group led by Muchadzidza that has most of the guns and ammunition. Meanwhile, Mabhunumuchapera sends back to the rear two of the remaining guerrillas for ammunition supplies and other reinforcements. Henceforth, these two groups which received similar training in Mozambique become avowed enemies (*Makara Asionani*). The novel’s depiction of the Selous Scouts, their operating methods and the trauma they caused for peasants is realistic and authentic in that it does not conflict with written history on the subject. For that reason, the novel ushers in a new dimension in Shona war literature where the liberation war was far from being a simple military exercise in which the guerrillas scored victory after victory against the Rhodesian forces. While retaining the celebratory sensibility, this novel (1985) evinces that the war was a complex experience in which the “enemy” devised a hotchpotch of complex countermeasures. As the war progressed, the Rhodesian government developed new counterstrategies which complicated the struggle. This was particularly at the height of the war when there was a flood of recruits into neighbouring countries. Commenting on the Rhodesian secret service’s strategies at this time, Flower writes:

The best recruits came from within our borders; the usefulness of their local knowledge and dedication far outweighed the usefulness of foreigners. It was an unending source of amazement to us that we never lacked local recruits for any murky or perilous calling Later, we went with nationalist movements into Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and further still.
(Flower 1987: 114)

As a result of the Rhodesian secret service’s underhand manoeuvres, the “enemy” was no longer predictable. The Selous Scouts masqueraded as real guerrillas, and it was often difficult to distinguish between them and real guerrillas because they had the same weapons as those used by guerrillas. They also employed the same strategies such as all-night gatherings which

were mainly used by guerrillas as consciousness-raising platforms. However, they maimed, raped, tortured and killed innocent peasants.

The Selous Scouts' use of excessive violence was meant to make the peasants, the mainstay of guerrilla war in Zimbabwe, despise guerrillas such that when the real guerrillas later turned up, they would get no support. In particular, they targeted those peasants who had a well-known record of supporting the liberation struggle. They turned the peasants' lives into hell and temporarily succeeded in disrupting guerrilla operations even though they could not prevent the victory. Guerrilla image needed a major overhaul because the peasants could no longer tell the difference between the pseudo-guerrillas and the genuine ones.

During a contact in which the renegades now joined by the Rhodesian soldiers try to apprehend the few remaining guerrillas, the latter emerge victorious. Despite the fact that Mabhunumuchapera's group has a depreciated stock of arms, they overcome their handicap by using a simple battle plan in which one of them pretends to surrender in an open space. With the Selous Scouts advised to hide, the Rhodesian soldiers fall into this trap with the result that all of them die without returning even a single shot. The author tells readers of this battle experience that "*vose vakafiramo pasina kana akambodorera fire*" [all of them died on the spot without returning even a single shot] (p. 87).

In the meantime, sporadic battles between the deserters and the genuine guerrillas continue. The deserters have an advantage over their colleagues since they have taken possession of most of the arms. However, their victories are presented as merely temporary. The real big battle for supremacy begins when reinforcements (for the genuine guerrillas) eventually come from Mozambique. The two groups face each other just outside the village that has been terrorised by the Selous Scouts (Muchadzidza's group). The village becomes a microcosm of the battle for Zimbabwe well marshalled by ZANLA and ZIPRA. The description of the battle borders on the melodramatic. Guerrilla exploits are exaggerated. This is despite the fact that the Selous Scouts (those who have deserted) are also heavily armed and are beneficiaries of the same training as the "real" guerrillas. No single genuine guerrilla dies in the big battle to regain control of Mhondoro. On the other hand, all the members from Muchadzidza's group die painful deaths, as they are torn into shreds.

In this regard, *Makara Asionani* (1985) celebrates the successful military ambush and counter-insurgency operations of guerrillas. Guerrillas become messiahs and saviours who bring joy to the tormented and traumatised peasants. After the victory, which marks the end of the war, peasants and all other people rejoice – "*Vanhu vakafara kwazvo paakapedza kutaura achivavimbisa kugara kwakanaka*" [People felt happy after he had finished his speech with promises of a happy life] (p. 99).

Symbolic Image of the Guerrilla as Resourceful: The Colonised as Creator

The Shona war novel in the early 1980s instrumentalises history as an expression of creativity and resourcefulness. It selects specifically those images which foreground the reversal of the inferiorisation of the African. In Asante's (1999: ix) parlance, it repositions the African "in a place of agency where instead of being spectator to others, African voices are heard in the full meaning of history". Nyawaranda's novel *Mutunhu Une Mago* [Impregnable Fortress] (1985) is especially concerned with guerrilla resourcefulness. The title underscores guerrilla formidability. The metaphor of wasps (*mago*) in the title concretises guerrillas' fighting abilities and their military presence as an "impregnable fortress". From the title, it is clear that the direction that the liberation war is taking is that of an unassailable victory. The author makes no pretension to camouflage his intention. Therefore, the novel commemorates the attainment of political independence after a protracted military struggle in which the guerrillas also prove to be endowed with superior intellection. In an interview with Itai Muwati in Harare, Nyawaranda, the author, had this to say about the title of his novel:

Mutunhu Une Mago is a political title. "Mutunhu" refers to Zimbabwe and "Mago" refers to the freedom fighters. In the novel, Zimbabwe becomes an impregnable fortress because of the fighters. It cannot be easily reached because it is well protected by the freedom fighters. The title *Mutunhu Une Mago* celebrates the presence of the freedom fighters in Zimbabwe.

(Nyawaranda in Muwati 2009: 173)

The author focuses specifically on the Tanda community and neighbouring white farms. Guerrillas operating in this area dexterously liquidate both the white commercial farmers and the Rhodesian soldiers. In most instances, the so-called Rhodesian soldiers are the white farmers who have constituted themselves as a garrison to "their" land. On this aspect, *Mutunhu Une Mago* (1985) creates historical images that are supported by evidence from Ranger (1985).

While there are few battles fought, the narrative devotes much of its attention to the guerrillas' attempt to apprehend Harrison, a white commercial farmer. Africans call him Zuvarigere, which appellation we shall also use. On the other hand, Zuvarigere is also making his own manoeuvres to apprehend the guerrillas in the area. It is this battle of wits, the battle for both military and intellectual supremacy between the guerrillas and Zuvarigere, that gives the novel its dynamism. The battle for liberation becomes a contest for military supremacy inasmuch as it is a struggle for political legitimacy.

The polarisation of the characters provides the writer with a dichotomous set-up where one side is valued while the other is devalued. As expected, the guerrillas' "intellectual" capacities and military acumen prove inimitable. This style of historical representation provides a counterdiscourse to a proclaimed white intelligence and supremacy which blacks have been made to live with for centuries. The endowment of the guerrillas with extraordinary qualities proves that whiteness is not an epitome of intelligence and intractable mental agility. Inevitably, this results in the reification of reality and the replacement of one hegemonic hierarchy of images by another equally hegemonic one. Guerrillas, the supposed representatives of the majority of peasants, are endowed with intellect superior to the whites'. This scheme is almost similar to what Bhebe (2004: 99) writes about Muzenda's open show of defiance and courage in the face of seemingly intransigent colonial machinery:

This type of bold and confrontational disposition of Muzenda fitted him well for the nationalist struggle he was about to enter. Colonialism very much depended on the white man's façade of being powerful, invincible and even dangerous to those who challenge his status. Courageous people such as Muzenda were very much needed at the beginning of the struggle to lead the way for the ordinary people by showing that whites could be challenged after all.

(Bhebe 2004: 99)

In the novel, the brave-and-intelligent-guerrilla and the dull-and-stupid-European dichotomy symbolises the dynamics that underpin the process of decolonisation. Decolonisation cannot be considered complete without emphasising, through restorative intellection, the intellectual capacity of the formerly colonised. The master-servant hierarchy must be dismantled. In the novel, the guerrillas become masters of intelligence and reservoirs of creative potential. Césaire summarises the relationship between coloniser and colonised during times of colonisation and decolonisation:

In colonial society there is not merely a master-servant hierarchy. There is an implicit hierarchy between creators and consumers. Under good colonization, the colonizer is the creator of cultural values. And the colonized is the consumer ... [The war] disturbs, however, precisely because it is creation. It upsets things, and the first thing it upsets is the colonial hierarchy, for it turns the colonized consumer into a creator.

(Césaire 1995: 155)

To prove that the colonised "consumer" has turned "creator" – and this is crucial for human-factor content – the guerrillas send one of their own fellows to work as a guard at Zuvarigere's farm. He carries out the necessary reconnaissance needed for a successful military onslaught. Ironically, Zuvarigere thinks that the guard is sincere and working on his side. This

irony, which is felt throughout the novel, raises the readers' suspense and makes the novel a military thriller. All Zuvarigere's plans work to the advantage of the guerrillas. Guerrilla plans go according to script. Zuvarigere's intellect is deliberately underdeveloped in order to advance the myth of guerrilla invincibility and intelligence.

While preparing for the day when the guerrillas are coming, Zuvarigere entrusts the cleaning of guns to his guard, who is in fact a guerrilla. As a result, the disguised guerrilla tampers with all the guns except his. When Zuvarigere orders that the guerrillas be shot, nothing comes from his gun. Telephone lines, too, have been disconnected. In the end, Zuvarigere is apprehended and made to issue orders that also put his fellow farmers at risk. Relying on surprise attacks as happens at the end of the novel when Rhodesian forces are ambushed as well as targeting areas of commercial interest to the state are realities also expressed by historians like Bhebe:

In terms of fighting ZANLA forces adhered to the Maoist approach of avoiding confrontation with superior enemy forces and concentrated on selecting enemy targets for destruction by "surprise attack, sabotage operations, ambush, and use of land mines". Such targets included all institutional and personnel expressions of the enemy's political, economic and social domination and exploitation in the communal areas, such as: military and police outposts, military and police convoys, white farmers and their homesteads, farm stores and cattle dips

(Bhebe 1999: 98)

The novel ends with a big battle which signals victory and the greatness of the guerrillas. The wisdom of the guerrillas is crucial for human-factor growth in the new nation. The consistent image is that of a people participating in the shaping of its history, destiny and future. Clearly, the Shona narratives operationalise the guerrilla as an avatar of sustainable human-factor human content and values for the new nation.

Conclusion

Shona novelists analysed in this article conveniently engage in selective remembering and convenient forgetting of battlefield experiences in order to integrate history in the dynamics of national image foundation. They blend history, legend and myth in a manner that underlines important human-factor values. Their pursuance of a monolithic historical trajectory in which heroism rather than victimhood and vulnerability is thesis is of course an unfortunate scenario engendered by a mistaken political view that celebratory rather than critical discourse is the basis for nation building. This kind of political thinking is engraved in Zimbabwean political life to the extent of truncating the past, burdening the present and asphyxiating the

future. The largely state-centred view of history occasioned by the time of publication and the Literature Bureau which monitored literature in indigenous languages limits both the reception of the discourse and its ability to engage other dimensions of Zimbabwe's complex liberation-war history. This has prompted critics such as Furusa (1998: 201) to argue that the Shona war novel in the early 1980s is "based on the falsity of historical myths of greatness ... [and that] it romanticizes the important historical event". While this is the case, this article has deliberately attempted to bring out what possibly could be one minor function of the narratives, that is, their contribution towards the search for human-factor content in the early years of independence. In this regard, the article has marshalled the argument that the indomitable image of the guerrilla is discursively operationalised as symbolic resource in the politics of founding a new Zimbabwe that the Smith-led regime had vowed would never be realised. In this way, it invests in the force of an example whose unfettered potential for restorative action, agency and human-factor manoeuvrability cannot be underestimated. However, as already pointed out, this monolithic rendition potentially oversimplifies history and undermines the complex historical process. There is need for the novel to strike a balance between heroism and victimhood, triumph and defeat.

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