

CHAPTER 4

CONTENT AND CHARACTER IN THE WHITE RHODESIAN NOVEL— THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

Introduction

There is a selection of novels, in this thesis, which has been called “the historical novel” because basically the content of such novels focuses on the historical roots of the white people’s presence in both South Africa, and in what later became Rhodesia. Close attention to a few of these novels will be paid in this chapter; novels such as Wilbur Smith’s, *Men of Men*; Wilfred Robertson’s, *Wagons Rolling North, A Story of Cecil John Rhodes*; E.M. Slatter’s, *My Leaves are Green*; Mziki’s, *Mlimo, The Rise and Fall of the Matabele*; and Betram Mitford’s, *The Induna’s Wife*.

The style of these novels varies: Smith uses an omniscient narrator to tell the story of Major Morris Zouga Ballantyne, a famous hunter and author of *Hunter’s Odyssey*. But in the first one-and-half pages of the story the narrator describes *the diamond*—how it was formed deep down in the bowels of the earth and how “it had never been exposed to the light of day...in the 200 million years since it assumed its present form...,” and how it is now being sought after by “an antlike colony of living creatures.”¹ It is an appropriate beginning because the whole novel centres on *the diamond*. People’s lives are regulated by it and the whole

¹ Wilbur Smith, *Men of Men* (London: Heinemann, 1981) 7-8.

exercise of occupying Zouga's "north" (as he calls it, referring to Rhodesia), is done with the power of *the diamond*.

Wilfred Robertson's novel, *Wagons Rolling North, A Story of Cecil John Rhodes*,² has, as the sub-title of its first chapter, "Tin Roofs and Diamonds," referring to the roofs of the diamond diggers' rugged accommodation made of corrugated iron tins. Again, it is the diamonds of the South that finance the journey north including the trekking of the Pioneer Column. The sub-title is also pertinent as it symbolically focuses on the harsh living conditions of the diamond diggers. An omniscient narrator is used to tell the story of the 17-year-old youth who comes from England to Africa seeking adventure.

E.M. Slatter's *My Leaves are Green*,³ gives insight into the life of the characters' struggle for economic fulfilment in South Africa, their homeland. That struggle includes involvement in the wars with Cetshwayo (spelt Cetewayo in the novel) and between the British and the Zulus. Gold and diamond digging, as a way of making a living, continues for David and Paul, the identical twins whom no one could quite tell apart. It is David who finally decides to go and settle in Mashonaland after having stolen Paul's identity when the latter gets killed in the Boer-Zulu war, though he really does not prosper under the stolen identity. David tells his life story, perhaps to purge or exorcise himself of the sin of jealousy which gnaws at him from beginning to end. It is that jealousy

² Wilfrid Robertson, *Wagons Rolling North: A Story of Cecil Rhodes* (London: Phoenix Ho., 1954).

³ Eve M. Slatter, *My Leaves are Green* (Cape Town: Nasionale Beekhandel, 1967).

that is responsible for his stealing Paul's identity after the latter dies. In Mashonaland, David and other Pioneers have to fight the 1893 and 1896 wars and families perish in the process.

Mziki's *Mlimo, The Rise and Fall of the Matabele*,⁴ resembles Bertram Mitford's *The Induna's Wife*⁵ in both content and style. *Mlimo* is a historical novel about the Ndebele people under Mzilikazi and Lobengula. *The Induna's Wife* is also a novel that recreates the history of the Zulu nation under Dingane and Mpande. In both novels the role of beautiful women plays a crucial part in the behaviour of the main characters telling the stories, the Mlimo and the Induna respectively. In both novels too, the style is similar in that the Mlimo and the Induna, tell their histories to white men who sit and listen to the end without comment.

The interesting thing about these novels is that they were not all written in the nineteenth century. *The Induna's Wife* was published in 1898 while *Mlimo* was published in 1925. Slatter's was first published in 1967; Robertson's *Wagons* in 1954; Smith's *Men of Men* in 1981. So it is not the time of publication that makes these novels historical. Rather, it is the content and the setting of the texts that make them so. The psychology and the manner of both the black and white characters depict

⁴ 'Mziki, *Mlimo, The Rise and Fall of the Matabele* (Petermaritzburg: The Natal Witness Limited, 1925).

⁵ Bertram Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* (London: F.V. White, 1898).

a particularity of the age being described; a particular historical truth in the artistic reflection of reality.⁶

It is as if some writers felt that they could not do justice to the current experiences of the white people in Rhodesia until they had dealt with the burning issue of how they got there in the first place. This is similar to what Chinua Achebe does when he writes *Things Fall Apart*.⁷ The only difference is that Chinua Achebe goes on to “look back and try and find out where we [the black people] went wrong, where the rain began to beat us.”⁸ That is a different and more positive approach than what the white historical novelists do, since they do not seem to address the question of where the white men went wrong in their colonising mission.

Character attitudes in the novels are best summarised by the tone of John Farrell’s poem quoted at the beginning of the travel book by Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia. It is worth noting, however, that Wadia articulates an Indian’s view of Rhodesia and seems, generally, to accept the white coloniser’s account of the country without any disagreement except where he criticises Rhodes’s philosophy on black people. Farrell’s poem reads as follows:

Rhodesia!

Thou land of Hope, Romance, Promise boundless!

⁶ See Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962 reprinted. 1981) 15.

⁷ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975 reprinted. 1977,1981) 44-45.

⁸ *Ibid* 44-45.

Why wert thou veiled from all the eager eyes?
 To wait through ages fruitless, scentless, soundless,
 Beneath thy tent of unconjectured skies?

What opiate sealed thine eyes till all the others
 Grew tired and faint in East and West and North?
 Why didst thou dream until thy joyful brothers
 Found where thou wert, and led thee smiling forth?

Thine eyes have no tears in them for olden sorrow,
 Thou hast no heartache for a ruined past;
 From Bright To-day to many a Brighter Tomorrow
 Shall be thy way, first of lands and last!⁹

Historically, Rhodesia was considered a land of hope, a romance with “boundless promise” by the white people who ignored the indigenous people as has been said in a previous chapter . This poem summarises character attitudes in some of the white novels. For example, in stanza one line two, the rhetorical question is asked as to why Rhodesia lay hidden from all eager eyes, presumably the white eyes, because there had been “open” eyes in this land of the Munhumutapas and of the civilisation that produced Great Zimbabwe. Yet stanza three suggests that this land called Rhodesia produced nothing of importance (fruitless, scentless) in spite of overwhelming evidence of its civilisation depicted by the cave paintings and the gigantic, artistic monuments which include the soap stone birds which the white people even stole from their original sites. “Soundless” implies that the country was uninhabited, a myth that abounds in practically all the novels which have been selected for discussion in this thesis.

Line three in stanza two even suggests that Rhodesia lay dreaming till her “joyful brothers” discovered her, only after which she could smile. The last stanza erases any thought of a meaningful past for Rhodesia—for she has “no tears...for olden sorrow,” suggesting that she has always been vacantly happy and continues to be happy with the “joyful brothers.” She also has “no heartache for a ruined past,” that is, she has no ruined past to long and mourn for, no history in other words. Her life begins today (From a Brighter To-day), and continues into an endless, happy tomorrow (to many a Brighter To-morrow).

Commenting on the white people’s shock and disbelief at the Shona uprising in 1896, Ranger has observed this kind of attitude in settlers and writes, “whites believed that the Shona peoples had no roots, no sense of history; no sense of religion, the feeblest of political institutions—in short, no way of life worth fighting and dying for.”¹⁰ This is the same racist attitude which is captivated in this poem.

The belief that Africans know nothing about anything is discussed at length by Winthrop Jordan as a belief that was held in the 15th to 16th centuries by Englishmen who were puzzled by the colour of African people. On first meeting these people, the English found them a strange sight, needless to say the feeling must have been mutual on the African people’s side too. Hence, they called their colour *black*; black—a colour which was variously defined in their dictionary then, to denote evil, iniquity, wickedness, a sign of danger and repulsion, among other

⁹ Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, M.A., *The Romance of Rhodesia*, Cover Page.

¹⁰ T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* 2.

unpleasantaries. They considered African religion as heathenism and so Africans were generally believed to be “a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe [sic] religion, or common-weath [sic].”¹¹ Englishmen then linked what they considered to be African heathenism with blackness and savagery.¹² These are attitudes that permeate the novels.

THEMATIC TRENDS IN THE HISTORICAL NOVELS

Thematically, *Men of Men* and *Wagons Rolling North* share a similarity. Both novels deal with their characters’ need to establish themselves economically and away from Britain, their home. Land is crucial to people in both these texts and while diamonds and gold take a central position generally, as wealth, they are also used as a stepping stone to the acquisition of real physical land where people can settle, farm and ranch. To do this, some of the land, its people and its resources have to be destroyed.

Destruction of African Land and Wild Life

In Wilbur Smith’s novel, *Men of Men*, destruction is symbolised by the devastation and plunder done to Colseberg kopje after diamonds are discovered at the “New Rush,” later to be called Kimberley after a British Lord of the same name. By the time the main character, Zouga Ballantyne arrives at Colesberg kopje, it is a ghost of its former self: “it

¹¹ Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden, Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) 6-7; 10-13.

was already half demolished, eaten away as though by the maggots in a rotten cheese, and men still swarmed over what remained.”¹³ The image of the maggots in rotten cheese spans beyond Colesberg and can be applied also to the devastation and plunder that happens in Zambesia where Zouga and other whites plunder its resources, for instance, by hunting wild life ruthlessly.

In *Men of Men*, this plunder is described eloquently by one of the characters, Bazo. When Zouga’s son, Ralph or Henshaw (as the Ndebele call him) admires the beauty of Matabeleland and its hundreds of herd of different species of game such as buffalo, kudu, impala, rhinoceros and antelope, he notices that there are no elephants. He asks why there are no elephants and Bazo answers,

Ask Bakela—your father.... He was the first to come for them with the gun, but others followed him, many others. When Gandang, my father...crossed the Shashi river as a child on his mother’s hip, the elephant herds were black as midnight upon the land and their teeth shone like the stars. Now we will find their bones growing like white lilies in the forests.¹⁴

To substantiate Bazo’s statement, Ralph/Henshaw opens a leather-bound notebook given to him by his father, Zouga/Bakela and among other things, Zouga/Bakela writes, “In the winter of 1860 while on trek from Tete on the Zamberzi River, to King Mzilikazi’s town at Thabas Induna I slew 216 elephant [sic]. Lacking porters or wagons I had perforce to

¹² *Ibid* 6-7; 10-13.

¹³ Wilbur Smith, *Men of Men*, 14.

cache the ivory along my route.”¹⁵ That is a tremendous number of elephants killed by one man alone. Hence, the truth of Bazo’s statement, that elephant bones will be found growing like white lilies. Zouga/Bakela cached a lot more ivory in “15 separate caches containing eighty-four good tasks” and another cache “made on 16 September, 1860” at a granite kopje that he named Mt. Hampden.¹⁶

After locating all but two of Zouga’s ivory caches, Ralph/Henshaw gets ready to leave for South Africa with a wagon full of loot and, again, it is confirmed that “the great herds [of elephant] that Zouga had described in *A Hunter’s Odyssey* no longer existed.”¹⁷ King Lobengula does not know that Ralph/Henshaw has such wealth in ivory and so when he asks for permission to hunt them, the king laughs and remarks that Ralph could kill “as many as are stupid or lame enough to let you” kill them. Little does he realise the loot he already possesses, thanks to his father.

When the reader goes through Wilbur Smith’s book she/he has to remember that Smith is writing a novel in which he offers an incredible account of the looted land. It is not only the elephants that are plundered close to extinction, but also the Great Zimbabwe Birds that are looted and stolen. In his notebook, which he gives to his son Ralph, Zouga describes his “discovery of the deserted city that the tribes call ‘Zimbabwe,’ a name he translates as ‘the Graveyard of the Kings’” for some obscure reason. Zouga also describes how he finds about 50 pounds of gold and how he

¹⁴ Wilbur Smith, *Men of Men* 242.

¹⁵ *Ibid* 242.

¹⁶ *Ibid* 242-243.

¹⁷ W. Smith 243.

carries away with him one of the ancient bird-like statues, a souvenir he keeps until he gambles it away to Cecil John Rhodes.¹⁸ While he manages to take away one soap stone bird, he is unable to carry with him six more of these artistic bird carvings. It is Ralph/Henshaw who completes the loot as he goes back to Kimberley via Great Zimbabwe to steal the remaining six stone birds, assisted by Isazi, his driver. When he finds them he exclaims, “I have come for you at last... [and indeed], there were six statues. One was shattered as though by the blows from a sledgehammer, the battered head lay beside it. Three others were damaged to a lesser extent, but the remaining two were perfect.”¹⁹ Ralph then loads them into his wagon and Isazi carries them away while Ralph contemplates their sale to the British Museum and the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C. He calls it a successful coup! When Lobengula’s soldiers led by Bazo intercept him, he fights back, kills one and they kill his horse. It is left to Bazo alone to kill him, but he spares him, preferring to betray his King by reporting that the thief of the stone birds has been killed.

In the poem referred to earlier in this chapter, Rhodesia is said to be fruitless; to have “no tears...for olden sorrow/...no heartache for a ruined past...” This incident where Ralph/Henshaw is almost killed for stealing Zimbabwean cultural artefacts is a perfect contradiction of such an assumption. The incident informs the reader that Zimbabwe has heartache for her ruined past and its art.

¹⁸ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 243.

¹⁹ *Ibid* 383-384.

King Lobengula who, in Smith's novel, is supposed to be the king of the whole of Zimbabwe, protects the Great Zimbabwe and its artefacts. When Ralph/Henshaw pretends ignorance of what he has stolen, Bazo reminds him: "You know about the birds... You know also the King's warning that to despoil the ancient places is death to any man, for I myself have told you of it."²⁰ This is one example illustrating a contradiction that exists between the white people's false historical, mythical representation of black people as children and savages with no meaningful past and reality. Though historically it is not proved that King Lobengula had authority over the Great Zimbabwe area, Smith seems to include this kind of power of Lobengula over the Ruins to emphasise the fact that Africans protect their art because it is important to them. He seems to agree with Macherey's argument, that the origin of the savagery of black people in Africa "is a false origin, a beginning which always presupposes the real history it suppresses."²¹

The contradiction between reality and myth is made more visible by the fact that it is a white author writing this story and, therefore, a white man laying bear his own people's prejudices which result in the myth of blacks being mere children, according to Rhodes' beliefs. The poem above describes blacks as "fruitless, scentless, soundless" and so on. Smith seems to contradict that thinking and, through the Zimbabwe birds episode, he emphasises the Zimbabweans' artistic consciousness.

²⁰ *Ibid* 396.

²¹ See Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* 125.

While it would seem impossible that one white man could steal all the Zimbabwe birds except with the help of black people themselves, historically it is true that six Zimbabwe Birds were retrieved from South Africa and at least one of them is still housed at Groote Schuur, Rhodes's former official residence.²² It seems, therefore, that Smith used the information on the looting of the Great Zimbabwe area of its birds, to highlight the importance of art to the ancient Zimbabwean people. He even deals with the episode where Rhodes acquires the eighth Zimbabwe bird and places it in his residence at Groote Schuur; a bird which is there to this day. Thus, the novelist here acts as a critic of the general prejudiced thinking in his white society during his time which tended to despise Africans as people who had no civilisation. There is more of this

²² "Bid to bring back Zimbabwe bird," in *The Herald* (January 15, 1998). The full article reads: "Zimbabwe, which in 1981 recovered six of its eight birds known to have come from Great Zimbabwe, is now pressing ahead with efforts to have the remaining bird and the plinth of the eighth brought back to the country.

At least eight birds, listed as national treasures, are known to have been found at Great Zimbabwe—one from the Valley Ruins and seven from the Hill Complex. The birds and their column supports were carved in soapstone.

Six of the birds were stored late last century in the Cape Town museum, the nearest museum to the ruins, and were returned on the request of the new Zimbabwe Government in 1980 promptly and without much fuss in exchange for a butterfly collection.

The seventh bird is split with the upper half, the bird itself, in Zimbabwe while the plinth is in a museum in Berlin, Germany, having been taken there by missionaries.

The eighth bird came into the possession of Cecil John Rhodes and now belongs to the South African government. It is still in South Africa at Groote Schuur, an official residence once the home of Rhodes.

The seven birds and six plinths in Zimbabwe are now housed behind armoured [sic] glass in a special hall at the museum at Great Zimbabwe, within a stone's throw of their original home.

While the South African museums were willing to release the six birds they were keeping, the South African government has repeatedly refused to return the other bird saying it is private property which had been bought by Rhodes.

Efforts are already underway to have the bird in SA and the plinth in Berlin brought back into the country. The two halves have been kept apart ever since the area was effectively looted in the 1890s until the recent exhibition by the Royal Museum of Central Africa (Belgium). The museum managed to get the Germans and Zimbabweans to release the halves.

Museum authorities hope to get permission to join the two halves. The International Council of Museums declared 1997 to be the year of the missing object and called upon the international community to mark May 18 1998.

type of criticism of mainstream racism in many of the white Rhodesian novels.

Plundering the Human Soul

In Smith's novel, the destruction and plunder of African resources by white people does not only end with the material things which have been discussed above. It also extends to destruction of the African people themselves, what shall be called, the destruction and plunder of the human soul. This is evident and well portrayed in some of the selected novels, but for now incidences of the destruction of the African people in the selected historical novels will be examined.

In order for white people to gain access to African land, it was inevitable that they take over political leadership in the countries in which they lived. Since people do not always give up their political power easily, they had to be forced, subdued or defeated in war before that could happen. As a precursor to such physical destruction and plunder, a method that worked well for them was to attack the African people's psyche or *unhu/ubuntu*. This entailed discrediting the African's culture and characterising it as inferior, evil, barbarous, savage (a favourite word); in short, looking down on these people as sub-human with no morality, no feelings of pain, and no culture of any description.

The African status, in their own countries, was always reduced to below that of the white man, woman and child. The white people then show black people internalising this socialisation, so that they are always

portrayed revering the white people. This is the picture that the Rhodesians liked to portray in the novels. Rhodes's biographers, for example, write about how Africans loved Rhodes, as Michell asserts, "Both [Cecil John Rhodes and his brother, Herbert] were favourites with natives, and Cecil remained so to the last day of this life."²³ He is supposed to have had a distinguished trait in that he had this "intuitive familiarity with native ways and thoughts [which] became invaluable [to him], when in later years, he had 10 thousand native labourers in his compounds—men from every tribe in South Africa, united in nothing but their confidence in him."²⁴

Rhodes is further said to have had a "magic gift of sympathy" for people, including blacks. Curiously, as evidence of this mutual love of natives for Rhodes and vice versa, "the sonorous royal salute hitherto only accorded to a great chief of [the Ndebele] own colour," which was given to Cecil John Rhodes at his funeral at the Matopos in 1902, is often cited. Thomas describes the funeral scene thus, "The hill was swarming with the Matabele he had won and betrayed and won again and, as the coffin was hauled up the granite slope, 'They gave him, alone of white men before or since, the royal salute... Bayete!'" Indeed, Thomas's comments in this scene is apt when he says, "Even in death, Rhodes had demonstrated his supreme power over men's imaginations, be they white or black, rich or poor, humble or mighty."²⁵ This is ironic, especially if we remember how Africans were treated in his mine compounds and how he himself viewed them as hordes of savages, or children... "just

²³ Sir Lewis Michell, *The Life and Times of the Right Honourable C.J. Rhodes*, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid* 16.

emerging from barbarism,²⁶ or as animals, if the reader remembers his speech at a dinner in Bulawayo early in June 1896:

They have most admirable donkeys in Egypt, and when there I arranged for a monthly shipment to Beira. I had hardly arranged for these donkeys to arrive here when I received a peremptory telegram, asking if it was correct that I was arranging for the importation of Sudanese. I replied promptly, gentlemen, that it was totally incorrect, and that the only animals I was receiving or arranging for were donkeys.²⁷

Of course, he also considered Africans as human beings, only similar to the Englishmen's ancestors, the Druids, who are separated from the current white generation by two thousand years. Thus, Africans to him were humans all right, but humans who could begin to close the gap of civilisation between them and whites in two thousand years.²⁸

From reading his biographies, one is left with the impression that Rhodes had a special art in balancing what he said to people, and what he did to them. He appears to have been a sweet talker: "Wherever he went he made friends with the Natives and had an uncommon gift, like his brother Herbert, of instantly attracting the black man and permanently attaching him to himself and his cause. At Kimberley, for instance, he was in the habit of sauntering round the Native quarters, chaffing and laughing, settling their little quarrels or learning all about their tribal customs."²⁹ It

²⁵ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes* 28.

²⁶ S.J.T. Samkange, *What Rhodes Really Said About Africans* 10.

²⁷ *Ibid* 11.

²⁸ *Ibid* 11-12 & 13-18. See also Gertrude Millin, *Rhodes* 225ff.

²⁹ Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia* 32.

is this apparent friendliness that he exuded, which fooled many people, Natives and non-natives alike. African nature being so trusting to a white man, they take his appearances for the real person. Yet “while taking up a most friendly attitude towards the Natives, he never tolerated any familiarity on their part, for he said the Natives were little children and in their own interests should be treated as such.”³⁰ Rhodes's dual personality is the reason why, even after the Jameson Raid fiasco, his own English people forgive him and still agree to do business with him. Jameson himself forgives him. Rhodes goes to see Jameson in the nursing home where he lies ill. Coming face to face with Jameson for the first time after the Raid, he starts the conversation by saying, “Both of us have had a rough time, but you have had a rougher time than I.” Then he “poured ‘his own blood into Jameson’s veins with talk of telegraphs and Tanganyika, and work to be done and accounts to be squared.’... Within days of Rhodes’s visit, Jameson was out of the nursing home.... On 26 March he was fit enough to appear before the committee and loyally kept to the script. He had indeed gone in against Rhodes’s wishes. Chamberlain, Sir Hercules Robinson and the noble directors of the Chartered Company were innocent, and so forth.”³¹

When Rhodes goes to England to lobby for the Charter for his company, the English initially do not want to even hear about it, yet he comes back with it including support from the same people in power who oppose him in the first instance. So it appears that he had a dual personality, one of which smoothened the raggedness of the other. Sorabjee Wadia, a tourist

³⁰ *Ibid* 32.

³¹ A. Thomas, *Rhodes...* 326-327.

who visits Rhodesia calls Rhodes's mission to that country, "the Romance of Rhodesia." He describes Rhodes's shortcomings and understands them well because, he says, they resemble what the British did when they colonised India, his homeland. But he proceeds to defend him and his mission and to call him a great man!³² Rhodes, thus, had a particular charm that people saw in him which transcended money or power, though mixed up with it.

It is possible that those Africans he dealt with loved him. What we know for sure is that Rhodes used Africans and anybody else for that matter, to achieve his "great idea" of colonising lands for Britain. This *use* is what could have been interpreted as a love for Africans. He detested them in reality. Herein lies the effect of ideology as being that of "misrecognition" as explained by Bennett. In this Rhodes-versus-Natives situation, Rhodes wants to advance his cause, his idea, and so holds a particular ideology about the Africans, whom he must do down in order for that idea to come to fruition. Ironically, the Africans do not recognise Rhodes's motives, nor do they recognise his ideology, hence the imaginary relationship between these black people and himself. Bennett writes,

The 'effect' of ideology [such as Rhodes's] is thus one of 'misrecognition.' It does not represent to men either the real nature of the conditions of their existence or the real nature of their relationship to those conditions. On the contrary, [Rhodes's] ideology proposes an entirely 'imaginary' and, by implication, false representation of individuals'

³² Ardaser Sorabjee N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia* 33-35.

relationship to the conditions of their existence which, in being taken for granted, constitutes the form in which people ‘live’ ...their relationship to those conditions.³³

The human relations between Rhodes and other whites and black people are so well described, sometimes dramatised in the novels that the “misrecognition” discussed above becomes glaring. Works of art, of course, have the advantage that they “make visible...by establishing a distance [between] the lived experience as narrated in history and as portrayed in the artistic work itself,” and in this case, the literary text. Althusser argues further,

The real difference between art and science [in this case represented by the concrete, factual history of Rhodesia], lies in *specific form* in which they give us the same object in quite different ways: art in the form of ‘seeing’ and ‘perceiving’ or ‘feeling,’ science [or history] in the form of *knowledge* (in the strict sense, by concepts).³⁴

Bennett also explains,

Literature, then,...enables us ...to ‘see,’ ‘perceive,’ or ‘feel’ [ideology]...it bestows a perceptibility on ideology, returning it from ‘recognition’ to ‘seeing’ by ‘foregrounding’ its operations.³⁵

³³ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* 117.

³⁴ L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 205. See also E. Ngara, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* 21.

³⁵ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* 122.

Since in this section there are some books that claim to pay tribute to those pioneers, into Rhodesia, who performed various duties for Empire, or, as one author put it in his specific tribute to his 1896 fighting group, “to discharge a duty I owe to the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Belingwe Field Force, lately under my command, by placing on record their share in the quelling of the Matabeleland rebellion of 1896,”³⁶ the reader would do well to remember that “a text naturally may speak of a real history...but even if it maintains empirical historical accuracy this is always a *fictive* treatment—an operation of historical data according to the laws of textual production. The essential difference between ‘fiction’ and ‘history’ is...that the objects of fiction are internal to it, whereas those of history are external.”³⁷ That essential difference is demonstrated each time a person reads biographies, autobiographies or, in this case, historical novels which all claim to adhere to “facts.” These kinds of facts might be called, “artistic facts.” That is why the representations of the relationship between Africans and whites, including Rhodes, is both fascinating and tragic when told in fiction. That relationship reflects the plunder and destruction of the human soul.

While it is true that in the search for the capital that would finance land acquisition, historically white people sometimes suffered just as much at the hands of the moneyed few, as the workers’ demonstration quoted earlier where Rhodes’s effigy was burnt shows, it is also true that black people suffered doubly in that they were dispossessed and their labour was exploited, thus, transforming them from owners of land to labourers

³⁶ Major D. Tyrie Laing, *The Matabele Rebellion, 1896 With the Belingwe Field force* (London: Dean & Son Limited,--no publication date given) 7.

on the land. Accordingly, the suffering of the white workers is never dealt with in fiction just as African ownership of property is never dealt with. For instance, Thomas observes that no biographical or other writing on Rhodes and his diamond and gold claims ever mentions that there were black people who actually owned diamond claims too. He writes,

[These] African claim-owners were another matter: 'It would be almost impossible for white men to compete with natives as diggers; there were differences between their living expenses... The difference between their general wants, necessities, character and position of the two races utterly forbid it'.... For the first time, the black man was seen not only as the white man's servant, but as his economic rival. A fateful corner had been turned.³⁸

The controversies surrounding black ownership of diamond or gold claims never surfaces in any of the selected novels. The concept was too damning to the white man's ego to attract his/her attention in fiction. So what kind of African image is dealt with in the novels and, specifically, in the historical novel? Focus will be on that issue in this next part of the discussion, the issue of the destruction and plunder of the (African) human soul.

Plundering the African Soul

The issue of the African soul or the African personality is paramount in understanding black identity. Traditionally at the time being dealt with,

³⁷ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction* 13.

the nineteenth Century and before, “Africans do not vary from one another in essence nearly so much as an outsider might imagine.”³⁹ They have dignity, pride, and integrity, qualities that are found in any civilised persons around the world. There is a certain humanity, what Africans call *unhu/ubuntu*, which Africans exude that was not always recognised at times by the white colonisers who denigrated them mainly because they despised their colour, their customs, and their culture generally. The reason for despising Africans was that they were simply different:

“Africans were *different* from Englishmen in so many ways: in their clothing, housing, farming, warfare, language, government, morals, and (not least important) in their table manners.... As with skin color [sic], English reporting of African customs was partly an exercise in self-inspection by means of comparison. The necessity of continuously measuring African practices with an English yardstick of course tended to emphasize [sic] the differences between the two groups, but it also made for heightened sensitivity to instances of similarity. Thus the Englishman’s ethnocentrism tended to distort his perception of African culture in two opposite directions. While it led him to emphasize differences and to condemn any deviations from the English norm, it led him also to seek out similarities. Particularly, Englishmen were inclined to see the structures of African societies as analogous to their own, complete with kings, counselors, gentlemen, and the baser sort.⁴⁰

³⁸ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes, A Race for Africa* 83-84.

³⁹ Austin J. Shelton, editor, *The African Assertion, A Critical Anthology of African Literature* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1968) 4.

⁴⁰ Winthrop D. Jordan, *The Whiteman’s Burden* 13.’

Unhu/ubuntu, the African essence/personality and what that stands for, are some of the qualities that are portrayed in the novels; qualities that were often absent in personalities such as Starr Jameson and Cecil John Rhodes. In seeking concessions from Lobengula, they lie and cheat him while he, Lobengula, trusts “their word” simply because he bases their standard of integrity and trustworthiness on his own.

Invariably in the selected novels, the denigration of black people is done in a cultural, moral or other fashion that undermines their *unhu/ubuntu* or their psyche. Take, for example, Zouga/Bakela in *Men of Men* arriving at the mine settlement at the Colesberg kopje where he hopes to find an open space to erect his tent and make a home in order to dig for diamonds. The settlement is not only crowded with no open spaces left for a quarter of a mile around, but it is also very dirty. Yet somehow the narrator tells us about how Zouga finds it hard to accept white people’s filth. He expresses his sentiments by comparing this place with black people’s filth, saying, “The filth appalled even Zouga who had known the kraals of the Mashona in the north and had lived in a bushman settlement with the little creatures who never bathed in their entire lifetimes.”⁴¹

What he means is that having lived with the Mashona and the “bushmen,” he never thought he would see filth worse than theirs and in white men’s quarters for that matter. Thus, he feels intense loathing for the filth of the “civilised” man whose filth in this camp includes

“a litter of rusty bully beef tins, broken fragments

⁴¹ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 15.

of bottles and porcelain, ...a snowstorm of paper scraps, the decomposing corpses of stray kittens and unwanted dogs, the scrapings from the cooking pots, the excrement of those too lazy to dig a latrine in the hard earth and screen it with a thatch of the silvery karroo grass, and all the other unidentifiable offal and castings with which ten thousand human beings without control or sanitary regulations had surrounded themselves.”⁴²

By juxtaposing Zouga’s statement on the filth of the Shona and the bushmen with that of these white people at the Colesberg camp settlement, it seems the author is pointing out that this is a human rather than a racial condition peculiar to the black races of Africa. As always, there is this problem in the narrator’s consciousness, in Zouga’s consciousness—perhaps reflecting the novelist’s consciousness. Yet the narrator here seeks to undermine the worth and dignity of the Africans in describing them thus. Gertrude Millin in her novel, *The Burning Man* has a white character who does not wash and whom she describes as follows: “[Johannes] was an unpractical man, used to servants, and he often forgot to prepare himself food, to sweep his room or wash his plates or make his bed. He did not wash or clean his clothes; and as the days of high summer grew hotter, he discarded one garment after another until all he wore were Hottentot sandals, a waistcoat and breeches, to which he added, on Sundays, his soiled black coat, but still no shirt or neckcloth.”⁴³

⁴² *Ibid* 15-16.

⁴³ Sarah Gertrude Millin, *The Burning Man* (Melbourne, London, Toronto: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952) 206.

In Page's *The Veldt Trail*, reference is made to the subject of bath shunning by white men, at a farmers' luncheon meeting where the discussion centres on cattle dipping—specifically, how often the dipping should be done. Sybil comments: "Personally I consider a bath once a month is quite enough for anyone; and once a week is mere affectation. What do you think Mr. Polling?" The joke is that "Polling was well known not to favour baths at any time," and so there is an "explosion" of laughter when Sybil directs her question to him.⁴⁴ Thus, if Zouga can so keenly see the filth of the white people at the mining dump, he should be able to realise the futility of regarding one race as superior to others.

Thomas, in his biography of Rhodes, also describes the white man's filth on the diamond diggers' settlement:

The first thing to assault the traveller was the smell of the place—and the flies [which were] ... far more aggressive than the European insect.... Dead animals were always taken for granted in the scenery of the diamond fields. Exhausted pack animals would be left to die where they fell, and the road into camp was lined on either side with "a hedge of bones and horns and rotting carcasses...."⁴⁵

This is the situation that is recreated by Smith in *Men of Men*.

Slatter, on the other hand, describes moral decadence prevailing at these

⁴⁴ Gertrude Page, *The Veldt Trail*, (London, New York, Toronto & Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1919 reprinted 1920, 1921, 1923, 1924) 232.

⁴⁵ A. Thomas, *Rhodes, The Race for Africa* 67.

mine camps where all sorts of people came from many parts of the world thus:

And now at this time all the rascals and scoundrels started to arrive. They came from all over the world—England, Australia, California, Canada...all the riffraff in existence. With them came the gamblers, confidence men, and tricksters to see what they could get out of the diggers. Bars and gambling rooms sprang up all over the camp....⁴⁶

These people then become rowdy and fight and in one incident, Aylward, an ex-convict and ex-Fenian from Ireland, starts a brawl and shoots a boy. In the melee and chaos that follows, a fire breaks out. The boy who is shot dies two days later and we hear that “Aylward was typical of the later arrivals in the camp, and following this crowd came diamond thieves and consequently illicit diamond buying—IDB.”⁴⁷ Later in the novel we find that some of these rascals and criminals take up important roles in pioneering occupation in Rhodesia; are given important positions in running public affairs and unleash untold cruelty on the Shona and Ndebele people.

Certainly in these novels, the authors seem determined to show that the white people who come to Africa are not always the “civilised,” responsible people that they claim to be, but among them are the riffraff, the criminal, the scoundrels. The descriptions here contradict the image of Africans as being the only dirty people around. It seems also that the

⁴⁶ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves are Green* 42.

⁴⁷ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 43.

authors want to emphasise the irony that arises when all these white rejects make themselves look like they are all “masters,” and demand to be addressed as such by all categories of Africans including those who may be kings, queens, princes and princesses.

On the question of labour, racism plays a big role and no equality between black and white is portrayed in all the historical novels. Racism causes a lot of anguish to the African people. What comes through most strikingly in Smith (who by the way, describes these conditions most vividly and better than other novelists), is the disparity between black and white labourers on the South African diamond diggings. Hence, there is a description such as the following, “only black men could stand the conditions of physical labour in the diggings. Only black men could work for a wage that made the diggings profitable, and even that beggarly wage was many times more than the Boer farmers of the surrounding backveld republics could afford to pay.”⁴⁸

This means that only black men could be exploited as labourers in harsh digging conditions because white men could not stand them. The wage that makes the diggings profitable is five shillings a week and a musket at the end of a three years’ contract. The Boer farmers pay less than that five-shilling wage.⁴⁹ As a result of such “high” wages in the diggings, there is a serious rivalry between the diggers and the farmers, mostly because of the addition of one gun per contract at the end of three years. The Boers who are said to have fought Africans for land and who

⁴⁸ W. Smith 49.

⁴⁹ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 50.

remember with trepidation battles at Weenen—the Place of Weeping; who remember Blood River; who remember the graves of their people “at the other accursed and abandoned grave sites across the land” (grave sites that are well described in one of Betram Mitford’s novels⁵⁰), could well imagine how the guns would be used in future. Guns for Africans are, therefore, unacceptable as far as Boers are concerned.

However, selling guns to Africans seems to have been a deliberate move on the part of the settlers because they knew or suspected that the Africans would not be efficient enough to use them accurately to their benefit in warfare. In the Ndebele-Rhodesian war, for instance, the Ndebele are greatly disadvantaged by guns, a situation often recreated in fiction:

The battle also revealed the disservice Rhodes had done Lobengula with his gift of 1000 rifles. If the Matabele had relied on their traditional fighting tactics and rushed the enemy with Zulu ferocity, armed with assegai and shield, they might have overwhelmed Jameson’s army in a single charge, but instead they fumbled with unfamiliar bolts and magazines and became easy targets.⁵¹

Nevertheless, in *Men of Men*, Zouga and others on the diamond diggings keep their “gangs” by a lure of the coin and the gun, though insufficient as a wage, for digging up the precious metal, things which work to destroy them in the long run. The Africans are lured by the coin and the gun because they believe these will be of some advantage in the future.

⁵⁰ In Betram Mitford, *Through the Zulu Country, Its Battlefields and its People* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1883).

White people have penetrated their country, so in war or trade, the money and the gun would come in handy.

Often the author's style and language reveal the inherent prejudices against black people, thereby undermining their *unhu/ubuntu* morally, culturally and in practically all ways possible. Smith's prejudice is revealed in his language in which the African is completely dehumanised. There are several examples of this in the historical novels.

In *Men of Men* when Zouga goes to look for Africans to work on his diamond claim, he comes across a group of Ndebele men who also happen to be going down south to look for work. He stops to talk to them and while he is talking, he sends his son, Ralph, to shoot a beast for meat. The *shooting* itself is also meant to impress the sixteen Ndebele men whom he hopes to employ. After Ralph kills a bull eland the Ndebele are described as streaming out “*like a pack of wild dogs, swarming* over the mountainous carcass...The Matabele *gorged* [not sampled or ate] on the fat eland meat” (my emphasis).⁵² No human beings can be described with such a simile and such a verb unless it is meant to dehumanise them.

In Wilfred Robertson's *Wagons Rolling North*, the same derogatory language is used to describe black people's eating habits. On his way north, Jim, the main character, shoots his first buck, a gemsbok bull, and we are told that, that act of shooting delighted the natives “with the

⁵¹ A. Thomas, *Rhodes* 255.

⁵² W. Smith, *Men of Men* 54.

prospect of a *gorge* of fresh meat” (my emphasis).⁵³ On their way into Mashonaland, Jim and another character, Hatfield, see a Ndebele soldier who is on security guard duty. When they see him, Jim asks, “Why does a warrior [not a soldier] perch himself on the top of a rock like a *gorged* vulture?”⁵⁴ Africans, therefore, are never seen as eating normally to the extent that the authors see it fit to use a vulture simile and the verb “gorge.”

In this same novel, *Wagons Rolling North*, Africans, particularly the Shona, are also portrayed as people with no dignity. Jim sees a leopard that has been eating a small antelope leave it and slip into the bush. The narrator then says, “the hungry Mashonas . . . followed promptly [to take] possession of the remains, squabbling as to who was to have the best pieces. When they caught up again with Jim and Hatfield there were cheerful grins on their faces; they felt the white strangers had brought them luck!”⁵⁵ The luck they are talking about is that of finding and eating meat left over by a leopard, something which they could not do before these white strangers came into their lives! The reader cannot miss the insulting, dehumanising attitude here.

One of these Africans offers to be a guide to Jim and his companion—chiefly because he is “promised a good meal.” In fact the narrator says, “the whole party [of Mashonas] insisted on accompanying him hoping for what they could also obtain, leaving only the women and children to look

⁵³ Wilfred Robertson, *Wagons Rolling North* 31.

⁵⁴ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 104.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* 111.

after the lonely huts in the bush.”⁵⁶ It is as if without the white people these Shonas would have no food. All this is meant to degrade and denigrate; to create the impression of worthlessness in a people; to strip the Mashona of their humanity or *unhu/ubuthu*.

Even African talking is described in derogatory terms. In Slatter’s *My Leaves are Green*, such derogatory language is used for Africans by the narrator, David, just after he and his father and identical twin brother, Paul, arrive at the settlement where diamond diggers camp out. In describing part of the last activities of the first night at this settlement he says, “The noises of the camp died away. The singing and shouting and *jabbering* [not talking] *of the natives* stopped, and then the occasional calls from one tent to the other died away” (my emphasis).⁵⁷ The Africans, or what they call natives are described with an animalistic image. Jordan has explained this animalistic description of Africans thus,

They [the English] knew perfectly well that Negroes were men, yet they frequently described the Africans as “brutish” or “bestial” or “beastly.” The supposed hideous tortures, revolting diet...seemed somehow to place the Negro among the beasts.⁵⁸

Another example where Africans and animals are bunched together is when David-Paul (note that both David and Paul are called David-Paul because the two twins are so identical that no one can tell them apart. Since David tells the story, we hear more about him in this double name)

⁵⁶ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 111-112.

⁵⁷ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves are Green* 34.

is describing the effect of winter on his family. He says, “Then a cold wind blew and it was July. ‘Guti’ drifted across the chill bare veld. The Mashonas and the cattle shivered under its knife-edged thrust.”⁵⁹ He talks as if Mashonas are animals just like sheep as in—sheep and cattle shivered.... On another occasion when he buys six donkeys and a cart with which to transport his wife and children from Beira to Salisbury, he says, “I got it [the donkey and cart] for twenty-six pounds together with the native driver.”⁶⁰ It is as if the native driver is also included in the price of twenty-six pounds—and maybe he is! In all of these images, the people become indistinguishable from the flock the traders deal in.

There is another example of an animalistic simile in Wilbur Smith’s *Men of Men* where one of the characters with a criminal career, Mungo St. John, goes to steal a pocket of diamonds from Ningi’s hut (“Ningi” is Lobengula’s sister in the novel, her actual name being Ncencengi). As soon as he enters the hut, he sees two people sleeping and the scene is described thus, “The fire in the centre of the large hut had burned low. There was just enough light to make out two figures *curled like dogs* on the sleeping-mats on each side of it and beyond it the ponderous bulk of the princess under her furs” (my emphasis).⁶¹ Their breathing is described thus, “Their snores started as a low grumbling like a volcano and rose to a whistling crescendo that covered any noise Mungo might make as he slipped across to the first of the sleeping hand-maids.”⁶² Human beings are hardly ever described with such similes or metaphors

⁵⁸ W.D. Jordan, *The Whiteman’s Burden* 14.

⁵⁹ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 219.

⁶⁰ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves...* 219.

⁶¹ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 349.

in normal person-to-person interaction, and certainly no one would deny that such a description of a princess as “the ponderous bulk of a princess,” no matter how huge, is highly derogatory. For example, one would not describe the British Princess Anne in this manner.

In *Men of Men*, there is much derogatory language describing Lobengula and his actions. For instance, when he enters Umlimo’s cave at the Matopos, Bazo places his carved stool facing the inner part of the cave and then this description follows, “Lobengula lowered his *great black haunches upon it gratefully*” (my emphasis).⁶³ The narrator could have simply said—Lobengula sat down gratefully, for no one ever describes the act of sitting down as that of “lowering one’s great or small, black or white or brown haunches upon a stool.” This kind of language is only and consciously used where Africans are described, the reason being to give them a gross monstrous appearance, which dehumanises them. The Africans themselves end up losing their self-image, which in some cases gets totally destroyed, judged by some of their reactions to the white men. This denigration by white people is what is called, plundering of the African soul. This is because the African is not considered human in all these various descriptions, a situation which is consistent with Rhodes’s ideology as it is adopted and put into practice by his fellow colonisers.

Wilbur Smith contrasts black and white working conditions in the diggings, the only fiction author to do so in very revealing detail. That description comes just after Zouga gambles his digging claim

⁶² W. Smith, 349.

⁶³ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 388.

and loses it to Cecil John Rhodes. He has to tell his son, Ralph, who also works in the claim that this is to be his last shift since the title deeds of the claim have been changed into Rhodes's name. So the narrator says, "Zouga could make out Ralph, for he was the only man who wore a coat. The other men with him were almost naked." Zouga then wonders once again why these black men had not rebelled against the new laws enforced by Colonel John Fry of the Diamond Police, recently recruited to enforce the new Diamond Trade Act requiring black workers to be

"compounded behind barbed wire [under] new curfew regulations to keep them in the compounds after night fall [with] spot searches and checks of the compounds, of men on the streets even during daylight, and body searches of each shift coming out of the pit. Even diggers, or at least a few of them, had protested at the most draconian of John Fry's new regulations. All black workers had been forced to go into the pit stark naked, so that they would not be able to hide stones in their clothing."⁶⁴

Zouga is one of the claim owners who had protested against this new law and John Fry had been surprised by such protest, and had exclaimed, "Good Lord, Ballantyne, but they are a bunch of naked savages anyway. Modesty forsooth!" Fry is forced eventually, "with the cooperation of Rhodes [the fiction character]," to adopt a compromise where blacks can cover themselves with a seamless cotton 'limbo' around the waist.⁶⁵ This scanty attire, of course, is all that is worn even in very cold weather such as when it is snowing as it is when Zouga seeks out Ralph.

⁶⁴ W. Smith, *Men of Men*. 222.

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 222.

The quality of gifts brought to Africa by white traders is focused on in *Men of Men*. Gifts are given to King Lobengula and his sister while trading goods are sold to his people. One of Lobengula's Indunas called Gandang criticises their quality. When Ralph/Henshaw announces the trading goods he has brought to the land of the Ndebele, which are "twenty bales of the finest beads and cloth," Gandang sounds unimpressed as he calls these cheap goods, "women's fripperies." When Ralph further announces that he has "fifty cases of liquor—the kind preferred by King Lobengula and his royal sister Ningi," Gandang gets angry and "this time the line of [his] mouth thinned and hardened [then he remarks in a voice that was almost a whisper], 'if it were my word on it I would force those fifty cases of poison down your own throat.'"⁶⁶ This comment shows what alcohol does to people all over Africa and the Americas—it destroys their humanity and their health.

The drink is poison because it contributes to Lobengula's gout. When his sister gets drunk, she loses all her senses, conditions that the white people do not mind as their chief mission is to work out ways and means of taking the King's land, perhaps, they hope, while he is in a drunken stupor. One of these white men called Mungo St. John, actually steals Ningi's diamonds from her while she is sleeping in a drunken stupor in her hut. She, Ningi, wakes up crying that witches have robbed her.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 247.

Thus, drink makes a fool of a royal Princess.⁶⁷ The King thinks that the theft is connected with sorcery since, he believes, all the guards must have been awake when it took place. But they were all sleeping having shared a little of the white man's drink for sure. Reprisals on his own people for this theft are terrible because the King causes the guilty to be "smelt out" by the "witch doctors." The victims of this "smelling out" are executed right there and then, while Mungo St. John watches with indifference. Even his own wife deserts him permanently for this crime.⁶⁸

In other words, this white man's drink plays a part in corrupting Lobengula and his sister, at least from the way Smith has portrayed the situation in his novel. They lose part of their *unhu/ubuntu*, which is what is meant by plunder to the human soul and physique.

The climax of this destruction and plunder of the African people in the territory that became Rhodesia, a climax that all historical novels describe in great detail is the wars of dispossession. Land is the chief, desirable commodity and so there is a tug-of-war for it between the new colonisers and its owners. In E.M. Slatter's novel, *My Leaves are Green*, for instance, the ambition of the white families is to buy a farm or a business for themselves and their children and then settle down.⁶⁹ But like Zouga in *Men of Men*, there is need to make a fortune at the diamond diggings before occupying this land. Slatter describes Cetewayo (sic) as "the

⁶⁷ W. Smith 348-351.

⁶⁸ *Ibid* 351-357.

problem” in her novel. David and Paul sense trouble coming their way after reading their father’s letter with news about Mpande’s death and Cetewayo’s accession to the throne as king of the Zulus. The father, who lives in Natal, writes: “Shepstone has been up to Zululand to crown Cetewayo king...I don’t like it. Cetewayo is quite a different type—forceful, dominating and ambitious. If Shepstone can control him I shall be surprised, although I believe he has forbidden Cetewayo to indulge in anymore indiscriminate killing.”⁷⁰

We note that the father talks in terms of the need to control or subdue Cetewayo so that he and his people can enjoy his land. The adjectives above show that Cetewayo is a good leader—“forceful, dominating, ambitious”—but a leader who is maligned and generally portrayed as very cruel to his people. Moreover the whites believe that Cetshwayo “encourages his young men against the white men” and that he is generally blood thirsty as shown by his alleged remarks, “My men are men...they are not children. They must have work to do and their spears must have blood.”⁷¹ There is a determined effort to discredit blacks and their leaders in this statement.

Slatter in *My Leaves are Green*, writes about Edward, a missionary and husband to David-Paul’s sister, who announces that he wants to establish a chain of mission stations from the Tugela to the Zambezi under native

⁶⁹ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves...* 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 46.

ministers and then with boyish enthusiasm declares, “Just think what it will mean to those unfortunate creatures. To be freed from their witchcraft and superstition and fear! But Cetewayo is a stumbling block.”⁷² Slatter insists that the Africans themselves would staff the missions, and that the good news of Jesus would free them from witchcraft, superstition and fear. To a certain extent, this is not untrue. However, Africans are generally viewed as being unhappy and oppressed by their own kings and as needing salvation to be provided by the white deliverer. This is the image that comes through in the novels, which is an unfortunate image as it obscures even those benefits that could come to Africa by interacting with a new religion in a non-racist atmosphere.

Inevitably, a war breaks out between the British and the Zulus in the south and David and Paul take part in it, just as a war breaks out in the north in which David (who by now has forged his brother Paul’s identity after the latter has died in the British/Zulu war), again takes part. The war with Cetewayo⁷³ breaks out as a result of what the British call his insolence and unrepentance because he refuses to demobilise his army of 50 000 men. Yet Cetewayo considers this formidable army a source of pride and joy to him; his and the Zulu’s life-blood; his and the Zulu’s guarantee of power, security and independence.⁷⁴

⁷¹ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves...* 77-79; 86.

⁷² *Ibid* 80-81.

⁷³ This is the spelling used in this novel of Cetshwayo. So we will continue to use “Cetewayo” for this King because that is what he is called in the book.

⁷⁴ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 93.

The real reason for the British desire to fight Cetewayo is to acquire his land freely; land which Cetewayo builds this formidable army to defend. For example, the two brothers, David and Paul buy a farm of six thousand acres in 'Maritzburg after making money from diamond digging.⁷⁵ That is a vast amount of land, and so they join the war against Cetewayo to defend the principle behind this new acquisition. The whole issue of the historical novel is centred on how the wars between the British and the indigenous black people of Southern Africa are fought over land. Historically in Rhodesia, the only whites who got free farms were the men in the Pioneer Column and the volunteers in the army attacking Bulawayo in 1893. As most of the pioneers died or left, their land was bought by late comers to that country. In the 1893 war against the Ndebele, there were many more blacks than whites in the march on Bulawayo and although they fought the Ndebele, they were given no land. This is a stark example of early land discrimination against black people. In the historical novels, this information is not reflected, however.

Having acquired land, freely or by purchase, the whites then get Africans, called *boys*, to work on it for them, and their condition is invariably described as a happy one. For instance, when David tells his brother, Richard, who has now bought his and Paul's farm, that they had trouble getting *boys* to work on the farm, Richard answers, "You did not attempt to make them comfortable.... Here they have good huts and their own vegetable gardens [while he has six thousand acres!]. They are settled with their families. I pay good wages and I feed them well [as if they are

⁷⁵ *Ibid* 89.

livestock]. Therefore, they stay. The daughters, as they grow up, come into the house as servants and work for three years. So Lucy has plenty of helpers in the house.”⁷⁶ He does not say what happens to these girls though, after working in the house for three years.

Historically, throughout the decades that the settlers occupied Africa, they always saw Africans as a very happy people who needed nothing else but that which was supplied to them by their master. That concept surfaces a lot in white novels and Slatter has dramatised that concept well in the preceding paragraph as Richard articulates the comfort and general satisfaction of the African *boys* and *girls* who work for him.

There was a lot of plunder, usurpation of land and destruction of African life during the occupation of Mashonaland by Cecil John Rhodes’s Pioneer Column. The historical novel describes this occupation vividly, complete with the inherent contradictions displayed by the Pioneers in their dealings with the local people.

In Slatter’s novel, *My Leaves are Green*, the main character and narrator of the story, David, who forges his late brother's identity primarily because he wants to marry his girlfriend, Anna-Marie, arrives in Mashonaland after the column has already settled and so he is told by the young man in the office, “Yes, we are still *supplying* farms to civilians,” and for £100 he is told to *take* three thousand acres of land and occupy them, somewhere, as long as it is six miles from Fort Salisbury. Once on the land, David, like all the other settlers, needs labour.

⁷⁶ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 193.

Occupation of Mashonaland and the 1893 War of Dispossession

White people coming into the country north of the Limpopo River find it a challenge having to deal with the Ndebele people because they display the kind of military superiority that they rarely associate with black savages. So while they still despise them, they are forced not to dismiss them as useless savages. As Thomas says, “However cruel the Matabele might have been, whites could not help admiring their extraordinary courage, stoicism and dignity.” One traveller is quoted as having described them thus, “Magnificently, one might say, almost painfully arrogant...I think honestly that here were no people like them in the world...There was something about a pure Matabele which was outwardly very attractive. Their placid brute courage was very perfect.”⁷⁷ Thomas further describes the Matabele, “not so much [as] a tribe, but as a standing army [and] their towns were regimental kraals, closely packed together within a 40-mile radius of Gubulawayo.”⁷⁸

It is no wonder, therefore, that Rhodes sees Lobengula, the Matabele King, as “the only block to Central Africa. Once we have his territory, the rest is easy,”⁷⁹ he declares. He has collaborators who also believe that the Matabele are a problem or a threat that ought to be eliminated. One of these is John Moffat who, in one of his private letters writes, “I fear there will be no change for the better until there has been a breaking up of the Matabele power and a change in the whole regime. It will be a

⁷⁷ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes*, 183.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

blessing to the world when they are broken up...I am sure their days are numbered.”⁸⁰ Lobengula himself understands his predicament very clearly and he is said to have described it to Helm in a lucid manner using the image of a chameleon stalking a fly: “The chameleon gets behind the fly and remains motionless for some time, then he advances, very slowly and gently, first putting forward one leg and then the other. At last, when well within reach, he darts out his tongue and the fly disappears. England is the chameleon and I am that fly,” Lobengula concludes this telling metaphor.⁸¹

We are familiar with the rest of the story concerning the fall of the Ndebele State as discussed in Chapter 2. The white people then built a myth around the Matabeles. Antony Chennells discusses this myth at length in his thesis and explains how the whites promoted the Ndebele as their allies against the Shona people because once in a while, the Ndebele raided the Shona.⁸² These aspects of the Ndebele history are covered in depth in the historical novel. They also come out in the context of labour relations where the whites always feel that the blacks must work for them.

Another aspect that comes out in fiction is the belief that the Shona people are segregated by fellow black people of other ethnic groups. Thus, the Ndebele, the Basuto, the Zulu or the Xhosa—anyone else is portrayed in the novels as being better ethnically than the Shona. This

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 182.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 188; 189.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 194.

⁸² Antony Chennells, “Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel,” 78-159.

kind of prejudice is called “black-on-black bigotry.”⁸³ It is not clear whether it is not a question of white authors putting words into the mouths of these characters. Nevertheless, the black-on-black bigotry appears in almost all the selected novels and the Shona are always the butt of such bigotry. While the white people are portrayed despising all Africans, holding them in contempt, instilling in them a sense of worthlessness and inferiority, once in Masonaland, they despise the Shona more, and their black servants from the south also despise the Shona. Many novelists portray the black-on-black bigotry in different ways. Even in those novels set in South Africa, the Zulu lord it over every other African with a different ethnic origin. The reader will not miss this aspect of the novels as it permeates many pages.

In Slatter’s *My Leaves are Green*, David, Paul and their father decide to join the diamond rush and try their luck at making a fortune to enable the sons to buy their own piece of land (which they do). When they arrive there, they find many people including native labourers: Fingos, Xosa, Bechuanas, Zulus and others. David, the narrator, then says, “Nyoni [their Zulu servant], with his usual Zulu arrogance, looked around him in disgust at the motley collection of noisy shouting natives from a dozen

⁸³ Frederick K.C. Price, *Race, Religion and Racism*, Volume 1, 156; 160-161. It is not called black-on-black racism because this writer agrees with Dr. Price’s definition of racism as “the uneven and unfair distribution of power, privilege, land and material goods favouring white people...a system in which people of color as a group are exploited and oppressed by white people as a group.” While black people can be prejudiced and bigoted, “racism can only be practiced [sic] by people in the power position in society.... Racism is a power relationship or struggle between groups of people who are competing for resources and political power. It is one group’s use of wealth and power and resources to deprive, hurt, injure, and exploit another group to benefit itself. Racism in practice never existed on earth until the 16th Century when white nations began to commercially enslave black people. Black people cannot be racists because they do not have enough power and wealth to exploit, injure or marginalize white society or any other group. Moreover, there is not one recorded instance in...history wherein black people have had sufficient wealth and power and attempted to use it to enslave, exploit

tribes. ‘Ai!’ he exclaimed, ‘Not even a vulture would eat them—they are so dirty.’”⁸⁴ This is an African who has earlier endured some insult from the boy, Paul, whom he calls Nkosana—little king—when he is attempting to wake him up: “Paul mutters sleepily, ‘Oh, go away, you old woman’” and it is said that “Nyoni stiffened at this insult.”⁸⁵ Perhaps Nyoni takes his humiliation at the hands of his employer and his children, on other black people, using his Zulu ethnicity as a whip since he believes that the Zulu are the superior ethnic group, only below the white race, even though some of the labourers he insults are also Zulu.

When David/Paul settles in Mashonaland with this same Nyoni, the two discuss the need for a voorloper (sic) and a driver for the oxen.

David/Paul reports that Nyoni “had viewed the few Mashonas [they] came across with his usual contempt.”⁸⁶ Finally they hire a Xhosa voorloper and a Basuto driver whose “owner” no longer needed them because he had sold all his trade goods in Fort Salisbury. The Xosa and Basuto are supposed to be superior to the Shona. Nyoni behaves arrogantly to the Shona people and David/Paul comments, “At times he was simply insufferable in his arrogance, and if the Mashonas had not been such an abject, downtrodden crowd he would have had an assegai in his back.”⁸⁷ He, too, thinks the Shona people are downtrodden by the Ndebele, another myth held at the time. Evidently, the Shona are very

or deny whites the basic necessities of life. But, on the other hand, there are millions of instances wherein whites have used their resources to kill, maim, exclude and marginalize blacks.”

⁸⁴ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 33.

⁸⁵ *Ibid* 2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid* 205.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 216.

humane, decent people not given to killing willy nilly. Yet the reason given here makes them sink further below human dignity.

David/Paul worries about how to find labour for his farm in Mashonaland, yet he goes on to deride the Shona when he says, “The Mashonas were quite the laziest, dirtiest, most dishonest crowd I had ever met. They would drift in for a week or so and then desert, taking with them what they could...”⁸⁸ Their laziness is thus punctuated by their thieving. David/Paul further observes: “The Mashonas were interested only in food and cattle, and once the novelty of being with the white man had worn off they were no longer interested in working.”⁸⁹ But perhaps the most ridiculous reason given by David/Paul of the Shona reluctance to work for the white man is the one where he links such reluctance with what he calls the “Mashona fear of the Matabele”: “Their [the Mashona’s] reluctance to work permanently for the white man was due in part of [sic] their fear of the Matabele. They believed that one day the Matabele would drive the white man from the country and then take their revenge on the Mashona for helping the Europeans.”⁹⁰ It never occurs to him that the Shona are an independent group of people who do not feel obliged to work for anyone else but themselves.

In Wilbur Smith’s *Men of Men*, this black-on-black bigotry sometimes reflects biting alienation between the diamond claim diggers already in Kimberley and new arrivals from the countryside in the north. After Zouga finds his “gang” of workers, the gang comes to the diggings of the

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 207.

⁸⁹ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 207.

new rush for the first time and has to undergo a customary ceremony of initiation. It is the content of the ceremony that indicates the kind of alienation that this white man's world is capable of nurturing. The old workers, "dressed in cast-off European finery as a badge of their sophistication," jeer at what is called a "gang of raw tribesmen" with the following insults, "Behold, the baboons have come down from the hills. Nay! Baboons are cunning; these cannot be baboons.' And they pelted the newcomers with pieces of filth as well as insults."⁹¹

The word "baboon" is typically used when people mean to dehumanise other human beings and so these "sophisticated" workers' objective is such dehumanisation. Then, of course, comes the occasion for the use of unfamiliar equipment, an equally alienating experience. The narrator says, "...Not one of the young warriors had ever swung a pick or lifted a shovel. Jan Cheroot [Zouga's Hottentot servant] had to place the tools in their hands, positioning their fingers correctly on the handles, all the while muttering his disdain of such ignorance."⁹² The climax of this little charade is yet to be experienced in the use of the wheelbarrow. Even the language used to describe its use shows that this wheelbarrow is a challenge to the Ndebele as it is said to "confront" the two new comers who respond by lifting it bodily and walking away with it and its contents. The white man, Ralph, demonstrates the correct use of the vehicle and it is said that "their wonder and delight was childlike."⁹³ This observation is consistent with the general ideology discussed earlier, that

⁹⁰ *Ibid* 207.

⁹¹ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 55.

⁹² W. Smith, *Men of Men* 56.

⁹³ *Ibid* 56-57.

of regarding the African as a child. Rhodes expresses it thus, “Now, I say the natives are like children. They are just emerging from barbarism. They have human minds...The natives are children, and we ought to do something for their minds and the brains that the Almighty gave them. I do not believe that they are different from ourselves.”⁹⁴ In fiction, the reaction of these two “raw” tribesmen confronted by a wheelbarrow is made necessarily “childlike,” illustrating this ideological thinking.

Between the Zulu and the Ndebele there is chronic prejudice that surfaces often as black-on-black bigotry and it assumes different shapes and forms in the historical novel. For example, in *Men of Men*, Isazi, Ralph’s driver, a Zulu, describes the Ndebele as “upstart bastards, with no breeding and less respect.” This is because when they reach the Ndebele territory on their way to the land north of the Limpopo River, Gandang, Lobengula’s Induna, and his warriors spare their lives and ask them to await further instructions before proceeding into Matabeleland. When Ralph asks Isazi if a Zulu Induna would have done what Gandang has done, the latter answers, “No,... He would certainly have stabbed us all to death. But he would have done so with greater respect and better manners.” Asked what they should do now, Isazi answers contemptuously, “We wait ...while that vaunting dandy [meaning Gandang], who should wear the induna head ring not on his forehead but around his neck like the collar of a dog, decides what should become of us... We may have long to wait—a Matabele thinks at the same speed as a chameleon runs.”⁹⁵ Although in general the white people considered the

⁹⁴ S.J.T. Samkange, *What Rhodes Really Said About Africans*, 10.

⁹⁵ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 246.

Ndebele to be a strong, military people because they descended from the powerful Zulu ethnic group, there are some who considered them to be weak because they had intermingled with the Tswana, the Sotho and the Kalanga. Perhaps it was also a Zulu myth as expressed by Isazi.

In the novels, while the Ndebele denigrate the Shona, the Zulu, Xosa and Basuto denigrate both the Ndebele and the Shona. The white man denigrates all these people with the Shona occupying the bottom rank. In Robertson's *Wagons Rolling North*, it is the Shona who are made the butt of the white man's scorn. They are said to be so scared that they "dived like rabbits into their burrows at the first approach" of the white man—another animal simile. One Shona man is said to have attached himself to Jim "as a sort of unpaid servant [because] he reckons he's better off with the column than starving with his friends in the bush." The Shona dwellings are also said to be perching "on the crests of huge boulders [which] could only be reached from below by a difficult scramble;" or they are a "cluster of huts that could be seen crowning some rocky crags about a mile from the line of march." Even their spears are described as having blades of soft iron which bend into a curve after being badly aimed.⁹⁶

When Jim and his Shona attaché whose name is Kapi eventually reach the dwellings of these people, the person who meets them is described as "a shrivelled old man." This is the village headman. As they talk to him, they survey their environment only to see a "place [which] was a typical Mashona kraal, with badly thatched smoke-grimmed huts. A litter of

rubbish lay around them amongst which skinny fowls and scabby goats sought for something eatable, and the whole place smelt of the insanitary habits of the occupants.”⁹⁷ We know that the Shona were very good ironsmiths, and that the Ndebele bought their spears from ironworkers at Hwedza. So why are their spears characterised as having a blade of soft iron which bent into a curve after being badly aimed?

Alongside this myth of the Shona dirt, incompetence and cowardice is the myth of the Shona fear of the Ndebele, which is well described in these books. In *Wagons Rolling North*, that fear is particularly dramatised. Whether or not we can say the episodes described indicate Shona vigilance or cowardice the reader can decide when reading an episode such as the following: “The approach of even two solitary figures [to their homestead] had the usual effect. Probably the Mashonas thought the idea was to distract their attention while a large body of enemies crept up unseen from their rear.”⁹⁸ The “usual effect” is that of scurrying away “like rabbits into their burrows.”

In *Men of Men*, the author also exploits this Ndebele-hating-and-raiding-the-Shona myth by describing Bazo’s mission in which he raids and kills Pemba, a Shona chief and his people. Bazo saves a young Rozvi girl, Tanase, who immediately denounces Pemba as an evil man while praising Bazo for having killed him.⁹⁹ How Tanase can switch loyalties so quickly is only explained with reference to the author’s desire to

⁹⁶ W. Robertson, *Wagons Rolling North* 114-115.

⁹⁷ *Ibid* 116.

⁹⁸ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 115.

⁹⁹ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 278-292.

demonstrate that the Shona chiefs are so worthless that even their own people hate them—sowing the roots of divide-and-rule between the Ndebele and the Shona and between Shona rulers and their people.

Through his style, the author of *Wagons Rolling North* exposes some contradictions that were current in the 1890s when whites believed that everything Shona, even when reality dictated otherwise, was bad while everything white was good. These contradictions occur in several places in that novel. For instance, the narrator talks about Jim who admires the beauty and fecundity of the land, and goes on to describe the land as empty. In his next statement, he mentions the presence of the Shona:

“If properly developed, this great, fertile, and empty land could produce and export vast quantities of food. Cattle could be fattened, providing beef and milk and hides for leather. Crops of all sorts could be grown; tobacco also and perhaps cotton. There might be wealth underground, Jim reflected, but there was no question about the wealth lying untouched in the surface soil.¹⁰⁰

Notice that the land has been described as fertile and good for agriculture and raising livestock. It has also been described as empty. Yet on the very next page it is said that when Jim gets to Fort Victoria after a journey south, he finds it already different from before his visit as more bricks are being sun dried for more buildings. Then follows this statement, “There were quite a number of Mashonas about, who had

¹⁰⁰ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 116-117.

come in from nearby kraals to offer themselves for work.”¹⁰¹ One wonders whether there could be "kraals" in an empty land.

Jim himself and other Pioneers are saved from starvation by the local Shona people as they barter goods with them for food and Jim acknowledges that he has “managed to get enough to live on from the Mashona kraals....”¹⁰² Yet it is Jim who says earlier that Kapi prefers to attach himself to him and other white men and work without pay than to remain in his own kraal and starve. Again the reader wonders who is feeding who now, and who is on the brink of starvation. As for the Shona “offering themselves to work,” it is as if they have nothing else better to do than wait and work for these new comers, a situation similar to the one that Chinweizu sarcastically refers to in this statement, “It must have seemed part of God’s work to teach the ‘lazy’ native the dignity of toil by creating in him a healthy thirst for doing the white man’s work.”¹⁰³

Maughan-Brown's statement can now be better understood when he argues that “the concept of myth becomes theoretically fruitful...where it is seen as *structurally necessary* to the ideology in whose cause it is articulated.”¹⁰⁴ These myths are structurally necessary for the white people as they advance their main goal of dispossessing Africans of their

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* 118.

¹⁰² *Ibid* 126.

¹⁰³ Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) 59. Chinweizu is referring to a situation where the missionaries at first reacted negatively to the Glen Grey Act which we talked about earlier. Later, after being reassured by a magistrate who argued that instead of coercing blacks to work on the mines using various taxes alone, a “healthy thirst” for land should be created which would do the job of sending them off to work more efficiently since they would not have means of survival. The missionaries thereafter “dismissed their qualms and went along with the plan.” That is when Chinweizu makes this observation.

¹⁰⁴ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 10.

land. They fear the Ndebele more because of their military might. The Shona are inconsequential.

The 1893 War of Dispossession

The story of how Lobengula is conquered and the wars of 1893 occupies good, generous space in the historical novels and here the reader gets to “see,” “perceive,” and “feel” the reality through the artist’s eyes as Althusser puts it.¹⁰⁵ The 1893 war is fought to dispossess Lobengula of his land and cattle. To begin with focus will be on how Lobengula is perceived by various characters in the novels.

In Slatter’s *My Leaves are Green*, the main character, David/Paul talks to a fellow settler, a store man, Henry Heath, who tells him that he has spent a couple of weeks at Lobengula’s kraal. So David/Paul asks for a description of the king. Heath says,

Well, he’s definitely a cut above the average nigger. He’s tall, about six foot I should say, and one of his front teeth has gone. All the same there’s something about him...dignified, I guess you’d say. In some ways he thinks like a white man. And then again he’s like a kid about some things.¹⁰⁶

We cannot imagine King Lobengula being “a kid about some things,” whatever those things may be, or thinking like a white man instead of just thinking like Lobengula. Asked whether Lobengula might co-operate

¹⁰⁵ L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 204.

¹⁰⁶ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 218.

with the white man, Heath's answer is that he himself is all right but that he may not be able to keep chiefs and young fighters under control. "They've been used to all these killings and raiding expeditions, and they don't like being stopped. And now they hate the white man."¹⁰⁷ This is another myth that white people believe in, the possibility of an internal crisis within the Ndebele State as discussed earlier. But as will be seen, the novelists demonstrate contradictory ideas about this possible internal crisis because in some books they show the Ndebele armies as being very disciplined, and not willing to break the king's word even in his absence and even when they are being attacked. Moreover, Heath's actual description of Lobengula is interesting. It is strange to read that Lobengula thinks like a white man, for blacks are supposed not to *think*. Anyway, this is how David/Paul is introduced to Lobengula.

Jim, in Robertson's *Wagons Rolling North*, is introduced to Lobengula and his country by Rhodes (more about this character later) as he wants him to go with Rudd, Maguire and Thompson to secure a concession to the British to prospect for gold in Mashonaland. When Jim tells this news to his host, Sheppard, the latter tells him he is lucky and then goes on to "enlighten" Jim about Mashonaland in a way that actually strengthens the white man's myth about Mashonaland being empty and Africans not needing that land. He says, "So he thinks he's going to get Lobengula to let us colonize Mashonaland? It's a fine country, I'm told, and not much use to Lobengula except for the purpose of raiding the wretched Mashonas, who live in terror of the Matabele armies."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 218.

¹⁰⁸ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 55.

The next illustration that Jim gets concerning the character of Lobengula is what can be termed, the grotesque. As he speaks to Fairburn after arriving at Gubulawayo, “the Place of Killing,” Jim describes what they see:

a party of armed Matabele passed by, driving in front of them two dejected looking prisoners. They reached the brow of a hill a short distance away above which a number of vultures were circling... Jim saw the armed men drive their spears through the captives, callously kick the bodies over the precipice on the further side, and start back, wiping their spears on handfuls of grass and exchanging pinches of snuff. The waiting vultures promptly dropped out of sight behind the brow.¹⁰⁹

This is just slandering Lobengula to create a distorted image of the king. This works out because Jim ends up concluding that “Lobengula must be an absolute fiend.” The description also buttresses Rhodes’s description of him as a savage with bloodstained hands.¹¹⁰ Even though Fairburn tries to repair the damage done to this king by exonerating him, the damage is already inscribed in Jim's and the reader's mind. Fairburn says, “...he [Lobengula] has his good points. He’s not altogether to blame, any more than a judge in England is to blame for sentencing a wrongdoer according to law. Custom is rigid here, and death or mutilation the only punishments.” The image of a cruel, callous killer of a king is the one that endures, something like Defoe’s image of “Friday’s” people being

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 60-61.

cannibals. It will be good to remember Jordan's statement on the differences between the English and the Africans. Those differences are reflected in the system of government and the judiciary where Lobengula punishes offenders in a particular way, which is, indeed, cruel. However, it is no less cruel than the English system where quartering and burning on the stake were used as punishments for particular offences, or the guillotine in France, lynching in the USA, and so on.

All this denigration of Lobengula and his people is done in preparation for colonising his country for the British. It is what Sekou Toure means when he argues that,

the imperialists used cultural, scientific, technical economic, literary and moral values to justify and maintain their regime of exploitation and oppression. Africans were oppressed militarily unless they cooperated, culturally so that some practices which the Europeans disliked or which constituted hardship or danger for the Europeans would be ended and economically so that Africans would not compete with Europeans in gathering the larger profits from trade.¹¹¹

As far as interaction between Lobengula and the incoming white people is concerned, Lobengula feels humiliated and hunted down, especially when dealing with concession seekers, and in particular, Rhodes. Fiction writers describe Rhodes's case of concession seeking in more detail,

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 61.

¹¹¹ Austin J. Shelton, editor, *The African Assertion, A Critical Anthology of African Literature* 11.

perhaps because he is the one who eventually succeeds in cheating his way to obtaining the desired concession. In *Wagons Rolling North*, Lobengula asks John Moffat who is pleading Rhodes's cause, "why does not Ulodzi [Rhodes] come himself to see me?... Kings should speak with Kings and not with servants."¹¹² The King's frustration is described well, to the extent that the reader ends up sympathising and empathising with him as he consults his Indunas, his white "trusted friends" and as he himself ponders over the best way out of this predicament. This frustration is vividly described in Smith's *Men of Men* as follows:

Thus it was that Lobengula, *plagued* by the *importunate* demands of the emissaries of a white man whom he had never seen [that is this Ulodzi], *confused* by scraps of paper whose signs he could not read, *troubled* by *doubts* and *tormented* by *fears*, *badgered* and *pulled* by the *conflicting* advice of his senior indunas—was at last returning to the secret cavern (my italics for emphasis).¹¹³

In this passage, Smith is able to create this empathy between his readers and the old King. His very good use of the verbs, nouns and adjectives in italics vivify the turmoil in Lobengula's soul. The author has succeeded in painting a vivid picture of how the king feels and why it is necessary for him to consult Mlimo in the sacred caves in the hope of finding a rational answer to all his questions, chief among which is who and what Rhodes really is. In this novel, *Men of Men*, Lobengula also asks, "Is this Lodzi a king, as I am a king?..." to which question Rudd answers that "he is not a king, yet he is greater than a king." Then "why

¹¹² W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 64.

does not Lodzi come to me himself?... if I could look upon the face of Lodzi, then I would know if his heart was great.”¹¹⁴

Here, of course, Lobengula is correctly working on the logical premise that leaders discuss matters that concern them face to face as equals. So he does not understand why Rhodes should send lesser men to a king to talk on his behalf. Rudd’s answer is strange in that he calls Rhodes “not a king, yet...greater than a king.” How is he both of these without the needed diplomacy of discussing such important matters as these for which he sends his envoys? What Lobengula does not know is that Rhodes is also arrogant, racist, not to mention deceitful. That he finds out later.

The arrogance is evident in one of Rhodes’s conditions: that Lobengula should acknowledge Queen Victoria as his supreme, though, distant overlord and that he should cease to have any dealings with representatives of other European nations.¹¹⁵ This is arrogant because in reverse, Queen Victoria would consider it unthinkable if this requirement were made in favour of Lobengula. Rhodes’s racism is evident when he feels it is below his dignity to negotiate on equal terms with a savage king. His deceitful ways soon become evident after Lobengula is made to sign an agreement whose terms are different from what he is made to understand in reality.

¹¹³ W. Smith, *Men of Menu* 385.

¹¹⁴ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 385.

¹¹⁵ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 64.

The confusion, trouble, torment and conflict that Lobengula suffers concerning Lodzi and other concession seekers, is well dramatised and articulated in *Men of Men* where the narrator repeats advice given to him by different advisers including the white doctor, Robyn, whom Lobengula calls Nomusa, as follows:

“If you give the white men a finger, they want the hand,” Gandang [his Induna and Bazo’s father] told him, “and having the hand, they desire the arm and then the chest and the heart and the head.”

“Oh King, Lodzi is a man of pride and honour. His word is like Lobengula’s own. He is a good man,” said Nomusa whom he trusted as he trusted few others.

“Give each of the white men a little—and give the same thing to each of them,” counselled Kamuza, one of his youngest but most cunning indunas, a man who had lived with white men and knew their ways. “Thus every white man becomes the enemy of the other. Set one dog on the other, lest the pack set upon you.”

“Choose the strongest of the white men and make him our ally,” said Somabula. “This Lodzi is the head bull. Choose him.” And Lobengula had cocked his ear to each of them in turn, and become more desperate and more confused with every conflicting view, until now there was only one path open to him, the path into the Matopos.¹¹⁶

The credentials of each adviser here are mentioned so that the reader can understand why Lobengula cannot simply dismiss each piece of advice, yet each person’s advice causes more conflict and confusion.

¹¹⁶ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 385-386.

In *Wagons Rolling North*, Rhodes's envoys seek permission to dig the gold reefs and the reason given for this is that these reefs "were useless to him," meaning to Lobengula.¹¹⁷ It is as if Lobengula has no use for his own land, so it can easily and gratefully be given away. Anyhow, the Rudd Concession gets signed. In *Wagons*, the signing is followed by a "dance" as a farewell entertainment for the white men. The description of this "dance" is not complimentary: "As might be expected from a people whose whole outlook was bounded by wars and raids and executions, the performance was grim."¹¹⁸

It is *grim* because it is said to be a re-enactment of a war scene, the cutting of throats, leaping and posturing with "savage ferocity of spear-thrusts, [and the] knocking on the heads of all those performers who had fallen 'wounded.'"¹¹⁹ The prejudice inherent in this description is not difficult to perceive. Once again, literature has dramatised historical events in a way that makes us comprehend the racism that is bound up with the acquisition of Lobengula's land by Rhodes. Unfortunately, Lobengula understands his predicament after the deceit has already been carried out and after he has signed the Concession and stamped it. In *Men of Men*, the Concession is written in Jordan Ballantyne's "fair hand" (Jordan is Zouga's younger son), and translated for Lobengula by Robyn or Nomusa. All these white people deceive him in that they do not tell him the truth about what he is giving away with his signature and stamp.

¹¹⁷ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 66.

¹¹⁸ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 69.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid* 69.

By the time the deceit gets explained to him, it is too late to undo. All his so-called friends like Nomusa and Colenbrander are not friends in the sense that he understands friendship to be. They are traitors, instead. In *Men of Men*, Lobengula feels betrayed by Robyn/Nomusa and Zouga/Bakela, and especially Robyn/Nomusa. So he asks her to tell him faithfully whether he has given away his land by signing the paper.¹²⁰ Robyn/Nomusa lies yet again when she answers that he has only given away the gold and not the land.

Lobengula's anguish, harassment, indecision and hopelessness in the face of all these white people who refuse to let him live in peace is well dramatised in these novels. The reader feels the same anguish and hopelessness when reading Samkange's description of what Lobengula went through in *The Origins of Rhodesia*.¹²¹ The reader also feels the same anguish, hopelessness and desperation as Lobengula felt, when reading Rhodes's biographies and, especially, the one by Thomas where Lobengula talks about himself metaphorically as a fly and England as the chameleon stalking him.

In *Wagons Rolling North*, Jameson offers to treat the King's gout and eyes in order to win his favours. He plans to intimidate the King if he continues to refuse to give him and Rhodes the required concession. He says, "I must win Lobengula's confidence first before I start on the diplomatic job. And when I do I shall point out that 'the devil he knows' is better than a dozen he doesn't, and that if he backs out of the treaty

¹²⁰ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 426.

¹²¹ Stanlake Samkange, *Origins of Rhodesia* chapters 8, 9, 10.

he'll have the Germans and the Boers and half a dozen other nations knocking at his doors again.”¹²²

Lobengula's desperation, regret, disbelief, anger, remorse and magnanimity are well described in the scene where he talks to Robyn/Nomusa about her advice to him concerning Rhodes: “Nomusa, you said that Lodzi was a man of honour. So why does he do these things to me? His young men swagger across my land and call it their own. They shoot down my warriors, and now they gather a great army against me, with wagons and guns and thousands of soldiers. How can Lodzi do this to me?” When she answers that she was deceived, too, by this Lodzi, Lobengula declares that he believes her. He does not feel vindictive towards her in spite of the fact that she must have understood Rhodes's intent since she can understand English.¹²³ Lobengula clearly feels sold out and in this fiction we see the pathetic picture of a wronged king.

Authors always seem to be sympathetic to Lobengula, and to want to recognise his humanity in the final analysis, including that of his soldiers and commanders, particularly where white men are concerned. He is portrayed as commanding absolute authority and as being always obeyed by his commanders. During the attack on the Shona and their cattle in Mashonaland as punishment for the allegation that chief Matanka's people cut 500 yards of telegraph wire for which Ralph arrogantly fines the chief fifty head of cattle, Bazo and his people keep the King's order not to molest any white men. Because of the perceived fatal black-on-

¹²² W. Robertson, *Wagons* 78.

¹²³ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 426-427.

black prejudice that exists between the Ndebele and the Shona, the Shona can expect no mercy from the Ndebele impi. Yet as much as is practicable, they do not, indeed, molest the white people.¹²⁴ Bazo's orders from the King are to "kill that dog Matanka ...and all his men."¹²⁵ Later Bazo reiterates this Ndebele position to Jameson saying, "The men we killed were Mashona...and the Mashona are Lobengula's dogs—to kill or keep as he wishes...and the cattle belong to the king."¹²⁶

In all their dealings with the Ndebele, the white people enjoy preferential treatment as portrayed in Wilbur Smith's novel, *Men of Men*. Lobengula promises protection to Robyn/Nomusa and her people in spite of their betrayal: "No harm will come to you, Nomusa. You have Lobengula's word upon it," he promises.¹²⁷ Later when Zouga/Bakela challenges the king in a sacrilegious manner, saying the king's young fighters have never fought with real men, Gandang hisses with anger. Zouga continues his insulting utterances, causing the three bodyguards of Lobengula to start forward impulsively towards him. But the King checks them and spreads his hands to restrain them saying, "Bakela is a guest of the king...while he stands in my kraal, every hair of his head is sacred."¹²⁸ He is, thus, protected personally and the *King's word* is trustworthy to the last degree. This magnanimity of the King, in spite of the provocation, marks him as more civilised than his tormentors.

¹²⁴ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 424-426.

¹²⁵ *Ibid* 424.

¹²⁶ *Ibid* 424-425.

¹²⁷ *Ibid* 427.

¹²⁸ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 428.

In *Wagons Rolling North*, Robertson also portrays this protective image of the King towards white people. The incident is that where Jameson and Jim budge into the King's sanctuary where he is busy working with his "witch doctors" on the sacrificial goat. For any other individual this kind of desecrating act carries one punishment—death. But Lobengula lets Jameson and Jim talk to him calmly, to the surprise of the "witch doctors."¹²⁹ When Lobengula promises safety to Fairburn and Usher in this novel, he actually means it, right up to the bitter end. So Fairburn says, "Yes, we're safe and sound—Loben's been 'a gentleman,' I'll say that for him. He promised we should come to no harm, and actually gave us a guard in case the Matabele should take it into their heads to blot us out as a last fling when they retreated."¹³⁰ This is during the 1893 war of resistance.

It is not clear whether this kind of treatment emanates from fear of the white man or from other reasons. The fact is that there is this preferential treatment in favour of the white people in these novels. One observes the same kind of treatment in real life even to this day. Dr. Price has traced the origin of this kind of behaviour from the white man's training of a black person to be a perfect slave, actual or simulated. The black person is required to have unconditional submission to the white race. His perceived inferiority is impressed upon him and a paralysing fear of the white man is developed in him. He then adopts the master's code of good behaviour. Having been so masterfully trained, the black person, in turn, "will not accept anything from another black man as having value until

¹²⁹ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 83.

¹³⁰ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 146.

the white community has given its approval of it. That is because of the way we have been trained. We have no confidence in ourselves.”¹³¹

The sparing of Fairburn and Usher is historically true. Usher was the King’s son-in-law, but the authors do not mention this since they do not mention inter-racial marriages or sex. Most commentators at the time see, in the fact that Fairburn and Usher are not killed, a sign of the King’s honour—which it is.

The cause of the 1893 war of resistance is portrayed in the historical novel in two ways. For Lobengula it is a war of self-defence, defending his territory, which is slowly being taken over by Rhodes’s people. The immediate cause, as portrayed in Smith’s *Men of Men*, is the killing of some members of Lobengula’s impi under Bazo’s command. His orders are to punish Matanka and his men for losing the King's cattle to the white men as already discussed. Jameson provokes Bazo’s men and so a shootout begins, resulting in thirty Ndebele soldiers dead. Lobengula considers the incident to be Rhodes’s breach of trust even though the reader knows that the trust has been one-sided. Thus, Lobengula returns a few gold sovereigns back to Zouga/Bakela, instructing him to take them back to Lodzi. Bakela tries to negotiate, using threats of war but Lobengula remains adamant and the war is declared.¹³²

The Matanka people incident provides Jameson and his people, with a pretext for declaring war on Lobengula and taking Matabeleland,

¹³¹ Frederick K.C. Price, *Race, Religion and Racism* 176-177.

¹³² W. Smith, *Men of Men* 427.

something for which Rhodes and his Pioneers have been preparing to do for a long time. They all crave Matabeleland. In a letter to his wife, Ralph in *Men of Men* writes, “Oh how I long for the sweet veld of Matabeleland. Trust the Matabele to pick the best stock country, so I’ll not be too surprised when others start thinking about Lobengula’s herds and pastures. If only the cunning old blighter had thrown his war spear and given us the excuse, we might be hoisting the flag over Gubulawayo now rather than over this dreary spot [the dreary spot being Salisbury].”¹³³

Zouga Ballantyne, talking to his second son, Jordan, also expresses the need to have Matabeleland: “We must have Matabeleland. It is as simple as that.”¹³⁴ The reason is that the Pioneers fail to find much gold in Mashonaland, so “they have convinced themselves that the gold they did not find in Mashonaland lies under Lobengula’s earth; they have seen Lobengula’s fat herds of choice cattle and compared them to their own lean beasts that starve on the thin sour veld to which they are restricted... If you [Rhodes] want to keep Rhodesia, you must give them Matabeleland,” Zouga tells Rhodes in *Men of Men*.¹³⁵ However, as long as Lobengula does not molest the white people, they cannot declare war on him even though they have already started preparing for it. So the Matanka incident becomes the perfect opportunity for provoking the Ndebele, a provocation that results in the 1893 war intended to dispossess the Matabele people of their land.

¹³³ *Ibid* 417.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* 419.

All the historical novels focused on describe the war with the Ndebele as the "Matabele Rebellion," as if the Ndebele ever agree to be ruled by the Pioneers and then suddenly change their minds. The novels also describe how the major characters are involved in the actual fighting and how Lobengula ends after he is defeated.

The story of Lobengula's end has various versions. In *My Leaves are Green*, he is said to have fallen victim to smallpox in a kraal and died in late January, 1894. In *Wagons Rolling North*, he is also said to have died of smallpox but that before he dies, he "summoned the remnant of those who had remained loyal to him, and from his wagon told them to go and make their peace with Rhodes. 'When I am dead...bury me here in the bush and cover up my grave so that no man shall ever find it. Then go to Ulodzi, and tell him you have come to serve him as faithfully as you have served me.'" He dies a few hours after this speech. In both novels Lobengula's oxen die of sleeping sickness from tsetse bite. In *Men of Men*, however, he takes poison mixed by his "senior witch doctor" who is then killed by Gandang because he should not witness a king's demise. The king drinks the poison and dies only in the presence of Gandang whom he charges with the responsibility of being the father of his poor people and to stay in peace. He is buried in the cavern, sitting upright and wrapped in the wet green skin of a leopard Gandang kills earlier on after they arrive and find it in the cave.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *Ibid* 419.

¹³⁶ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 490-493.

The fate of Allan Wilson and his gang is also well described in the novels. In *Wagons Rolling North*, a Ndebele man whose name is not given, tells the story of Allan Wilson's last battle. In *My Leaves are Green*, a white man called Sieveking tells his fate to David/Paul. In *Men of Men*, the narrator tells the story. In the latter novel, Robyn/Nomusa's husband, a Reverend Clinton, is also a member of Wilson's gang sent to persuade Lobengula to deliver himself to the white men. The Reverend is included in order to woo Lobengula more easily since Nomusa, his wife, is the King's trusted friend. In other words, deceit is resorted to again.

However, in both *Wagons* and *Men of Men*, the Ndebele warriors are forbidden from carrying out the traditional disembowelling of the dead enemy, as it is said: "No, we did not rip up the dead bodies as is our custom with fallen enemies. 'Do not touch them,' ordered our captain, 'for these are not Mashona dogs but the bravest of the brave.' So we left them...to pass un mutilated to the regions beyond the stars. Ai-ee ! but they were brave men indeed!"¹³⁷ In *Men of Men*, it is Gandang, the great Induna of Lobengula, who gives the order not to disembowel saying, "Let them lie... These were men of men, for their fathers were men before them."¹³⁸

In both of these novels, therefore, the praises given to white men echo even beyond the grave. The command, "do not touch the white man," lives on. The Shona, in comparison, are denigrated as "dogs" even beyond the grave, too. The prejudice here is evident: it is the white

¹³⁷ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 150.

¹³⁸ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 489.

man's desire to divide the Ndebele and the Shona forever as it were, in the minds of the reader.

The authors use the Ndebele praise for, and non-disembowelment of the white men to show that they (the Ndebele) are better black people than the Shona. *Wagons Rolling North* ends the story of Lobengula with an opinion about him, "he had been a tyrant—but what savage king was not?" the narrator asks. Then the assessment comes, "On the whole he had tried to keep his promises as he understood them—as witness the protection of Fairburn and Usher during those last days of his reign. He had been a victim of circumstances too strong for him, and in trying to free himself from them he had brought about the downfall of himself and his people."¹³⁹

Instead of admitting that the white men bring about the fall of Lobengula and his people, this narrator ascribes that fall to unidentified "circumstances." He also tries hard to discredit Lobengula even where he treats white people with exceptional leniency as in the case of Fairburn and Usher.

The Land and Cattle are Won—Dispossession Complete!

The final objective of the settlers is achieved after the war: that of carving out large chunks of land for themselves and distributing Ndebele cattle among themselves. In *Men of Men*, Zouga literally rides a horse to claim land:

It had taken almost ten full days of leisurely riding to make a circuit of the boundaries of the ranch lands that Zouga had claimed with his land grants. It stretched eastwards from the Khami river, almost as far as the Bembesi crossing and southwards to the outskirts of Gubulawayo, an area the size of the county of Surrey, rich grasslands with stretches of parklike forests and low golden hills. Through it meandered a dozen lesser rivers and streams, which watered the herds that Zouga was already grazing.¹⁴⁰

At last Rhodes's mission of taking Matabeleland and the whole of that country for white men and their families is achieved; a mission which surfaces in fiction as strongly as it does in the biographies. In *Men of Men*, he appoints Zouga who becomes

“the custodian of enemy [Matabele] property with powers to take possession of the royal herds of Lobengula. The hundred troopers who volunteered for the duty, rounded up almost 130 000 head of prime cattle. Half of these belonged to the Chartered Company, but that left 65 000 to be distributed as loot to the men who had ridden into Gubulawayo with Jameson and St. John.”¹⁴¹

Later on, Rhodes is made to change his mind and to redistribute 40 000 head to the Ndebele people because Robyn/Nomusa and some of her fellow missionaries shed crocodile tears by protesting against the looting going on. But as an illustration of how much looting goes on after the

¹³⁹ W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 152.

¹⁴⁰ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 500-501.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid* 501.

1893 war, Zouga is a good example of it. Besides acquiring the vast amounts of land, he acquires ten thousand prime cattle, which he buys at £2 each because so many of them flood the market that their price plunges. He uses “half the proceeds of the Ballantyne diamond to buy up ten thousand of them to stock his new estates.” He is also “able to select only the best animals, and he had graded them by colour, so that one herd might consist of all red beasts while the next of only black ones.”¹⁴² So he and his new wife Louise (former Mungo St. John’s wife), just ride around the estate choosing a spot to build their dream house to be called King’s Lynn. The defeated Ndebele, the “boys,” who have been transformed from landowners and ranchers to labourers, are hired to herd Zouga’s newly acquired cattle!

BLACK PEOPLE’S RESPONSE TO WHITE DOMINANCE
LEADING TO THE 1896 UPRISING

With the kind of humiliation that black people suffer at the hands of white people in the novels, one would think that they would be portrayed as cowed individuals or individuals who are completely destroyed. But this is not so. There is a resilient spirit that emerges in them and that is not always recognised or even discovered by the white characters. Only the reader gets to understand this spirit and through their divergent styles, the authors deal with this aspect of black people’s response to bad treatment at the hands of white people in a variety of ways. The black people nurture this resilience and resistance against inhuman conditions till at some point it bursts—that point being the year 1896. However,

¹⁴² *Ibid* 501.

even before the 1896 climax, there is evidence of black people's resistance to bad treatment. A few examples will give the reader an idea of what we are talking about.

In *Men of Men*, we examined the alienating factor at the diamond diggings and how Bazo's group of new comers is welcomed with insults. These new comers react decisively at such taunting by threatening violence. Bazo sings a Ndebele war chant and "the entry of the little band of warriors to the new Rush diggings became a triumphal procession" to the extent that Zouga, their master, feels proud and so he rides at the head of the group like a Roman Emperor!¹⁴³ This is a unique reaction so far as this community is concerned. New groups are supposed to be intimidated, yet somehow this group decides to challenge the stereotyped image of new comers held in this community.

In the same novel, there is Jan Cheroot who reacts with dignity to his master, Zouga's acquisition of the diggings by refusing to work in them. He says that he is not a mongoose that lives in a hole and, therefore, he is not going to go burrowing underground for diamonds.¹⁴⁴ Jan Cheroot is a worker who is not afraid of his master. He demonstrates his pride by refusing to work as a diamond digger and he actually gets away with it.

When Bazo finds a big, clear diamond in Zouga's claim, he does not hand it over to his master. He and his friends debate possible ways of its disposal, and go over the various forms of punishment unleashed by the

¹⁴³ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 56.

¹⁴⁴ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 57.

white people on those who are found stealing diamond. These include being burnt alive as one man was in his hut: “They say he smelt like a roasting joint of warthog meat,” they recall. Someone else recalls how they tied another man by his heels and dragged him behind a galloping horse as far as the river and how at the end of it all when they had finished dragging him, he no longer looked like a man at all. They think about these atrocities for a while, but they are not shocked by them because they have seen men burnt alive before.¹⁴⁵ We also believe that their resolve to claim a share of the fruit of their hard labour strengthens and hardens them.

In the process of arguing about the newly found diamond, one of the workers, Kamuza brings out shocking analogies as Bazo tries to grapple with the morality of stealing from Bakela who is like a father to him since he is a friend of Gandang, his father. Kamuza counters such morality with a strange but plausible argument. He says, “He is a *buni* [sic], white man, it is not wrong doing to take from him any more than it is against law to send the assegai through the heart of a Mashona dog, or to mount his wife in sport, or to take the cattle of a Tswana and put fire into his kraal to hear his children squeal. Those are natural and right things for a man to do.”¹⁴⁶ Kamuza’s argument places the white man, a *buni*, in the same category as Shona and the Tswana—they are all trash so far as he, a Zulu, is concerned. The reader cringes when listening to what Kamuza would do with impunity to these people.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid* 96.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* 107.

Although these black mine workers despise the half-caste IDB agent, the Griqua Hendrick Naaiman, this coloured man, Naaiman, conscientises them regarding their rights as he argues:

Only the ant-bear and the meercat dig in the earth for no reward more than a mouthful of insects...Do these hairy white faced creatures own all the earth and everything upon and beneath it? Are they then some kind of magical creature, some god from the heavens that they can say to you 'I own every stone in the earth, every drop of water in the...rivers and lakes....I tell you then to see how, when the sun burns away their skin, the red meat that shows through is the same coloured meat as yours and mine. If you think them gods, then smell their breath in the morning or watch them squatting over the latrine pit. They do it the same way as you or me, my friends....¹⁴⁷

This is a beautiful passage which indicates that Naaiman may be oppressed by the white people, but he knows his rights as a human being. He knows, too, that there are no differences between black, white or coloured in as far as they are human beings even though imagined differences are emphasised; differences that represent possession for the whites and dispossession for the blacks and coloureds. So he seeks to deny the white man, Zouga, possession of a diamond that has been dug from God's earth, which, by right, belongs to anybody who finds it because the whites do not own the earth. In the end, Bazo splits the stone so that he and his friends have their share while he carries the other piece to his employer, Zouga Ballantyne. Zouga, in turn, almost kills Bazo for

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid* 91.

breaking it up; breaking up what he calls his “key to the north,” which he has been waiting for all along.¹⁴⁸

The point is that while the white man believes that he owns the diggers and collects the fruit of all their labour, the blacks respond by keeping some of that fruit for themselves in spite of all the cruel forms of punishment that can be unleashed on them. This is what we mean by black people's response to the white man's oppression.

There emerges also the spirit of nationalism and patriotism that burns in the hearts of the blacks and is watered by the labourers' sweat and blood. For example in the novel, *Men of Men*, Kamuza goes back to Matabeleland only to come back to the diamond diggings a changed man who talks nationalism. He tells his colleagues about the white men who have come to Matabeleland asking for all kinds of things from Lobengula:

This one asks for the right to hunt elephant and take the teeth, this one asks for the young girls to be sent to his wagon, another wants to tell the nation of a strange white god that has three heads, another wishes to dig a hole and look for the yellow iron, yet another wishes to buy cattle. One says he wants only this, and another only that, but they want it all. These people are consumed by a hunger that can never be appeased, they burn with a thirst that can never be assuaged. They want everything they see and even that is never enough for them....¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 110-101.

Kamuza then goes on to describe the white men's plundering, for instance, how they kill all elephants regardless of size. He finally tells them of how Lobengula and his top indunas consult the Mlimo at the Matopos and having heard three of these consultations, the Mlimo has predicted doom to, and gloom in the land. In the first one he has said, "The stone falcons will fly afar. There shall be no peace in the kingdoms of the mambos or the Monomatapas until they return. For the white eagle will war with the black bull until the stone falcons return to roost."¹⁵⁰ In the second prophecy, the king has been told that "when the midnight sky turns to noon, and the stars shine on the hills, then the fist will hold the blade to the throat of the black bull." The third prophecy has been an order to the king and his people to "sting the mamba with his own venom, pull down the lion with his own claws, deceive the clever chacma baboon with his own trickery."¹⁵¹ The three prophecies are reminiscent of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*'s unenviable circumstances except that in *Macbeth*, it is Macbeth himself who is responsible for his pending fate whereas Lobengula is virtually a victim in his own home country.

In order to counter the white man's greed, the Ndebele mine workers evolve a strategy—that of stealing diamonds for Lobengula and taking guns to him so as to empower him. The stealing is done at their own peril, but they feel determined as Kamuza argues, "a warrior's duty is to die for his king."¹⁵² This solution is accepted though Bazo still faces a dilemma. He considers it immoral to steal from Zouga/Bakela and

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid* 168.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid* 169.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid* 170.

¹⁵² *Ibid* 172-173.

Ralph/Henshaw whom he regards as father and brother, respectively. This long debate on self-defence against the white intruder is important. Not many novels in this historical section deal with the dilemma of colonisation from the victim's point of view. Here we have it as the black people's response to a situation that threatens to displace them. The seeds of conflict are being sown, a conflict whose climax is the 1896 uprising.

While there is virtually no talk of white labourers in almost all the other novels, including in *Men of Men*, the life of Ralph Ballantyne, Zouga's first son is revealed in terms that make him a white labourer who toils underground but gets no benefits from his sweat, just as the blacks who dig the diamonds, even though we do not see a community of these white labourers. The conditions of work for Ralph, Bazo and Donsela, the black man who gets imprisoned for fifteen years for stealing a diamond, are highlighted in the discussion that Bazo has with Ralph, a discussion which awakens Ralph to his poor, proletariat condition. For it is Bazo who points out that Ralph has neither found fame and riches in the diggings, nor has he "a woman with hair as pale as the winter grass" to give him comfort in the night, nor does he have a family of his own. It is after this discussion that Ralph quarrels with his father and makes a significant break from him and decides to head north in search of fame and fortune through trade; fame and fortune that he fails to find at the diamond diggings. Bazo's frank talk with him, therefore, helps Ralph and spurs him to decisive action.¹⁵³

Significant reaction to white dominance is observed in Tanase, the Mlimo, who is rescued by Zouga after she has been raped by Will Daniel, one of the criminal elements in the group of white pioneers in the novel, *Men of Men*. After driving Will Daniel off the scene of this rape, Zouga, who has actually come to destroy the Mlimo, addresses Tanase, telling her that she is no longer Mlimo since she is no longer a virgin (it is not clear, though, how he knows this). He then tells her to go in peace, to which Tanase retorts angrily, “Peace, you say, white man. There will be no peace, ever!” and she walks away from him.¹⁵⁴ Later Tanase aborts the pregnancy that results from the rape and feels a strange kind of joy in the pain that she suffers when she pierces her inner self with a horn-like object, pours the lethal liquid into it and then bends double as the spasmodic pains caused by the abortion seize her body. The narrator says, “she would have delighted in mutilating and burning it [the image of Will Daniel], but there was nothing substantial to expend her hatred. So despite the purging of her body, she carries her hatred with her still, fierce and unabated, as she toils on, deeper and deeper into the Matopos.”¹⁵⁵

This fierce, unabated hatred translates itself into another war. It is heard again later, long after this war with Lobengula when Tanase and Bazo, who is now terribly disfigured by bullet wounds and subsequent illness, are going from home to home delivering a message to the Ndebele to rise and get back that which is theirs. They now have a son named Tungata Zebiwe, and as this baby suckles, Tanase indoctrinates him by saying,

¹⁵³ *Ibid* 224-228.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid* 441.

“Tungata is your name, for you will be a seeker. Zebiwe is your name, for what you will seek is that which has been stolen from you and your people. Drink my words Tungata Zebiwe, even as you drink my milk. Remember them all your days, Tungata, and teach them to your own children. Remember the wounds on your father’s breast, and the wounds in your mother’s heart—and teach your children to hate.”¹⁵⁶

Wilbur Smith has shown that even though the Ndebele have been thoroughly defeated, they have not been totally subdued. While the war against Lobengula makes the white people complacent, thinking that the blacks are now very afraid of their military might, he has pointed out that war as the very reason for another future war. This he reveals, firstly, through Bazo and Tanase who spread a message of war. Secondly, he uses symbols: the coming of locusts and rinderpest as pestilence that serve as harbingers of the bigger pestilence, the war still to come. While the locusts destroy practically all plant life, rinderpest all animal life, the greatest pestilence, the war, is set to destroy human beings. Thus, his novel practically ends with the war drums beating—“the people of the Matable listened and took new heart and looked to their steel.”¹⁵⁷

Historically, the locust scourge and the rinderpest were actually used by the leaders of the Ndebele war of liberation as reasons for the 1896 uprising. The Mlimo pointed these out as reasons why they had to fight the white man who was responsible for this pestilence. The people were already desperate and so the destruction of their crops and livestock was

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* 456-457.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* 503.

the last straw. In the novel, Smith offers the destruction of crops and livestock as a mystical sign rather than the final point of collapse of an already severely strained economy. Smith is trying to show that the Ndebele live at the level of spiritual signs and spiritual forces rather than that these are an expression of social and economic concerns to the Ndebele people. Nevertheless, the 1896 war is the black people's response to the dispossession they suffer in 1893, as Wilbur Smith sees it in *Men of Men*. However, Smith forgets all about the Shona. For him they are still inconsequential.

Smith has also used the rape of Mlimo, Tanase, by Will Daniel, as a powerful symbol of the rape of Zimbabwe. Will Daniel is a mercenary who gains a bloody reputation for fighting against black people in Zululand; against Cetshwayo in Ulundi; fighting at the hill of the Dove in Gazaland; against "the free burghers of the Transvaal" and everywhere else where there has been trouble and shooting. He has "his henchmen" of similar notoriety. One of these, Jim Thorn, has just been released from prison by Dr. Jameson. He "was awaiting trial for beating a Mashona servant to death with a rhinoceros-hide sjambok. His pardon depended on his conduct during the campaign."¹⁵⁸

Cecil John Rhodes has often been cited as a ruthless man who used his fortune "to fund mercenary armies, to murder, steal, bribe, cheat and corrupt in a headlong rush to secure as much of Africa's land and mineral

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid* 505.

¹⁵⁸ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 433.

wealth as he could lay his hands on.”¹⁵⁹ The way Wilbur Smith presents his story in *Men of Men*, is reminiscent of such tendencies by Rhodes’s mercenary army. In the novel, the story of Rhodes’s colonisation of Zimbabwe can be described as a rape that his henchmen carry out. These henchmen are people such as Will Daniel, Dr. Jameson, Mungo St. John, a former slave trader whom Jameson appoints the Administrator and Chief Magistrate of Matabeleland after the war,¹⁶⁰ Zouga Ballantyne, the big looter of land and livestock, and others. Rape produces hatred and disgust. In Tanase it also nurtures the desire for revenge just as the rape of Zimbabwe most noticeably in the 1893 war, produces similar sentiments in both the Shona and the Ndebele. Hence, the 1896 uprising.

In *My Leaves are Green*, the African response to the occupation of their land is evident at the mines where some of the black miners deal in illegal diamond buying. However, the narrator reports it as if white IDBs are better. He says: “The worst of it was that this I.D.B. soon extended to the natives.” For the natives themselves, it becomes a way of getting back at their employers and so they collaborate with the diamond thieves. The narrator says, “The natives were adept at hiding them [diamonds]—between their toes, in their woolly hair, even in cuts made in their skins. They hid them in shoe heels, in bullets, in their pipes, and even in the hair of the goats that browsed near the depositing floors.”¹⁶¹ The bad news is that these Africans still get cheated by those who send them to steal because their rewards for taking all these risks are meagre, in one

¹⁵⁹ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes*, 8, see also 13, 19, 187, 215-220.

¹⁶⁰ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 405.

¹⁶¹ E.M. Slatter, *My Leaves...* 44.

instance amounting only to free three meals a day at the eating houses—no match in value with the stolen diamonds.

In all the white novels discussed so far, therefore, the black response to prejudice and oppression takes different forms. These various forms culminate in the 1896 uprising during which the Ndebele and the Shona attack many white people in their homes before the latter know what is happening. Smith's novel, *Men of Men*, concludes with Tanase and Bazo doing house-to-house calls to urge the blacks themselves to revenge against the white people for the land usurped. Robertson's *Wagons Rolling North* ends with Rhodes's reaction to the decision made by some of the pioneers to honour him by naming the country Rhodesia. He muses, " 'I shall not be forgotten: I shall be remembered in four thousand years' time!...' He had reached the apex of his career."¹⁶² This is at the end of the 1893 war in that novel. It may be remarked here that Rhodes will, indeed, not be forgotten in Zimbabwe. He will always be remembered, not so much for the good he did, but for his raping the land.

The 1896 Uprising—Also known as the First Chimurenga

In *My Leaves are Green*, Slatter describes the second war between the British and the Ndebele and the Shona. The Shona uprising is experienced first because the narrator, David/Paul, lives in Mashonaland. Because the whites in this novel have denigrated the Shona so much, the latter's actions are never taken seriously. So when David/Paul and his family wake up one morning to find no Shona "boys" at work in the

house and in the fields, David/Paul dismisses it carelessly with the comment, “I suppose they’ve gone off to a beer drink at another kraal. They’ll be back tomorrow.”¹⁶³ It turns out that they have previously been going off like that several times, perhaps as a strategy to throw their employers off the scent when the time for conflict comes. David/Paul goes off to town, leaving his family vulnerable to the Shona assegais.

Slatter dramatises the beginnings of the 1896 war in an interesting way, which exposes the arrogance and contempt of the settlers for the Shona people. In the process, the cause of the war is also given as the actions of Lobengula’s regiments which did not take part in the 1893 battles and, therefore, never felt defeated; the locust and rinderpest outbreaks, which are bad omens since no similar pestilence had been experienced for twenty years. Peters, who is telling David/Paul about the new Ndebele uprising says that the Ndebele believe it is the white man who has brought these disasters and so he must be wiped out completely. We notice that Peters does not include the whites’ dispossession of Ndebele land and livestock as part of the cause of the current uprising. Laing, on the other hand, in his narrative, *The Matabele Rebellion, 1896...*, merely mentions a reading of dispatches from the administrator, presumably of Rhodesia, the contents of which include the “supposed cause” of the “rebellion,” but he does not actually enumerate these “supposed causes.”¹⁶⁴ However, these "supposed causes" are published as the official British South Africa Company’s report, that rinderpest and

¹⁶² W. Robertson, *Wagons...* 158.

¹⁶³ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 243.

¹⁶⁴ Major D. Tyrie Laing, *The Matabele Rebellion, 1896 With the Belingwe Field Force* (London: Dean & son Ltd. no date) 61.

locusts cause the 1896 uprising. (Laing's historical narrative will be examined as one of the selected texts for this discussion, to represent several other historical narratives available on this subject).

Wilbur Smith mentions locusts and rinderpest in the form of a Mlimo's prophecy whose words are carried from home to home by Tanase, a former Mlimo herself cum-Mlimo's messenger. She, accompanied by her husband, Bazo, Lobengula's former Induna, passes this message on:

When the moon sun goes dark with wings, and the trees are bare of leaves in the spring time—then warriors of Matabele put an edge to your steal... When the cattle lie with their heads twisted to touch their flank and cannot rise—then will be the time to rise up and to strike with the steel.¹⁶⁵

This is said in reference to those locusts and the rinderpest that are referred to in *My Leaves are Green* as one of the causes of the 1896 uprising.

The actual war begins on the morning of the 23rd of March, 1896, in *My Leaves are Green*¹⁶⁶; on the 26th of March in Laing's *Matabele Rebellion*,¹⁶⁷ when reports reach out that white families have been murdered at night by groups of natives. While Ann-Marie, David/Paul's wife in *My Leaves*, responds correctly by feeling anxious and apprehensive, fearing that the Shona might also rise, the men respond by

¹⁶⁵ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 504.

¹⁶⁶ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 240.

¹⁶⁷ Laing, *The Matabele Rebellion...* 15.

being cynical. Peters even laughs “till he nearly fell off his chair. His white-and-blue willow pattern cup went flying and splintered into fragments and he exclaimed with mirth: ‘The Mashona!...Why, they run if you lift a finger to them! No, no, Mrs. Grenville, they’re the biggest cowards on this earth. Besides, look what they owe to us—protection, security, no more Matabele raids. We shan’t have any trouble there.’”¹⁶⁸

Even after the day starts with a Mashona absence from work, David/Paul still thinks they have gone for a beer drink and so does not pay attention to Griffiths’ news concerning the death of Tate at Beatrice. The cynicism is, therefore, well dramatised. It ends on a horrifying note for David/Paul when he returns home to discover that his wife and two daughters have been killed, too, and that, by the cowardly Mashona! Yet earlier he paternalistically comforts himself by assuming that his Mashona will never be rebellious as he says: “It was stupid to feel anxious...My Mashonas were undoubtedly far away by this time....”¹⁶⁹ The war goes on till the Shona people are defeated. The importance of land is emphasised in this novel, for instance when Wallace asks David/Paul to return to his farm to start growing food for them all after the war.¹⁷⁰

Even though the whites win the war this time, the last pages of *My Leaves are Green* reveal a powerful symbol about Africa—She is ferocious, as mysterious and as angry as the lioness that fatally attacks David/Paul. Symbolically, the novel ends on a note that reminds the settler that Africa does not forgive and forget. She kills!

¹⁶⁸ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 241.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid* 245.

Laing, in his narrative, writes about the activities of the Belingwe Field Force during the 1896 war. While Slatter, in *My Leaves are Green*, describes the incredulity of the white people at the Shona rising— whites and their Zulu or Cape “boys” who insist on calling the Shona “dogs and cowards”¹⁷¹—she ends up surprising these same whites when the Shona go on the offensive, though of course, they are not the protagonists right through to the end. In Laing’s narrative it is the Ndebele who rise against the whites even though there is talk of chiefs who are said to be rising, too, in Wedza and other Mashonaland areas.

The major theme that runs through Laing’s text is the African spirit of resistance and defiance and how the white people recognise that spirit, yet still remain without respect for the African. Even though Laing is a settler, he recognises this defiant spirit of resistance which he chronicles because he wants to show that in spite of this African arrogance and defiance, the white people still win the war. He, in turn, is being arrogant.

The Africans in Laing's book, *The Matabele Rebellion...*, demonstrate what Kwame Nkrumah calls, a positive, organic principle; a principle seen in Bazo and, especially, in Tanase, his wife, when she tells Zouga, in *Men of Men*, that there will never be peace between them. Tanase demonstrates this principle when she indoctrinates her baby son to grow up to hate the white man and again when she and Bazo go from home to

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* 259.

¹⁷¹ Slatter, *My Leaves...* 255; 268.

home reciting Mlimo's new prophecy, telling all the Ndebele to sharpen their spears and assegais once more for battle. In doing this, Tanase is re-establishing the Ndebele dominant ideology by reaching out to the whole society; the ideology expressed in her name as "the Seeker after what has been stolen."¹⁷² She displays a revolutionary determination to take back their land and livelihood from the white people. Nkrumah has discussed this kind of revolution as a programme based on principle, as follows:

Every true revolution is a programme; and derived from a new, general, positive and organic principle. The first thing necessary is to accept that principle. Its development must then be confirmed to men who are believers in it, and emancipated from every tie or connection with any principle of an opposite nature.¹⁷³

This principle and programme are well presented in Laing's book. Events in that book prove correct the statement that "one can compromise over programme, but not over principle. Any compromise over principle is the same as an abandonment of it."¹⁷⁴ The Africans in Laing's text demonstrate their adherence to the principle of liberation and self-emancipation in the 1896 war which Laing and his colleagues call rebellion.

In Laing's narrative, Africans are well organised in their attack of the white people and are united by a common ideology and spirit of solidarity with each other. This includes those who are employed by whites such as

¹⁷² W. Smith, *Men of Men* 504.

¹⁷³ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism, Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonisation* (London: Panaf, 1964 repr. 1966, 1970, 1974 & 1978) 56.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

policemen. At the earliest opportunity they desert their employers and, loot livestock as they desert. The Doro Mountain white farmers, for instance, report the looting of 56 of their trek oxen.¹⁷⁵ Many times these Africans deceive their employers into believing that they are loyal and then at the first opportunity, they desert them. At other times, they work well as the “Wanderer’s Rest” natives do. They carry out their required duties at the mine, but when a favourable opportunity arises, they destroy the entire foodstuff they have put together which is meant for the white people's ox wagon to pick up. So the truth finally dawns on Laing’s narrator who comments, “It appeared very plain that all the natives had an idea of what was going to happen.”¹⁷⁶

Deceit is also experienced by white people in dealing with black policemen. The policemen all profess to be very loyal; not to be “party to the rebellion;” and they assure the whites that they want to be loyal to them. Meanwhile, this is a strategy because at an opportune moment, all the native police except three desert, carrying with them twenty rifles and ten rounds of ammunition each.¹⁷⁷ After this kind of action, Laing and his colleagues conclude, “there were very few loyal natives to the west, south and north” of Belingwe.

Those Africans caught in action by the Belingwe force regret only the fact that they have been caught, but they remain unrepentant at taking part in the rising.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Laing, *The Matebele Rebellion* 22.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid* 22.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid* 26; 31.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid* 70-71.

When the Force gets to a place where the natives are beating their corn, they send three of their best “Kaffir” linguists to talk to them. Instead of being intimidated or frightened, the natives’ replies to questions “were insolent.”¹⁷⁹ While M’posi’s people are said to be faithful to the white men, Carruthers has to struggle to get back from there to a place called Gondoque because his rifle gets stolen by some of M’posi’s people while he is drinking water “out of a gourd handed to him by a native at a kraal some fifteen miles further on than where we were, and then [he is] chased for ten miles by a band of rebels with assegais, all of whom he managed to elude in the bush, as it became dark....”¹⁸⁰ Darkness is often a good cover for the Force whose members are running away from native ambushes. When travelling anywhere, members of the Force prefer the night because “it is always safest...to travel at night and [to] avoid the main footpaths and [to] hide during the day when dealing with natives on the warpath.”¹⁸¹

Another feature of this war, one with a direct bearing on the cause of it, is the fulfilment, as it were, of the objective set out at the end of the previous war in 1893; an objective well articulated in *Men of Men* when Tanase is called “the Seeker after what has been stolen.”¹⁸² Africans, in Laing’s narrative, take back what was stolen from them then, and if they cannot take back land yet, they take back the cattle, breaking them up into small herds and stampeding them away to the east and south.¹⁸³ At one

¹⁷⁹ Laing, *The Matebele Rebellion...* 116.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid* 117.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid* 94.

¹⁸² W. Smith, *Men of Men* 504.

¹⁸³ Laing 72.

point they laugh and jeer at one Bergquist who attempts to drive back his cattle, which are being stolen by natives. The Africans do not try to kill him even though they are armed, showing that their major interest is in the cattle which they want back.¹⁸⁴

The members of the Belingwe Force actually admit that in one incident they succeed in recovering only 190 out of about 380 head of cattle and that “during the night a lot of milch [sic] cows came back to their calves. We lost about one-half of what we had that morning and most of the young cattle were taken by the rebels.”¹⁸⁵ Those Africans that work for the force shed crocodile tears at such a loss, pretending to sympathise with their bosses over the loss of their cattle and congratulating them effusively for the recovery of some. When they are confronted with evidence that some of them were collaborating with those Africans collecting cattle, they admit and confess their allegiance to them, whereupon they are condemned to death and executed while the rest leave the laager without regret.¹⁸⁶

All in all, cattle are one commodity that the narrator admits the natives fight for, as he says at one point, “The rebels at the first onset fought well for the cattle.” Among the fighters at this particular battle is a “witch doctor” who gets shot, even though he believes that he is charmed and so cannot be harmed by bullets.¹⁸⁷ Africans fight for a specific objective—

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid* 28-29.

¹⁸⁵ Laing, 76; see also 72-81.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid* 76-78.

¹⁸⁷ Lang, *The Matebele Rebellion* 79.

the recovery of their stolen property from the white man, property stolen after the 1893 war of dispossession.

A third feature that comes through in the 1896 war, as described by Laing, is that by this war, three years after the 1893 one, Africans can use guns much more effectively and can also plan their attacks more strategically than is the case in 1893. For example, “one of the rebels who had his position on the top of the hill close to the police camp, seemed to have charge of a rifle of no ordinary calibre. He directed all his fire over the laager, and at regular intervals of about five minutes sent a missile over the heads of its defenders....”¹⁸⁸ There is plenty of evidence of Africans capturing property from their obviously dead enemies. Some of the property includes ammunition and clothes.¹⁸⁹ In terms of strategy, one method that Africans use to mislead their enemies is to spy on the white people. When one of these Ndebele spies is caught, he refuses to give information, pretending to be a fool.¹⁹⁰ This way, the Force has difficulty finding out the natives’ strategies for war.

Although the Shona are part of this war since people from Marandellas and Wedza are mentioned, Laing attributes the war to the Ndebele whom he says, are leading the uprising and traces such leadership to Gondlwayo and to Maduna, son of Marqua, Lobengula’s sister.¹⁹¹ The idea here is to continue to despise the Shona while elevating the position of the Ndebele as superior to them. Historically, the first Chimurenga breaks out in

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid* 80.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid* 82-87.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid* 98.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid* 85.

Matebeleland in 1896 and spreads to Mashonaland in 1897. The distortion in Laing is the denial of leadership among the Shona. Both the Ndebele and the Shona had able leadership. Furthermore, the whites portray themselves as always better than Africans in battle: “The dispatch-bearers also brought the following information in regard to the rebellion:—that they had heard of several big fights between the white men and the rebels, near Bulawayo, in which the white men had always got a little the best of the battle.”¹⁹² When reports are against them, for instance, that “the rebels reported that they took away all our cattle, killed all our horses and four white men during the engagement,” the narrator says, “this was the sort of reports the rebels always kept circulating in order to incite the lukewarm ones to rise.”¹⁹³ By the narrator’s accounts, though, the Africans fight pitched battles in some places such as at Inungu where they attack the laager and fight relentlessly, claiming many victims within the laager, till the white men adopt the strategy of having blacks who fight on their side and whom they call the *friendlies*, fight in the front line so that they may become cannon fodder, a buffer, and receive the wrath of their fellow blacks first.

In spite of this strategy, the rebels fight on, taking cover in the rocks and keeping a “lively fire for an hour and a half or two hours, doing a considerable amount of damage to men and animals.”¹⁹⁴ At these times, “the friendlies” refuse to leave their cover under the laager wagons and have to be threatened with execution so as to force them to fight in the rocks. Once outside, they fight to stay alive but the narrator attributes

¹⁹² Laing, *The Matebele* Rebellion... 95.

¹⁹³ *Ibid* 95.

their efforts to “sheer desperation [and then adds], but to my mind they were chiefly inspired by the gallant behaviour of their white leaders.”¹⁹⁵

A leadership which fights from behind? One wonders.

The natives who possess rifles, handle them competently. The whites, therefore, get shocked by their own casualties because they have not expected them: “The list of those murdered and missing was much greater than was anticipated, and left an impression on every mind anything but amicable to the rebels [sic]. To say that we were shocked would be putting it mildly. Disgust took the place of surprise, and revenge was the most natural sentiment under such revolting circumstances.”¹⁹⁶

Africans generally also become very defiant, as they, too, feel disgusted by the political, social and economic position that they occupy after 1893. So when Laing asks one kraal chief to come and speak to him, the chief defies him and refuses to come. When an African gets captured, often he refuses to give information about the movement of his people, or he swears that he and his people are very friendly to the white man, thus, telling them what they want to hear.¹⁹⁷ For example, “On the 23rd we remained at Gondoque. A great many of the natives came from the surrounding country and brought presents of mealies, potatoes, etc. [sic] to us. This assured us to a certain extent that they were friendly, but we could gain no information from them, either about the column we

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid* 290.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid* 291.

¹⁹⁶ Laing 154.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid* 133-139.

expected to meet or the rebellion. This made me rather uneasy, and inclined to mistrust them altogether.”¹⁹⁸

African defiance is evident, too, when a message comes saying that “Senda’s people were defiant, and had strengthened a naturally strong position by every available means and challenged the white men to take them out of it.”¹⁹⁹ In another incident, the natives shout at Laing and his colleagues. Laing remarks, “The natives seemed to be everywhere about, and commenced to shout insulting and defiant threats to us. It was now quite evident that they were in force, and meant fighting if their position was attacked.”²⁰⁰ It is also said that “whilst the men were having breakfast, the rebels showed very boldly on the most prominent parts of the hill and shouted down to us all sorts of defiant abuse.”²⁰¹ In trying to get the Africans to surrender, “A linguist tried to get into conversation with the rebels, offering them their lives and liberty if they surrendered. After many vain endeavours the attempt was given up as the rebels never replied.”²⁰²

These examples show that the Africans are determined in their cause. The attitude of Africans as described in Laing’s narrative demonstrates the obvious facts, what Nkrumah means when he asserts:

Just as a morality guides and seeks to connect the actions of millions of persons, so an ideology aims

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid* 139.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid* 226.

²⁰⁰ Laing, *The Matebele Rebellion...* 229-230.

²⁰¹ *Ibid* 310.

²⁰² *Ibid* 312-313.

at uniting the actions of millions towards specific and definite goals notwithstanding that an ideology can be largely implicit.²⁰³

The actions of the Africans in this narrative show that there is an ideology that unites them towards a specific and definite goal.

The white people's reaction to this uprising is first to disbelieve its seriousness as seen in *My Leaves are Green*. In Laing's narrative, when a meeting is called in the Belingwe Hotel soon after reports of the uprising reach the area, thirty men attend, ten short of the expected number. However, five of the ten are said to be twenty-five miles away and "two others were at a camp three miles away, who pooh-poohed the idea of a native rising."²⁰⁴ Once the war has established itself with casualties on both sides, white men respond by extorting cattle, grain and sheep from black chiefs. For instance, cattle and grain are extorted from M'posi's people in order to enforce their loyalty to white men. Laing threatens M'posi's son, "I shall be back here again before a new moon comes round, and I shall judge of your father's loyalty by his actions. Before I come to the Nuanetsi River, on my return journey, I shall expect to find two wagonloads of grain lying there. If I find them, then I will know that your people are our friends, but if the grain is not there you will be treated as enemies, if you come in our way."²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 58.

²⁰⁴ Laing 22-23.

²⁰⁵ Laing 129-130.

It seems that under any circumstances, the Africans try hard to hang on to their cattle as seen in the case of Senda's people who escape with them. The attacking force loots as much of their grain as they can and burn down the remaining corn which they cannot carry. On their part, Senda's people send about twenty goats and sheep to the Force but no cattle. So the narrator laments, "I was sorry the rebels still held the cattle, but decided to let them keep them for the time being and push on to where the services of the column would be of more benefit to public welfare."²⁰⁶ The real reason for letting Senda's people keep their cattle is that they are not easy to dislodge since they fight back hard.

Another incident is when the Force gets to the Shambo Mountains only to find one African on scouting duty. The Force's own scouts say they captured "few young cattle and sheep here, which were rolling in fat."²⁰⁷ The description of these cattle is different from descriptions in other novels that always see African livestock as thin and malnourished. The point here is that this is the first time African cattle have been described as *fat*.

Laing's narrative ends with the Belingwe Force being disbanded and we assume that the war has ended. While this narrative is not a novel per se, it has been included in the discussion because as Daiches correctly argues, "Literature ... refers to any kind of composition in prose or verse which has for its purpose not the communication of fact but the telling of a story (either wholly invented or given new life through invention) or the

²⁰⁶ *Ibid* 237.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid* 244.

giving of pleasure through some use of the inventive imagination in the employment of words.”²⁰⁸ Laing’s purpose in telling the story of the Belingwe Field Force fits into the category of the “telling of a story” rather than the communication of fact, as he says, “My purpose in writing this book is to discharge a duty I owe to the officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Belingwe Field Force, lately under my command by placing on record their share in the quelling of the Matabeleland rebellion of 1896.”²⁰⁹ He claims that he is writing history. The narrative also shows that the basic source of conflict between the blacks and whites is the control of and desire to have dominance over the chief means of production in Rhodesia—land. There are many more narratives of a similar nature.

**WOMEN AS SILENT PROTAGONISTS IN THE HISTORICAL
NOVEL—MZIKI’S ‘MLIMO AND MITFORD’S
THE INDUNA’S WIFE**

In Wilbur Smith’s *Men of Men*, after his mission to destroy Pemba and his people has been accomplished and he has returned with Tanase, the virgin girl of mysterious magical powers, Bazo meets his long-time friend and “brother,” Ralph/Henshaw and they camp together for the night. Their meeting has been unexpected. The two talk about their work and then zero in on the subject of women. Each has had unrequited love and both, at different times, exclaim that the issue is no laughing matter. While Bazo watches Tanase at work (with whom he has fallen in love),

²⁰⁸ David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature* 2nd edition (London and New York: Longman, 1981) 4-5.

²⁰⁹ Laing 7.

he makes an important statement about women: “They are so soft and weak, but they wound more deeply than the sharpest steel.”²¹⁰

This statement is nowhere more pertinent than it is in the case of Mziki’s *‘Mlimo* and Mitford’s *The Induna’s Wife*. The theme of the story of *‘Mlimo* is basically that of Malida’s revenge for losing his sweetheart, Sevana, to King Mzilikazi. In the first place, the *‘Mlimo* is a man called Malida, the son of *‘Mambuya*. The story he tells the white man who goes to see him after his sanctuary is discovered by Tabela, that white man’s guide, is about war, defiance of King Tshaka by his Chief Mzilikazi and the story of the orphan girl, Sevana.

Sevana is the daughter of Ndlovu by his youngest wife—Ndlovu, a man who, together with his entire family, perishes after he is “smelt out” and marked for death by Tshaka. By telling the story of this “smelling out,” Mziki, the author of this novel, is doing what many of the white authors do, that is, fulfil the myth that blacks and especially the Ndebele people, are cruel people who do not respect human life. This stereotyping is prevalent in many books written by white people but is particularly highlighted in *‘Mlimo* and *The Induna’s Wife*. Maughan-Brown has found the same stereotyping of blacks as wanton killers in the colonial literature about Mau Mau in Kenya, and comments that the view of “the African as brute or savage had, of course, never been absent from the colonial mythology....”²¹¹ Maughan-Brown finds that “‘African brutality’ is stressed in all the colonial accounts of ‘Mau Mau.’” Then he

²¹⁰ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 295.

²¹¹ David Maughan-Brown, *Land, Freedom and Fiction*, 89.

quotes one ex-Governor Mitchell of Kenya who maintains that “Africans have an extraordinary indifference to taking life, to killing...” Another colonialist, Lander, also believes that Africans “love a nice bit of blood and suffering.”²¹²

This thinking is reflected in the novels already discussed and those that are still to be discussed. Here is an example of a “smelling out” scene from Wilbur Smith’s *Men of Men* to show how, indeed, writers of colonial themes like to portray these savage Africans who enjoy killing and the general bloody scenes that they create. The occasion is after Mungo St. John has stolen Ningi’s (Lobengula’s sister’s) diamonds. The King believes the theft was carried out by witches and, hence, the necessity to smell out and eliminate these witches. Thus the witch-hunting and smelling begins:

There was a ragged chorus of shrieks and whines and maniacal laughter from beyond the stockade walls, and through the gateway came a horrid procession of beldams and crones, of prancing hellhags and gibbering necromancers. At their throats and waists were hung the trappings of their wizardry, skull of baboon and infant, skin of reptile, of python and iguana, carapace of tortoise, and stoppered horns, rattles of lucky bean pods and bones, and other grisly relics of man and animal and bird.... Some of them went whirling and cavorting, brandishing their divining rods, one the tail of a giraffe, another the inflated bladder of a jackal on a staff of red tambooti wood, still another the stretched and sun-dried penis of a black-maned lion, the rods with which they would point out the evil ones....

“I smell evil,” shrieked the witch, and the woman fell to her knees. “I smell blood...” The witch struck again and again,

²¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

the tail cutting stingingly into the woman's unprotected face until the tears started and ran down her cheeks.

The executioners came forward and pulled her to her feet. The woman's legs were paralysed, so they dragged her unprotesting before Lobengula... One of the executioners swung his war club, a full blow that stove in the back of the woman's skull. The bone crunched like a footstep in loose gravel, and the woman's eyes were driven from their sockets like over-ripe grapes by the force of it. When she fell face forward in the dust there was a bloodless depression in the back of her head into which a man could have placed his fist. The witch scurried away to continue the hunt...

The chorus of howls and shrieks was unending now as the sisters warmed to their work, and the victims were dragged out and slaughtered—until their corpses were a high mound before the king's throne, a tangle of black limbs and shattered heads, that grew and grew.

A hundred, two hundred, were added to the pile, while the sun reached its zenith and the dust and heat and terror formed a suffocating miasma, and the blue metallic flies swarmed in the staring eyes and open mouths of the dead, and the witches cavorted and giggled and struck with their rods.

Here and there a maiden, overcome with the fear and the blazing heat, fell swooning from her place and the witches pounced upon this irrefutable evidence of guilt and rained blows upon her bare back or glossy breasts, and the executioners hurried to keep pace with their dreadful task.

The sun began its slow descent towards the western horizon, and at last one at a time the witches crept back to the mountain of death they had created. They staggered with exhaustion—the dust had caked on their running sweat, but they bayed and whined like dogs as they pored over the corpses, selecting those they would take with them—back to their caves and secret places—a sliver of the womb of a virgin was a powerful fertility charm, a slice of the heart of a blooded warrior was a wonderful talisman in battle.... They chuckled and hooted and, bearing their gruesome plunder

with them, they shuffled away through the gateway of the stockade.²¹³

This is a typical description of how a whole nation of black people including their king and white guests, entertain themselves by watching such a gory orgy of bloody slaughter as innocent people get butchered one by one. Some are taken away to be mutilated and their body parts turned into various charms. It is the same Robinson Crusoe myth that makes Friday's people cannibals. The only other text in English literature where people seem to revel in the pleasure of evil is in Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*. But even there, there is not such a repulsive detail of pleasure in murder. As mentioned earlier, scenes like these are meant to dehumanise and demonise the Africans.

Another good example of such demonising is found in Mitford's *The Induna's Wife* when King Mzilikazi condemns the Bakoni slaves to death because, he says, somehow they know about the great beast that has been killing people in his kingdom. The Bakoni are actually called "dogs" in this novel as the king roars,

"Hold!...After feeding upon the flesh of a brave man I will not let my alligators be poisoned with such carrion as this. There may yet be more royal meat for them," he put in, in a lower tone, and with a savage and deadly sneer. Then raising his voice, "Let these dogs be taken up to yonder hill and burnt."

A roar of delight broke from all, mingled with shouts of *bonga* as to the King's justice and wisdom. And none were more pleased...than the slayers, men of fierce and savage mind, who,

²¹³ W. Smith, *Men of Men* 353-356.

from constantly meting out torture and death, loved their occupation the more the further they pursued it....

Away upon a round-topped hillock, within sight of all, the slayers were collecting great piles of dry wood, and upon these the condemned slaves were flung, bound. Then amid the fierce roar and crackle of the flames wild tortured shrieks burst from those who writhed there and burned, and to the people the shrieks were the pleasantest of sounds, for the terror of the Red Death had strangely fastened upon all minds, and they could not but hold that these who thus died had in some way brought the curse of it upon them.²¹⁴

In Mziki's *'Mlimo*, Malida, the old and fake 'Mlimo even describes a time when the warriors were restless and the king had to provoke a war with the Boers as a cure for boredom. The pleasure with which Malida tells the story of human slaughter is consistent with the mythology of blacks as wanton killers:

The time of peace was now prolonged and it might have continued had it not been for the restlessness of the young, who asked each other if the tribe had not turned to women. The king, hearing of these murmerers, ordered out the Oyenge, Iziewe, Abaketi, 'Ntunte, 'Nsingo, and 'Gibixengu regiments, with instructions to retaliate upon the Boers. I was captain of the 'Gibixengu, and was one of those who went....As usual we surrounded the wagons at dawn and before [the Boers] could reload we were in upon them....They clubbed us with their rifles, while we stabbed them one by one to death. The slaughter on both sides was great. But what of that? We had beaten them in return, and red was the grass with their gore that day.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ B. Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* 25.

²¹⁵ Mziki, *'Mlimo* 53.

This is followed by the inevitable praising of the white men:

Yes, as our enemies they were worthy of us, and they fought
and died like men....²¹⁶

Likewise, in *The Induna's Wife*, the Indunas and other ordinary people are always in danger of being summarily sentenced to death at the king's word after being "smelt out" for various misdeeds, or death is imposed as collective punishment for the trespasses of one of their own. Life is cheap and totally unpredictable, as there is no certainty to existence, a basic human right. The king himself is portrayed as being very callous to, and uncaring for his people. A few instances of the king's reaction to certain events will illustrate this point.

Two people come to complain to Mzilikazi of a monster or a *tagati* that kills people when they go to mine iron ore used to make different tools for the nation. Several reports of people killed by the sharp horns of this monster are given to the King for action and his reaction is a callous rebuff: "Umzilikazi [sic] only laughed, saying that he cared nothing that the spirits of evil chose to devour, from time to time, such miserable prey as these slaves. There were plenty of them, and if the wizard animals who dwelt in the mountains, wanted to slay such, why, let them."²¹⁷ More people die from this Red Death monster as it is now called, but again, Mzilikazi's reaction is a non-committal sneer, "well, I care not...Go back now and cause your seer, Gacitye, to charm away the *tagati*, and that soon, lest I visit him and you with the fate of those who make witchcraft.

²¹⁶ Mziki, *Mlimo* 53.

²¹⁷ B.Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* 10.

Shall we keep a dog that cannot guard our house? For to what other use can we turn such a dog? Be gone.”²¹⁸

The issue of the Red Death becomes so serious that the narrator, Untuswa, the king’s induna, contemplates a coup against Mzilikazi because he is tired of his callous inaction.²¹⁹ It is in trying to solve the problem of this monster that the king sentences the Bakoni slaves to death by burning, the ordeal of which has been quoted above. Finally, Untuswa volunteers to go and kill the Red Death monster alone. While his other *izinduna* salute him, the king half sneers and gives him two conditions for doing so: “Thou shalt proceed to the Valley of the Red Death, but with no armed force; and before this moon is full thou shalt slay this horror, that its evil deeds may be wrought no more. If success is thine, it shall be well with thee and thine; if failure, thou and thy house shall become food for the alligators; and as for thine *inkosikazi*, the stake which she has for the time being escaped shall still await her. I have said it, and my word stands.”²²⁰

Lalusini, Untuswa's wife, has earlier been sentenced to death soon after the Bakoni slaves are sent out to be burnt on the stakes because of her magic powers which the king is now calling fake powers since she cannot stop the Red Death killings. She is only saved by the thunder that strikes twice, the second time over the burning hill of the slaves, scattering their fire, ashes and bones into the sky and surrounding environment. This she calls, a sign that shows that the Bakoni had lied when they named her the

²¹⁸ *Ibid* 11.

²¹⁹ *Ibid* 36-37.

Queen of their *muti* who could vouchsafe the meaning of the reappearance of the Red Death among them. The meaning is that the Red Death foretells the accession of a new king to the throne, meaning the end of Mzilikazi's reign. It is partly for this utterance that the Bakoni themselves are sentenced to death. Secondly, Lalusini is saved because her husband, Untuswa, then volunteers to go and slay the Red Death single-handedly.

“African brutalities” are stressed heavily, especially by the authors of *‘Mlimo* and *The Induna's Wife*. It is as if there is nothing else that these rulers live for except killing and generally wallowing in human blood. In these two books, however, the central issue, in the final analysis, involves two women, Sevana and Lalusini respectively. It is because of these women that the kings in each novel face significant challenge from their trusted Indunas.

In *‘Mlimo* the story of Sevana begins with such “smelling out” activities as described earlier. Her father and his entire family get smelt out and Malida gives, as a reason for it, king Tshaka's jealousy of Ndlovu's wealth in cattle. Sevana is saved because the mother simply throws her at Malida, instructing him to save her. Malida is sent by his father, Mambuya, a friend of Ndlovu's, to warn the latter of the ambush that awaits him and his family at dawn. It is this young Sevana who becomes the bone of contention between Malida and his king, Mzilikazi; who also becomes the reason for Malida's hatred for Mzilikazi and Lobengula, causing him to pose as a false Mlimo with the assistance of his childhood

²²⁰ B. Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* 31-32.

friends, Mapibana and Ndundululu. His purpose for this faking is to avenge Sevana and revenge himself for the loss of his fiancée. In posing falsely thus, he derives satisfaction in that he destroys the Ndebele nation. He gets a kind of macabre joy from advising them to take up arms against the white man in both the 1893 and in the 1896 wars, knowing fully well that they will be defeated, but playing on the Ndebele superstitious nature. For example, in 1896, he tells the people that “The white men’s bullets will be turned to water, and where they strike no harm will follow. Your enemies will be swept away like leaves before the wind, and you will become fat with the white man’s riches, and the country be yours for ever.”²²¹

This idea of bullets turning into water is also mentioned in Laing’s narrative where he talks about a “witch doctor” being among the rebels: “One horrid-looking old witch-doctor was at the head of the attacking party. At first he had only a battle-axe and charms, and laughed at the white men, saying they could not harm him, and that they had no shot that could kill him. He had three bullets before he dropped. After this his followers seemed to lose a lot of their dash and became rather an easy prey for us for a short time.”²²² It is an idea that occurs also with the Maji Maji in Tanzania and more recently, with the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda. Whether this is just a belief, or the bullets, indeed, turn into water, is outside this writer's scope of experience. The fighters who believe in this concept, however, see it as real. Of course, when a white novelist writes, he is not going to admit to the validity of that concept.

²²¹ Mziki, *Mlimo* 145.

²²² Laing, *The Matebele Rebellion...* 79.

Later, the narrator in Laing's book talks about some of the Africans whom they see dead as having a piece of ox-fat tied to their throats. This, he afterwards learns, is taken from oxen killed by the 'Mlimo and given to each man after it had been *umtigatied* (bewitched), to render the man impervious to harm from the bullets of the white man.²²³ This story is evidently related to the one in '*Mlimo* and both stories are about invincibility to the bullet through magic.

The wound that Sevana leaves on Malida's heart, therefore, hurts more deeply than that caused by the sharpest steel for him to go to this length in falsehood in order to settle an old score about a love affair. He knows that all this prophesying he does is untrue, yet he does it in order to punish a whole nation for the sins of their king.

This wound is caused by king Mzilikazi's supreme power over life, love and death. He orders people to do whatever he desires and they do it or else they get killed. In the case of Sevana, she eventually comes under the guardianship of the king since she is an orphan, and the king has jurisdiction over her life according to Ndebele laws. Although many suitors ask for her hand in marriage, she turns them down because she is in love with Malida. Malida, on the other hand, wants to give her the chance to marry anyone she wants and, thus, delays requesting her to marry him. When he sees that she is refusing to marry all the other men, he goes to the king to ask for permission to marry her and the king grants it. However, two days before they are to be married, the king summons

²²³ *Ibid* 84.

them to appear before him. His reason is that he would like to see “the thing that has turned the heart of so brave a man to water.”²²⁴

When the king sees Sevana, he immediately orders that she be taken to his head wife so that she can join his other wives since she “has more beauty than all the women of the harem. Such beauty must be saved!” he declares.²²⁵ As for Malida, he is told that he is lucky to remain alive after falling in love with such beauty that should have been the king's all along. Although Malida and Sevana make plans to elope during the night, the plans are thwarted because the king hears about them and intercepts the lovers at their meeting place, whereupon Sevana kills herself using one of the king's induna's spears. Malida is sentenced to death with all his family. The king, thus, demonstrates his power over life, love and death. This is the grudge for which Malida takes revenge. He does not die when cast down at the place of the killing, but survives by getting caught on a tree branch during his fall. He then claims that his *Madhlozi* (guardian spirits) have saved him in order that he may bring the Amandebele nation to destruction for having killed his family and Sevana.²²⁶ That is how he assumes this Mlimo position. For him it is the love of Sevana that he seeks to avenge. Ironically, though, he himself used to be an executioner for the king.²²⁷

Men and women, in this novel are portrayed as being subject to the will of the king and their subservient position is made crystal clear throughout

²²⁴ Mziki, *Mlimo* 90.

²²⁵ *Ibid* 91.

²²⁶ *Ibid* 95-96.

²²⁷ Mziki, *Mlimo* 95.

the novel. Women are in a worse position, however. At this point it is relevant to consider the following statement by Karl Marx about women:

In the approach to *woman* as the *spoil* and handmaid of communal lust is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself, for the secret of this approach has its *unambiguous*, decisive, *plain* and undisguised expression in the relation of *man to woman* and in the manner in which the *direct* and *natural* species-relationship is conceived. The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the *relation of man to woman*. In this *natural* species-relationship man's relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature—his own *natural* destination. In this relationship, therefore, is *sensuously manifested*, reduced to an observable *fact*, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature to him has become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man's whole level of development. From the character of this relationship follows how much *man as a species-being*, as *man*, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being. It therefore reveals the extent to which man's *natural* behaviour has become *human*, or the extent to which the *human* essence in him has become a *natural* essence—the extent to which his *human nature* has come to be *natural* to him. This relationship also reveals the extent to which man's *need* has become a *human* need; the extent to which, therefore, the *other* person as a person has become for him a need—the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social being.²²⁸

In relation to Mziki's novel, what this means is that in treating Sevana as the *spoil* and handmaid for his lust, the king degrades Sevana and Malida as people who exist for his personal pleasure. His relationship to men

²²⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959 repr. 1961, '67, '74, '77, '81 & 1982) 89-90.

and women, and especially to women, shows that he lacks humanity and humane behaviour. The king's needs do not resemble those of other human beings. So the King appears a monster to his people whom he terrorises, intimidates, subdues, and finally kills when they do not bow down in conformity to his will. The case of Sevana and Malida is especially illustrative of this position. The king ends up pitting himself against Malida whom he does not know has survived the fall at the Place of Killing. Having survived, Malida acts as the Mlimo and deceives the whole nation as to his real identity. His revenge is served when the Ndebele nation engages in the 1896 war and gets defeated. Malida's *Madhlozi* give the following instructions:

All the nation will consult you as "The 'Mlimo,'" and this is what you have been saved to do—to bring the Amandebele nation to destruction. To do this you must live, and when Mzilikazi is dead, and the kings who follow him are dead, when the whole nation are [sic] dead and scattered, and as Bushmen without a home, then, and not till then, shall we come and call you. When this is come to pass you shall be at rest for ever and ever with your *Madhlozi*.²²⁹

This, indeed, comes true as he says after the 1896 war, "...so it is—the Amandebele are no longer a nation. My revenge and the revenge of my *Madhlozi* has been accomplished, and these words foretold by them, 'They shall be as the bushmen, without a home,' have become the truth."²³⁰

²²⁹ Mziki, *Mlimo* 96.

²³⁰ *Ibid* 148.

Malida's reasons for his vengeance makes it necessary to repeat the contention that in this novel, it is the woman who is a silent protagonist. It is not just Sevana who defies the king, choosing to die in the process of that defiance, it is also Malida's step-mother who acts heroically in the face of extremely trying circumstances. When Malida tells her of the king's decision to steal Sevana from him, as well as his plans to escape with his loved one during the night, she does not dissolve into helplessness and self-pity. Instead, "she was brave and good, and in place of weeping over what we could not help she gave me words of wisdom, and told me that our only hope was to fly both night and day, until we reach a place of safety."²³¹ Furthermore, she displays immense selflessness when she herself refuses to join in this flight, knowing her imminent fate fully well: "She was old, she said, and would not join us; she could not travel far, and if she could she would not. If my plan succeeded, or if it failed, meant certain death to her as being of my home; and as we spoke I learned the love she bore me and 'Sevana."²³² Thus, Malida's stepmother defies oncoming death to face it squarely and defiantly for her stepson's sake. Hence, both Sevana and Malida's stepmother can be called heroines of love, conviction and principle.

Untuswa, in *The Induna's Wife*, bears a grudge against King Mzilikazi (of that novel) for the way he treats his wife, Lalusini whom he loves more than any other woman. We also observe that both Malida in '*Mlimo* and Untuswa in *The Induna's Wife* remember their loved ones vividly and even though both are old now, that love makes them feel young again.

²³¹ *Ibid* 92,
²³² *Ibid* 92.

They remember the pangs they have suffered for it vividly. For Malida it is that moment the night they were to run away from their country and king; when the king appears and when Sevana commits suicide rather than live to be one of the royal queens against her will. For Untuswa it is the moment when Lalusini is sentenced to die as royal food for the alligators (royal because she is king Tshaka's daughter), and Untuswa says as he describes his experience to the Inkose to whom he is telling this story,

And I, Nkose [sic], I sitting there, how did I contain myself, as I was obliged to behold my beautiful wife—whom I loved with a love far surpassing that which I felt for King and nation, or my own life a hundred times over—standing thus awaiting the word which should adjudge her to a shameful and agonising death! *Hau!* I am an old man now—a very old man—still can I see it before me; ... *Ye-bo*—I see it all—the angry infuriated countenance of Umzilikazi, the dread anxiety on the faces of the other *izinduna*, which was as the shrinking before a great and terrible storm about to burst. *Hau!* And I see more. I see, as I saw it then, the face of my beautiful wife, Lalusini, Daughter of the Mighty—as she stood there before the Great One [the king], in whose hand was death—proud, fearless, and queenly. And she was awaiting her doom.²³³

Elsewhere Untuswa further describes his love for his wife, Lalusini, and in one instance he compares his love for her with that for his other two wives and says, “Fumana and Nxope were no longer young and pleasing, but Lalusini seemed ever the same. Was it her magic that so kept her? She had borne no children, but of this I was rather glad than otherwise, for we loved each other greatly, and I desired that none should come

²³³ B. Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* 26-27.

between us to turn her love away from me, as children would surely do. For my other wives it mattered nothing, but with Lalusini, it was different. I loved her, Nkose, as some of you white people love your women.²³⁴

In both cases of Malida and Untuswa, the anger these men feel rises against the persecutor of their loved ones and in both cases that persecutor is King Mzilikazi. The modes of revenge are different, but both seek the downfall of the King and his people. Hence, the women emerge as the silent protagonists in these two historical novels.

CONCLUSION:

The nature of the history reflected in '*Mlimo* and *The Induna's Wife* is different from that in the other novels discussed in this chapter. In the other novels it is the history of how the white people come to South Africa and Zimbabwe and the events surrounding the advent of colonialism. In these last two novels it is the history of the Ndebele people themselves being described, and the form of the narrative changes.

In the two latter novels an African narrator tells the story of his life and his place in that Ndebele history. It is a critical narrative where the narrator denounces his former king for his excesses and non-observance of basic human rights, which lead to the downfall of that king and his people. We have seen the nature of Malida's revenge. Untuswa seeks revenge for his wife, Lalusini, who disappears three days after he goes to

²³⁴ *Ibid* 86-87.

fulfil his mission of killing the Ghost Beast. An old woman, Gegesa, further confirms that she saw four top executioners of the king escorting her and letting her drop into the alligator pool. His form of revenge is to ultimately kill the king and all his people and take the throne himself, a coup in today's language.

To achieve that objective he begins by marrying some of the key induna's daughters in order to get their fathers' and their impis' loyalty. The king's comment on these marriages indicates his own personal prejudice against women as he remarks, "Taking new wives at last, Untuswa?... *Whau* but you have been long content with old ones. How often have I told you that women are like a bowl of *tywala* delightful and stimulating when fresh; but, when stale, sour and injurious, and the sooner thrown away the better?"²³⁵ From this comment we can deduce Mzilikazi's callousness towards women. The comment reveals the extent to which his *natural* behaviour has become *inhuman*, or the extent to which the *human* essence in him has become an *unnatural* essence—the extent to which his *inhuman nature* has come to be *natural* to him, as Marx would say.²³⁶

However, that nasty comment about new and old wives does not deter Untuswa from his purpose. Eventually he attempts to kill the king, spurred on by "The spirit of Lalusini, agonised and bloody, [which] rose

²³⁵ B. Mitford, *The Induna's Wife* 91.

²³⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* 89-90.

before my eyes, beckoning me onward, and my one thought was how soon I might bury my spear in the heart of her slayer.”²³⁷

In this novel, Untuswa’s story spills over to the history of Dingaane where he runs to seek asylum because he fails in his attempt to assassinate his king, Mzilikazi. Finally he serves under Mpande who takes over from Dingaane. After Mpande, Cetshwayo and then, of course, the war against Cetshwayo is described as it is in the other novels such as *My Leaves are Green*. Untuswa does get reunited with Lalusini in Dingaane’s kingdom because she, too, survives the fall into the alligator pool and escapes.

‘Mlimo and *The Induna’s Wife* are histories that, like Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, reveal the internal dissatisfactions; cracks, within the Ndebele and Zulu states. Jealousy plays a big role in discrediting indunas. Beautiful women are coveted by the king and either the women are killed for it or their husbands or boyfriends are the ones killed or “smelt out.” In both circumstances in these novels, the authors’ objective seems to be to discredit African rulers and portray them as gargantuan monstrosities that literally eat up their own people. The main purpose for this literary style is to portray African populations as subject to persecution by their own rulers and that they, therefore, become extremely grateful to the white people who come to their countries supposedly to liberate them from such persecution. Their readers in England and elsewhere in Europe had no access to any other viewpoints and so they tended to

²³⁷ B. Mitford 101.

believe these writings anyway. Ultimately the white people's purpose is to gain access to the African land and its resources.

The next chapter turns the reader's attention to those novels that describe what is called, the “vengeance of the earth”—mother earth’s vengeance, as it were, against those who abuse her.