

CHAPTER 3

IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS THAT SURFACE IN THE WHITE RHODESIAN NOVEL

Introduction

Reading through the novels written by white people in the then Rhodesia from as far back as the 1890s, confirms that, that literature was, indeed, born out of a historical, socio-economic situation where one race came to another's country, usurped the land which was the economic base of the people of that country, and proceeded to denigrate, belittle and subjugate those people in a bid to ensure that the indigenous people felt inferior economically, culturally, socially and politically. This was done in order to use the indigenous people to build a colonial empire and consolidate its economic base, agriculturally and commercially, and, in the process, create a complementary superstructure (for example, laws governing daily lives), to sustain this newly established colonial state.

This situation is quite apparent, not only in the historical novels that were written by some Rhodesians, but also in all the novels that deal with purely social themes such as love, marriage and social conditions prevailing in the new colonial country.

Land, therefore, whether for farming, ranching, mining or for commercial use, emerges as a recurrent theme in the Rhodesian novel. This is because it is a universal economic base for all humanity where men and women are able to create and recreate themselves. At times the problems involving land in the new colony are linked to those in the home country and the intricacies involved in these problems are sometimes similar. For instance, at least two of the selected novels deal with the problem of how land was taken away from its rightful owners in Britain. As a result of such dispossession, the characters come to the new colony to try and acquire new land as a symbolic, emotional and practical way of replacing the land that they lost. In one novel two brothers who lose their land and home, come to Rhodesia to seek a fortune with the hope that they can return to Britain to redeem their home.

Sometimes this land taken away from some characters is given back to them in the far future, thereby restoring the equilibrium lost when the land was originally taken away. In some novels, however, the characters simply need to get away from Britain where the quality of life is unacceptable to them. In the new colonies they believe that they can acquire land and with it recapture their prestige as the landed gentry. So they sail to the New World where land and opportunities are readily available to them. Invariably, they carve out chunks of land for themselves in "South Africa," which includes Zimbabwe. Sometimes such land is given as a reward for pioneering occupation in 1890; for crushing the Ndebele in 1893; for crushing the Ndebele and the Shona in

1896 or as a reward for having served in the First and Second World Wars, and so on.

All in all, it emerges that land plays a central, thematic role in one way or another in the Rhodesian novel, a study of which is quite interesting, particularly in the decade of the 1990s when the land question is still a burning issue in Zimbabwe.

In the following chapters, a selection of novels written by white people in Rhodesia will be examined from the point of view of content and character. All of these novels revolve mainly around the question of land. However, before these novels are discussed, we thought that it is important to have a chapter, this very one, on the ideology that drove the white Rhodesians in their dealings with the African people whom they found in the countries they colonised. This focus is important because the novels have something in common. All of them describe a new, empty, vast, unoccupied land, where white people can simply choose a place they want to settle.

The land is also often described as harsh, thick with forests, teeming with dangerous, wild animals and difficult to tame. Yet in the next breath the reader hears that this “vast, empty” land provides settlers with “native” labour. These “natives” also provide the new settlers with food and, at times, tips on where best to live. They provide a trade market. The labour they provide ranges from carrying out vital errands between one settler homestead and another, or between the homesteads and the commercial areas; to buying essential supplies for the masters. The

natives are also mailmen, messengers and telegram deliverers called *runners*. They provide transport by carrying some of these settlers in what are called "machilas" or hammocks. They drive their oxen, which are day-to-day "vehicles" and the chief means of transport. They labour on the farms, in the mines, in homesteads as cooks and cleaners.

All this evidence, therefore, suggests, not an empty land, but one inhabited by indigenous people whose way of life changes upon the arrival of the settlers. Therefore, the occupation itself was not an accident. It was well formulated with a firm ideological design.

The source of this ideology was the colony's architect, Cecil John Rhodes. His impetus was to seek power and fortune, and colonial lands for Britain; for Empire. There is need to briefly discuss this man's ideology which eventually translated into the white Rhodesian coloniser's ideology concerning black people and their country. Rhodes was the founder of the colony later called Rhodesia and was also the main architect of the laws that governed black-white relations and shaped the white attitudes towards black people in South Africa and, subsequently, in Southern Rhodesia. Both historically and in fiction, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia—the beautiful land between the Zambezi and the Limpopo—are closely linked culturally and financially.

Some settlers came to South Africa in search of good health, land, gold or diamonds; made a lot of or little money and then moved on to a supposed extension of the golden eldorado, the land of King Solomon's Mines as

told by Rider Haggard; Ophir. Such was the belief about this land then, that the wealth made in South Africa was used to finance settlement in Rhodesia, though some of the settlers came to Rhodesia directly without necessarily coming via South Africa. That is why this discussion, cannot be adequate without discussing the role played by Rhodes and his ideology in the colonisation of Rhodesia.

A DEFINITION OF “IDEOLOGY”

A discussion of this nature naturally has to be prefixed by a definition of the word *ideology* as it pertains to this study, for the study is very “specific and regional in that we are dealing with a particular literature of a particular country at a particular time, determined by a specific set of material and ideological conditions, and produced at a specific historical conjuncture.”¹ In dealing with the literature of a country colonised for the white men by Cecil John Rhodes, we would agree with Maughan-Brown that ideas that arise in the white literature of that country “must be treated...in terms of their historical roots, the classes which subscribe to them, the specific conjunctures in which they arise, their effectivity in winning the consent of the dominated classes to the way the world is defined and understood by the dominant class.”²

¹ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction; History and Ideology in Kenya* (London: Zed Books, 1985) 4.

² Stuart Hall, “The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the ‘Sociology of Knowledge,’ ” *On Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1978) 21.

In this case the objective of these white people and their desire to take over the territory they called Lobengula's country north of the Limpopo River, was not concealed from other people or even to themselves. After the Pioneer Column arrived, that objective became paramount and so is well dramatised in the novels or other texts such as travel books, which are the focus of this thesis.

In defining *ideology* reference is made to Luis Althusser's much debated theory. Acknowledgement is also made to Tony Bennett³ and other critics, whose theory Maughan-Brown asserts. Althusser's theory has elements which can be applied without necessarily involving oneself in the details of its pros and cons which have been treated exhaustively elsewhere. At any rate, it is not the objective of this study right now to delve much into this theory.⁴ Althusser defines ideology in various ways. One of these is that it is "as a system of mass representations [which is] indispensable in any society if men [and women] are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence."⁵ He goes on to say that in a class society such as the one being examined where there was the ruling white colonial class, and the working class made up primarily of the black people who were the underprivileged, "ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is

³ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen, 1979; reprinted Routledge, 1989).

⁴ Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction...* 4-5 and Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, chapter 6, 111-168.

⁵ Luis Althusser, *For Marx* translated by Ben Brewster (London: NLB Verso Edition, 1979) 235.

settled to the profit of the [privileged] ruling class.”⁶ Althusser also defines ideology as “the expression of the relation between men and their ‘world,’ that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real condition of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses* a *will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.”⁷

The above definitions of ideology, are relevant and true to the conditions of the characters that populate the white Rhodesian novel. For instance, the reality in Rhodesia and South Africa was that there were people already occupying these lands during and prior to the 1800s, even though their population was small, perhaps about 400 000. Yet the Europeans often claimed to have discovered lands that were vast, empty and unoccupied. Herein lies the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”⁸

This is a situation that can also be described as that of “misrecognition,” where the incoming settlers decide to live in a world of make-believe. They make-believe that the indigenous people in the new lands are non-existent, or simply invisible, because they want to take over those lands while at the same time acknowledging their labour. The best way to erase these indigenous labourers, often called savages, from their own “sophisticated” and “civilised” minds, therefore, is to *imagine* that these

⁶ *Ibid.*, 225-226.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 233-234.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 233-234. See also Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, 116-117.

people do not exist. Maughan-Brown has described the same kind of “misrecognition” in Kenya by the British settlers there and explained it by saying that “the ubiquitous colonial settler myth of ‘lands previously unoccupied’ is necessary to the justification of the settler presence...it functions as a myth irrespective of whether the lands were in fact occupied or not.”⁹ There is a lot of this imaginary situation in the novels.

Emmanuel Ngara has synthesised a definition of ideology in a way that is also pertinent to this discussion as it links up very well with it. He begins with a summary of Raymond Williams’ definitions and then synthesises them by saying that ideology refers “to the dominant ideas of an epoch or class, with regard to politics and law, morality, religion, art and science.” After all, “according to Marxist philosophy, social development is based on economic relations which constitute the material relations of people.”¹⁰

This definition captures the important element of politics in its relationship to law, morality, religion, art and science—elements that are crucial in any progressive society. These are also crucial in the society created and governed by Cecil John Rhodes because the chief controlling factor is the kind of ideology that produces the politics, law, morality, religion and education of his society; the superstructure lying on the economic base of his society. In this same context, it is, therefore, true to say that “the function of ideology...is to legitimate [sic] the power of the ruling class in society...[for] in the final analysis, the dominant ideas of a

⁹ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 10.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Ngara, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing* (London: Heinemann, 1985) 20. See also Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 55, for a discussion of the various definitions of ideology.

society are the ideas of its ruling class.”¹¹ The kind of ideology that operates in the white Rhodesian novel arises from Rhodes’s personal beliefs concerning his mission in the world for his English race, his country England, and his British Empire. He then works with tireless speed to see that mission and those beliefs fulfilled before he dies. Those beliefs and his ideology live on for almost a century as they get adopted by his fellow white men and women throughout the African territories that he claimed for Great Britain: Southern and Northern Rhodesia, and the land he ruled as Prime Minister, South Africa. It is at this point then, that Cecil John Rhodes’s ideology and mission in Africa need to be examined.

THE IDEOLOGY AND MISSION OF CECIL JOHN RHODES

Rhodes can be looked upon as a man whose mission was shaped by a search for a purpose in life. At 23 years of age he wrote,

It often strikes a man to inquire what is the chief good in life; to one that thought comes that it is a happy marriage, to another great wealth, and as each seizes on the idea, for that he more or less works for the rest of his existence. To myself, thinking over the same question, the wish came to me to render myself useful to my country...I contend that we are the finest race in the world, and that the more of the

¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1985) 5.

world we inhabit the better it is for the human race...Added to this, the absorption of the greater portion of the world under our rule simply means the end of all wars....¹²

The story of Cecil John Rhodes is presented in a very systematic manner by his biographers including the most recent, Antony Thomas, and so one is able to easily trace the development of his thought process. Rhodes seems to have acted very deliberately at every stage in the development of his thought and ideology. He decided early that he was going to dedicate his life, not to a happy marriage; not to enjoying great wealth, but to rendering himself useful to his country. Nothing sounds extraordinary about that pledge until one reads on, only to discover that Rhodes believed that his was *the finest race in the world*, “and that the more of the world [his race inhabited] the better for the human race.” Thus, his wish or mission was to work towards “the absorption of the greater portion of the world under [British] rule” and he declared that that would *simply* mean the end of all wars. This paragraph is part of what comes to be known as Rhodes’s “confession of faith,” and little did he realise that his mission as articulated here, would actually mark the beginning of many wars.

Having declared his “chief good in life,” the next important point that follows is his “idea” which he says, “framed itself into a plan.” He goes on:

The idea gleaming and dancing before one’s eyes like a

¹² Antony Thomas, *Rhodes, The Race for Africa* Harare: African Publishing Group, 1996 reprinted. 1997) 113.

will-of-the-wisp at last frames itself into a plan. Why should we not form a secret society with but one object, the furtherance of the British Empire and the bringing of the whole uncivilised world under British rule, for the recovery of the United States, for making the Anglo-Saxon race but one Empire?

[It] would be a society not openly acknowledged but which would have its members in every part of the British Empire...placed at our universities and our schools...in every Colonial legislature. The Society should attempt to have its members prepared at all times to vote or speak and advocate the closer union of England and the colonies, to crush all disloyalty and every movement for the severance of our Empire. The Society should inspire and even own portions of the press for the press rules the minds of men.

What a dream, but yet it is probable. It is possible.¹³

For Rhodes, therefore, the supremacy of the English race was to be promoted throughout the world by a secret society. Once he established this ideology, this objective, he set about achieving it. It became his driving passion throughout his life and even beyond, since he wrote wills with a provision for using his fortune to advance the cause of Empire.¹⁴ It is just unfortunate that the “world” he started with happened to be Southern Africa.

Rhodes’s mission determined his method of achieving it, namely by conquest, using a secret society similar to those of the Freemasons and the Jesuits, only more usefully and purposefully so far as he was concerned. For he comments, “I see the wealth and power they [the Masonic Order] possess, the influence they hold...and I wonder that a

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

¹⁴ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 81.

large body of men can devote themselves to what at times appear to be the most ridiculous and absurd rites *with no object, with no aim*. But might it not be possible to form another secret society that *would be prepared to use its wealth, power and influence in the service of a great object, a great aim?*”¹⁵

At a time Rhodes felt that his life was worthless and was directed to no clear aim, certain factors came into play. One of these was a lecture at Oxford by John Ruskin who, in his inaugural address, appealed to young Englishmen in the following words, “All I ask of you is to have a fixed purpose of some kind for your country and for yourselves, no matter how restricted, so that it can be fixed and unselfish.”¹⁶ For a man who did not seem to plan to have a family of his own, this charge took root and the secret society idea was a good enough course for him. The very idea of going to enter Oxford was for Rhodes, not to excel in academia, but a means to achieving power in a future that he planned to dominate.¹⁷

A third aspect of Rhodes’s ideology concerns the treatment of the black people of Africa whom he and his fellow countrymen and other white races found in the new lands. In the first place, the question of why he came to Africa at all, has often been paused and a lot of reference has been made to his poor health. However, his health issue appears to have come in later, after he was 19 years old. He suffered from a cold that affected his lungs and his doctor had written in his files that the boy had

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

six months to live.¹⁸ The original reason for leaving his homeland was at the suggestion of his family doctor who thought he was consumptive and so “a long sea voyage would be the best cure.”¹⁹ This was probably a misdiagnosis since the consumption was not confirmed by his autopsy at death. But whatever fate drove him to Africa, it gave him a new horizon to formulate his aim or his object in life, first becoming a cotton farmer and then a diamond and gold magnet. In both fields he had to work with Africans.

The tendency in most white men who came to Africa was to declare that they liked Africans as if Africans were a variety of food to be liked or disliked, and Rhodes is said to “have enjoyed an easy, unprejudiced relationship with the local Africans. He was always intensely interested in them (as he was in everything else that satisfied his ambition) and quickly appreciated the value they placed in a man’s trust.”²⁰ So trustworthy were these Africans that Rhodes believed them to be “safer than the Bank of England” when any money was loaned to them.²¹

Thus, Rhodes was purposeful. Before he could use Africans to advance his mission, he first studied their personality as a race. We shall see to what use he put this trust as he developed his ideology which is also well portrayed in the novels. The journey he took with his brother, Herbert, into the hinterland, to the Transvaal at 19 as recuperative therapy since he had suffered a “mild” heart attack, introduced him to what in the novels is

¹⁸ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

called, Lobengula's country, which he coveted right away. It is at the time of this visit that he made up his mind to conquer the hinterland for Empire.

Once this mission and objective were certain, all that remained was to find the means to carry it out. Rhodes's obsession with money, capital, was in order to finance his great plan of taking Africa, for he declared, "Africa is still lying ready for us. It is our duty to take it."²² It is ironic, however, that in pursuing what he called God's Divine plan which was to "spread Justice, Liberty and Peace...over the widest possible area of the planet...to make the world English,"²³ he used the most cruel methods to subdue Africans and make them bend to his and "God's" purpose, thereby denying them the justice, liberty and peace that he professed to bring them in the first place. Hence, he articulated his ideology about Africans thus:

I will lay down my own policy on this native question. Either you have to receive them on an equal footing as citizens, or call them a subject race. Well, I have made up my mind that there must be class legislation, that there must be Pass Laws and Peace Preservation Acts, and that we have got to treat natives where they are in a state of barbarism, in a different way to ourselves. We are to be lords over them. These are my politics on native affairs, and these are the politics of South Africa. Treat the natives as a subject people as long as they continue in a state of barbarism and communal tenure; be the lords over them, and let them be a subject race, and keep the

²¹ *Ibid.*, 63; 80.

²² *Ibid* 134.

²³ *Ibid* 114.

liquor from them.²⁴

We will not fail to recognise this ideology at work in the novels because in real life it was Rhodes's driving force in his dealings with the people he called natives. Antony Thomas contends that Rhodes was not always so callous and cruel, but that he developed these qualities gradually because of what he had to achieve. Of all the biographers of Cecil Rhodes, Thomas's thesis is much more lucid and traces the development of Rhodes's cruelty both to his fellow white people and to the Africans. He explains this cruelty by stating a truism he has discovered over the years which is that "all men in positions of great power need to construct a personal ideology that makes sense of their actions and decisions—both to themselves and to others. The need for moral justification seems equally compelling whether the activity is religious, political, commercial or criminal."²⁵

On the other hand, Rhodes was a man for whom "events [seemed] to move forward under their own momentum, and the temptation [was] to let them roll."²⁶ Those events had to do with the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley and later gold in Johannesburg, as well as Rhodes's recognition that these minerals represented his chance of accumulating a big enough fortune to enable him to take Africa. To illustrate his need for money to advance his cause, he is said to have told General Gordon who is reported to have refused a Chinese gift of a room full of gold as a

²⁴ Stanlake J.T. Samkange, *What Rhodes Really Said About Africans* (Harare: Harare publishing House, 1982) 15; A Thomas, *Rhodes* 9.

²⁵ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes* 114-115.

reward for his services, that “I’d have taken it, and as many roomfuls as they offered me. What is the use of having ideas for the benefit of mankind if you haven’t the money to carry them out?”²⁷

Rhodes’s passion, therefore, from age 20 till he died at 49, was for the politics of conquest and money gave him the power to advance his politics. Anything that stood in his way was crushed, “squared” or bribed in one way or another. His politics and economic moves were moulded to conform to his general cause—to advance the greatness of Great Britain, his country. Wadia has discussed this issue well when he says, “*The Empire* was his [Rhodes’s] life’s watchword. It was the one master passion of his life which later on became almost an obsession and swayed his entire being and turned and twisted the course of his chequered career.”²⁸

To achieve his objectives, Rhodes’s methods adhere to the dictum, “the ends justify the means, so he sought the legal means to push his agenda forward. The most important legislation for him was the Glen Grey Act which he fast-tracked through the Cape Parliament. This Act laid the basis of segregation by creating “Reserves,” that is, land that was allocated to Africans only for communal habitation in the Cape. This is the basis of the Reserves and the Land Apportionment in Rhodesia. What he also did was to buy the Cape newspaper, the *Cape Argus*, in order to

²⁶ *Ibid* 116.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 130.

²⁸ Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1947) 28.

control men's minds as he believed the press did.²⁹ He became a Member of Parliament in order to be at the source of power which he needed to use to further his ideas. Among other legislations he saw through parliament was one where he opposed a motion to disarm the Sothos because they "provided a significant proportion of the labour force in the mines." The mines were pivotal to his accumulation of wealth so that he could advance his main objective in life, that of conquering Africa for Britain. The Sothos' main purpose for their presence in South Africa was to earn the money to buy guns. If that incentive were removed, there were few other reasons for a tribal African to wish to sell his labour in a neighbouring country for cash. Apart from the labour issue, "Basutoland was an important source of Kimberley's wood and grain. Hostilities were disrupting supplies and forcing up prices. That too, was bad for the mining industry."³⁰

Later Rhodes would use draconian measures to secure this native labour. In the Sotho case, it is possible that the Sotho saw him as an understanding friend since he fought his own Parliament on their behalf. Yet his real motive lay behind labour and other crucial resources for the mining industry as he says himself.³¹ Nevertheless, this was his parliamentary victory.

His next achievement in Parliament was to help "steer the Diamond Trades Act through the House" whose provisions were disastrous for the

²⁹ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 113; 127.

³⁰ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 129.

³¹ *Ibid* 136.

black labourers.³² For this bill to go through, Rhodes worked systematically to achieve his goals in unity with the Afrikaner Bond while sacrificing the black people:

Rhodes's mining interests had moved him a long way from his original instincts and much closer to the position that Afrikaners had taken towards blacks. It now suited his larger ambitions to close that gap entirely. By the early 1880s, Rhodes was already looking beyond his immediate ambitions in Kimberley to a future that would depend [sic] on close cooperation between Englishman and Afrikaner. And if the blacks had to pay the price for white unity, that was a small consideration compared to the great issues that were now turning in Rhodes's mind.³³

The question of Bechuanaland (Botswana) was important to him only because of the "native labour, wood and grain" the territory would supply Kimberley. While he really did not care about Basutoland on whose side he fought for her continued purchase of guns, he cared about Bechuanaland which he viewed as "his Suez Canal to the North."³⁴ So he and Mackenzie, deputy Commissioner of Bechuanaland who opposed Rhodes, vied for territorial dominance over Bechuanaland, each pretending to want to "protect" the natives against abuse by the other. These two men, however, joined forces later only because they feared a German advance after South West Africa became a German Protectorate.

³² *Ibid* 130.

³³ Thomas, *Rhodes* 133.

³⁴ *Ibid* 136.

To demonstrate the ruthlessness of Cecil John Rhodes towards the black labourers whom he wanted controlled and whose labour needed to be consistent and unflinching, we should look a little more closely at the provisions of the Diamond Trades Act. The Act was meant to eradicate what was called the Illegal Diamond Buying, IDB, and in practice only blacks were targeted as IDB criminals. The Act was, therefore, meant “to improve security and discourage this illegal trade.” Workers would be strip-searched daily as they left the mines. Diamond thieves would be flogged and the jury system abolished in IDB trials.³⁵ Although the strip-searching was to include white workers, that provision was quickly abandoned after some “disastrous strikes in Kimberley.” So only blacks suffered at the hands of this Act:

Over 11, 000 African labourers were housed 20 - 25 to a room in corrugated-iron barracks, set out in a square and surrounded by a 12-foot fence (3.6 metre), which was patrolled by company police with dogs. The whole area was roofed over by double-meshed wire netting and guard towers with searchlights were placed at each corner. At the centre of the compound there was a cook-house, consisting of four strips of tin roofing supported by wooden posts. A concrete pool was provided for communal bathing.

When the workers returned to the compound at the end of their shifts, they had to discard the sacks they wore in the mine and file naked into a tin shed, where they were subjected to a full body search:

[The guard] ran fingers through their woolly hair, pressed their flat nostrils, felt inside

³⁵ Thomas, *Rhodes* 132.

mouths, under their tongues, in the ears,
and up their rectums. Then the native had
to lift his arms, stretch apart his fingers, and
“jigger” (jump), so that any diamonds
concealed by muscular contraction would drop
on the floor.

At the end of their terms of contract, the workers were shut
in a “detention house” where they remained “in a perfectly
nude condition, save for a pair of fingerless leathern gloves,
which were padlocked to their hands, for some ten days.
Their excrement was collected and examined daily.”³⁶

Anyone reading through this would agree that the architects of such
treatment had to possess a certain amount of madness. One also must
wonder why these black people still came to work in the South African
mines under such trying conditions. The blacks continued to come
because it was one good source of money, which they hoped to take back
home at the end of their contract. They found these conditions when it
was too late to go back as they would already have arrived, there being no
radios, BBC or CNN which would highlight such bad conditions and
prevent a further influx of people into the gold mines. The gold rush
affected everybody, black and white, and everybody hoped to get rich
quick somehow from it. Another reason for black people going to work
in the mines was that some of their countries benefited from their wages,
which were paid directly to these countries. Upon the completion of the
miners’ contract, the mine labourers would then be given back a certain
portion of their wages while their governments pocketed the remainder,

³⁶ *Ibid* 132-133.

inevitably, the bigger portion. So it was a source of foreign exchange for the miners' countries too.

As we have seen, the labourers in the mines were treated and housed in worse conditions than criminals in a prison; worse than animals in their habitat. Yet they were providing a useful service to those mines. One wonders why these workers stayed on at all. But they did stay on and worked, firstly because Rhodes concocted a system of taxes—a labour tax, a hut tax, pole tax, among others, after what was called the Strop Bill failed to become law. Gertrude Millin writes:

One of the first things Rhodes did as Prime Minister was to support what is known as the Strop Bill. He did it to please the Dutch farmers.

One thing the Dutch farmers were always complaining about was that they could not control the natives: their habits, their labours, their comings and their goings. A native earned himself the money to buy a few cattle and then he lay on his back in the sun gazing up at high heaven. Nor, failing complete freedom, had he anything much against prison. Prison life was no worse. How was the farmer to punish the unsatisfactory native? By dismissal or imprisonment? Useless.

The Strop Bill was a bill empowering magistrates, in certain master and servant cases, to impose the lash (hence 'strop'). Not only Rhodes, but Hofmeyr, supported the bill. The bill did not become law.³⁷

The bill did not become law and so Rhodes came up with the idea of these taxes one of which, a labour tax, had as its purpose, to “give a

³⁷ Sarah Gertrude Millin, *Rhodes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1933) 227.

gentle stimulus to these people to make them go on working.... If a labour tax of 10s were imposed, they would have to work... the only way to do this is to compel them to pay a certain labour tax.... Every black man cannot have three acres and a cow or four morgen and a commonage right...it must be brought home to them that in future nine tenths of them, will have to spend their lives in daily labour.”³⁸ In Rhodesia these numerous taxes were also applied, so was “chibharo,” forced labour, as well as a generous use of the “strop” or “sjambok” as “gentle stimuli” for black men to go to work for white men.³⁹ These are examples of naked exploitation of one racial group of people by another. Unfortunately these exploitative ideas were adopted and accepted as normative in both South Africa and Rhodesia for a long time during and after Rhodes’s lifetime.

Rhodes further created and consolidated a permanent subjugated condition of black people in the Southern African territories where he operated, thereby creating and consolidating the white people’s economic base in the colonies. He succeeded in doing this as Prime Minister, when he and his colleagues formulated what they called the Glen Grey Act and forced it through Parliament “in an unprecedented all-night sitting on 30-31 July, 1894. There was no apology, no talk of preserving ‘native culture and tradition,’ no recourse to any of the other excuses used by those who try to make racism ‘responsible.’” The bill was about votes and labour, particularly labour. Rhodes came straight to the point:

³⁸ Vindex, Pseudo. (Reverend F. Verschoyles), *Cecil Rhodes: His Political Life and Speeches* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1900) 373.

³⁹ S.J.T. Samkange, *What Rhodes Really Said About Africans*, 32.

When I see the labour troubles that are occurring in the United States, and when I see the troubles that are going to occur with the English people in their own country...I feel rather glad that the labour question here is connected with the native question.... If the whites maintain their position as the supreme race, the day will come when we shall all be thankful that we have the natives with us in their proper position.⁴⁰

The Glen Grey Act was draconian in that it not only robbed black people of their human rights as occupiers of their own country, but it also bonded them to the white people within their own reserves and outside them. The so-called Glen Grey district of South Africa was to be the first “native reserve,” as Rhodes articulated, “My idea ... is that the natives should be kept in these native reserves and not mixed with white men at all.” Thomas describes an excerpt of the provisions of that Act as follows:

While whites would not be permitted to acquire land or property in the Glen Grey area, blacks would receive eight-acre (3.24 hectare) allotments which they were forbidden to subdivide or sell. By these means, the eldest sons could inherit; younger sons and unmarried daughters would have no means of support. The measure would also prevent African advancement. The successful black farmer could not expand by purchasing neighbouring property, and the man who wished to leave the land would be unable convert [sic] his asset into cash.

In addition to these restrictions, every family in the district would be compelled to pay a hut tax and every male (landowners and landless) who did not sell his labour outside

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 271.

the area within a 12-month period would be compelled to pay a labour tax. Rhodes described this last measure as a “gentle stimulus to these people to make them go on working.” Whatever work they did in the colony, they would have no right to vote there.⁴¹

Rhodes believed that blacks should not mix with whites because, “the natives, in their undeveloped stage were readier to imitate the vices of Europeans than their virtues.” The natives, therefore, were to be “kept apart in their own interests from the Whites and from their liquor bars and canteens.”⁴²

In Rhodesia, the Land Husbandry Act was a direct descendant of this Glen Grey Act. Rhodes’s basic idea of treating black people as good for nothing else except labour for white people became the foundation of race relations between blacks and whites; the foundation of the justification of denigration and then dispossession of the African people in Rhodesia and South Africa. Rhodes described the Act as “a native bill for Africa and his favourite child.”⁴³ As Thomas says, “if anyone can be accused of laying foundations of apartheid, it was ‘that most English of Englishmen’ Cecil John Rhodes.”⁴⁴ Stephen Tsoroti has also commented on this by saying that the Glen Grey Act of July 30-31 “will remain in the annals of history as the most berserk Act in the history of the world.”⁴⁵ This was

⁴¹ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 270-271.

⁴² Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia*, 33.

⁴³ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 270.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 9.

⁴⁵ Stephen Tsoroti, “Book Review of A. Thomas’s *Rhodes: Race for Africa* (sic)—The Untold Past Revisited. Mutare: *The Manica Post* (Wednesday, December 24, 1997).

like reinventing slavery through legislation. Rhodes had accomplices though, in formulating this bill; accomplices such as Colonel Crossman who is said to have had “firm views on Africans” and who believed that “they must be treated as children, . . .incapable of governing themselves.”⁴⁶

The whole concept of formulating ways and means of legally and permanently keeping one race under another’s governance was just diabolical. Wadia has commented as such:

...for one to hold and preach the doctrine of Race Predominance is dangerous at all times; but it becomes positively criminal when it is turned into a dogma and made the ruling principle of a dictator or the guiding policy of a nation. It then develops in a race-obsessed people certain unhealthy supercilious ideas which when exercised on other races of the world lead to a cold, wooden, soulless system of government—the much-abhorred Imperialism, so aptly described . . .as “the assertion of racial superiority, suppression of political and economic freedom of other peoples, the exploitation of the natural resources of other countries solely for the benefit of an Imperial country.”⁴⁷

Before concluding this discussion on Rhodes, it should be pointed out that he was a man who did not hesitate to sacrifice his own fellow white people, or commit crime if that sacrifice or crime advanced his cause of acquiring wealth through keeping the Kimberley diamond mines open. Many examples can be cited in this regard. He waylaid Boer wood

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 99.

⁴⁷ Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia*,30.

wagons in order that he might supply enough wood to the mines.⁴⁸ He sabotaged De Beers water pumping equipment in order that he might be awarded the mine water pumping contract.⁴⁹ His conspiracy in the Jameson Raid and his subsequent shifting of all blame to Jameson alone shows his willingness to sacrifice a friend when he thought it necessary.⁵⁰ His part in the “politics of death” as Dr. Torrell calls it, is also a case in point.⁵¹ Rhodes, with the collaboration of four medical doctors, including Dr. Leander Starr Jameson, suppressed news of the outbreak of smallpox in the worker compounds because he thought that if it were known, all workers would desert the mines. The doctors reported this rampant illness as pneumonia or chicken pox. Rhodes “squared” anyone, doctors or judges, who looked like they could report this smallpox outbreak.

Eventually, of course, the public got to know about the outbreak, but that was after many people had died. So if these doctors, judges and Rhodes could be so callous to their own people, how much more to the black people! The Jameson Raid and the raising of the Pioneer Column were ideas he actually put into practice. All that Rhodes wanted was to raise enough capital by any means necessary, to finance the colonising of new African territory for Britain. He succeeded in accumulating such a massive capital base as a diamond and gold magnet in South Africa. Then he used that accumulated capital to single-handedly finance the Pioneer Column that trekked to Rhodesia in 1890, thereby expanding the

⁴⁸ Thomas, *Rhodes...* 94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* 99-101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid* 273-304.

⁵¹ Rob Torrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 258. Thomas, *Rhodes...* 153-160.

British Empire. This occupation of Rhodesia also provided him with an opportunity for greater exploitation of people and resources.

Rhodes's callousness can be explained in the Althusserian concept of ideology as something that has its own material existence.⁵² Bennett has explained this concept in less convoluted language when he says, "The ideas of a human subject...exist only in his/her actions, and these actions are inserted into practices which are, in turn, 'governed by rituals in which these practices are inscribed within the material existence of an ideological apparatus,' such as a church, a school or a political rally."⁵³ In Rhodes's case, he had the idea—"my idea"—and he put this idea into action which he, in turn, put into practice using the political ritual of an Act of Parliament. Thereafter, the *idea* was there to stay and to be obeyed as an instrument of justice that has acquired its own life. The fact that that *idea* lived on for almost a century tells us that it worked on "the raw material of social relationships with the instruments of ideological production provided by its subject-centred structure."⁵⁴

Amazingly, another biographer of Cecil John Rhodes, Lewis Michell, does not find it necessary to write about this ugly side of Rhodes. He dwells on what he calls *his greatness*, and his *love* for natives and goes on to say that he was "sincerely desirous of protecting the natives of the

⁵² L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971) 158.

⁵³ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, 113.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

countries over whom [he] bore away....”⁵⁵ While admitting that Rhodes may have “committed errors [and] sometimes have been mistaken in his policy,”⁵⁶ Michell does not elaborate on the gross errors and segregation policies that have been discussed above; so that a reader who does not know what he actually did, would not know the extent and depth of Rhodes’s cruelty, not only to the Africans, but also to his own people. His own people hated him too because he was one of the early monopoly capitalists. As such, he was feared and hated by smaller capitalists. For instance, his methods of amalgamating all diamond digging mines into one big, monopoly company, De Beers, resulted in the laying off of hundreds of white workers, not to mention thousands of black workers. The company also swallowed up smaller individual diggers who were least amused, and at one time in 1888, Rhodes and Barney Barnato his partner, “were...so unpopular that they had to be given police protection in Kimberley.”⁵⁷

A great deal of settler history is full of the settlers’ anger against Rhodes and the Company before 1922, which was effectively, anger against monopoly capitalism. The sense of whites as a nation was largely created in those years of fighting against the British South Africa Company. That anger starts very early on in the 1890s. This disenchantment with Rhodes and the BSAC surfaces very strongly in some of the settler novels that have been selected for discussion in this thesis. Perhaps De Beers was Rhodes’s “secret society” meant to advance his “noble” cause for Empire.

⁵⁵ Sir Lewis Michell, C.V.O., *The Life and Times of the Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes, 1853-1902* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912) 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

In June of 1888, “a twilight procession of unemployed white and Coloured workers marched from Dutoitspan to Kimberley. As an effigy of Rhodes was burnt outside the new De Beers Company headquarters, the demonstrators intoned:

We ...now commit to the flames the last mortal remains of Cecil John Rhodes, Amalgamator General, Diamond King and Monarch of De Beers...a traitor to his adopted country, panderer to the selfish greed of a few purse-proud speculators, and a public pest. May the Lord perish him. Amen!”⁵⁸

The Rhodesian novel in English deals with these historical issues in one way or another. Rhodes, for example, is portrayed as a loved-hated character in different novels and sometimes, that double image comes through clearly. However, invariably, his company, the British South Africa Company, BSAP, is portrayed negatively. It is important to understand the position and place of Cecil John Rhodes from a historical and ideological point of view because the novelists describe the conditions of their characters that, in one way or another, react to, or articulate these historical and ideological issues. The content and form of these novels revolve around these issues. The difference between reading this information in history and biography books, and reading it in literature, in an artistic form, is that the literature “enables us to ‘see,’ ‘perceive,’ or ‘feel’ something that alludes to reality. That ‘something’ is

⁵⁷ A. Thomas, *Rhodes, The Race for Africa*, 181.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

‘the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art and to which it *alludes*.’”⁵⁹

It has been essential, therefore, to define ideology and then to examine the ideology of the colonisers inherited from their chief architect, Cecil John Rhodes. Without this knowledge the context of the novels would not be well understood. The next chapter discusses a selection of the Rhodesian historical novels and how the ideology discussed in this chapter surfaces in those novels.

⁵⁹ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, 121-122