
Literature & Liberation ... the Second Phase
 Shimmer Chinodya's
Harvest of Thorns

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I

The theme of this chapter derives from Lewis Nkosi's argument that while the first phase of the liberation struggles throughout Southern Africa and indeed elsewhere, is characterized by writers who 'attempt to capture in their pamphlets, poems, novels and plays, the revolutionary impulse of which they are inalienably a part', the second phase being a period of reconstruction is characterized by writers who 'register not only the pains and joys of national rebirth but begin to constitute an important source of critical consciousness for the nation'.¹ The chapter will investigate the extent to which Shimmer Chinodya registers 'the pains and joys of national rebirth' and will go on to assess critically whether *Harvest of Thorns* indeed begins to 'constitute an important source of critical consciousness' for Zimbabwe. We shall begin by referring to Chinodya's earlier major works in order to place *Harvest of Thorns*² in its proper context.

Shimmer was born in Gweru, Zimbabwe, in 1957, the second in a family of seven children.³ When he was about ten years of age the family established a new home in the rural district of Gokwe in 1966.⁴ But by that time Shimmer and the other sons in the family were attending school, so they had to remain in Gweru with their father while the girls had to live with their mother in Gokwe. Shimmer enjoyed country life and felt sad that his father now lived a lonely life in town without his wife and the rest of his family.⁵ It is these town and country experiences that make up the subject matter of his first novel, *Dew in the Morning*,⁶ in which 'the author examines the human and social relationships of rural people through the eyes of a very observant [ten year old] child, Godi'.⁷

Chinodya's next book, *Farai's Girls*,⁸ chronicles a growing child's first awareness of his sexuality at an early age of four years. The child has a crush on his teacher at six years and yet at ten years of age he has an aversion to girls, possibly as a result of hormonal changes.⁹ The theme in this novel

remains on the personal, sexual adventure level. At secondary school, however, Farai becomes very careless, believing that the more girl friends one has the more popular one is and indeed, Farai is very popular since he has seven girls while his friend and confidante, Wilbert, only has one. He continues this behavioural trend right through his second school after he gets expelled from his first secondary school, Gariro, for taking part in an illegal demonstration. However, in *Child of War*, a novella which he writes under the pseudonym Ben Chirasha,¹⁰ Chinodya takes up the theme of the war of liberation. The protagonist is a child, but one who is a *mujibha*¹¹ or errand runner for the guerillas fighting the war of liberation.

Chinodya's thematic concerns have been developmental in nature, starting with what Flora Veit-Wild describes as the 'general characteristics of Generation 2 writers' and 'the emergence of a private voice'.¹² She discusses Shimmer Chinodya as a writer dealing with the problems of 'growing up in two worlds'. These are the two-world experiences described in *Dew in the Morning*: the time is out of joint as it were, because of colonialism and its effects on the African family. Hence, the reference to the two worlds, the urban and the rural.

Childhood and teenage experiences within a relatively tranquil setting or environment are described in *Farai's Girls* but the impact of the African resistance to colonialism and the divisions it has brought to the African family begin to affect the children at school where they get involved in the struggle and eventually pay the price. That price becomes pronounced in its viciousness in *Child of War* where Hondo and other young children grow up into adults literally overnight because of social hardships and involvement in the war around them. This subject of war is further pursued in *Harvest of Thorns*. While *Child of War* pays tribute to the role played by the *mujibhas* in the Zimbabwean war of liberation, *Harvest of Thorns* pays tribute to the actual freedom fighter, the ex-combatant who returns home to a barren land where the fruits of his liberating efforts seem elusive, as elusive as Freedom T.V. Nyamubaya's bride in 'A Mysterious Marriage'.¹³

Harvest of Thorns, the most mature of Chinodya's works, deals with a topical issue, often the subject of the literature of liberation, the kind of literature Frantz Fanon calls

... a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation ... a literature of combat because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; ... a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space.¹⁴

Chinodya's novel, as the following analysis will show, belongs to this category of a literature which liberates.

II

The point of departure is the title of the novel: *Harvest of Thorns*. Here we need to remember Ernst Fischer's words on 'subject, content, meaning' when he says that a subject is raised to a particular status of content 'only by the artist's attitude' which would then contextualize that subject and its meaning

by the way it is presented with a particular 'degree of social and individual consciousness'.¹⁵ Fischer goes on to give an example of how a word like 'harvest' can be treated: either 'as a charming idyll, as a conventional genre picture, as an inhuman ordeal or as the victory of man over nature', depending 'on the artist's view, on whether he speaks as an apologist of the ruling class, a sentimental Sunday tripper, a distinguished peasant or a revolutionary socialist'.¹⁶ We wonder at this point what attitude Chinodya has towards his harvest if it ends up being that of *thorns*.

The word 'harvest' obviously has agricultural connotations and reminds us of hard labour; it makes us anticipate a good reward, a lavish feast after the hard work put into the farming stage. It is a positive word full of good connotations to a great extent. 'Thorns' on the other hand, is a 'negative' word in that it automatically makes our body shiver ... the pain of stepping on a thorn! It also reminds us of Jesus' parable of the sower some of whose seeds fell among thorns. They germinated and attempted to grow but were choked to death by the 'thorns'.¹⁷ Then there is William Wordsworth's poem, 'The Thorn' ... in which a persona puzzles over a thorn 'so old and grey / Not higher than a two year child [which] stands erect, this aged Thorn ...'¹⁸ In the end its mystery is linked with a possible baby dumper who mourns all the time next to the thorn. It is all a mystery! Consequently, to imagine or even hint at the fact that somebody could actually harvest *thorns* ... is to condemn that harvest to wretchedness. What then does the novel focus on that is so thorny?

Several thematic issues are focussed on in this novel surrounding the wretchedness of the African people. The first important theme we will discuss is the religious one during the 1960s as this provides useful background information about Benjamin, the boy who ends up as a combatant in the Zimbabwean war of liberation.¹⁹ Chinodya moves from the current events of the novel in Part One to delve back into the history of Benjamin's family background so that we can understand his present status and circumstances. That history begins when Shamiso Mhaka, his mother, and her elder sister go to the town nearest their village to obtain a birth certificate for the latter's baby son. It is at the District Commissioner's office that they meet Clopas J. Wandai Tichafa, tea-boy, messenger and future husband to Shamiso and father of Benjamin. The Tichafa family is used as a case study of how life was for families living in the urban townships at a time when the rise of African nationalism competed with the rise of a myriad churches; a time when even 'football was not just football anymore; [when] teams were no longer just teams but armies of power and identity' (p. 79).

Chinodya reveals what life was like for a boy like Benjamin growing up in the upheavals of this time, yet cushioned from the significance of all these upheavals by a fanatical brand of Christian religion. For instance,

Men shunned the streets and in the darkness of their houses listened furtively to crackling voices on muted short-wave radio stations. The anger was there in the voices, in the air. We sensed it, we saw police reserve men patrolling the streets at night, but in our youth we did not know what it meant. (p. 80)

A boy like Benjamin could not have known the meaning of all this because 'as soon as he and his siblings were old enough, Mrs Tichafa took them to camps [where] they learnt the rites of the church' (p. 80). A fuller dose of the

religion was dished out at home (see also p. 80). The indoctrination of these children is so severe that 'whenever they saw somebody dancing in the street they would yell "Daughter of Satan!" or "Son of Lucifer" ...'

The results of this indoctrination are evident when Benjamin is assaulted in the boys' toilet for being a sellout, but remains puzzled at what the word means. As the political momentum gathers in the country and people go round selling party cards, the church too intensifies its grip on the Tichafa family so that instead of buying the card Mrs Tichafa chimes, 'we're church people ... We're interested in the spirit, not in the flesh. If it is God's will to change a government, then He will change it Himself, in His own time' (p. 81). Instead of attending political meetings, 'Mrs Tichafa hid herself and her children in the wardrobe and under the bed [while] Mr Tichafa rolled himself into a jute sack and wriggled against the wall like a bag of sweet potatoes' (p. 83). Vicious punishment is meted out to Benjamin in particular for behaviour that is unbecoming of a religious parent's child.

It is this stifling social background at home that drives Benjamin into 'politics', a process which begins by the burning of the beer hall in the township. In his ignorance of what really is taking place around him, Benjamin still feels he must do something positive so as not to be labelled a sellout, whatever the word meant. But he is basically groping in the dark as he strives to unravel the mystery of identity symbolized by the phrase, 'child of the soil'. He puzzles out:

Could the people who marched into town singing and chanting be children of the soil? What about policemen and soldiers? What about sergeants and super-intendents? What about thieves and robbers and murderers and rapists? ... He thought about it. He didn't know. (p. 97)

Consciousness is an important aspect of Benjamin's development. As he continues to search for it, he finally understands what is going on in the country after Form One when he rebels against his strict church background and simply goes wild (see p. 104). In colonial Rhodesia characterized by political, moral and social decadence, such rebellion by the oppressed was not totally out of character. For there was no ideology that could unite the actions of millions of black people towards specific national goals²⁰ since they were not recognized as a significant and productive part of that nation. Benjamin's rebellion against authority symbolized his readiness to take up bigger challenges that lie ahead – rebellion against the Rhodesian authorities as he and others take up arms to fight in the bush.

The background to Benjamin's life is very important and enlightening because Chinodya has dealt with a section of Zimbabwean history that no-one else has described – township life and the rise of black nationalism complicated by fanatic religious worship. To that extent then, the book has made us conscious of the complex problems involved at the time and, in particular, the complex problem faced by youngsters growing up in the milieu. By the time we see Benjamin as a freedom fighter, we have to appreciate the struggle he has had to put up in order to overcome his crippling, incapacitating childhood experiences. Chinodya's novel therefore fits into the category of the literature of combat described by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, as he shows how national consciousness is moulded and given form and contours while flinging open new and boundless

horizons enabling the achievement of total independence for the African people as they take up arms to liberate themselves.

The theme of socio-political liberation for Zimbabweans is the second and major one in this novel. The *present* of the novel involves Benjamin after his return from the bush but the *past* describes to us military events leading to that return (including the background discussed above). Chinodya describes briefly how Benjamin crosses into Mozambique, alone, and the tough training he goes through. The training is both physical and political-historical-ideological in order to create a clear sense of purpose for the struggle. He also describes briefly life in one waiting camp where education was provided for the refugee children (as taught by Ropa), the disease that grips these children and combatants (dysentery) and the deaths experienced by these people as they run short of hospital medication and are finally forced to resort to roots for treatment and relief. We also live through a Rhodesian raid of the refugee waiting camp and witness the death of Ropa and several children. These experiences are ingrained in the minds of the combatants such as Benjamin (alias Pasi NemaSellout), who actually get initiated into the war by this episode. They leave a vivid impression on the mind of the reader too, for example as we remember the vibrant, vivacious, caring Ropa with all her eager children who gets reduced to looking like 'a piece of cardboard perforated with nails' (p. 146). For those who did not live through the war years, this description of a massacre emphasizes the nature of the supreme sacrifice that black people had to pay for their freedom in Zimbabwe. For those who lived through such experiences and survived them, this description is also a reminder of what had to be done to secure present day Zimbabwe. This then is a literature that describes the duty and responsibility that Zimbabweans felt obliged to offer their country.

Although Veit-Wild argues that 'Benjamin is neither a hero like Wilson Katiyo's "son of the soil", who after much suffering consciously joins the nationalist struggle, nor an anti-hero like Stanley Nyamfukudza's Sam, the sceptic, who deeply mistrusts the political leaders ...'; and that Benjamin is an ordinary young boy who

seemed to have been catapulted through it all by some force he had not recognized, some force that had pitched him through a blur of crowds and places and events and plunged him, alone, into the dark bowels of this dilemma²¹

once confronted by the situation on the ground where he has to kill or be killed Benjamin rises up to the challenge especially after undergoing the politico-ideological training that was so very necessary. It is true that Benjamin is not a hero or anti-hero like those mentioned above. He could not be if we remember his home background Chinodya so vividly and humorously describes and which we have discussed above. Yes, Benjamin 'suddenly finds himself a fighter'²² because he has no choice. He either has to abscond or go back to face the interrogators and a punishment worse than that of his youth after burning that beer hall (pp. 88-90). So the 'common myth' that *all* guerillas who crossed over were 'highly motivated, conscientious and conscientised nationalist activists'²³ can never be true. Zimbabweans would be super-human if that were the case. One got conscientized once one arrived at the training ground, in this case Mozambique as described by Chinodya (pp. 120-41). Another novelist, I. V. Mazorodze,

portrays three friends who cross the border because they have to run away from two murders committed by one of them in a village near their school. But once over, they get the necessary training and become successful combatants.²⁴

One unique aspect of the novel is the description of the people who are approached by the combatants when they come into Zimbabwean villages and formally or informally introduce themselves. The encounter is memorable each time and Chinodya is convincing in his portrayal of ordinary villagers, businessmen or farm labourers carrying out their normal routine activities. We think of the old woman fetching water, offering the thirsty guerillas water to drink and reminiscing with herself on what they have told her. Then there is Business Mlambo, closing his shop at the end of the day, thinking of taking a holiday in order to rest. Msindo the farm labourer lies in bed thinking about his wife, his late wife, children and his job. As we eavesdrop into his private thoughts, we discover the poverty that has become part and parcel of his life. For example, when he says his first son is doing well, we learn that he is only a tractor driver on Baas Melleker's farm! (p. 159).

This background to the people's lives is significant because it is when each person is preoccupied with his/her own life that the guerillas intrude and alter the course of that life. One is no doubt reminded of the event in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* the night Kihika visits Mugo and changes the course of his life.

This is a point where the guerillas are like fish entering their waters as they prepare for sabotage and outright confrontation with the enemy in the battle on the hill (the enemy here is in the shape of sellouts like Mai Tawanda who meets her fateful death in the most cruel manner possible). Chinodya describes these events vividly and does not brush aside personal problems faced by guerillas amongst themselves as frustration mounts. Thus, they argue about the ethics of having girl friends while in the war and because Baas Die himself is guilty of the same 'offence' he snaps and quarrels to the point of almost shooting Mabhunu Muchapera, his colleague (p. 221).

Chinodya convincingly re-creates events during the war of liberation, complete with scenes of mass historical-political-ideological education: well water poisoning by Rhodesian Selous Scouts who also coloured their faces black with soot in order to disguise themselves as Africans and to discredit freedom fighters;²⁵ poisonous sprays; consultations with the spirit mediums for guidance and portrayal of the burning of homesteads. All this serves to make us conscious of the hardships that characterized the struggle, lest we forget.

Shimmer Chinodya has said that in writing *Harvest of Thorns* he 'did not intend to write the "classical war novel"; [that] his interest was to explore the psychological reactions and development of a young man, still a boy really, who suddenly found himself in the situation of war'.²⁶ However, we have to acknowledge the fact that his research was very thorough to enable him to portray what was happening at the war front so realistically.²⁷

The third and final theme to be discussed, which is really a continuation of the major theme of the liberation war, is the portrayal of a returned freedom fighter and his reaction to 'home' and its situation, its shortcomings and its progress or lack of it. In chapter two as Benjamin, Peter and Nkazana

take a bus to town, a number of observations are made concerning the condition of black people after independence: transport problems, '... there never seemed to be enough buses in the townships ...' (p. 6), being a problem that persists well into the 1990s. Some old values too have remained intact as Benjamin observes how some areas still carry blisters and scars of war while others seem never to have been touched by it, and he muses:

Amazing, he thought, that certain areas could completely heal, while some festered on like stubborn wounds and others, like suburbs on the hill, chose to remain untouched by war. He looked at the faces of sparkling glass, pinewood, stone, at the marble driveways and blue swimming pools and gleaming cars in half-closed garages, at flawless lawns tended by black garden boys in khaki and black maids still pushing white babies in prams after the war and only months after independence (p. 7).

This is a significant commentary from an ex-combatant who expected to find his people leading a better life than that of gardeners and maids after independence. Yet, alas, the reality of the situation is that life picks up from where it left off with little change for the ordinary man and woman. Benjamin is generally not impressed.

The building boom is referred to as 'a lot of the small four roomed houses [which are] being extended' and 'two new beer halls in the township and one large new school with rows and rows of flowers and neat gardens', replacing the one old beer hall that stood there long ago when he was still a child. To some extent this is progress, though it is minimal as it affects only a few people. Nevertheless he registers it in his commentary.

The problem of attitudes between races is not left out as we hear the white girl at a supermarket till asking Benjamin whether he is sure that he will be able to pay for all the things he has collected (p. 8). He literally exploded with anger until the white girl is forced to leave the till and the Indian manager is forced to apologize to Benjamin.

It has been necessary to discuss these observations by Benjamin because these are contemporary issues on which Chinodya has critically focused. As explained earlier, this section is actually the present of the novel which is followed by a narrative of the past events discussed above. As we pick up the present again in Part Four, it is to meet a changed Mr Clopas Wandai J. Tichafa who now drives a 'battered red Zephyr Zodiac' which cost him 'six hundred dollars from a white man who was emigrating to South Africa' (p. 259). He has left the church of the Holy Spirit, left home, wife and Peter; is now a drinker as evidenced by empty beer bottles in the boot of his car; is proud owner of Dingo, the German dog, and is living with Muchaneta, widow of a deceased Rhodesian soldier. Indeed tremendous change has taken place in the lives of this family! Benjamin becomes a focal point here as he literally unites the family again. For Mr Tichafa comes to see him and to welcome him back home. As fate would have it, his Zodiac 'packs up' so that he is forced to spend the night at Shamiso's. Esther comes home for the first time since she eloped with Dickson, who also comes to Esther's house for the first time. She too has rebelled from the church, wears high-heeled shoes and a lot of make-up. Even Muchaneta is brought into the family as Mrs Tichafa insists that she and her baby come out into the open.

Generally, there is a transformation in the behaviour of the Tichafa family

with everyone adopting a reconciliatory attitude. No-one, for instance, harasses Esther for having eloped and stayed away all these months. Mr Tichafa apologizes to Benjamin when their first meeting turns out to be an argument. Mrs Tichafa changes most drastically and positively as she adopts a more aggressive attitude than before. She is no longer cowered by religion and now knows her rights and defends them vigorously, refusing to be exploited anymore by Clopas and his mistress (see p. 269). Benjamin himself has developed into a mature understanding person as shown by his analysis of his past life and his reasons for having joined the war: 'I went because I was caught up in a crisis and leaving was the only thing to do', he says (p. 273), and we know this is the truth.

We need now to assess Benjamin's reaction to the post-independence situation more carefully for us to determine whether he represents the accepted visionary of the period; whether we can see the novel as a progressive one in terms of giving hope for the future. We agree with Wole Soyinka when he says:

... the reflection of experience is only one of the functions of literature, there is also its extension. And when that experience is social we move into areas of ideological projections, the social vision. It is this latter form of literature that holds the most promise for the strengthening of the bond between experience and medium since it prevents the entrenchment of the habitual, the petrification of the imaginative function by that past or present reality upon which it reflects.²⁸

For Benjamin the whole story of this book has been a reflection of experience, but has it also been an extension of that experience? In Chapter 34 of the novel when he is drawn to discuss his war experiences by Dickson, he answers that there is nothing to talk about. He continues:

When you are trying to piece together the broken fragments of your life it hurts to think back. The worst thing is to come back and find nothing has changed... We won the war, yes, but it's foolish to start talking about victory. All this talk about free schools and free medical treatment and minimum wages is just a start. The real battle will take a long time; it may never even begin. (p. 272)

Herein lies the 'Harvest of Thorns' for this ex-combatant. Basically what he is saying is that although Zimbabwe is politically free, in terms of the distribution of wealth she remains in bondage. But coming from one who was trained in the struggle that victory is certain no matter what harsh conditions prevail, the above statement is very pessimistic, as pessimistic as the vision that dominates Nyamubaya's poem (see note 13). Benjamin here exudes a spirit of defeatism, perhaps because of the frustration that he remains unemployed and the fact that 'a guerrilla is only a hero while the war is raging. Once it's over the regular soldier in the smartly pressed camouflage kit takes over' (p. 274). If we interpret his mood and feelings this way, it is as if to say there is no hope for Zimbabwe.

However, we must remember that this is not the final word of the novel. Its last chapter ends on a more hopeful note and, ironically, it is Benjamin, the seeming pessimist, who champions that hope. When his son is born three weeks too early, he calls him Zvenyika and vows that his son 'will use his head and hands and grow up to be somebody' (p. 277). The narrator comments:

He's only twenty and has no job or house of his own yet but he tells himself he'll do all he can to raise the little bundle of humanity in the cot. He'll do all he can, even though all he has is a pair of chapped hands. He tells himself he'll do it. (p. 277)

That, as a concluding statement to this novel, is a very powerful statement in which Benjamin braces himself for new, greater challenges of life ahead. Instead of recoiling and mourning about how he will feed, clothe or shelter this baby and its mother, he determinedly vows to do 'all he can' to see to it that the 'little white bundle' grows up strong and well provided for. Besides, it is fitting that the novel ends with a newly born baby whose symbolic significance we shall discuss later. For now it is important to note that the novel sounds pessimistic and in the same breath braces us for a greater struggle to come which we must face with determination and tenacity.

III

Just as 'for Marxism, it is changes in a society's material "content", its mode of production, which determine the "forms" of its superstructure', so for literature the content determines form and vice versa. As Eagleton correctly affirms, 'if form and content are inseparable in practice, they are theoretically distinct. This is why we can talk of the varying *relations* between the two'.²⁹ The two are dialectically related and indeed as Ralph Fox declares, 'Form is produced by content, is identical and one with it, and, though the primary is on the side of content, form reacts on content and never remains passive'.³⁰ The reason the two are inseparable is aptly described by Soyinka who says that it is 'because in reality, the umbilical cord between experience and form has never been severed, no matter how tautly stretched'.³¹ These statements are pertinent to Chinodya's handling of form and content.

The author makes good use of symbols and we have already referred to 'Harvest' and 'Thorns'. He also uses the 'act of naming' as a significant pointer to the meanings hidden in names and character. Because Mr and Mrs Tichafa bore their children after they were converted to Christianity or to the Church of the Holy Spirit, after they had been thoroughly acculturated, their three children bear biblical names, Esther, Benjamin and Peter. We need to understand and emphasize the importance and significance of 'the act of naming' here. Freire, like many philosophers of language, sees the act of naming as an act of creation. Langer describes naming as 'the vastest generative idea that ever was conceived, its influence might well transform the entire mode of living and feeling, in the whole species within a generation'.³² It is in this light that we must understand the author's use of names. The names are not just arbitrary, but have a meaning which is woven up with the rest of the story of the liberation of black people who have failed to hold a dialogue with their oppressors. For, as Freire argues, '... dialogue is an encounter among men [and women!] who name the world, it must not be a situation where some men name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one man by another'.³³ During the colonial era Africans were robbed of their right to name their world, or even to retain their own names and to name their children. Other people were naming the world for them, hence the need to

liberate oneself and to restore that right. That is why all the combatants in the novel assume *new names*; i.e. 'war names', when they get to Mozambique; names that express their aim to transform their political and material conditions in the bid to restore the humanity of the African; to restore love for each other and for the rest of the people of the world. After all, the very act of taking up arms to liberate one's land is an act of love for one's country and its people; for oneself too, as confirmed by Freire.³⁴ It is during and after the war of liberation that Africans become humanized again, so that Benjamin is able to name his child, *Zvenyika* and Esther comments, 'nobody gives children European names any more ... especially Jewish ones' (p. 276). Chinodya has therefore done well to focus on names because *naming* carries a significant chapter in the black people's history.

Another device used in the novel is powerful and vivid description of events and episodes mixed with the stream of consciousness technique, sometimes employing short words to create rhythm. In this novel, indeed 'consciousness ... does not appear ... chopped up in bits'. Language and thought 'flow like a river or a stream'. The author therefore creates 'a stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life'.³⁵ There are several examples of this flow of thought where the second person pronoun is used to depict fear, anxiety in a particular character, or activities that were routine for many days during military training (see pp. 128–31).³⁶ Sometimes the first person plural narration is also used, a technique that Veit-Wild calls 'the collective form' used in order to widen the involvement of the characters which include the narrator himself.³⁷ There is also the use of song, dance and story-telling as the masses are politicized to create a strong base for the freedom fighters' intended operations. This device symbolizes a retreat into the olden times when parents and grandparents used the same devices to informally educate their youth, which makes this technique consistent with the appeal to Nehanda and Chaminuka to give the youth of the second Chimurenga the necessary strength to fight and win the war that their forefathers started; to complete the cycle as it were.

Use of appropriate diction is done well. For instance the old woman at the well 'talks' differently from Businessman Mlambo or Msindo who uses Chiraparapa (Fanikalo), the master-servant lingua franca (pp. 149–63). Chinodya goes further to show how Msindo and other foremen like him have internalized their oppression by their discussion at a shebeen over a chibuku beer drink where they talk in terms of 'your tobacco', 'my tobacco', 'my farmhouse', 'my floors' (which need new carpets), 'my lawns' (which need fertilizer), 'my tractor' (needing new wheels) etc. (p. 162). Listening to this conversation one would conclude that these are the owners of the farms talking, yet they are the dispossessed labourers. Compound adjectives which convey meaning with minimum wastage of space have been used to chronicle Shamiso Mhaka's life, her hard work, her innocence, current fashion in dress, her physique and so on (p. 27). The author's style here is terse, yet comprehensive.

Through the interlacing of form and content, Chinodya has tried, and I believe succeeded, in being *realistic*. For 'realism ... implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'.³⁸ By this we do not mean that the novelist has merely 'copied' reality, but he has penetrated the very essence of a phenomenon such as a

liberation struggle in an artistic method 'that makes it possible to disclose the typical traits of a particular age'.³⁹ For art is 'an important weapon in the ideological struggle between classes'⁴⁰ and in this case, between the colonizer and the colonized. 'It could reinforce just as it could undermine the power of the exploiters, could serve to defend class oppression or, on the contrary, contribute to the education and development of the consciousness of the toiling masses, bringing them closer to victory over their oppression'.⁴¹ What we must ask ourselves now is whether the author has used historical matter as a basis for progressive thought in terms of portraying it as a dynamic rather than a static process. Does he anticipate more progressive change, in other words. For art, as defined by Marx and Engels, 'is one of the forms of social consciousness and it therefore follows that the reasons for its changes should be sought in the social existence of men [and women!]'.⁴²

Chinodya has been progressive and, yes, he does anticipate more change for the better in spite of the title of his novel which strikes a pessimistic note. But then we also need to remember that that title is derived from a story told to the villagers at a *pungwe* or political gathering by Baas Die (p. 179). Seeing that the title applies to the whole novel, 'Harvest of Thorns' has come to symbolize the harvest of independence, meaning that the anticipated 'plenty' has not materialized. The author redeems his work however, in the passage where Benjamin points out that the real battle left now is economic, which, if we are not careful, may not even begin. The optimistic part comes through the reunion of all of the Tichafa family members including Muchaneta and her baby at Nkazana's bedside because she has just given birth to a baby boy. This is symbolic of the things to come where perhaps all people will unite to admire the newly born baby that is Zimbabwe; people who will vow to work for her (in spite of the baby being a boy). A new born baby always symbolizes hope for the future and so it is fitting that Benjamin calls him Zvenyika and promises to fend for him. The optimism shown by Benjamin has come about because he himself has experienced a catharsis with his feelings. He has come to accept that the heroism of the war has to work hand-in-hand with that of tackling civilian life; that it is futile for one to remain bitter at not being given a preferential place in society because one fought in the war (pp. 271-4). One has to acquire new civilian skills to survive in the new country. The cathartic effect comes where he mourns his comrades who died in the war, and in the process, mourns for the heroic age of the struggle which has gone forever. That done, he is now ready to tackle the future (symbolized by his son) with a new vigour and determination. It is no use to sit and mope. One has to gather courage and push on with life in whatever way possible. He has thus contributed to the education of the masses and shown them the way to bringing them closer to victory over the oppressive forces without prescribing to them the actual method of doing so. It becomes important, therefore, that Chinodya has not ended his novel on a pessimistic note.

Shimmer Chinodya himself has rejected critics' argument that the 'post-independence situation [is] the situation of a "wounded nation"' in a negative sort of way. I believe that he is correct in denying that perspective. It is true that Zimbabwe can be described as a 'wounded nation' after independence. It had to be wounded. The war was vicious and could not just end without 'some kinds of wounds', to use Charles Mungoshi's phrase. So Chinodya is

right when he asserts that rather than calling a 'dejected and unemployed ex-combatant, a torn family and a wounded nation'⁴³ a negative picture of independence, we should call it reality. But even then, as we have shown, the family is not left torn apart at all. Rather, it is reunited and, in fact, it is Benjamin with his wife Nkazana who reunites everyone as they come to see him and as they witness the birth of his baby. Symbolically, it is the ex-combatant who reunites all Zimbabweans, blacks, whites, Asians and others, all under one new flag. From this point of view, the novel is of vital value, not only for Zimbabwe, but also for all those countries in Africa and the rest of the third world trying to recover from the wounds of war.

Notes

1. Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile and Other Selections* (London & New York, Longman, 1965 repr. 1983), 161.
2. Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns* (Harare, Baobab Books, 1989). References to this text will be by page numbers in the chapter.
3. See Rennita Deka, 'Shimmer Chinodya, The man and his work', an unpublished project based on interviews with Shimmer (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, Department of Curriculum and Arts Education, 1991), 9-13.
4. Ibid. See also Flora Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (Harare, Baobab Books, 1993), 157.
5. Rennita Deka and Flora Veit-Wild, *ibid.*
6. Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1982 repr. 1987).
7. Rennita Deka, *op.cit.*
8. Shimmer Chinodya, *Farai's Girls* (Harare, College Press, 1984 repr. 1987).
9. Rennita Deka, *op.cit.*
10. Ben Chirasa, *Child of War* (London, MacMillan, 1985 repr. 1990).
11. A *mujibha* was a helper or errand runner (male) for the combatants during the Zimbabwean war of liberation which ended in 1979, sometimes called Chimurenga II. (Note that a female helper was called *chimbwido*.)
12. Flora Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 151 ff.
13. Freedom T.V. Nyamubaya, 'A Mysterious Marriage' in *On the Road Again* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1986), 13. The full poem is reproduced below:

A Mysterious Marriage

Once upon a time
there was boy and girl
forced to leave their home
by armed robbers.
The boy was Independence
The girl was Freedom.
While fighting back, they got married.

After the war they went back home.
Everybody prepared for the wedding.
Drinks and food abounded,
Even the disabled felt able.
The whole village gathered waiting
Freedom and Independence
were more popular than Jesus.

Independence came
But Freedom was not there.
An old woman saw Freedom's shadow passing,

Walking through the crowd, Freedom to the gate.
All the same, they celebrated for Independence.

Independence is now a senior bachelor
Some people still talk about him
Many others take no notice
A lot still say it was a fake marriage.
You can't be a husband without a wife.
Fruitless and barren Independence staggers to old age,
Since her shadow, Freedom, hasn't come.

14. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1980), 193.
15. Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art, A Marxist Approach* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1959 repr. 1978), 131.
16. *Ibid.*, 132.
17. *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*, Matthew 13: 1–14.
18. William Wordsworth, 'Lyrical Ballads: The Thorn' in David Perkins, ed., *English Romantic Writers* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 197–201.
19. Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns*. See also Flora Veit-Wild, *op.cit.*, 323.
20. See discussion on 'Society and Ideology' in Kwame Nkrumah, *Conscientism, Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonisation* (London, Panaf Books Ltd., 1964 repr. in paperback 1978), 56–77.
21. Flora Veit-Wild, *op.cit.*, 325.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. I.V. Mazorodze, *Silent Journey from the East* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1989).
25. Henrick Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War: Counter-Insurgency and Guerrilla Warfare, 1962-1980* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1989), 98, 103, 104.
26. Flora Veit-Wild, *op.cit.*, 321–3.
27. *Ibid.*, 322.
28. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967 repr. 1978), 64.
29. Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London, Methuen & Co., 1976 repr. 1985), 22–3.
30. Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* quoted in Terry Eagleton, *ibid.*, 23.
31. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 64.
32. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, The Seabury Press, 1974), 76. See also Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in New Key* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974), 126, and T. T. Moyana, *Education, Liberation and the Creative Act* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1989), 4, 27, 29.
33. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, The Seabury Press), 77.
34. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes:

I am more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love. For me, the revolution, which is not possible without a theory of revolution – and therefore science – is not irreconcilable with love. On the contrary: the revolution is made by men to achieve their humanization. What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves men to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanization of man? The distortion imposed on the word 'love' by the capitalist world cannot prevent the revolution from being essentially loving in character, nor can it prevent the revolutionaries from affirming their love of life. (77–8)
35. Sisir Chattopadhyaya, *The Technique of the Modern Novel* (Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay Publishers, 1959), 35.

36. This same use of the second person is employed by Angus Shaw in his novel, *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place* (Harare, Baobab Books, 1993) for the same purpose as discussed here.
37. Flora Veit-Wild, op.cit., 324.
38. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow, Progress, 1976), 60.
39. Ibid, 23.
40. Ibid, 22.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid, 17. See also Terry Eagleton's discussion of Lucien Goldmann's ideas on the same subject in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 32. The passage below is illuminating:

Goldmann is concerned to examine the structure of a literary text for the degree to which it embodies the structure of thought (or 'world vision') of the social class or group to which the writer belongs. The more closely the text approximates to a complete, coherent articulation of the social class's 'world vision', the greater is its validity as a work of art. For Goldmann, literary works are not in the first place to be seen as the creation of individuals, but of what he calls the 'trans-individual mental structures' of a social group – by which he means the structure of ideas, values and aspirations that group shares. Great writers are those exceptional individuals who manage to transpose into art the world vision of the class or group to which they belong, and to do this in a peculiarly unified and translucent (although not necessarily conscious) way.
43. Flora Veit-Wild, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers*, 322.