

CHAPTER 6

CONTENT AND CHARACTER IN THE WHITE RHODESIAN NOVEL—

SOME NOVELISTS' CRITIQUE OF SETTLER IDEOLOGY IN RHODESIA

Introduction

From the beginning of the 1890s there have been literary voices criticising the ideology and practices of the settlers in Rhodesia. Arthur Shearly Cripps' voice is one of these and, as seen in the last chapter, he criticises the architects of the Chartered Company through some of his characters. He himself suggests that Rhodes will suffer in Purgatory, though he is not revolutionary in his criticism of the Company's policies on Africans in Rhodesia.

These literary, critical voices tend to re-enact what happened historically. For example, Britain was not financially responsible for the colony, so she felt little responsibility for Africans. The British left the Chartered Company to run the colony in its own way until after 1897 when it was subjected to greater scrutiny by Whitehall. As one British High Commissioner to South Africa wrote to the British Prime Minister six years after Company administration started in Rhodesia, and before the 1896 First Chimurenga:

Nothing is more certain than that if the Imperial Government were to be seen taking a strong line

against the Company for the protection of the blacks, the whole Dutch opinion in South Africa would swing round to the side of the Company... You might indeed unite Dutch and English by protecting the black man, but you would unite them against yourself and your policy of protection. [The “great thing” is] to secure the appointment of honourable and capable men as magistrates and native commissioners. If that can be done, I think the lot of the natives may be a very tolerable one and that even a system of compulsory labour indeed, under fair conditions and proper safeguards, may be turned to their advantage.¹

Britain worried more about Dutch opinion and how both the Dutch and the English in Southern Africa could turn against her if she attempted to stop unfair Company practices towards the Africans of Rhodesia. Cripps does a good job of showing the “capable” native commissioners and magistrates at work in Rhodesia in his novels as discussed earlier. He also does a good job of showing how “the lot of the natives” is “tolerable” under the “system of compulsory labour... under *fair conditions and proper safeguards*,” and how those conditions are “turned to [the Africans’] advantage.” Of course, this is a contradiction in terms. How can “compulsory labour” ever be done “under *fair conditions and proper safeguards*?” The moment something is compulsory, it is already unfair. Thus, some Rhodesian novelists expose the gap between professed theory and practice in their works.

Besides Arthur Shearly Cripps who writes much earlier, the other critical novelist to be discussed in this chapter is Olive Schreiner in her novel,

¹ Claire Palley, *The Constitutional History and Law of Southern Rhodesia 1888-1965 with Special Reference to Imperial Control* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966) 140.

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland,² published in 1897. Schreiner's book is very significant because it is one of the earliest to express a divergent opinion from the mainstream opinions of the day. Peter Gibbs in *Stronger Than Armies*,³ and John Parker in his Autobiography, *Rhodesia: Little White Island*,⁴ can also be considered critical. These two are written much later, 1953 and 1972, respectively.

It will also be observed that Schreiner portrays conflict among white people in the early days, this often having to do with opposing Cecil John Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSAC) and its policy on land between 1890 and 1923 when the Company ruled Rhodesia. The Company was resented for various reasons. Bowman writes:

The major focus of white conflict before 1923 concerned disagreements over BSAC policies and the long-run political future of Rhodesia. Tensions between the company and the settlers arose initially when the settlers became angered over the company's inability to protect them during the African rebellions. More lasting disagreements emerged over development policy. The settlers resented the company's effective ownership of the land and felt its policies were not directed toward long term development of the country but only toward short-term profit.⁵

Later on, conflict among white people took a different shape once the BSAC was out of the way, but the reasons remained the same: "The root

² Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897).

³ Peter Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* (South Africa: Central News Agency Ltd., 1953).

⁴ John Parker, *Rhodesia: Little White Island* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1972).

⁵ Larry W. Bowman, *Politics in Rhodesia, White Power in an African State* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973) 7.

of the conflict lay in the disagreement over the best strategy to follow to protect white interests.”⁶ These white interests were invariably synonymous with white economic monopoly and political power. In order to protect these white interests it was necessary to create a superstructure that served white supremacy. Because whites wanted to maintain this superstructure and blacks sought to dismantle it, conflict between the two races became inevitable. All these conflicts make up the content of the Rhodesian novels selected for study in this thesis. Some of that content ends up as a critique of white settler ideology. Some authors portray this conflict with an ironic twist, for instance, when the whites who support the blacks get annihilated, and those that do not, live on. Attention will be paid to these conflicts in this chapter to show how some white Rhodesian novelists criticise the settler ideology.

A CRITIQUE OF THE BRITISH SOUTH AFRICA COMPANY AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN RHODESIA

A critique of the British South Africa Company is evident in Schreiner’s novel, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, whose setting is soon after the 1896-1897 war of dispossession in Rhodesia. The Company troops overrun Mashonaland, burning down and generally destroying Shona homes; looting their granaries and burning all the food they cannot carry with them. In one area forty miles south of Central Mashonaland, kraals are destroyed “and 200 black carcasses were lying in the sun.”⁷ The troops also dynamite caves where the Shona attempt to seek refuge.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ O. Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket...* 193.

The reader hears about these activities from various characters including the main one, Peter Halket, when he is sitting by the fire the night he gets lost in the veld, separated from his colleagues. These war activities are tied up with the issue of land, naturally, because the war is fought over this issue. So Halket dreams about what he calls “his business prospects.” After his voluntary service with the Company is over, he

“...would have a large piece of land given him, and the Mashonas and Matabeles would have all their land taken away from them in time and the Chartered Company would pass a law that they had to work for the white men; and he, Peter Halket, would make them work for him. He would make money... Other men had come to South Africa with nothing, and had made everything! Why should not he? All men made money when they came to South Africa—Barney Barnato, Rhodes—they all made money out of the country... why should not he?”⁸

Ideologically, in this novel, making money is the *raison d'être* for Rhodes and his company, and for the rest of the settlers for being in this part of the world. They have come here to secure land and to make money from it. That money can be made by farming or mining—mining which enables the “other men” who come to South Africa with nothing to make everything, as Halket muses. Mashonaland is especially good for farming and for prospecting. In a short reverie, Halket has summarised the Company’s purpose and even how Halket expects to make use of

⁸ Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket*... 28; 29; 37.

compulsory African labour. The reader has seen how that works in Cripps' novels.

It is worth mentioning briefly, that historically Olive Schreiner, started as an admirer of Cecil John Rhodes, but developed great hostility towards him because of his policies towards Africans. In the Cape Parliament, Rhodes's support for an amendment Bill to the Masters and Servants Act, which sought to empower white rural magistrates to sentence blacks to flogging for minor offences "such as disobedience and insolence to their employers, was the last straw for Schreiner." The word of the masters or mistresses against the employer would be sufficient evidence for the sentence to be passed. Although the bill did not pass, Rhodes lost the friendship of Olive Schreiner over the fact that he had supported it at all. Schreiner had once described Rhodes as "the only great man and man of genius South Africa possesses."⁹ She now did not want anything to do with him. Later she explained her position:

We fight because he means so much of oppression, injustice and moral degradation in South Africa;—but if he passed away tomorrow there still remains the terrible fact that something in our society has formed the matrix, which has fed, nourished, and built up such a man. It is the far future of Africa...which depresses me...I believe we are standing on top of a long downward slope. We shall reach the bottom, at last, probably amid the upheaval of a war with our Native races (then not the poor savage, but generous races whom we might have bound to ourselves by a little generosity and sympathy, but a fierce and half-educated, much brutalized race who will have come into

⁹ Antony Thomas, *Rhodes*, 268.

their own). The men to come after us will reap
the fruits of our “Native policy”....¹⁰

Schreiner, therefore, was one of those writers who could “penetrate the fog of propaganda, [who] could separate fact from fiction and distinguish the ‘pirate flag’ of a ‘speculator and gamester’ from the banner of ‘truth and justice which knows no race or colour.’”¹¹ These qualities of Schreiner are evident in her novel, *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*.

In that novel, the Company has gone to war for the second time in Mashonaland and Matabeleland, the Chimurenga of 1896. Even with good business prospects for the troopers, however, criticism of the Company is still heard from those very troopers who fight for it. For example, the sheer bureaucracy and class segregation within the Company hierarchy itself is attacked. All people are not equal in its eyes. An example of this inequality is evident in the very meals they eat while in the veld. There are four fires burning where the troopies have camped. Three are said to be “cooking the mealies and rice which formed the diet of the men, their stock of tinned meals having been exhausted; while the fourth, which was watched by a native boy, contained the more appetising meal of the captain.”¹²

The three colonial Englishmen discuss the class problem within the company where the men at the top echelons of power, order them around. The issue of food may seem trivial, but it is tied up with the whole issue

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

of who is exercising power over whom in the Company. These three troopers are galled by the fact that it is the rejects of English society that are doing so in Rhodesia, in the Colony. These are “Fellows who couldn’t do as farmers, and couldn’t do as shop keepers, and God knows what else; [fellows whose] friends in England didn’t want to have them; [who] are sent out here to boss it over us! Why, I want to know, ain’t I as good as any of these fellows who come swelling about here? Friends got money, I suppose!”¹³ The suggestion is that they have access to power through money. Historically, William Milton who came to reorganise the Rhodesian administration in 1896 at Rhodes’s request, was shocked to see Jameson’s methods of appropriating land. So he commented:

Everything official here is in an absolutely rotten condition... and will continue so until we can clear out the Honourable and military elements which are rampant everywhere and are evidently expecting to be rewarded with fat billets after the war. If they get them I am off. The country has been very nearly ruined by them already under the wing of Jameson, and if it is to continue the Imperial Government will be quite justified in stepping in....¹⁴

Schreiner, in her novel, suggests that these fellows acquire their positions through corrupt means just as, in real life, land was acquired through corrupt means after the Second Chimurenga. The captain of the troopers is further criticised directly when the troopers talk about how he allocates only “one half teaspoon of Dop” to his men “while he has ten empty

¹² Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket...* 196.

¹³ *Ibid* 201-202.

¹⁴ T. O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7 A Study in African Resistance* 103-104.

champagne bottles lying behind his tent.” While these men have to live on mealies only for food, “he has pati and beef and lives like a lord!”¹⁵

It is not only the issue of food that irks these fighting men. It is also what they see as the maladministration of the Company. This maladministration is responsible for the lack of support they have of Company’s top hierarchy while they fight. The administrators, meaning Jameson and his men who take orders from Rhodes, leave the fighters “to be murdered here while they went gallivanting to the Transvaal.” One of the troopers goes as far as to say, “If my mother or sister had been killed here, I’d have taken a pistol and blown out the brains of the great Panjandrum, and the little ones after him. Fine administration of a country, this, to invite people to come in and live here, and then take every fighting man out of the country on a gold hunting marauding expedition to the Transvaal, and leave us to face the bitter end. I look upon every man and woman who was killed here as murdered by the Chartered Company.”¹⁶ Historically, since Schreiner was pro-Boer, she regarded the 1896 attack on the Transvaal as illegitimate and immoral. Part of her attack in her novel is on British Capitalism.¹⁷

In John Parker’s autobiography, *Rhodesia: Little White Island*, this resentment is also evident except that it extends to the British:

An attitude of resentment toward authority in general,

¹⁵ Olive Schreiner, *Trooper Peter Halket...* 200-201.

¹⁶ *Ibid* 204-205.

¹⁷ *Ibid* 82; 117.

and to British authority in particular, thrived among the independently-minded settlers...The early settlers spent a large part of their time warring with both these [British] and the Company officials, and endeavouring to take over control of their own affairs.”¹⁸

Hence, the historical conflict among the white people in the early 1890s to 1923 finds its way into fiction. The conflict is between the ruling class and the ruled who object to the ruling methods of the former. They wanted direct control of their own destiny, a subject that surfaces through grumbling by characters in Schreiner’s novel and in Parker’s autobiography.

It seems also that the Company promises people wealth when they recruit them to immigrate to the colony; wealth that becomes elusive, as one of the troopers complains: “What’s all this fine administration they talk of? It’s been six years since I came to this country, and I’ve worked like a nigger ever since I came, and what have I, or any men who’ve worked hard at real, honest farming, got for it?”¹⁹ One of the troopers also confirms that he has been here for five years and has had “lots of promises,” though he has not got anything else yet.²⁰ When Halket first meets the stranger who comes to his fire camp, he asks him whether he works for the Company, to which the stranger answers negatively. Halket’s comment on this answer is another critique of the Company as

¹⁸ J. Parker, *Rhodesia: Little White Island* 22.

¹⁹ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 205-206.

²⁰ *Ibid* 207.

he says that it is not those who work who make the money, "it's the big-wigs who get the concessions."²¹

The troopers complain that all benefits from the land end up being monopolised by the Company and "if England took over the Chartered Company tomorrow, what would she find?—everything of value in the land given over to private concessions—they'll line their pockets if the whole land goes to pot! It'll be the jackals eating all the flesh off the horse's bones, and calling the lion in to lick the bones."²² The lion, in this case, would be England and the jackals, the Company men.

The result of this Company neglect of its people and false promises to them is that the troopers become corrupt and are prepared to do anything for selfish ends. As one of them says, if asked to sign a paper that their captain never got drunk or swore, he would do it "if there was a good dose of squaring to come after it. I could stand a good lot of that sort of thing—squaring—if it would only come my way."²³ It will be recalled from a previous chapter that Rhodes conquers all his political, social and economic opponents by *squaring* them, his expression for bribing. That is what Schreiner is criticising here through her character's sarcastic approval of that habit. At the same time, this talk shows that few people can resist that squaring in the face of so much poverty. After all, "there's nothing a man can't be squared to do."²⁴ The sarcasm continues where one of the troopers says he expects to see a paper come round "signed by

²¹ *Ibid* 54.

²² *Ibid* 206.

²³ *Ibid* 207.

²⁴ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket*... 210.

all the nigger chiefs, saying how much they love the BSA Company, and how glad they are the Panjandrum [that is, Rhodes] has got them, and how awfully good he is to them.”²⁵ It will also be remembered how Rhodes is always said to be loved by black people even though he abuses them.

In this novel, the reader searches for Schreiner’s critical voice, and finds it in her provision of the alternative to conforming to the Company rules. The stranger provides that critical alternative. What he does is to question some of Rhodes’s values as articulated by Halket, such as his being “death on niggers;” his attempt to pass, through the Cape Parliament, a bill that is intended to empower whites to flog their African servants; how good Rhodes is because he will not give Africans the vote, civilisation or education. Instead “he’d keep their noses to the grindstone” because he prefers “land to niggers.”²⁶ Halket supports Rhodes when it comes to having Africans working for the white people under slave conditions because “we don’t come out here to work...but to make money, and how are we to make it, unless you get niggers to work for you, or start a syndicate?”²⁷ With Rhodes in charge of Rhodesia, too, there are no investigations if one thrashes a nigger “provided you don’t get *him* in trouble.”²⁸ This is the treatment that Cripps also condemns in *Bay Tree Country*, using a different literary artistic form. It is also a curious phenomenon where people who are oppressed go on to oppress

²⁵ *Ibid* 210.

²⁶ *Ibid* 81-82.

²⁷ *Ibid* 83.

²⁸ *Ibid* 84.

others if they are given the opportunity. Thus, the oppressed Trooper hopes to oppress the blacks if he gets the chance.

Halket rambles on about these “virtues” that he likes in Rhodes while denouncing the British because they want to accord Africans rights and privileges such as giving them land to live on.²⁹ Here, Schreiner is using sarcasm effectively in her denunciation of Rhodes and the values he promotes in Rhodesia under his Company rule. Then the stranger comes with a different solution altogether to the Company problem.

The stranger is a man who is Christ-like. Several allusions are made that remind one of Jesus Christ, for example, his knowledge which seems to have a touch of the supernatural when he addresses Halket as “Peter Simon Halket” even though Peter has not told him his middle name.³⁰

When the stranger arranges the logs on the fire, it burns brighter and higher, giving a touch of the miraculous. The conversation with Halket is conducted in such a way that Halket appears naïve, as he answers the stranger’s several questions: which is the greatest soul out of all he has seen;³¹ what comprises greatness;³² where he or England got his land from;³³ and whether the black people were also parcelled out with the land.³⁴

²⁹ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 82.

³⁰ *Ibid* 85.

³¹ *Ibid* 87.

³² *Ibid* 88-89.

³³ *Ibid* 90.

³⁴ *Ibid* 90-92.

All these questions lead to a discussion that ultimately illuminates, to Halket, the need for a new approach to the Rhodesian question. The question of what a rebel is, for instance, is asked by the stranger and Halket's response is that he is "a man who fights against his king and his country. These bloody niggers here are rebels because they are fighting against us. They don't want the Chartered Company to have them. But they'll have to. We'll teach them a lesson," he declares with great satisfaction. Shreiner then demolishes Halket's argument by contrasting his definition of a rebel with the case of the Armenians who fought the Turks in order to regain their independence. This is done through the stranger's and Halket's debate on the pros and cons of colonisation, with the stranger equating it to the struggle of the Armenians against the Turks. Halket's prejudice surfaces glaringly as he hates the Turks and does not see anything wrong with the Armenians fighting the "bloody Turks."³⁵

The stranger gives another example of a white prospector who is defended by his black servant. However, the servant gets killed for defending his master and the white prospector eventually also dies beside his servant.³⁶ By this story, the stranger demonstrates mutual love between two people of two different races—love that transcends race as it were.

The stranger further tells the biblical story of Naboth, the Jezreelite, who has a vineyard that Ahab, King of Samaria, covets and tries

³⁵ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 93-102.

³⁶ *Ibid* 109-113.

unsuccessfully to persuade the former to give him. He then equates this story of Naboth and Ahab to that of the Africans who, metaphorically speaking, are Naboth who “has a vineyard in this land; and in it there is much gold; and Ahab [the white man] has desired to have it that the wealth may be his.” The equation stretches on to indicate Naboth as also standing for the Boers under Paul Kruger whose “vineyard”—the gold fields of Johannesburg—are coveted by Ahab—Rhodes and his Parliament in Cape Town—resulting in the failed Jameson Raid. The stranger tells the story of Naboth and Ahab as one that was itself told to a particular church by a particular preacher to his congregation. The story enables the preacher, the stranger and ultimately Schreiner, to put forward their point of view. The preacher argues with his wife who believes that he should not denounce the Jameson Raid so openly since he hopes to be promoted by the same people who believe in that raid and who walk out of his church out of disgust because they cannot stand his attack on immorality which the congregation regards as treacherous.

The point being made here is that one should not condone something wrong no matter who or what race commits it: “If I have defended the black man when I believed him to be wronged, shall I not also defend the white man, my flesh-brother? Shall we speak when one man is wronged and not when it is another?”³⁷

The other point being made is that people should learn to avoid the mistakes of the past, and that they should try to create a better future,

³⁷ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 120.

meaning a future of equality for all people.³⁸ A more direct criticism of the British silence in the face of injustice is made when the preacher criticises his wife, pointing out that people's selfish reasons are responsible for their silence. Hence, "Here and there one has dared to speak aloud; but the rest whisper behind the hand. One says, 'my son has a post, he would lose it if I spoke loud;' and another says, 'I have a promise of land;' and another, 'I am socially intimate with these men, and should lose my social standing if I let my voice be heard....'" The only problem comes after the preacher explains how the sins of a man voted into public office affect the whole people. In his last sermon from which his own wife and all the elders walk out, the preacher becomes more blunt in apportioning blame when he says, "Tonight we shall look at our own share in the matter [of the suffering of the people of this land at the hands of men whose aim is to attain power and wealth]. I think we shall realise that with us, and not with the men we have lifted up on high, lies the condemnation."³⁹ This is a condemnation of the white society at large.

What the preacher means is that by condoning the Company activities, contemporary white men and women are equally to be condemned for those activities. It is at this point that everyone walks out of the church. They would rather not hear more of this kind of talk. Hence, the preacher ends up standing alone on this issue though "it is easier for a man to die than to stand alone. He who can stand alone can, also, when the need be, die."⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid* 121.

³⁹ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 142-143.

⁴⁰ *Ibid* 143.

The stranger tells another parable of a woman who, alone, refused to eat human flesh when everyone else around her did. In the end everyone abstained. Thus, one person's act of courage can affect many to change for the better.

In Gibbs' novel, *Stronger Than Armies*, the same kind of condemnation of society and the BSA Company is made after the trial of one Nicholas Jorgansen who kills Muntambo, a black leader, in a strike action being undertaken by Africans to force white people to improve their pay, their work and living conditions. The white jury finds Jorgansen not guilty of the murder of this black man, as happens in such cases also in Cripps' novel, *Bay Tree Country*, discussed earlier. However, the judge, in Jorgansen's trial, passes his encompassing condemning judgement as follows:

“If the prisoner is absolved from blame for this man's death, it does not absolve the system of society that brought his death about. If society has found the prisoner guiltless, then society has condemned itself. Each of you here,” and he still looked towards the white people in the court, “are members of that society. A society that stands condemned cannot survive. The prisoner is discharged.”

For a long minute the cold scornful words hung in the air about the court-room as if they would go on sounding for ever. In the silence that followed people felt that the judge had pronounced sentence of death on each man himself. It was only Jorgansen, the man who had done the killing, who

found himself spared.⁴¹

As for what to do about the problems which have been raised in the debate between the stranger and Halket in Schreiner's novel; problems that centre mainly on what to do with the Company-moneyed class, the reader will find the solution compromising. This is because the stranger does not wish this class punished, nor does he wish that those men give up their wealth, luxuries or joy. He just wishes them to "leave this land they have tortured and ruined. Let them keep the money they have made here; we may be the poorer for it; but they cannot then crush our freedom with it...."⁴² This is a solution similar to the one offered by Cripps in *Bay Tree Country* where Lyndhurst's death remains unavenged, his true identity unrevealed, and Rose, for whose cause he is shot dead, is not even asked to answer questions. His friends, Jack and Vaughan prefer to "leave her alone"⁴³ (see earlier discussion of this).

What the stranger (Christ? Schreiner?) seems to be saying is that although the speculator and the monopolist have raped Rhodesia and its people, they cannot be punished. They should be left alone. This is the kind of solution Palley is talking about when he suggests, that all that is needed is to appoint "honourable and capable men as magistrates and native commissioners" so that they make the lot of the natives tolerable (see note 1). Schreiner, like Cripps, is non-committal in respect of the African cause. But she considers the BSAC worse than the Dutch and the British

⁴¹ Peter Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 169.

⁴² Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 128-129.

⁴³ Cripps, *Bay-Tree Country* 167-168.

in their dealings with the natives.⁴⁴ It is difficult, though, to see how they have been better when they consciously turn a blind eye on the work of the Company as articulated in the preacher's words above and in the words of Lyndhurst's friends in *Bay Tree Country*. These friends prefer to leave the whole issue of his death alone.

Schreiner seems to believe strongly that the wholesome actions of one person may have a positive influence on the majority. The stranger's story of flesh eaters is one illustration of this belief. The second illustration lies in the tasks that the stranger assigns Peter Halket to go and do in order to belong to his Company which seems better than the Chartered Company. This is reminiscent of the question Jesus was asked by the rich man, "What must I do to be saved?" Halket's first task is to go to England to ask the British to retrieve the Charter from Rhodes and his people, to "take the sword" they gave away. The second task requires that he dissuade the English and the Dutch from fighting each other for African land since they are really two branches of one tree. The third task demands that he goes to Rhodes and try to turn him from his evil ways of buying people's souls and shedding blood because, though he seeks to make his name immortal in this land of Rhodesia by having it written "in gold dust and set it with diamonds, and cement it with human blood shed from the Zambesi to the sea, yet—," meaning, yet it will still be erased.

This is a powerful message and a telling prediction made at the time Shreiner is writing, 1897. Rhodesians believed that Rhodesia was there

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 130.

to stay forever and Rhodes believed that his name would be inscribed on the map of Africa and be remembered for four thousand years. Halket declines to carry out all these tasks because he considers them too heavy. His fourth task is to love his enemies; do good to them that hate him; always walk forward without turning around and without worrying about what people say; to “succour the oppressed; deliver the captive;” to feed his enemy if hungry and to give his enemy drink if thirsty.⁴⁵ Halket finds this task easier to do than the other three and he literally carries it out, quarrelling with his captain in the process.

After the stranger has left, Halket changes, for the stranger has had a strong impact on him; a stranger who can be considered Christ-like. More Biblical allusions support his Christ-like image: he says he is a Jew from Palestine; he has five wounds; he is in several places and with several people simultaneously in all their different situations at different times;⁴⁶ he teaches in parables and stories; he says he fasted for forty days and forty nights; and the way he simply vanishes at the end of giving Halket his fourth task. He changes Halket’s life from one of killing and subduing black people, forcing them to work for him, to a life where he serves them, his enemy. For instance, he serves the black man whose release he fights for by giving him food, drink and freedom at the expense of his own life. Thus, he gives up his own life for that of the black man.

Halket’s life changes other people’s lives too. For example, the other trooper, the Englishman, wonders in the end “whether it is not better for

⁴⁵ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 187-188.

⁴⁶ Schreiner, *Trooper P. Halket...* 74; 78; 139; 142; 143.

him now [Halket dead], than for us [alive].” The other troopers all recognise the change in Halket, especially when he does things that no one else has ever done before, like arguing with the captain on behalf of the blacks, and criticising the Company and the whole ideology behind their mission in Mashonaland.

Throughout this novel, therefore, the Chartered Company and Rhodes’s ideology that sustain it are severely condemned. However, the author has been conformist in her condemnation because the stranger who is the strongest critical voice, does not make it his responsibility to personally carry out the four tasks he asks Halket to do. Halket manages to carry out the fourth task which is more localised in that he deals with people in his immediate environment only to the extent that they believe he has gone a little crazy after spending the night alone, lost in the veld. Nevertheless, his death seems to change the thinking of the other three English troopers, so by doing the fourth task, the other three may follow suit.

Trooper Peter Halket... seems to have influenced a number of readers, for example, Cripps who adopted its approach to the solution of the problems caused by the Chartered Company, especially its oppression of Africans in South Africa and Rhodesia. The novel also portrays conflict among white people concerning the Chartered Company rule in Rhodesia. No doubt this liberal work was considered a very radical text in its day. Nothing very radical could be expected at that time when the English and Rhodesian readership loathed books such as this one which strenuously avoided romance conventions, “not only because they exposed settler

brutality and mediocrity but because they offered no alternatively flattering image of the settler.”⁴⁷

This extensive discussion has shown the portrayal of an uncomplimentary image of the white settler in Rhodesia. Schreiner’s is, therefore, a major critical voice of the settlers in Rhodesia in her time.

A CRITIQUE OF SETTLER IDEOLOGY—
“THE NATIVE IS CHILDLIKE...”

Peter Gibbs in his novel, *Stronger Than Armies*, and John Parker in his autobiography, *Rhodesia: Little White Island*, go several steps beyond a critique of Company practices to a critique of white attitudes towards black people. They expose current settler ideology, which takes its roots from that planted by Cecil John Rhodes, the colonial founder of Rhodesia. In both texts, the Africans agitate, not only for equal rights, but also for total control of their social, political and economic destiny. This idea of total independence for Africans is what is “stronger than armies” as it cannot be suppressed even militarily.

Both Gibbs and Parker deal with the issue of attitude right at the beginning of their texts to demonstrate the inherent arrogance of the white people in an African country. The arrogance is evident when they describe a handful of whites who come into the country, and in the space of barely seventy years, succeed in suppressing the Africans, claiming that the country they now occupy was unexplored; was there for the

⁴⁷ A.J. Chennells, “Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel” 252.

taking; was empty; and that this was a country where a small population of white settlers could lord it over ten times as many black people and get away with it. Gibbs writes, “The white man had come and taken over the country and the natives had apparently been allowed to remain there only on sufferance... The natives were not just a conquered people. They were a race apart, and barely human at that. Nobody spoke to them except to give them orders, or more frequently, to admonish them.”⁴⁸ Parker too describes the invisibility and unimportance of the Africans to show what little attention the white people pay to them.

African invisibility and insignificance become the ideological basis on which black and white people interact in the novel and autobiography, with one race actually persecuting the other, which then fights back. One of the ideological factors emphasised in *Stronger Than Armies* is that of degrading the African. As discussed earlier, Rhodes considered the native a child. In this novel, *Stronger Than Armies*, that idea is so well projected that it shows how Rhodes’s ideology still affects the fabric of society seventy years after white pioneers settled in Rhodesia.

First of all, it is the invisibility of the African that the narrator highlights as he says, after commenting on Muntambo, an African political leader who invites himself to a white cabinet session,

It would be wrong to say they [members of the cabinet] had not noticed the native in the room before the Prime Minister had spoken. It would be quite right

⁴⁸ P. Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 1-10.

to say they had taken no notice of him... White people did not notice natives the way they would notice others of their race. The natives, the whole lot of them, were part of the landscape or the furniture. No white person had any communication with them—except when ordering them about—and what they thought was their affair. Even what they did was of no interest, so long as they were not interfering with the concerns of their white masters.⁴⁹

Parker also indicates that,

The old-time Rhodesian and his children regarded the African as a conquered people who exist to serve the white settler and his family in whatever capacity the settler likes to choose. It may be in the home, on the farm, in the factory—or even in the Civil Service or police force. Except in very few circumstances...the old Rhodesian either fails or refuses to admit the possibility that an African could ever be an equal to a white in any sphere. Should the African step above his station, he must be put down by whatever means are at hand—by word of mouth, shouting, bullying, striking, kicking, whipping or shooting if necessary.⁵⁰

This treatment of Africans is well documented in both Gibbs' novel and Parker's autobiography. This shows how that ideology worked in practical life.

Another stereotyped idea about Africans is that which has been characterised as the Ndebele myth—the supposed superiority of the

⁴⁹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 12-13.

Ndebele over the Shona. Muntambo is described as a “tall man, an obvious descendant of the true Zulu race.”⁵¹ A person with such courage and personality could not be a M’shona! Later on after delivering his speech to members of the white cabinet, the narrator says that he waits to be dismissed, a Zulu mannerism, acknowledges the Prime Minister who claims to know “something of the innate manners of the descendants of the true Zulus [as if there were false ones]. He saw something was expected of him and his annoyance was immediately softened. For the moment they were no longer white man and black man, but the leaders of two people facing each other.”⁵² There is almost an acceptance of Muntambo as an equal simply because of the belief that he is a “true Zulu descendant.”

In Parker’s autobiography, the issue of the whites preferring the Ndebele to the Shona comes up again as he describes one of his longest serving servants or garden boys, Muhadi, as one who “was of the Khumalo clan—the descendants of the rulers of the Matabele—[who] stayed with us for more than three years.”⁵³ The context is that the other garden boys who were Shona do not stay that long because they are not as worthy as this Ndebele boy.

⁵⁰ Parker, *Rhodesia: Little White Island* 45.

⁵¹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 13.

⁵² *Ibid* 22.

⁵³ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 69.

In *Stronger Than Armies*, when a white man addresses an African, it is as if he were speaking to a child. When Muntambo speaks, he is referred to as a child and his actions as childlike. Thus, when the Finance Minister addresses Muntambo, the narrator says, “He spoke simply, as to a child. To speak thus was the custom of many white people. The custom conditioned the mind so that the natives were generally looked on as children and usually behaved as such.”⁵⁴ Even the paper that Muntambo brings to the meeting is described as being “covered on both sides by writing in big pencilled letters, like a child’s exercise.”⁵⁵

Because of their attitude towards the blacks, the whites find it difficult to imagine that the blacks are capable of adult action. Hence, when Muntambo talks about a strike for more money, one of the Ministers, the youngest one, Philip Anderson, finds it incredible: “He found it difficult to believe that the natives had the initiative even to conceive –let alone, put into effect any spontaneous demonstration. He knew them to be like children. Never had any of them, since he had known them, shown any inclination to act for themselves and, like children, they accepted without questioning the way of life ordained for them by the white people.”⁵⁶

After the strike begins, Philip and others still fail to take the blacks seriously. Philip exclaims, “I nearly made a fool of myself. They’re just

⁵⁴ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 15-16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* 33-34.

a lot of children....”⁵⁷ Margaret, Philip’s wife, sees the strike action as a “funny sort of revolution” and she and Philip titillate themselves about what this “revolution” means. It is as Chennells writes, “ For nearly seventy years settler novelists had from time to time titillated their readers with the prospect of another rising. When it came, most novelists did not recognize [sic] that another rising had indeed begun... [They did not] realize [sic] that the rising of the settler mythologies had been transformed into a modern revolution that could end only in their defeat.”⁵⁸ Certainly in this novel Gibbs titillates his readers with a mock revolution and one of the characters, Jackson shouts, “So. ‘The blacks have risen?’ without any idea that for once the jest was dangerously near the truth.” When the sergeant asks him if he has got batons, one of the men answers, “ ‘Yes. And I’ve got these too.’ He lifted clenched fists. They laughed together for they had their own opinions of the best weapons for dealing with natives [which included fists and a sjambok].”⁵⁹

This strike is not taken seriously, of course, and the author shows the ridiculous extent to which his people go in discrediting black people’s efforts at self-emancipation. Few of the whites in the novel take notice of this black action which they consider unusual: “For the natives had the childlike minds of simple people and delighted in raising a laugh at the expense of anyone singled out from the mass for attention.”⁶⁰ Thus, black

⁵⁷ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 43.

⁵⁸ A.J. Chennells, “Settler Myths...” 421.

⁵⁹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 76-77.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* 69.

people's actions are a butt for insults. Consider the description of what is taken to be their daily behaviour:

[Because of the strike], there were no *streams of messengers* on bicycles, shouting to each other childishly across the streets. Nor were there the usual *knots of natives squatting on the pavements* at every corner. Normally they sat there, some *chattering like monkeys*, others *gazing vacantly at nothing*, some even *sleeping* undisturbed by the bustle of the city (my italics for emphasis).⁶¹

So the narrator is able to continue the mockery later: “The natives had been mesmerised by fear and, like children duped by a clever conjuror, they imaged the guns to be there because they had been told so certainly that they were there.”⁶² Ironically, the absence of Africans on the street during the strike makes the whites feel refreshed by “not having a lot of bloody kaffirs about,” making the country seem like “a real white man’s country at last!”⁶³ The world of make-believe does not last that long though.

We could say the author is mocking black people here in these descriptions—the word “child” or “children” or “childlike,” appears at least seven times in different instances quoted above—or we could look at this portrayal as the author’s critique of his people’s naiveté and ideology; a naiveté and an ideology which are responsible for their future demise. The latter is the point of view that seems to be consistent with

⁶¹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 83.

⁶² *Ibid* 135.

the main vision of the story as articulated at the end by Philip. It takes the loss of his wife, Margaret, at the hands of the “childlike” Africans, for him to realise that the idea of freedom is, indeed, “stronger than armies.” The book tries to see blacks through the stereotype and then shows how inaccurate the stereotype is.

The strike action that Parker describes in his autobiography is greeted with less cynicism and sarcasm because so much resistance has taken place already for the whites to react like those described by Gibbs in his novel. Besides, while Gibbs’s book was published in 1953, Parker’s was published in 1972, almost twenty years later. Much more African rumbling and dissatisfaction with white oppression had surfaced during the intervening years and this explains why Parker’s characters are less sarcastic and cynical. In fact, by 1972, the Second Chimurenga was already being fought.

Another difference between Gibbs’ book and Parker’s is that Parker adopts the autobiographical form instead of the pure fictitious novel form to tell his story. He, therefore, tends to be more factual in his presentation of events and characters, sticking to people’s real life names and attempting to present their historically attested political views and activities. He has much less latitude than Gibbs in how he can tell his story even though biographies and autobiographies fall into the realm of fiction as acknowledged in a previous chapter. This is borne out in Sir Roy Welensky’s foreword to Parker’s book where he writes, “I must

⁶³ *Ibid* 83.

make it clear that I do not agree with a great deal of what the author has written. He has viewed events from an angle, and honestly and firmly believes that what he expresses as events, and the reasons for them, are the honest truth; and, knowing him, I accept this; but nonetheless, many of his assumptions are wrong. I give one example—his version of the part which Lord Malvern played in the choice of his successor as Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, when Lord Malvern moved to the Federal field....⁶⁴ This comment makes Parker's book look more like a fictional autobiography.

To come back to the strike, Parker writes:

It took two years for the City Youth league, starting as a civic organisation aimed at improving matters in the Salisbury townships, to establish itself as the first firm opposition to white authority [just like the Dr.'s and Muntambo's strike action is the first resistance to white oppression in Gibbs' *Stronger Than Armies*].... In 1956 [the CYL leaders] organised a highly successful strike against increased bus fares in Salisbury—the first time that the urban Africans were able to witness how effective retaliatory action could be. At the same time they were preparing to challenge the white man's monopoly where it would hurt most—in the rural areas—and to form a truly national organisation which would link up the various elements in Salisbury and Bulawayo and the rural areas.... By 1957 they were ready to challenge the whole process of occupation and the demoralization [sic] of the African people. Fittingly enough, they chose Occupation Day, September 12 1957 as the day to launch the new African National Congress of Rhodesia.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Parker, *Rhodesia...* viii.

⁶⁵ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 63-64.

Historically, there was a strike in 1948 that was sponsored by the earlier version of the ANC under the Presidency of the Reverend Thompson Samkange backed by “young educated men like journalist Enoch Dumbutshena... the ANC had some initial success. It sponsored the only general strike ever in Rhodesia, in 1948, when for the first (and so far, last) time house servants joined their industrial brothers for 48 hours.”⁶⁶ Industry was paralysed throughout the country. It soon became clear to the African leaders of that strike that they could not achieve more favourable conditions for their workers without political power. It is on the basis of this 1948 strike that Gibbs describes his strike action by domestic workers in his novel, satirising the African leadership and discrediting them by portraying them as foolish.

**A CRITIQUE OF THE WHITE MAN’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS
AFRICAN PEOPLE’S LEADERSHIP AND DEMANDS**

Gibbs seems to be unhappy with the complacency, neglect and downright arrogance of the Rhodesian settlers towards the needs of the black people. At the political level the government he portrays has one of its Ministers, Philip Anderson, looking after “the natives’ modest claims to attention,” and this is considered to be “one of the *lesser* of Philip’s social services,” with a pun on the name of his actual Ministry, called the Ministry of Social Services.⁶⁷ So when Muntambo walks into the midst of the cabinet, claiming to have come here to speak for his people, the claim is a strange

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 62-63.

⁶⁷ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 11.

one to them; as strange as the thought of him wearing a suit as the narrator describes one Minister's reaction: "The Minister of Lands stared at him open-mouthed. In his world on the farm, a native in a suit was inconceivable."⁶⁸

Muntambo is evidently very courageous, eloquent and very articulate as he presents his people's demands: they need more money paid to them for their work, he says.⁶⁹ Then he defends his right to speak on their behalf even though he is not their "elected" representative in the white man's sense. He raises the issues of more pay, freedom for his people whom he says are not free, but "are slaves;" the issue of adequate housing; of the non-existent social interaction with their families since the wives and children must be left in the kraal because there is no room for them in the cities and no money to fend for them; of compulsory taxation; of passes and police brutality to those found without them.⁷⁰

Yet when asked *how* much more money would help his people, Muntambo's answer is most awkward and he appears confused, a confusion which is reminiscent of Stephen Blackpool's in Dickens' *Hard Times*. Muntambo answers, "I do not know, master. That is for our masters to say. But my people are asking me to tell you that if they have more money they will be able to buy more food and then everything will be better."⁷¹ Since food and shelter make up basic material life, it makes sense that these needs be satisfied before anything else. Therefore, it is

⁶⁸ *Ibid* 14.

⁶⁹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 15-19.

⁷¹ *Ibid* 19.

logical for Muntambo to articulate these needs on behalf of his people since they are being deprived of them.

Having told the cabinet of his people's basic concerns, Muntambo later produces a piece of paper referred to earlier on, and reads the grievances of his people:

The Africans work and have little food and the white people have much food and big houses. The Africans go on bicycles and on their feet and the white people go always in motors. One day when the Africans will not work the white people will not have food, they will not have their houses clean, their trains will not go, their motors will be still. Better that Africans have more money for more food than the Africans not work for the white people.⁷²

The first two statements contrasting what Africans do not have and white people have, are straightforward. The rest of the set of grievances is more complex. Muntambo presents the black people's problems in terms of how they affect the white people. By these grievances, the author may be suggesting that the white people do not realise the gravity of the situation encapsulated in the grievances. The white leisure and privileges are a direct consequence of black labour, labour that they would not enjoy in this country if blacks withdrew it. It is also labour that the white people do not enjoy in their own country. On the surface, however, it appears as if Africans have no idea of their real needs and only find satisfaction and fulfilment in working for the white people. After Muntambo has

⁷² Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 21.

presented his people's grievances so well before reading this paper, how could he fail to summarise them when asked to do so in the written piece of paper? Muntambo appears unusually dumb and appears to fit the stereotyped image of a child who does not know what he wants until the parent—the white man—tells him what to say. Yet he knows what he is doing and saying even though he cannot pinpoint the amount of money and work conditions that blacks require in order to achieve equality with their white counterparts.

The same strategy is used by Charles Dickens, but in his case, he discredits the workers' leader, Stephen Blackpool, in his novel, *Hard Times*. After Stephen correctly articulates the contrasting differences between the life of the masters and servants and how the latter suffer always, making the whole thing “a muddle,” Bounderby asks him to tell him how he would “set this muddle to rights.” Stephen answers, “ ‘Tis not me as should be looken to for that, sir. ‘Tis them as is put ower me, and ower aw the rest of us. What do they tak upon themsln, sir, if not to do’t?”⁷³ It is up to the masters to liberate their servants; a situation as ironic as the fact that Philip's cook, Moses, has his “most treasured possession hung on a nail on the wall [of his hut],” it being a photograph of his master!⁷⁴

One other way of interpreting this portrayal of blacks in Gibbs' novel is to say that the author is critical of white behaviour which results in eventual conflict between the two races. On the one hand, the prevailing

⁷³ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1995) 155.

⁷⁴ Gibbs, *Stronger...* 27.

socio-political system produces docile blacks like Moses who say they do not need more money or any improvement in their living conditions, and who sell black people's secret activities and plans to the white man they work for. On the other hand, the system produces radical men of action like the Doctor and Muntambo, who are ready to do battle in order to improve their people's condition. Certainly both interpretations are supported by the events in the story, but perhaps the latter view, where the author is critical of his own people, is even more justified by the position, that Philip, Margaret and the Africans occupy in that novel.

By contrast, Parker describes African leaders in a much more realistic manner, partly because of the autobiographical form he chooses to use. So he is largely dealing with the actual personalities themselves. He portrays leaders like Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe, Michael Mawema, Benjamin Burombo and others. Of Robert Mugabe he writes,

Mugabe, who made a brilliant and moving speech at the inaugural meeting, was one of [the African intellectuals]. He had three university degrees, and threw up a lucrative teaching post in Ghana to come home and work full time for African freedom in Rhodesia. I recall interviewing him and his beautiful Ghanaian wife in another tiny house in Highfield township, and wondering what future lay ahead of this gifted, sophisticated man who had so much to offer to society.⁷⁵

Of Parirenyatwa and Joshua Nkomo he writes,

⁷⁵ Parker, *Rhodesia, Little White Island* 80.

Parirenyatwa was perhaps the most forceful personality of them all. After Nkomo returned, I remember “Pari” sitting behind Nkomo’s shoulder at Press conferences. The large amiable Joshua was rarely a formidable debater, and it was Pari who would inject the whiplash answers, either himself or through Joshua. Nkomo was sometimes willing to be turned aside by the soft question, to allow himself to be distracted by irrelevances. Pari never. You could almost see Nkomo’s backbone stiffening as Pari would lean forward, whispering in his ear the telling phrase or the barbed reply....⁷⁶

Parker gives an subjective view of the leaders as he saw them. It is evident that Parker was impressed by Mugabe and Parirenyatwa as dynamic leaders but was not so impressed by Joshua Nkomo. So he portrays Nkomo in this description as someone whose ideas are enriched by those of Parirenyatwa. The reader can see the contrast in the description above.

None of these leaders is described in derogatory terms or considered a child or childlike by Parker, perhaps owing to his chosen form. Form is dialectical. It is “produced by content, is identical and one with it, and ...reacts on content and never remains passive.”⁷⁷ Parker’s content is the beginning of the African liberation struggle and the political parties that are formed to execute this struggle in the midst of severe socio-political repression by the current settler ruling class. So he chooses a form that allows him to tell his story in a historical fashion.

⁷⁶ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 81-82.

Parker's critique of white Rhodesia is evident throughout his book. While he can understand the reasons behind African agitation, he cannot understand why the other white people react with fright and incredulity to the increasing militancy and effectiveness of Africans as they form political parties such as the old African National Congress (ANC, 1957), the National Democratic Party (NDP, 1961), The Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU, 1962) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU, 1963). ZAPU rises phoenix-like from the ashes of the NDP after the latter is banned. So he writes, "They could not understand or appreciate that the 'munt' was capable of meeting and beating the European in diplomatic argument—the more so, of course, if it happened to be successful."⁷⁸ His critical voice against the whites is plain and it runs through the entire text. His criticism, though, is not one-sided. He is critical of African nationalists as well.

To understand the subtle critique of the white ruling class in Gibbs' novel, *Stronger Than Armies*, reference should be made to the following statement by Marx and Engels:

The production of ideas, of conceptions of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [and women]—the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real,

⁷⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 23.

⁷⁸ Parker, *Rhodesia*... 82-83.

active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness [das Bewusstsein] can never be anything else than conscious being [das bewusste Sein], and the being of men their actual life process.⁷⁹

First, there is the general idea of the repression of blacks expressed and enforced by the Prime Minister and his various Ministers who make up the ruling class. These men have developed certain conceptions which have, in turn, evolved into their consciousness in so far as they regard black people—conceptions such as, the blacks are lazy; “the kaffir’s a snivelling coward;” and so on.⁸⁰

These conceptions and this consciousness have been nurtured by “material intercourse” between the white and black people of Rhodesia. The mental intercourse of white Rhodesians is seen to be “the direct efflux of their material behaviour” towards the Africans: they sjambok them, punch them, harass and humiliate them at night in their meagre sleeping quarters, arrest those who hesitate to produce their passes even if they are married women to their male servants. These women they dub prostitutes because of their mere presence in these sleeping quarters. They pay servants meagre wages and generally enact laws that govern them and their every movement without their participation in such law making. Hence, they govern the Africans’ mental activity “as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics.” This white

⁷⁹ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress, 1976) 42.

ruling class, therefore, ends up being conditioned by the actual processes that it sets in motion against the black race.

Through the main characters of both races, namely Muntambo, the Doctor and his lieutenants such as Aaron and Inkomo on the black side; Philip, his wife, Margaret, and, to a certain extent, Sir John, the Prime Minister, on the white side, the author adversely criticises the dominant racist attitude of the white ruling class. To do that successfully, there is Muntambo representing “his people,” who gate-crashes into the Cabinet meeting to express his people’s needs and present their complaints and demands. This comprises the first stage of the back people’s struggle. When these demands are ignored, the blacks move on to the next stage of the nascent struggle or “revolution” as it is sarcastically called by Margaret who actually admires them for it; by the narrator, and finally contemptuously by some of the Ministers. This second stage comprises a mass stay-away from work by all black employees including domestic workers (perhaps enacting the 1948 national strike?). The rest of the story thereafter demonstrates what Marx and Engels mean in their statement that, “it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. For the first manner of approach the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; for the second manner of approach, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness.”⁸¹ While the black people, or at least the Doctor who is their leader, know that the white people depend on them and cannot do

⁸⁰ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 81.

⁸¹ K. Marx & F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, 42-43.

without their labour,⁸² the white people become conscious of this fact only when the blacks strike. Here are four out of nine or ten instances where they admit that fact:

Minister of Communications: “They must get back to work—immediately. The country’s absolutely dependent on them... We can’t carry on without them.”

Philip Anderson, Minister of Social Services: “We are entirely dependent on them, and we all know it. The only way to handle this is to face the truth. We may have to bluff them, but we must never bluff ourselves.”

Philip’s neighbour: “ ‘How can we possibly do without our servants? I told you my wife’s going to have a baby.’ In this world, even the process of nature relied on native servants.”⁸³

A crippled white woman: “They won’t take Thomas. Yes. If I wasn’t a cripple, I’d be chasing the wretches away myself. I don’t know what they’re coming to. They’re a good-for-nothing lot. Thomas is as much a fool as the rest of them. But he’s strong and I’m used to him. If I could do without him, I would. But I can’t.”⁸⁴

For the first time the white people have been forced to think consciously of the role of black people in their lives.

The black people, in turn, become conscious of their power after Muntambo gets killed by Jorgansen who has to stand trial for the murder. Although he is acquitted, the mere fact that he is arrested and tried at all,

⁸² Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 65.

⁸³ *Ibid* 45.

strengthens their cause and this knowledge and triumph spur them on to overturn the Jorgansens' car and burn it with its arrogant occupants comprising Jorgansen himself, his pregnant daughter and his nephew. The incident results in more Parliamentary debate by the ruling class, and more determination by the blacks to overthrow the system. On the negative side, the incident results in more repressive laws against the blacks. What Parker says about this kind of problem in his book, *Rhodesia, Little White Island*, is, indeed, true, that "The details of [this] story are less important than what I hope they will show, which is how a police state could be conceived, born and nursed into full being by a community of ordinary people—'People Like Us.' There is no bigger fool in the world today than a White Rhodesian."⁸⁵

In *Stronger Than Armies*, the "police state" is created after the Jorgansens' death. In Parker's book, it is created as a result of the general African unrest, unrest caused by their dehumanisation at the hands of the whites. Before this general unrest and before Muntambo walks into that Cabinet meeting, whites in both texts do not even recognise the existence of the African. The African is practically invisible so far as they are concerned. So Parker writes, "...the last thing to worry about was the African in Rhodesia. He was there, convenient, imitating, smiling, insolent, hard working or shiftless, however one found him. But he wasn't our concern."⁸⁶ Philip and Margaret, in Gibbs' novel, put it differently: they just have never thought about the African before, and

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 48.

⁸⁵ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 1.

⁸⁶ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 9-10.

Philip reflects, “concern for the native had dropped, if not altogether out of sight, at least into the dim background.”⁸⁷ Parker further observes that “in the ‘20s and ‘30s...[white] supremacy was taken for granted by the white Rhodesian. If the black Rhodesian had any feelings, they were either ignored or simply not heard.”⁸⁸

The blacks in Gibbs’ novel respond to this condition of invisibility through a planned three-phase revolutionary action, the third stage of which is the use of violence against the white people. Writing in 1971/’72 Parker predicts that the Rhodesians will pay dearly for the blunder they made when they chose UDI. In Gibbs’ novel published in 1953 they begin to pay already even before UDI.

Gibbs exposes the oppressive Rhodesian system by showing that it leads to racial confrontation, chiefly by the use of parliamentary/cabinet debates to show the ruling class opinion; by the Prime Minister’s visits to Philip’s home where he discusses these emerging racial issues, thereby drawing in Margaret’s revolutionary or idealistic opinion, and where Moses, the cook, leaks information on African plans to Philip who, in turn, passes it on to the Prime Minister; by showing Africans meeting in the Doctor’s little, crowded, shabby office which symbolises the black man’s deprived condition; by street confrontations with the regime’s police; nightly African harassment and humiliation in their sleeping quarters and by the use of powerful symbols.

⁸⁷ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 20; 109.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 29.

The powerful symbols include the gathering storm and thunder during and after the overturning and burning of the Jorgansens' car; in Parliament soon after the Interior Minister talks about arming the police.⁸⁹ The storm and thunder seem to predict the gathering storm of African anger and the explosion that will follow in the form of the armed struggle or the violent stage of the Doctor's and Muntambo's revolution. Parker also uses the powerful symbol of the pressure cooker as he says,

...the future of Rhodesia no longer lies in the hands of the Europeans. It is not a question now of if, but when and how, the Africans will take over. *More Africans are born every year than there are Europeans in the country. More Africans leave school each year than there are European workers in employment.* Rhodesia is a pressure cooker with the lid screwed down by the Europeans, and it will blow up in their faces.⁹⁰

In *Stronger Than Armies*, the other powerful symbol is that of the Prime Minister breaking a plate at Philip's house, symbolising his break with the usual, racist, lenient treatment of white murderers when he announces to Margaret, "My dear, you can have the satisfaction of knowing you've influenced high policy this evening. I'm going to instruct the police to arrest this man [Jorgansen for shooting Muntambo in cold blood] if they're [the police] satisfied of his guilt...I'm being most undemocratic of course...Because I haven't consulted my other colleagues, and I'm overriding the authority of the responsible Minister."⁹¹ This is positive

⁸⁹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 183-185.

⁹⁰ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 162.

⁹¹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 121.

change in the Prime Minister, change dictated by the actions of Africans. Hence, “consciousness ... can never be anything else than conscious being...and the being of men is their actual life process.”⁹²

The author’s critique of the white supremacist, authoritarian, political system is also evident in the various discussions that the Prime Minister holds with Philip at the latter’s residence. For instance, Philip argues, “We rule them [the natives] and legislate for them and they haven’t a say in our decisions. It’s hardly democracy.”⁹³ Margaret, too, argues for justice and influences the Prime Minister to take the decision to arrest Nicholas Jorgansen for shooting Muntambo.⁹⁴ She argues for a “change of heart” in dealing with Africans instead of using the usual draconian police against them. She shouts,

Police, police. It’s always police, Sir John...
Yes, now perhaps [they’re the only ones who can stop the chaos]. Now it is too late. Now there will be more killing. First a white man killed a native. Then they killed him. Then the white policeman killed another native. Now it is their turn again and they want to kill white men. So it will go on—and on.⁹⁵

It is through Margaret’s insightful talk that Philip resolves to fight “this repression of the natives” for his people’s sake and safety as well as their

⁹² Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 42-43.

⁹³ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 111.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 118-121.

⁹⁵ *Ibid* 209-210.

own.⁹⁶ He carries out his resolution by resigning from the ruling party to become an opposition member in Parliament. Unfortunately his decision to leave the ruling party comes after Margaret has been killed by the revolutionary forces of the African rising. This is the ironic twist mentioned at the beginning of this chapter where people with the right ideas are the ones who get killed first, at times. It is as an opposition member that Philip makes his most poignant speech quoting from

a great French writer [who] lived in the days when the spirit of the French masses, crushed for centuries by a tyranny of repression, was struggling towards the liberty which was its human right and which it was inevitably destined to achieve. His words were clear and strong now. The forces against that spirit, which was struggling for freedom, were stupendous; but this man said, in the simplicity of a great truth—

“There is one thing stronger than armies,
An idea whose time is to come...”

The native people in this country, like any other human race in the history of the world, are destined inevitably to achieve their freedom. For years we have held it from them and each time the idea has been denied them it has grown a little stronger....⁹⁷

Through Philip’s speech, the author has made his point clear even though the rest of the members of Parliament do not share what they call, Philip’s “extreme ideas.”⁹⁸ As in Shreiner’s novel, a change in attitude towards

⁹⁶ *Ibid* 211.

⁹⁷ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 235.

⁹⁸ *Ibid* 237.

the Africans is strongly advocated for by characters who end up dying, examples being Trooper Halket and Margaret, or who end up in pain like Philip. The toll on the African side is much higher. A new era has been ushered into the lives of both races... “The chimes of the city hall clock, striking seven, came floating up from the streets below, as if announcing the opening of a new era.”⁹⁹

This new era is also hinted at, at the end of another novel, *The Rhodesian Rancher*, when the narrator says, “The native is losing his pristine freshness and cheeriness; the spreading up as-tree of civilization [sic]—the canker that creeps outwards from the townships and big mines like ink on blotting paper—is turning him from an interesting savage to a detribalized ‘nigger.’”¹⁰⁰ In *Stronger Than Armies*, the change in the African attitude is referred to many times, for example, in the words of the crippled woman quoted earlier who exclaims, “...I don’t know what they’re coming to [these natives]”;¹⁰¹ in the words of the nervous man whose factory is closed because African labour has deserted and so cries that the natives are “cheeky swine;”¹⁰² in the words of the police sergeant who says the native “is getting ideas. He’s very different from what he used to be, even a few years ago. You can’t even keep him off the pavements today. He’s growing dangerous.”¹⁰³ It is evidently the African people’s harsh life, their harsh experiences that are changing their

⁹⁹ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 44.

¹⁰⁰ Wilfred Robertson, *The Rhodesian Rancher* (London & Glasgow: Blackie & Son Ltd., 1935) 210.

¹⁰¹ Gibbs, *Stronger...* 48.

¹⁰² *Ibid* 95; 98.

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 81.

attitudes towards the white people—thus, consciousness emanating from life.

Conclusion

Although Gibbs criticises the racist attitude of his fellow whites against blacks, there is evidence that he remains a liberal in his own attitude. For example, the manner in which he portrays African leaders is not totally devoid of bias. He makes them look like fools and dictators, unsympathetic to their own followers. Muntambo, Aaron and Inkomo do look like fools in the way they carry out their duties. The Doctor is the unsympathetic dictator who responds to the news of Muntambo's and Aaron's deaths with the comment, "He's a fool" in each case. At no time does he show pain at the loss of his cadres. That cannot qualify as an unbiased portrayal because practically none of the African leaders in *Stronger Than Armies* is seen or shown as wholly balanced and credible.

Gibbs' own attitude towards Africans remains prejudiced especially if consideration is given to the narrator's final description of them in the most uncomplimentary terms possible:

They [the Africans] were everywhere, crowding the pavements, loafing in the alleyways, lounging in the gutters. They had no dignity nor character and they shouted to each other stridently, childishly and pointlessly. They chattered like monkeys, none listening to the other, and grown men held each other's

hands like fatuous children....¹⁰⁴

While one can argue that the above is what the narrator says Philip sees and thinks on his way home from Parliament rather than what the author believes, the fact remains that the final African image in his novel is negative. He could not end a novel with this description of white people, so why of Africans?

As for Parker, an anonymous reader of a University of Zimbabwe library copy of his autobiography, writes on the “contents” page of the text in ball point pen: “This book does very little to portray the real truth about the situation in the then Rhodesia. The writer is biased against the Africans. In other words he wants us to think that he is saying the truth yet in actual fact he is poking fun at us.” Perhaps this impression is created by the fact that while Parker can articulate the problems of the country from both the white and, the black people’s points of view, he himself remains uncommitted to the black cause. He attempts to assist, but does not go all the way. He explains why he does this,

I was fast coming to believe that the only way the African in Rhodesia would ever attain his goal of political freedom and equality with the white man was through the use of force. Nothing that has happened in the past six years since UDI has led me to change my mind, I feel it more strongly than ever. But I felt equally strongly that I did not wish to be part of such violence, although I could see quite plainly the course which both whites and blacks had laid out in front of me.

¹⁰⁴ Gibbs, *Stronger Than Armies* 238.

I was by now convinced that the African demand for political freedom was just. Sympathy was leading to friendship, and friendship would inevitably lead to assistance. Put bluntly, this was involvement, and once involved in the nationalist cause there could be no turning back. It would be “boots and all” into the violence which must inevitably grow one day to a bloody climax. Put even more bluntly, it was no great step to visualise myself planning—and even executing—political murder.

I am a coward. Violence is anathema to me. The prospect of inflicting physical suffering on another human being is only slightly less repulsive than the prospect of someone else inflicting pain on me....¹⁰⁵

This statement summarises Parker’s attitude towards the Rhodesian race conflict—yes, he understands why blacks need to fight physically for their freedom, but no, he is not going to be part of that struggle. In real terms, therefore, he is ambivalent about his position in the conflict, and he finally decides to leave Rhodesia rather than be forced to take sides against his own people as he says, “By accepting the challenge to my own idea of journalistic ethic I had publicly declared myself to be opposed to the Rhodesian Front which meant to the majority of the people among whom I lived and worked. In their terms, this branded me ‘traitor’ anyway.”¹⁰⁶ He is persecuted for being a journalist who does not toe the line of the incumbent racially biased government well enough, according to them. Thus, he suffers as much as a white person could be said to suffer in that society, which suffering is much less than if he had been a black person. His own children begin to feel the racial prejudice in the

¹⁰⁵ Parker, *Rhodesia Little White Island* 151-152.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid* 149.

country at school where some boys mock Parker's children because of his political opinions.

Faced with all these problems, Parker chooses to leave Rhodesia to protect himself and to protect his sons: "I wanted my sons to be neither left-wing revolutionaries nor right-wing supremacists as a result of *my* actions. I wanted them to be able to make up their own minds."¹⁰⁷ This is the choice that makes him a liberal and, perhaps, that is why the anonymous reader of his book makes the comments above. Parker does not stand on the same side as the black people in their struggle even though he understands their cause, and even though he criticises the Rhodesian whites for finding unity among themselves "based on mutual greed and mutual fear," knowing that they have everything to lose. They choose to band together to hang on to their policies, nevertheless.

Parker also criticises the Africans for having no unity among themselves in order to confront their one enemy,

The Africans—with everything to gain, dissipated their effort in individual rivalries and the struggle for power at the top of the movement. It is probably Rhodesia's greatest tragedy—for whites as well as for blacks—that an African leader has not so far emerged who can command the respect as well as the attention and fear of both races... The whites found Nkomo too easy to despise, for in despising him they devalued all the African peoples in Rhodesia. The blacks helped the whites to smash their organisation into tiny pieces at a time when unity above everything

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 153.

else was essential.¹⁰⁸

This criticism is made after Parker's description of the inter-party rivalry and violence, particularly in the township of Highfield between ZAPU and ZANU while he and other white journalists are left unscathed by the violence which could have been directed towards the white people as the Africans' common enemy. Parker's first comment is, indeed, valid. Black people have sometimes found it easier to direct their anger and violence towards each other than to the white man as the enemy. However, when he comments on the African leader who still has to emerge because Nkomo is not good enough, he forgets that the leader who is approved by the black majority may not necessarily be approved by the white people.

Another valid point he makes in the same vein is the readiness with which black leaders have in confiding in him, a white journalist whom they do not know well. They tell him all their political plans and strategies. Thus, he describes an incident when he is taken into such confidence by Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole as follows:

After washing we were given a complete account of the plans of the Zimbabwe African National Union.... That these plans have hardly matured, that ZANU under-estimated the Rhodesian security's intelligence system, that their hopes have not been fulfilled, do not matter in this context. What does [matter] was that they were prepared to reveal to two complete strangers and one who was at best a nodding acquaintance some of their most detailed secrets on the strength

¹⁰⁸ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 98-99.

of the knowledge that one of their visitors was prepared to stand up against the regime. They were prepared to identify me on a precisely similar basis to that on which I was recognised by the Rhodesian Front. The white supremacist said: "If you're not with us you're against us." The African nationalist interpreted it: "If you're against them you must be with us."¹⁰⁹

It is at this point that Parker decides to leave Rhodesia because he is not prepared to do what it takes to be on the African side: "...I felt equally strongly that I did not wish to be part of such violence, although I could see quite plainly the course which both whites and blacks had laid out in front of me."¹¹⁰ Hence, Parker emerges as a liberal in his autobiography, that is, one who is "willing to understand and respect the ideas and feelings of others; [one who favours] some change as in political or religious affairs,"¹¹¹ but goes no further to bring such change to fruition. Perhaps that is why there is some angry reaction to his book by some readers.

The discussion of Olive Schreiner's novel, Gibbs' novel and Parker's autobiography has shown how some white writers criticise, not only Rhodes' Company rule in Rhodesia, but also the ideological stand that is taken by settlers once they arrive in Rhodesia. The novelists fuse together content and character in such a way that the reader is left in no doubt as to what they are trying to say as they point out the shortcomings of Rhodesian society.

¹⁰⁹ Parker, *Rhodesia...* 151.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 151.

The next chapter is a natural follow up to the discussion in this chapter as attention is turned to the novels that describe African nationalism and the Second Chimurenga War.

¹¹¹ Paul Procter, Chief Editor, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1978) 630.