

CHAPTER 7

CONTENT AND CHARACTER IN THE WHITE RHODESIAN NOVEL—

AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND THE SECOND CHIMURENGA

Introduction

All the books discussed in the last chapter end up by predicting a revolution, a violent conflict or a Second Chimurenga in Rhodesia between blacks and whites. As previously observed, Gibbs uses the symbol of the thunder and the storm while Parker uses the symbol of the pressure cooker waiting to explode in the white man's face. Parker, writing in 1971, talks about the question of "when" and "how" the Africans will take over power in Rhodesia, no longer a question of "if...." In this chapter, discussion is centred on a selection of novels that view the Second Chimurenga from the white man's perspective.

Historically, a lot of material has been written and published on the Second Chimurenga war. Descriptions of the white Rhodesian and black African personalities and strategies have been done and more work obviously is currently under way.¹ In 1991 the University of Zimbabwe

¹ Descriptions of the Second Chimurenga have been done in books such as by C.S. Banana, *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890 to 1990* (Harare: The College Press, 1989); Henrick Ellert, *The Rhodesian Front War: Counter-Insurgency and Guerrilla Warfare 1962-1980* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989); Julie Frederikse, *None But Ourselves: Masses Versus Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Anvil Press, 1982); D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House; London: James Currey, 1985)...and many others too numerous to mention here. An example

hosted an international conference on Zimbabwe's War of Liberation and two book volumes were published on the subject of that conference.² So much has been told about what went on in the background while Africans tried to organise and win back their country from the colonisers. So many disagreements went on and have been documented in many articles, book chapters and book-length discussions.³ So much black blood was shed, some of it the result of assassinations and abductions,⁴ and some the result of mass slaughter by the Rhodesian regime such as in the rural areas and in cross-border hot pursuits in Zambia and in Mozambique on November 23, 1977. It is a rich history, some of which still has to be fully documented.

Fiction writers, both black and white, have focused on this rich history of the liberation of Zimbabwe, describing events from different perspectives and points of view. In this chapter, focus will be on a selection of novels by white authors, novels that attempt to describe aspects of the liberation war. These novels will be dealt with under three sections, namely, those that describe Africans as incapable of a successful struggle to liberate themselves; those that simply mock or satirise the African people's efforts and attempts to organise and come up with viable organisations capable of fighting for self-emancipation; and those novels that were

of on-going research is T. Ranger's research into the history of the Matopos, 1898 to 1964 to be published under the title, "Voices from the Rocks."

² The two books were edited by N. Bhebe and T. Ranger entitled, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* Volume 1 (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995); and *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* Volume 2 (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995).

³ An example of book-length discussions is that by Masipula Sithole, *Zimbabwe: Struggle Within the Struggle* (Salisbury [Harare]: Rujeko, 1979).

⁴ Such as the assassination of Herbert Chitepo, J.Z. Moyo, Alfred "Nikita" Mangena, to mention a few. An example of abductions is that of the late Edison Sithole and his secretary Miss Mhlanga, Mr. and

written after independence which describe what the young white boys experienced on the war front, as well as the aftermath of that war effort.

In all the books selected for this chapter, it will be seen that there is no time when the Rhodesian novelist attempts to show an understanding of what African nationalism meant and how it was threatening to engulf white dominance in Rhodesia. Chennells puts it succinctly as he says, when the Second Chimurenga came, whites did not recognise it because so far as they were concerned, it could not be a war, but perhaps another rebellion:

Their failure to understand what was happening around them was entirely predictable. Victims as they were of their own discourses, fostered over the years and kept ignorant by their media of developing ideologies among Black nationalists, the settlers and their novelists had few means of correctly analysing the situation in which they found themselves. Perhaps the most striking feature of the novels... is their limited understanding of both the motives of the nationalists and the progress of the war.⁵

This lack of understanding is, indeed, striking because even in some of the novels published in the 1980s and 1990s, when the war had already been fought and won, the blacks are still described in the old stereotyped way and the African liberation war leadership is still mocked and reviled as useless or portrayed as communist stooges.

Mrs. Masangomai and their domestic worker in 1978 during the transition to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia of 1979.

⁵ A.J. Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse, Rhodesian Novels and the Zimbabwean Liberation War" in N.Bebe & T. Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, Volume 2, 104.

Part of the reason for this lack of understanding is caused by what Peter Godwin and Ian Hancock term, the white people's "Rhodesianness." They go on, "Their attitudes [are] congealed into a 'self-centred Rhodesian-ness' which appeared to express itself negatively in opposition to Africans, Afrikaners, or non-British Europeans."⁶ It is this "Rhodesian-ness" that gives them the feeling of superiority and defiance in the face of military opposition to their way of life. The Rhodesian-ness also makes it impossible for the novelists to write predictive fiction. The novelists portray no future progressive vision, or something different from the life they lead. That is why right up to the end of the war in 1979 and even after that, novels still describe events where Africans are losers and Rhodesians never die.

As late as August 1998, Ian Smith does not see why it was necessary to remove him from power. When interviewed on the eve of the 1998 Heroes' Day, August 11, he insisted that terrorists "were people who were involved in the intimidation and killing of black people" during his reign as Prime Minister.... "My Government jailed these people for killing black people, their own people...we moved in to protect black people because the terrorists were killing black people using petrol bombs and rifles." Smith also denies that he is a racist: "Most of the black people who know me personally will tell you I'm not a racist. Those who say I'm an unrepentant racist say so as a direct influence of the ZANU PF government propaganda which is twisting the truth against its opponents

⁶ Peter Godwin & Ian Hancock, "*Rhodesians Never Die*" *The Impact of War and Political change on white Rhodesia C.1970 - 1980*. (Harare: Baobab Books, 1993) 19.

in order to keep itself in power,” he declared in that interview.⁷ He sounds like a re-incarnated Cecil John Rhodes of the later 20th Century without the aspect of empire building for Britain.

This attitude will be reflected in the novels where whites believe that the Rhodesian uprising by black people involved only black-on-black violence. Inevitably, the novelists portray blacks killing each other or killing the “good” whites such as Missionaries working among blacks. There is rarely a portrayal of blacks attacking the hard core racists or the white soldiers as happened in the war of liberation. The mark of Rhodesian-ness takes several shapes, namely, “racial solidarity in defence of privilege and White rule;” a “combination of fear and prejudice”—fear that Africans might one day take over power, and prejudice against them because of the belief that they are incapable of ruling. It can also be identified as the white people’s ignorance “of their own world and of the world outside, an ignorance born of distance rather than of an innate racism or idiocy.”⁸

This typical Rhodesian attitude will be evident as it is enacted in the selected novels.

⁷ Ray Choto, Interview, “Ian Smith Speaks Out,” *Zimbabwe Standard* Online, www.samara.co.zw/standard/front/front1.html (Harare, August 16, 1998) 1-4.

⁸ Peter Godwin & Ian Hancock, “*Rhodesians Never Die....*,” 45-50.

**THE MYTH ABOUT THE AFRICANS' INCAPABILITY TO
STRUGGLE SUCCESSFULLY FOR THEIR FREEDOM**

Many novels describe the mediocrity and incompetence with which Africans approach the whole issue of struggle for independence and self-determination. It is true that some problems arose and blunders were made, especially at the beginning of the armed struggle. One example of such a strategic blunder is when James Chikerema invited a BBC television team to come and film the first guerrillas crossing the Zambezi to go and fight in the western bushes of Rhodesia.⁹ This kind of blunder does not paint a good image when recreated in fiction.

The novels in this chapter describe guerrilla warfare on the western and north-eastern parts of Rhodesia. This is consistent with history because long before the opening up of the eastern border with Mozambique, and before the famous Chinhoyi (Sinoia) battle of 1966, according to Dabengwa, “the fact is that ZAPU’s armed struggle [had] started in 1965 when the small units [of seven or eight men] were sent into the country... to carry out further recruitment and to reconnoitre targets such as telecommunication systems, electricity supply installations, and so on. As a result of our efforts, there were many acts of sabotage of enemy interests in 1965.”¹⁰

⁹ D. Dabengwa, “ZIPRA in the Zimbabwe War of National Liberation” in N.Bhebe & T. Ranger, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War* Volume 1, 30. See also C.S. Banana, editor, *Turmoil and Tenacity...* 140

¹⁰ D. Dabengwa, *Ibid.*, 27.

Because this was a third attempt by the blacks to unseat the whites from Rhodesian politics and power, whites had developed a myth that Africans were incapable of struggling successfully for their freedom. A novel like Antony Trew's *Towards the Tamarind Tree*¹¹ focuses on this issue during the period when ZAPU's efforts in their struggle for Zimbabwean independence were most pronounced in the western part of the country. The novel has several plots, in fact, three plots. It begins with the theme of the need for freedom for Africans, a freedom for which they are ready to die.

In Trew's novel, a group of guerrillas has entered Zimbabwe via the Zambezi River and are making their way into the nearest forest:

“Their orders were to establish supply bases in the forests, to bury ammunition, explosives and provisions for those who were to follow. Then they were to make for their objectives—road and railway bridges to the south and west—and blow them up. Once this had been done, any white people encountered were to be killed, and farms, trading stores and homesteads looted and burnt. The operation completed, they were to return to their forest bases and join forces with those who were to follow.”¹²

The author makes use of the omniscient viewpoint so that the narrator has access to the inner thoughts of each guerrilla. Consequently, the reader experiences their fears and apprehensions; fears and apprehensions that

¹¹ Antony Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* (London: Collins, 1970).

¹² Antony Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 13.

result in one of the characters, Titus Luena, thinking about his girl friend Lilli Pelema back in Zambia in order to “take his mind off these discomforts, the shaking from the fall, his thirst, the mopani flies and a blister on his heel.”¹³ It is also Titus’s inner thoughts that reveal the manner of their leaving Zambia, for instance, the kind of politicians who send him and his group “in sections of seven men” on this pioneering mission. The reader gets privileged information on how the group succeeds in “burying the explosives, ammunition and provisions for Base One;” how the members of the group think that this part of the country, the Kyananza, is free of homesteads until they spot homes of the vaGawa people who are thought to be unfriendly; and why they march on, leaving the inhabited area behind, in search of security.

However, this guerrilla group walks into an ambush, but not before Katembe, the overall commander, has executed their guide, a vaGawa man, accusing him of selling out the group. The execution is done with a panga in a scene in which the author attempts to demonstrate the savagery and cruelty of the African to his own kind: “The vaGawa turned to make a run for it, but he was no match for Katembe. The big man caught him by the shoulder with one hand and with the other executed a swift backhand stroke with a panga. The beheaded vaGawa executed a neat little dance before falling down next to his head. While the head lay there twitching grotesquely, Katembe cleaned the panga blade with some leaves and went back to the thorn bush.”¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid* 11.

¹⁴ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 16-17.

This is the political plot, the first plot in the novel, which really begins and ends quickly with the annihilation, in an ambush, of the entire guerrilla group except for two, Titus and his wounded colleague, Motlani. Symbolically it is as if Trew is saying that the subject of African guerrilla fighting should be disposed of as quickly as possible to make room for more important matters. Notice that by chapter two of the novel this political plot is done with. Thus, in sixteen pages, the theme of African guerrillas invading Rhodesia begins and ends. The next time we hear about them is when a white prospector, McGann, sights Titus whom he hunts down and shoots, claiming that he is the terrorist who has shot another mining prospector called Fisk. These fighters are mentioned in a report to John Richards, alias Rufus, so that he can warn the hunters and McGann of their exploits.

In Peter Stiff's *The Rain Goddess*, a novel published in 1973,¹⁵ black-on-black acts of cruelty are also abundant. The author dramatises Ian Smith's belief that blacks intimidate their own people. Ian Smith claims, "The nationalist politicians lost no time in getting their gangs of intimidators into the field, and already one chief had been burnt alive in his thatched roof hut.... Intimidation is a dreadful evil at any time, but even more formidable since we were dealing with a primitive society, of simple, peaceful people, living under rural conditions in huts built of local wood poles with thatched roofs."¹⁶

¹⁵ Peter Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* (Salisbury [Harare]: Jacaranda Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Ian D. Smith, *The Great Betrayal, The Memoirs of Ian D. Smith* (London: Blake Publishers Ltd., 1997) 80.

Stiff, thus, portrays black politicians “intimidating” simple rural folk, killing and burning them for refusing to follow their instructions. It has always been Ian Smith’s belief that the “terrorists” were killing their own people only as he insists, “My government jailed these people for killing black people, their own people.”¹⁷

On the whole, *The Rain Goddess* highlights the evil of the freedom fighter and also mocks him. First of all, the nationalist leader, in the person of Simon Gumede, is mocked as he is presented as fat, well nourished, effeminate, a criminal, a cheat and a double agent who lives an expensive life at the expense of his political party. Note the following description of him: “Simon Gumede wriggled his fat, soft buttocks on the hard uncomfortable chair and wished the talking would end. His tie was loose at the neck of his expensive silk shirt and although it was late, the heat was still sufficient to cause an almost continuous dribble of sweat to pour down his fleshy neck onto his collar.”¹⁸

The mockery of Simon Gumede begins when he is portrayed as uncaring to the comrades whom he sends to the Rhodesian bushes. It continues after the air attack of the would-be fighters by the Rhodesians during his (Gumede’s) visit to them in the bush accompanied by another party official called Matenga. Thus, there has been no success by these guerrillas and their political party since they left Zambia. In this visit to them in the bush, Gumede is wearing a tailored uniform while everyone else wears baggy ones. During the attack, Gumede proves to be no

¹⁷ Ray Choto’s Interview with Ian Smith, “Ian Smith Speaks Out,” 1.

¹⁸ Peter Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 20.

“General” since he quakes with fear at the thought of impending death. After the attack it is Kephas, the emerging leader of the guerrillas, who orders him, the “fat ox,” unarmed, to lead the retreat back to the Zambezi River with the hope of crossing. In their single-file march to the river, they get ambushed and Gumede gets badly injured and is left alone while the rest of the guerrillas run to hide. Because he cannot move, he is practically eaten alive by a dog hyena, boots and all. In fact the scene of Gumede’s end lacks verisimilitude in that his leg is pulled away while he remains alive. Next, his entrails are torn away from his stomach, yet he remains alive, to the point of actually having “the slimy contents of his stomach [sliding] wetly through his fingers” as “he weakly clutched his belly with his hand.”¹⁹ No one could go through such painful disembowelling and still remain alive. The scene is a crowning, dramatic humiliation of an African nationalist leader. It is unreal. But then, that is why it is fiction.

The same demise of the guerrillas and their leaders is portrayed in *Towards the Tamarind Tree*, where reference has already been made to the execution of the vaGawa man by his leader. This execution of a character by his own kind matches the execution of Fisk by McGann, a prospector who wants to protect his prospecting *find*. But only the reader is able to deduce this fact because the author uses a form which hides this truth from the rest of the characters.

¹⁹ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 191.

McGann's prospecting for gold makes up the second theme in Trew's novel. Chennells has correctly observed that Trew is responding to the beginning of the liberation war in a unique way where the Zambezi valley is untouched and "only man is vile."²⁰ The evidence for this is where Trew's narrator, in a preface to the story, says, "Into this wilderness had come from time to time hunters, prospectors, missionaries and patrolling policemen: but times had changed and where since the dawn of history animals had killed animals, men had come to kill men...terrorists, freedom fighters, insurgents, guerrillas; they were called by these things but if their nomenclature was in doubt their purpose was not—they had come to kill."²¹ The author follows up this statement with the guerrilla statement that "any white people encountered were to be killed."²² Indeed, man has come to kill man.

In this second plot, the prospecting theme is pursued, with McGann vowing to protect his *find* of gold. He has previously lost a platinum discovery to a prospecting company. So this time he is "resolved with a single-minded and obsessive determination that he was not going to be cheated again."²³ It is this resolve that makes McGann shoot Fisk because he threatens his *find*. Thus, man has come to kill man.

The third theme of this novel involves game preservation and John Richards, a man who is very sensitive to animal welfare and is the chief

²⁰ A.J. Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse, Rhodesian Novels and the Zimbabwe Liberation War" in Bhebe and Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 114.

²¹ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 7.

²² *Ibid* 113.

²³ *Ibid* 26.

protector of these animals. He is worried, especially by the latest report which indicates that “such things as terrorist activity, the continuing state of emergency [and] the possibility that mineral deposits might be discovered, in which case economics would have to take precedence over game preservation.”²⁴ Note how African freedom fighting is referred to as “*such things* as terrorist activity” and then bundled together with game preservation and mineral prospecting. It is not taken seriously as a threat to human life and the current socio-econo-political system.

Trew seems to use all the three themes to demonstrate the white people’s disregard for the guerrilla threat that is beginning to face them. That threat is regarded as insignificant, a nuisance and an inconvenience. McGann, the prospector, first considers freedom fighters an inconvenience as he “cursed the terrorists...But for the terrorists the Reserve would have been quiet and deserted.” Then he considers them insignificant according to the following comment: “Stubborn and taciturn, he had more or less told [the Police and the Patrol unit] to mind their own business...but he did not say that the coming and going of white men worried him more than the threat of terrorists.”²⁵ Another Wild Life official, Daniels, dismisses the report on the engagement of the Rhodesian army with the freedom fighters, Titus’s group, and pays more attention to game and mining: “Daniels read [the report on the terrorists] and hunched his shoulders. ‘Bloody awful world isn’t it? If valuable minerals are found in the Reserve, you can say goodbye to the game.’”²⁶

²⁴ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 44.

²⁵ *Ibid* 29.

²⁶ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 47.

Once again, worries over game and mining take priority over the guerrilla war threat.

Later on, McGann recites, from Deuteronomy, verses that suite his curse for his enemies, especially the terrorists: “these [verses] were references, he presumed, not only to those who would like to cheat him of his just rewards, but also to the terrorists who were making things difficult for him in the valley.”²⁷

In the third plot comprising game preservation, Richards or Rufus also regards the guerrilla incursion as an inconvenience and for him wild life takes precedence: “It was the wild life, the animals... The thought of them, the game among which he’d spent so many years of his life, evoked all the compassion of which he was capable. And that was considerable for he was a sensitive man.”²⁸

In this novel, therefore, the freedom fighters or "the terrorists" are consigned to the dustbin and seen as inconvenient and insignificant. It is true what Chennells says when he asserts, “The guerrillas in the novel are thus another manifestation of man’s reckless desire to disrupt nature. Trew is indifferent to their political motives or indeed to the rights and wrongs of their cause. Rufus Richards has made the preservation of the valley’s wild life his absolute and in his eyes at least the activities of the

²⁷ *Ibid* 41.

²⁸ *Ibid* 44.

human characters in the novel are imperfect when measured by that standard.”²⁹

Finally, the author in *Towards the Tamarind Tree*, does not seem to think that the freedom fighter has a future as evidenced by the guerrilla group’s attack and complete annihilation immediately on crossing the Zambezi. In addition, when Fisk, the Very Important (VIP) hunter from America is shot, Richards correctly suspects McGann, and not the so-called “terrorist,” Titus, though he cannot figure out McGann’s motive. What Trew does is to discredit the African guerrilla, for Fisk could not be shot by an African because that would mean that they are *capable* of doing so. In the white Rhodesian novel, blacks or the munts either kill each other as in the case of Katembe and the vaGawa guide, or they get killed by white men as in the case of Katembe’s whole guerrilla group or Gumede whom they shoot and is finished off by a dog hyena. Although Titus and Motlani escape the earlier ambush, they die later, Motlani from his gun shot wound and Titus from McGann’s shooting in order to cover up the Fisk fatal shooting to protect his gold find. Richards guesses this motive when he says, “maybe it was something to do with mining. Fisk was a mining man, McGann a prospector. Could have been some old quarrel.”³⁰ It is McGann’s fulfilment of his vow to protect his *find* at all costs that causes him to commit murder and then cover it up. Trew would rather have that crime in the midst of a guerrilla insurgency.

²⁹ A.J. Chennells, “Rhodesian Discourse...” in Bhebe & Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, 114.

³⁰ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 235.

Towards the Tamarind Tree reinforces the myth that Africans are incapable of liberating themselves. In fact, while Richards sits there trying to figure out McGann's motive for fatally shooting Fisk, he does not even consider looking for the motive for the "terrorist" insurgence. They are invisible, yet in the foreground. It becomes a serious problem when Sonya, an American journalist, is suspected of having leaked the news of the terrorist being a suspect in Fisk's death.³¹ So Richards the conservationist, goes to a lot of trouble to "prove that Fisk had not been killed by the terrorist."³² Therefore, a novel that begins with the theme of freedom fighting ends with detective work, the "who done it" probe into Fisk's death and a less serious problem than with the dilemma of war.

The nationalist leader in Trew's novel is ridiculed. He is said to be "a slump ZAPU official; a well dressed man with shining brief case, gold wrist-watch and gold-rimmed glasses." He steps out of a big, sleek, black Mercedes Benz car. He addresses his comrades with a hollow-sounding speech and when asked why he is not going to the Rhodesian bushes with them, he replies that he is needed in Zambia, "To lead the political fight for freedom [which] is highly important work." Then "he jumped into the black Mercedes with his body guards, and [was] driven off in a cloud of dust."³³ This description matches that of Gumedede in *The Rain Goddess*.

In Merna Wilson's novel, *Explosion*, there is another African nationalist leader who is portrayed as caring much about the personal publicity he

³¹ Trew, *Towards the Tamarind Tree* 188-191.

³² *Ibid* 188.

³³ *Ibid* 13-14.

should get from a mine explosion. He writes a press report which is “near enough” the truth and in which he is not really concerned about liberating his people. He is concerned more about his own power and potentially lucrative position than about the actual safety of the people trapped in the mine. He says, “Oh, keep up the angle that there are mostly black men trapped, speak to all reporters who will flock there. I myself will make an appearance when they have all arrived, and say I have come to be with my people in their time of need. Have a cameraman go with you and take plenty of pictures. Pictures of crying wives, not the white ones of course...such pictures will bring much sympathy for our cause, is that not so?” He then gives instructions to issue seven drums of petrol discretely to the Youth League members during the American journalist’s visit presumably for them to petrol bomb a few places. He finally declares, “It will not be long now! Soon, soon we will have our freedom...and all the things that go with government, big cars...clothes...fine houses...the things we have all worked for will soon be ours!”³⁴

None of these leaders in these three novels is serious. They are all portrayed as phoney, materialistic, with absolutely no dedication to their cause. The authors poke fun at African leadership in many different ways in a bid to prove that they cannot prosecute a serious war against the white man as they lack the necessary dedication and seriousness of purpose.

³⁴ Merna Wilson, *Explosion* 139-140; 141.

In *Explosion*, intimidation is again rife. People are intimidated into buying party cards. For example, Petros shouts: “Big John Mwale!...where is your party card, *shamwari*? When Z.U. comes to power as the Government, you had better have a party card or you will be killed. This country is only going to be for those who support Z.U. Our great Zimbabwe will not have rats and fly-manure like you, Big John! When I am the Minister for Education and Internal Affairs, I will see that you are ...attended to!”³⁵ Petros also intimidates Pawendi to give him his last ten shillings with which he wanted to buy a tin of milk for his baby. Then he boasts gloatingly that Pawendi is afraid of Z.U. and its leader Chimuzu... “he knows that his white friends will not protect him from the wrath of Chimuzu...the wrath of Tobiradzai the witch-doctor, and the anger of Z.U. party members like myself.” In the ensuing quarrel between Petros and Big John, Chimuzu is called “a rogue who calls himself a saviour; who puts himself in place of Jesus Christ... who uses our money to fly to America and England and tell them lies about us!”³⁶ Perhaps the novelists seriously believed Smith’s theory about African politicians intimidating their own people only.

Cases of intimidation and physical assaults abound among Africans in *Explosion*. Petros stabs Big John with a knife and Big John breaks his jaw in turn, and so on. These cases indicate that instead of Africans working towards achieving their cause of liberation in a united fashion, they spend time and energy fighting among themselves. Sometimes they fight among themselves in this way at the instigation of the white man as

35. M. Wilson, *Explosion* 21.

³⁶ *Ibid* 23.

in the case of Big John and the self-centred leaders like Petros who flaunt Chimuzu's powers combined with those of the witch doctor, Tobiradzai. Tobiradzai preys on people's fear of his *tagati* which he threatens to put on anyone who disregards the Z.U. party. Evidently this is a different version of the dramatisation of Ian Smith's ideology that throughout his leadership of Rhodesia, he was trying to stop African intimidation of each other. Antony Chennells has argued interestingly that this kind of portrayal of African leadership was the more "conventional response to nationalism...to show that its authority of Blacks is achieved by a combination of magic and thuggery which serves to confirm that they are contained within a closed discourse of irrationality and timidity."³⁷ He uses the episodes from *Explosion*, some of which are referred to above, to support this viewpoint.

Part of the reason why authors dwell on this image of African liberation efforts is that the earlier ZAPU and ZANU efforts themselves were quite unsuccessful in achieving liberation. As evidence of their lack of success, one can cite the fate of the seven cadres of the now famous Chinhoyi battle of April 29, 1966, who were totally annihilated. Also, at that time, "ZAPU's efforts were even less threatening [to white Rhodesia]. Three times in 1967-8 groups of 80 to 100 ZAPU guerrillas and members of the South African National Congress crossed into Rhodesia and were quickly defeated, without seriously challenging white

³⁷ A.J.Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse..." in Bhebe and Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*. 107-108.

rule.”³⁸ Predictably, the author of *The Rain Goddess* and *Towards the Tamarind Tree* describe guerrilla-Rhodesian security forces encounters where the guerrillas are all defeated. First, some of the Africans in *The Rain Goddess* such as Madziwa, Kephass, Matavi and Job, go round killing their own people in villages for no particular reason as if to demonstrate the senselessness of Africans and how blood-thirsty they can be. One sordid example of such black-on-black cruelty in *The Rain Goddess*, is the description of Khumalo castrating and then stabbing Mambo, a former milk deliveryman in Lusaka. Mambo has been pressganged in Lusaka to forcibly join the struggle where he then gets trained as a guerrilla. In trying to desert, he gets caught and is sentenced to death by execution, an execution that is carried out by Khumalo, after which he “...stepped back as the dead man’s guts spilled onto the ground. [He] paid no heed, but stepped back and methodically wiped his blade clean on a tuft of grass.”³⁹

By describing how Mambo is forcibly recruited into the guerrilla war, the novelist has dealt with the system of forced recruitment of Zimbabweans in Zambia for guerrilla training.⁴⁰ Stiff and other novelists recreate these historical facts to re-assure their fellow white readers that Africans are not capable of posing a formidable threat politically and militarily, to white

³⁸ Peter Godwin & Ian Hancock, “*Rhodesians Never Die*,” 90. See also Dumiso Dabengwa, “ZIPRA in the Zimbabwean War of National Liberation” in Bhebe and Ranger, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, 24-35.

³⁹ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 135.

⁴⁰ See a description of this method in D. Dabengwa, “ZIPRA in the Zimbabwean War of national Liberation,” in Bhebe and Ranger, *Soldiers in the Zimbabwe Liberation War*, 40.

people. The reassurance is done through the portrayal of effeminate black characters and ineffectual events in their novels.

A Different Picture

On the other side of the spectrum, Nan Patridge, in *Not Alone*, has tried to deal with the possible causes of the black-white conflict. She gives the reasons for the war between blacks and whites in Rhodesia.⁴¹ Those reasons are to be found in the manner in which each race lives. She calls this manner of living the “Two Streams,” and says that in this part of the country, Bulawayo, human beings are divided into two groups, the privileged class and the underprivileged class. They also live in two different parts of the city. One race owns better homes and vehicles. The other owns shabby, crowded homes and older, battered vans packed to bursting every time with people who have no other means of transport. The members of the privileged race, however, are said to be always irritable. This situation presents contrasting pictures of how white and black people live and work in Bulawayo. While the whites seem contented with their condition, Patridge argues that they are always irritable and dissatisfied because they lack the humanity and the personality of the people in the second stream.

The style that Patridge adopts in this book, however, defeats her purpose...she speaks for the characters, for example, Sibanda her main

⁴¹ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone. A Story For the Future of Rhodesia* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1972).

character. In describing his feelings, she conjectures and imagines how he feels. While her basic style comprises a narrative in which she debates with herself as it were, she does also explain her characters. First, this is a perfect example of the white man's belief, that Africans are children, so they need adults to speak for them. Patridge's narrator is that adult speaking for Sibanda. Secondly, it is an example of what Wayne C. Booth calls *telling* as opposed to *showing* events and characters in a story, a form that kills the story somewhat.⁴²

Furthermore, the narrator tells the reader that Sibanda does not want to go back to live in the village; that he prefers to stay in town because "the very nature of [town] life is variety and, even while he clings with one hand to many of the old kinship ties, he reaches out with the other to new friendships and wide acquaintances. Town makes available these sets of people. 'Chance chooses his work-mates but choice determines with which he spends his lunch hour and which ones he visits in the evening.'" ⁴³ Because of the way the story is presented, there is no way of assessing the truth of the narrator's assertion since Sibanda himself is not given a voice to speak for himself.

⁴² Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961, eleventh impression, 1975) 3-19. Booth discusses the difference between "telling" and "showing" using the example of the book of Job in the Bible where the narrator "tells" us that Job was perfect, upright and feared God. After all the tribulations he goes through Job still does not sin nor does he charge God harshly. Booth then contrasts this story where Job is evaluated for us and we simply believe what we hear, with a modern story, "Haircut" by Lardner. In this story, Jim would take note of different addresses while travelling through particular towns or cities. When he gets home he would write back to these people, something like, "Ask your wife about that book agent that spent the afternoon last week," or "Ask your Missus who kept her from gettin' lonesome the last time you was in Carterville." Then he would sign the card, "A Friend." He would then take pleasure in imagining the social fall-out of these practical jokes. The story concludes by saying, "Jim was a card." The difference between these two styles is that one speaks for itself while the other depends on authorial evaluation for the reader. Patridge in *Not Alone* "tells" rather than "shows" her characters and events.

However, Nan Patridge makes a good point in this novel. The point she makes in all this rambling, rationalising explanation of Temba Sibanda's life is that the cause of conflict between blacks and whites lies in their inequality which leads to separate social facilities for the two races. That is the main issue she puts across:

We in the small group are ranging ourselves against the forces of life itself if we pit our group against theirs. That is not a battle which anyone has ever won. But we in the small group rarely see the human dignity, the daily greatness, of those in that other larger group. If we see an African riding to work we never give him, himself, a thought. To us he is a garden boy, a factory hand, a messenger—his services are welcome even where he is not; we see him as he serves us, not as another human being with a hundred interests... If only members of the small group would see that African on the bicycle as a person, a whole person, potentially a great person, if only they would see him as being as much a person as they are themselves, perhaps even more a person, happier, better integrated... If they would see that, even yet it may not be too late to save the future, not only for the small group, but for us all.⁴⁴

Because the “small group” treats the “larger group” so callously, it drives “the good African” to extremes. An example of this is when Temba Sibanda is forced to shelter an African revolutionary who is being hunted down by Police. While Sibanda may not be a revolutionary himself, he is forced by circumstances to become one eventually because of the harsh social conditions surrounding him.

⁴³ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone* 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* 4.

The narrator also focuses on the white people's belief that Africans are always happy: "Are there other reasons why Sibanda and his friends are so relaxed, so open, so happy in their response to life on this hot morning with a long day's work ahead of them?"⁴⁵ In other words, the people "in the first stream," the privileged ones, assume that Sibanda and his colleagues are happy. The sequel to this "happiness" is the desire by these people of the first stream, "to hold these people of that second stream, to hold them where they are, to hold them in their jobs, to hold them in their 'place,' to hold them in clear safe categories in their minds."⁴⁶ There are also assumptions about Sibanda, assumptions that are questionable, such as when the narrator says, "Sibanda can't conceive man as an individual, existing by himself, unrelated to the animate and inanimate forces surrounding him."⁴⁷ These are assumptions the reader is told about, not facts or ideas derived from Sibanda himself. But the narrator in his/her patronising manner evaluates Sibanda and then expects everyone to agree with that evaluation. It is difficult to figure out whether Patridge believes what she is saying or is simply pointing out that such assumptions exist among her people.

Poor working conditions for Africans are focused on as one reason that might drive them to extremes because they make life unbearable. For example, Mavis, Sibanda's wife, has to resign from her teaching job in

⁴⁵ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone* 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* 30.

order to have her second baby.⁴⁸ Getting re-employed after that becomes very difficult. In her case, she fails to be re-employed as a teacher.

What Patridge is saying is that injustice of this kind is responsible for the African response—which is the search for freedom from such bad conditions of living. Seething anger fills the African chest to bursting point and so, even when insulted or beaten, the African seems immune. Take, for example, the case of Sibanda’s brother who is beaten by his employer. The victim’s reaction to such beating puzzles the employer, a farmer, who furiously exclaims, “I can’t hit him and still feel he has escaped me...” But Sibanda’s brother is affronted by anger and feels he must escape from it as we would feel we must escape from a scene in which someone else is being punished or scolded. His form of escape is endurance—enduring the insult seemingly with great patience. He only manages to endure this way because he closes his mind to pain: he is absent in spirit and so his real self is not touched, “he is not spoiled...Anger is like a stranger; it does not stay in one house. One feels tainted by it, unless one escapes in this way...,” he says later.⁴⁹

It is this overflowing anger and frustration that spills over into a war between the races. In this regard, Temba Sibanda has a dilemma. While he longs for peace and remembers the teachings and counselling of the

⁴⁸ I experienced this work condition where I had to resign from Mutare Teachers’ College where I lectured in 1979 to go and have my second daughter. I only got re-employed after ZANU (PF) was voted into power in March 1980 because I took advantage of the uncertainty that lay in the future and went to the Ministry of Education to push for re-employment. I got my job back but no longer at the same salary level as before my resignation. I had to start all over again at the bottom of the rank as if I were a newly employed College lecturer, yet I had worked for two years before resigning. It took another six months of arguing, letter writing and visits to the Ministry Head Office in Harare to be reinstated at the correct salary level.

old folks “cautioning him to stay out of trouble, not to get mixed up with the police in any way at all,”⁵⁰ he also remembers David Sithole’s words: “You cannot have peace without this struggle for justice;” and if one is a Christian and knows that Jesus died for what He believed in, then one should also be ready to die for freedom and equal opportunity because one believes in them.⁵¹

Although Sibanda does not really want to get involved in politics, he is forced by circumstances to shelter Amos, a man who is on the run for sheltering David Sithole who has just been arrested.⁵² What Nan Patridge seems to be saying is that bad socio-political-economic conditions eventually paint a different picture of life to otherwise humble people who are then forced to take the side of those that are committed to die for freedom. Taking sides makes them proud; gives them a sense of belonging.⁵³

Nan Patridge has such good skill in merging thought and action in her characters that some of their actions are inextricably bound with their thought. Sibanda’s sweeping rhythm of the factory floor, for example, is a direct response to how he is feeling at the moment. Pleasant family thoughts result in long sweeps. Troubling political thoughts, which make him nervous, result in his clenching the broom tightly; he “squirms in spirit, making a great show of sweeping thoroughly.” When he finally

⁴⁹ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone* 33.

⁵⁰ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone* 68.

⁵¹ *Ibid* 69.

⁵² *Ibid* 80-85.

⁵³ *Ibid* 85.

takes a firm position that he will never join the police and is convinced of the correctness of his decision, he feels more confident and thus, “his broom becomes more positive in its swoops.”⁵⁴

It is this debate with self on the pros and cons of being politically active, that spills over into the positive action of sheltering Amos who is running away from the police; an act which gives him the sense of belonging “to those others, whom yesterday he thought of as the brave ones but whose rank he did not feel he could ever join....”⁵⁵ This is a brand new image of himself, Sibanda, a totally different picture of his achievement. Using this narrative form, Patridge somewhat succeeds in telling her story. The problem is that, as pointed out earlier, there is no time that Sibanda's voice is heard expressing his personal opinion about anything at all. So the author emerges as a matriarchal elder speaking for her child, the African. By speaking for the African, Patridge therefore, embodies what is actually portrayed in other texts, that Africans are incapable of serious, independent and deliberate thought and action. They are children.

BITING SATIRE AND AFRICAN NATIONALISM

⁵⁴ *Ibid* 64-69.

⁵⁵ Nan Patridge, *Not Alone* 85.

This particular theme of African political incapability is carried to extremes in Robin Brown's *A Forest is A Long Time Growing*.⁵⁶ The story is set in the future; the future of what Zimbabwean independence might turn out to be, complete with shortages of basic commodities such as meat during that independence period. It is a distorted future (even though the period of shortages does actually happen in independent Zimbabwe for various reasons). The United Nations, in the story, grants the independence, but there is no population, buildings are disused, there are no buses and Africans are portrayed as leaderless. They also do not quite know what to do with the country that they have just won. It is said that "By the night of that final battle...the white guns had gutted the rabble army of the Black Messiah, leaving only slaughter on both sides. Only bitterness and hatred remained and the white men who knew they had lost and the leaderless black mass for whom the price of victory was chaos and mass destruction, faced each other, content for the end to be as meaningless as the beginning."⁵⁷

The struggle then is described as "meaningless" and the black masses as leaderless, thus, once again, refusing to acknowledge the significance of the struggle and the leadership of the black people. There is also a menacing dissident problem in the Eastern Highlands that is fought and thwarted by the main character and his colleagues. But basically, the process of forming a government is utopian, including the education system.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Robin Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1967).

⁵⁷ Robin Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* 44-46.

The title of the novel itself implies that it takes a short time to destroy a country (Rhodesia) and a long time to “grow” one (Zimbabwe). It is derived from a quotation by Seneca who says, “In a moment the ashes are made but a forest is a long time growing.”⁵⁹ Certainly the time it takes Kamativi and colleagues to “grow” Zimbabwe suggests this interpretation.

Thematically, the novel anticipates black rule in Rhodesia in a very satiric and lop-sided manner where Africans do not know what to do with their independence. The author makes use of metaphor and satire to reveal his message. For example, right at the beginning of the story, Rory Gentleman who is also the narrator, says, “But think back to your modern history books, your Keesing’s Archives, and remember it is only three years since Geoghan and I had stumbled out of this forest when all the trees were bleeding and this new Zimbabwe was less than an egg... The woods had divided to trees all overnight and the only surface left to record my name upon had been the temporal person of Barry Geoghan.”⁶⁰

This description would have been appropriate for a novel written in the 1980s or 1990s after the Second Chimurenga. But the novel was published in 1967, which makes Robin Brown a very pessimistic author. Obviously his vision of what the country would be like after the war, which was beginning again, albeit with false starts, is a grim one. He foresees some days when there will be a vacuum in the country’s affairs

⁵⁹ *Ibid* 7.

⁶⁰ Robin Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 10.

with no government, no people, no services, and no food in Zimbabwe described here as “less than an egg.” He seems to believe that Africans have, all too soon, been given their independence: “The woods had divided into trees all overnight....”⁶¹ There are no people in this new country and as evidence, Rory says, “I walked the length of First Street, down Kingsway and then up along Manica Road and in that time I passed thirty people, all races included... and of those thirty—five were women....”⁶² There is also no transport service: “In the almost-empty street an army truck came by slowly, looked me over if you can imagine a truck doing that and then trundled on. I watched it idly. A hundred yards up at another crossroads a couple stepped off the kerb and flagged it down. When the next truck hove in sight I decided to chance my arm. The truck pulled up...The driver grinned 'you're new...The Transport Division reckon they'll have a skeleton bus service running by April, but for the time being we're it. At least you don't have to pay fares.'”⁶³

As the army truck rolls along, they pass empty streets and through Eastlea and Cranborne he sees no single occupied house. On enquiring about this emptiness, the truck driver's answer is that all the city suburbs are still empty because the people who work for the “Productivity Divisions” live at their work places. “We don't need the rest of the city yet...It's in mothballs.”⁶⁴ A city in “mothballs” indicates that the city is still cacooned, waiting to burst into life and presumably spill out all the people who should run and live in it and the rest of the country.

⁶¹ *Ibid* 10.

⁶² *Ibid* 18.

⁶³ *Ibid* 19.

⁶⁴ R. Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 20-21.

On the question of what really happens to the people, Reverend Geoghan's explanation is most intriguing as he says that during the war white women and children were evacuated to South Africa and the men decided to follow their families. The few that remained including a few farmers and the "hard-core group who, when the time to go came, found that they did not want to, even though the prospects were so dismal..." remained behind. "These people were literally sitting in the empty streets with their minds and lives just as empty."⁶⁵

As for the Africans, "They have suffered a similar collapse...Perhaps for the first time the existence of a common bond was there to be seen. Obviously they still commanded a vast numerical superiority, but it is meaningless. Almost all the African political leaders were killed in the fighting; the people themselves were shattered by the number of dead and what had been gained? Nothing! The cities were no longer an attraction. They were dead and empty, looted in the earlier fighting. The Africans, without any of their own to guide them, drifted back to their homes..." As a way forward to fill in the vacuum, Geoghan says, "the whites took the first initiative...they had the training...they set up what was called an emergency committee...based on the same old principles where the cities were defence strongholds run by the whites and the bush a swamp of ignorance in which the black man, so long as he was peaceful, could be left to grapple with the impossible task of trying to live by his traditions

⁶⁵ *Ibid* 24.

in a shrinking world that offers survival only to those who can be a competitive part of their era.”⁶⁶

The rest of the story deals with efforts to destroy a dissident group in the East and finally there is a spy whose efforts are foiled as he tries to blow up Rufaro stadium in a suicide attack of the President, Kamative, during the independence ceremony. The reader will agree that this is an extraordinary novel so far as its satire and pessimism are concerned.

There is a point where the author anticipates Bruce Moore-King’s *White Man, Black War*⁶⁷ in that he portrays the preacher Geoghan’s guilt for his part in the just ended war. Moor-King’s novel has characters that express similar guilt for the role they play in the Second Chimurenga. Brown’s narrator says that Geoghan’s sense of helplessness is as monumental as his feelings of guilt so he gets himself nailed to a makeshift cross “in that corpse-strewn valley bottom.” The narrator, Rory Gentleman, then takes over Reverend Geoghan’s preaching and says, “I even got up in his pulpit one day and read, in ringing tones, a passage from the Bible. But half way through I saw the pews fill with the accusing eyes of our nation’s dead and I was forced to come down in a hurry.”⁶⁸

The author displays a familiar racist attitude against black people, but at the same time, he can stand back and criticise his own people, too. It is a contradiction often unexplainable in this literature as has also been seen in the authors discussed in an earlier chapter entitled, “Some Novelists’

⁶⁶ R. Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 25.

⁶⁷ Bruce Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1988 reprinted 1989).

⁶⁸ R. Brown, 12-13.

Critique of Settler Ideology in Rhodesia.” One explanation could be that the authors believe in their typical prejudiced attitudes but can also recognise the folly of such attitudes. Hence, that folly is voiced from time to time.

There is also the biting satire on the narrator’s race in *A Forest is a Long Time Growing*. This satire is found where the narrator says that we should remember he has come from a land peopled by strange shapes; that he is the offspring of creatures without substance, a meringue race with hard crusts on the outside and nothing more substantial than air on the inside.⁶⁹ The 200 000 whites are further described as having buried their heads “deeply in the sand” peacock-like, only to “pop up like autumn crocus” at the sight of the “blacks streaming out of the sticks as does the oily Matabele ant when he feels his time has come.”⁷⁰ While racism is acknowledged, hope is made a goal in this new land, “...Cloud cuckoo-land has new birds in the nest...maybe. But it’s not the birds that matter...it’s the eggs they lay.”⁷¹

This novel basically demonstrates what Chennells has identified as the reasons for the white people’s misunderstanding of what was happening to, and around them. In real life they simply mocked the war, which, by 1967, was shaping itself into a long resistance by Africans to white rule. Chennells writes:

⁶⁹ R. Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 14.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid* 29.

The war, when it came, could not be a war [they believed]; it could only be a rebellion which meant, in settler mythology, primitive space attempting to reabsorb civilised space, and it was a battle against this reassertion of the primitive that the war was described and indeed fought...⁷²

Robin Brown's novel demonstrates such ignorance of black people's reasons for fighting among other things, especially where the narrator says that "the price of victory was chaos and mass destruction [and] the end [was] as meaningless as the beginning."⁷³ This indicates that the narrator has either missed the causes of the war, or he deliberately does not want to acknowledge them. He refuses to understand the meaning of this war that he describes. Nan Patridge, at least does better by focusing on the causes of the black-white conflict. For Brown's narrator to display such ignorance of the reasons for the war at a time when several black political parties have been formed and banned; when the slogan "Mwana Wevhu/Son of the Soil" is being shouted around for all to hear; when political leaders are being jailed and much commotion is going on concerning African nationalism and black consciousness, is absolutely disarming. But then this is where the Rhodesian white novelist lacks vision and foresight to warn his/her readers of the impending doom and defeat.

To a certain extent, Brown's prediction that white people will continue to control the country even after independence is accurate. As this author

⁷² A.J. Chennells, "Rhodesian Discourse..." in Bhebe and Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 104.

⁷³ R. Brown, *A Forest is a Long Time Growing* 12.

writes her thesis in 1998-1999, there are numerous indications that black people possess political power which they are failing to utilise in order to take full control of the economy of the country and to make it and its people prosper. Some of the people in leadership positions fumble and get bogged down by corruption, nepotism, and cronyism. Examples of this abound in Zimbabwe in 1998-1999. Those examples will not be enumerated here as that subject falls outside the scope of this discussion.

The Bones of the Wajingas

Of all the novelists who use satire to communicate their ideas on the Rhodesian situation, none does so with more bite and greater humour than Denys Roberts in his novel, *The Bones of the Wajingas*.⁷⁴ One just has to read this book to enjoy this type of satire. The novel is hilariously written yet its ending forces the reader to stop mid-way in laughter and realise that the meaning is not funny. The novel's satire on colonialism complements its theme of black people trying to fight colonialism with the help of a few white liberals who are understanding and sympathetic. Here they are represented by some British members of Parliament.

A Definition of "Satire"

⁷⁴ Denys Roberts, *The Bones of the Wajingas* (London: Methuen & Co., 1959).

In discussing satire and its purpose, in *The Bones of the Wajingas*, there is need to use M.H. Abrams definition of it. That definition makes it easy to gain a deeper understanding and better interpretation of the novel.

Abrams defines satire as,

...the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. It differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire “derides;” that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual...or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even...the whole human race....

Satire has usually been justified by those who practise it as a corrective of human vice and folly...Its frequent claim (not always borne out in practice) has been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a person is not responsible.⁷⁵

Roberts makes use of satire in a manner consistent with this definition.

Abrams further divides satire into two broad categories, formal or “direct” satire where the satiric voice speaks out in the first person; and “indirect” satire. Roberts makes use of the latter which is “cast in another literary form than that of direct address. The most common indirect form is that of a fictional narrative, in which the objects of the satire are characters who make themselves and their opinions ridiculous by what

⁷⁵ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th Edition (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Montreal, Toronto, London, Sydney, & Tokyo: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1988) 166.

they think, say, and do, and are sometimes made even more ridiculous by the author's comments and narrative style."⁷⁶

It seems Roberts has selected this form consciously in order to ridicule and deride all parties involved in the country he has named Wajingaland, an imaginary country, since he tells the reader, "There is, unfortunately, no such place as Wajingaland."⁷⁷ First, the butt of his satire are Europeans who generally come into the new lands believing that the locals are cannibals (remember *Robinson Crusoe*?). So it is said that Krumm, a German adventurer, survives the African cooking pots because his skin is so pale as to be unappetising unlike the other few Europeans before him whose "brick-like faces [proved to be] too great a temptation for the meat-hungry Wajingas."⁷⁸ Then there is the aspect of how local people are always fascinated by foreign things to the point where they admire the strange tattered German flag nailed to a tree by Krumm.

The goods used for trade by the British are not spared the satire. After Krumm describes his discovery of Wajingaland to MacArthur, a British director of mid-African Barter Company, it is said that the company "traded in tin whistles, kitchen salt, low-grade gin and a large stock of otherwise unsaleable Bibles in Cornish for ivory." MacArthur himself immediately urges his Foreign Office in Britain to declare a Protectorate over Wajingaland. As for the reasons for such a declaration, we learn that "the inhabitants of [Wajingaland] were clamouring for trade, law and

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁷⁷ Denys Roberts, *The Bones of the Wajingas*, inside the title page.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* 1-2.

order and Christianity, which admirable desires could naturally only be met under British rule.”⁷⁹

The whole book reads like a comic satire on colonialism, local government run by foreigners, African nationalism, the British government, ineffective self-proclaimed liberators of their people, and even the civil service. It is comic satire because Roberts makes use of the ridiculous to the point of hilarity without compromising the ultimate purpose of his satire, which is to point out faults in both the Wajingas and the British.

The satire then shifts and focuses on the local Chief, Molobo. In describing Molobo and his habits, Roberts seems to be ridiculing the idea often expressed by colonisers, of how African chiefs thrive on shedding the blood of their relatives, their servants and of anyone else who happens to cross their path. One is certainly reminded of the bloody orgies ascribed to Lobengula. So Molobo is presented as "a genial giant of a man [who] was bored with life. He enjoyed forty-three wives and a weekly execution and had exterminated every rival chief for fifty miles around." On hearing that the German spokesman wants to transform Wajingaland into a prosperous land, "The chief asked what he, personally, would gain as he was not in the least interested in any advantages which might accrue to his subjects."⁸⁰ He is, therefore, given a gift of a rifle and "after an hour's practice the Chief was able to puncture one of his nephews at a range of a hundred yards." Then he also shot one

⁷⁹ *Ibid* 2.

⁸⁰ D. Roberts, *The Bones of the Wajingas* 3-4.

of his mothers-in-law and declared that he would announce his final decision after a week because “he wanted to see if the mother-in-law would die; also he wished to test the durability of the bang sticks. His axes wore out on the executioner’s block in a few weeks. After three days he was a dead shot and becoming bored with success, and a shortage of household guards was looming up.”⁸¹ When the British traders arrive, they put themselves in competition with the Germans and paint a very pleasing, “objective picture of the benefits of association with the Great Queen of England, indicating a powerful form of magic known as Christi’s words.”⁸² It is in trying to satisfy what the Chief calls, “grosser pleasures,” that MacArthur introduces whiskey to the Chief.

Thus, the colonisers' habit of giving whiskey and guns to local colonised Chiefs is derided: “The Chief downed two bottles [of whiskey] in an hour and was captivated. He particularly liked the effect of seeing double; each of his soldiers became two, a phenomenon which would strike terror into the hearts of his enemies.” This whiskey is given to convince Molobo to choose the British, instead of the Germans or the French, to establish sovereignty over Wajingaland. With whiskey as a great attraction, therefore, and after MacArthur and his British trader promise “an unending supply of the fire water” in the form of a case of whiskey a week, the Chief announces he has accepted the Queen’s protection.⁸³ His people misdirect the German delegation into the swamp as they want to go and fetch more reinforcements, and “for the next five

⁸¹ *Ibid* 4.

⁸² D. Roberts, *The Bones of the Wajingas* 4.

⁸³ *Ibid* 5.

years the [British] traders prospered [while] the Chief sank steadily into an alcoholic paradise, his loyalty growing to the Queen who provided his bottled happiness.”⁸⁴ The colonisation of Wajingaland is complete!

Roberts describes, satirically, a very serious and painful event in which a Chief rules his people at a time when foreigners are clamouring for recognition and land occupation, an event in which one country colonises another. He succeeds in “making [that situation] ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation.”⁸⁵

Even the missionaries are said to be coming in, in order to deal with the “blackened souls” of the Wajingas. Drink, trade and Christianity take over the lives of the Wajingas in a dramatic way. Large tracts of their fertile land are bought off by Indian and European planters and the reasons for such purchases by foreigners is that “most of this land was empty, the Chief having killed off its inhabitants years before. If villages existed, the Chief burned them down; he was an honest man and had promised to sell unoccupied land.”⁸⁶

After this satire on socio-economic life, follows one on the political life in the rest of the novel, with Limbulu as the African nationalist attempting to rally all the Wajinga people against colonialism. However, his efforts are made ridiculous at one of his organised meetings because there is a Wajinga government sergeant who keeps on disrupting the meeting with mocking statements of Limbulu, thus, confusing the

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 5.

⁸⁵ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 166.

⁸⁶ D. Roberts, *The Bones of the Wajingas* 8.

audience in the process. While Limbulu denounces Chiefs, Obove, the Sergeant, praises them and because the audience cannot quite follow Limbulu's English, they end up doing what Obove says and a brawl erupts!⁸⁷ Limbulu's message ends up distorted as Obove shouts that people should support him in order to get a lavatory.⁸⁸ All these events take place between 1882 and the early 1920s.

Wajingaland political activities are further complicated by the arrival of a British independent member of Parliament, Frank Stubbing, who pretends to fight for justice in dependent colonies. The two of them, Stubbing and Limbulu, go through so many goofs that at the end they emerge as thorough idiots. Limbulu who boasts of knowing "his" people misleads Stubbing, the visiting "liberator." He misleads him because in reality the latter knows nothing about the Wajingas. Stubbing, who offends and despises the Wajinga people at every turn, is no liberator in reality. He lacks tact, is pompous, self-righteous and impolite, yet he sees himself as a martyr for justice. In an attempt to impress the people in a particular village, he wears monkey skins and then stands on a grave in order to "talk down" at them. He is, instead, regarded as a mad man!

It appears that Roberts' purpose here is to discredit any sensible political activity by the Wajingas. At the same time, in all the confusion, the Chief and his tradition triumph at the end when he claims back the land on which the government secretariat building stands. Although the Chief loses the case on land ownership in a court of law, he eventually regains

⁸⁷ *Ibid* 12-16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid* 14.

the land. First, the building on which it stands is gutted by fire, perhaps symbolising ancestral anger at the desecration of their land since it is said to have been built on a grave site, on top of their bones, “the bones of the Wajingas” in the title. Secondly, there is a localised earthquake two days after the court case that fails to return the land to the Chief. The earthquake, the first of its kind to hit Wajingaland, demolishes the Secretariat building only. The bones of the Wajingas have been appeased and so the people can have their piece of land back. Perhaps Roberts believes that nothing short of a miracle can return the Wajinga’s land to them, a highly pessimistic view which may have been widely held by the colonisers at the time his book was published in 1959.

As for the black politicians, they remain foolish, uninfluential and without consequence, as if to say, besides Chiefs, Africans have no modern, viable leaders and so cannot rule themselves in the near future. That is why we call this biting satire on African nationalism.

**AFRICAN NATIONALISM AND THE SECOND CHIMURENGA—A
SELECTION OF THE POST-INDEPENDENCE NOVEL**

Women and the War

When next Nancy (or Nan) Patridge writes, she describes a situation where women are in grief after the loss of loved ones in the war, whether those women are black or white. Consistent with her sympathies for black people and their condition in *Not Alone*, Patridge has these

characters caught up in a sad situation in the Second Chimurenga in her novel, *To Breathe and Wait*.⁸⁹ The title reflects, literally, what her main character, Deidre Messiter, does throughout the novel. Afflicted by cancer, she breathes and waits for the unknown. She suffers a lot of pain in silence, suffers spiritually from seeing her sons get called up to fight against blacks in Smith's war, and she simply waits for all this to end someday—her life and the war. However, both do not end by the conclusion of the novel. The focus of the novel is strictly on women of both colours and on how they endure the war with a lot of pain and suffering symbolised by cancer.

Cancer is a very strong symbol in the novel. It symbolises the global cancerous condition at the heart of the Rhodesian problem.

Appropriately, it affects the mother, Mrs. Messiter, whose children it ingests like an amoeba, drawing them deeper and deeper into the conflict. The Second Chimurenga war is now raging and Deidre Messiter's hopes are mingled—hopes for the country, for herself and for her children:

“...she wanted only to live each day as she had always done, planning for the children, for the garden, for her friends, seeing things come to flower in it, in them. It would have been wonderful to see—to think one might see—something come to flower for the country but there was no hope in her now for that: peace, stability, progress, she would not live to see any of it.”⁹⁰ Hence, she has to suffer the endless waiting for her own end and for the end of the political conflict at hand.

⁸⁹ Nancy Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986).

⁹⁰ Nancy Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 62.

The intensity of the war is emphasised in the opening sentence of the novel: “The *violence* of the light was *defeated* by the sharp tilt venetian blinds except for one narrow shaft of the sun striking through vertically at the window’s edge and falling in dazzling clarity on the muted colours of an Egyptian vase, wakening the quiet reds and browns to life.”⁹¹ Certainly the *violence* of war is felt in the novel as it rages on, taking life and drawing people to one side or the other of the conflict. However, Partridge does not write about the soldiers on the war front. Rather, she deals with the women who have to endure the anxiety of having sons on call-up, or who have absconded to the guerrilla war, or brothers who have fallen by the gun. She actually does not discriminate in her presentation of the anguish of white and black people. Deidre, on two occasions, insists on calling the African fighters “terrorists,” first, when talking to her friend, Katharine and, secondly, when talking to her daughter, Susan. In both cases she fails to convince the other to call them such and she ends up debating the issue with her friend, Katharine who argues, “... Well... if their brothers or their cousins come to see them asking for food, how can they refuse them. They know soon enough they are with the boys; they might even sympathise but first of all they are family—or family friends—and must be helped.”⁹² Deidre’s response is that they are just terrorists and she cannot bring herself to call them “boys,” even though her maid’s two sons are among them. As soon as she says this, doubts assail her mind because her own two sons and their friends are in the same war. So she goes on to say inwardly, “That name [boys], means Charles and Jonathan and Peter and Adam in this house. How can black

⁹¹ *Ibid* 7.

⁹² Nancy Partridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 71.

women feel about those murderers as I feel about Charles and Jonathan...and yet Julia must.”⁹³ Julia is the one person who takes very good, compassionate care of her. It is Katharine who reminds her also that “war *is* terrible. We are in it too, of course.”⁹⁴

Later when talking to Susan, her daughter, who also calls African fighters “the Boys,” Deidre again insists that they be called terrorists but Susan reacts by asking what she would then call their own army. As if to prove that the army is no good, Julia’s brother, the young, innocent, handsome Lancelot is gunned down in his village while rushing to help his uncle whose huts have been set on fire by the army.⁹⁵ Again, talking about this tragedy, the women—Julia a black woman, Katharine and Deidre—find themselves united, bound together by grief. It no longer matters whether Lancelot is black or white because in Deidre’s mind, he gets mixed up with her son, Charles and Jonathan, his friend, though she believes that since terrorists started it, something had to be done. The fact that Deidre is the one who has a terminal illness seems to suggest that her prejudiced ideas are also terminal. Some of her friends share these prejudiced ideas which will not live beyond this war and she is “unable to make the leap of faith that would see the war over, people drawing together ‘to hold a hand uplifted over Hate....”⁹⁶

In using these characters, Katharine, her husband, Bill, and Susan, who have ideas that unite blacks and whites in a future after the war, Patridge

⁹³ *Ibid* 71.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid* 96-103.

⁹⁶ *Ibid* 125.

seems to be promoting ideas of unity by showing interaction between her white and black characters. This could be the “sharp tilt of the venetian blinds” that *defeats* “the violence of the light” as stated in the first sentence of the novel, for as Deidre continues to interact with Julia and Katharine, they continue to debate the pros and cons of the war. Deidre becomes more enlightened and appreciative of other people's viewpoints. For instance, she begins to understand that the war always uproots people and this is one "part of its devilement,...[sic] it wasn't only war: how could the government force people off the land they lived on, however many arguments they came up with to justify it?" She also comes to understand why Julia “had been proud of the Tangwena refusal to accept eviction; even when their chief led the children into those wild mountains, she would not join in the condemnation. She said only, her mouth set and stubborn, ‘He is doing it for his people’ [her sons] being ‘out’ was a matter of pride as well as of grief: it showed in her complete control.” It is easy to see that Deidre is beginning to admire such complete control and pride in one’s conviction.⁹⁷

Through Deidre, the central character, Patridge shows how critical consciousness develops in some of the women or mothers during the Second Chimurenga. Somehow Deidre’s illness helps her to focus on, and to analyse the situation in her country more keenly. For example, the death of Lancelot, her maid’s brother, enables her to empathise with the victim's mother more, as she remembers that her own son, Charles, is in the same war that kills Lancelot. So she says, “What expiation could

⁹⁷ Nancy Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 126.

there be if Charles died out there in the bush... Would I not snatch at Vengeance ever more? Oh, I hope not, I hope not, but may I never be tested. May he come back safe and whole in mind, though how could what he is going through help him to see more clearly? Or Lancelot's mother? How can life be bright for her again?"⁹⁸

Deidre has now acquired the ability to critically analyse issues such as the habit of giving posthumous war decorations. After she reads of one being given to a man who shot and killed the leader of a gang of terrorists with his last breath since he, too, had been fatally shot, her critical comment is that it is not useful for the family to receive this decoration because it is his companionship of which they have been infinitely deprived that is more important. She is convinced that the war will not be won "by killing one more than they kill."⁹⁹

The author evokes the pain of war in the reader by showing Deidre's very sensitive and acute image of war. A good example is when she comments on the wasteful nature of war and centres her sensitivities on "those finely tuned *nerves*...." When she comments on her son Charles's wounded foot, she again centres on "bones shattered, all those *nerve ends* exposed... Oh God." Later she wonders "...how does a young man cope with the pain of those severed nerves and muscles..." Charles's injury brings her closer to him and she wonders why that closeness should happen now particularly. Her explanation for it goes back to those

⁹⁸ N. Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 138.

⁹⁹ *Ibid* 141-142.

shattered nerves... “Something about the pain, a *knife-exposing nerves*, made sensitive by the frustrations of suffering.”¹⁰⁰

The talk of shattered nerves, the carriers of sensation and feeling, gives us a vivid picture of how painful the whole ordeal is, not only the ordeal of the war but also of the physical body itself that gets exposed to it. It is this concern for physical pain that seems to enable Deidre to empathise with other people, be they her own white people such as Eleanor, her pregnant daughter-in-law, or Africans such as Julia, her maid: “Life seems extra hard on African women. Her [Julia’s] poor mother: all those bright hopes centred on Lancelot... as on this baby coming [her anticipated grand child].”¹⁰¹ In one breath she is now able to equate what happens to an African family to that of her own family. She has come a long way.

While Deidre brings out the physical, emotional and spiritual pain of the Second Chimurenga, her friend, Katharine, brings out the anger against it; contempt for the government that orchestrates it. Her husband, Bill, gets harassed and persecuted because of his activities among Africans. His job is to supervise schools around the Lupane area. Because he works near Africans in an operational area, the white government suspects he is doing something wrong though it has no concrete evidence as to what it is he is doing. He and Katharine are, indeed, sympathisers with “the boys” and as evidence, Katharine goes to attend Lancelot’s funeral with Julia. They also go to attend an African church and in a conversation with

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* 141; 150; 152.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* 154.

Deidre, Katharine's angry outburst is unequivocally against her government as she literally explodes: "Bill is being harassed and I am very *angry*. He was called in again today. Wretched little nincompoops. They strut round, their uniforms newly pressed, like little Napoleons and start questioning him all over again, trying to get something on his African friends. Blasted Government! It is iniquitous. I could put a bomb under them!"¹⁰²

This government is ridiculed and viewed as corrupt, vicious and made up of short-sighted fools since they resort to and condone harassment, detention and torture. They then have the nerve to argue that they do all this "to make sure the terrorists have no chance of imposing their 'vicious and corrupt system' on the unwilling people of Rhodesia." Katharine considers this as terrible hypocrisy.¹⁰³

Government is further condemned when finally Bill and Katharine announce their deportation and Deidre feels helpless, "pierced suddenly by the reality of a government that could not be appealed to..."¹⁰⁴ In denouncing this deportation, Patridge makes a very critical statement of the government which indicates that it cannot stop the tide of Black Nationalism advancing onto them. She says, "It is so stupid... What end can it possibly serve, getting rid of Bill? It's trying to hold back a tide... can't they see the determination there is... can't they see the tide is

¹⁰² N. Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 166.

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 166-167.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* 195.P

setting in that direction? What difference for goodness sake, will the removal of one European from the scene make?”¹⁰⁵

Nan Patridge, therefore, traces the consciousness of this one white woman, a dying cancer patient from total ignorance to total awareness of her socio-political environment. That awareness comes in three stages marked by three painful events in her life. The first event is the wounding of Charles, her first son, in a landmine explosion. The pain of Charles losing his foot brings her closer to him, it brings “relaxed love” between them oddly enough.¹⁰⁶ The second event is her own accident when she gets run over by her daughter’s car, because she tries to push Julia’s little niece away from it. She chooses to be run over herself instead of letting this little black girl get run over. This shows a boundless love, not only for her white family and friends, but also for her black friends for whom she is willing to die. She understands black people better now, as people who also love and hurt, and she can love them back selflessly as she admits, “I didn’t know before, and now I know and I can do nothing...Those raids...I had no idea. Could they really have been laughing in those helicopters, as they looked down their gunsights? Our own boys? What have we done to them?”¹⁰⁷ At the end of her hospitalisation for that accident, she can even speak a smattering of Sindebele... “Hamba kuhle” to Kay, and she works to improve her accent of the language.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* 197.

¹⁰⁶ N. Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 172.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 187.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* 191.

The third event that brings her awareness is Katharine's departure from Rhodesia. It peels off the past layers of ignorance and she bemoans it:

I am ashamed Katharine, whenever I think of it. I have
No hope now that things will be better if we bear another
year or two of this struggle...I should have been awake to
what is going on, to how Africans feel about what is
happening, indeed to what *is* happening. My ignorance
and un-caring is part of that shame, so my anger against
this government does not give me any release, for I am part
of it. When I think of what it has done to you and Bill I am
humiliated. My own people. My own sons in their army—I
don't know how you have continued to be my friend. It is a
disgrace beyond any deserving.¹⁰⁹

Katharine's answer is that in Deidre's world it was difficult to know enough about what was happening. For her world was cloistered. More critical insight follows after this and Deidre is able to scoff at Ian Smith's "not in a thousand years" pronouncement and can see that there was nothing rational about these last years when such a Prime Minister's unthinkable pronouncement was the very cause of this Emergency, a rolling phrase which is already irrelevant, she concludes.¹¹⁰

At the end, one understands that the myopia in the Smith government merges with Deidre's illness—both the government and Deidre's life are terminal, as the narrator says, "Her own illness seemed somehow part of the terrible chain of events, ensuring that she could do nothing. Nothing," even though she grieves "for the future she would not see, for

¹⁰⁹ N. Patridge, *To Breathe and Wait* 203.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 231.

the cloud over it.”¹¹¹ The de-segregation of that future is symbolised by Patridge’s ending the story with Deidre sitting up in bed having tea with Julia’s mother who has come to see her. Julia, too, has been more than a maid. She has been a true friend.

This portrayal of the Second Chimurenga is different from Peter Rimmer’s in *Cry of the Fish Eagle*, Peter Stiff’s in *The Rain Goddess*, Angus Shaw’s in *Kandaya, Another Time Another Place* or Tim McLoughlin’s in *Karima*. Patridge’s story focuses on women and mothers of both races in the conflict, instead of focusing on the actual soldiers, their sons and husbands who are out there to perform heroic deeds. She deals with the pain of a dying civilisation, of oppression and inequality, and how it feels to have one’s physical and emotional nerves shattered and exposed by a system that one cannot control. It is a very powerful and soul-searching portrayal. She is one author who does not ridicule Africans as children, nor does she have all those other derogatory epithets we find in other novels.

Savagery and the Second Chimurenga

In Stiff’s *The Rain Goddess*, there are two images of the African: the compliant one, sometimes called the sell-out by Africans themselves; and the savage killer. Ndlela who is an elderly policeman is the compliant

¹¹¹ *Ibid* 239.

African while his son, Kephass, and the headmaster of his school, Madziwa, are the savage killers. Kephass and Madziwa can be called savage killers because their activities are portrayed as having nothing to do with freedom fighting or fighting the white people in order to defeat and take power from them. It is a puzzle as to how Stiff conceptualised this kind of character in the name of the African struggle. Examples of the savage killing by Madziwa, Kephass and others will demonstrate our point.

After the first political meeting of eighty villages dubbed “the Youth League,” addressed briefly by Simon Gumede who rushes back to his sanctuary in Salisbury, Madziwa, the local party official, orders these eighty people who include his student, Kephass, under threats of violence to their own persons if anyone of them dares to pull out of the “Youth League,” to break thick branches of trees and to go to the villages to indulge in an orgy of blood-thirsty violent assault on these innocent villagers whom they call sell-outs because they failed to turn up at Madziwa’s and Gumede’s political meeting. The savage beating is vividly described. It is reproduced below:

They beat on doors. If they were not opened immediately, Then they kicked them down. The occupants were given no opportunity to say whether they supported the Party or not. Men, women and children were dragged outside into the open. Many were battered to their knees with sticks, while others were kicked and punched until senseless. The poor victims of the sudden attack screamed in terror as the wraiths from the night descended upon them. No mercy was extended to anyone.

Excitement gripped Kephass and he grasped his stick more firmly and stared around at the carnage. Suddenly he wanted to join in. In fact he had to join in. A compulsion took hold of his mind, which he could not resist. A form slipped from one of the huts and ran off into the darkness. He yowled a bloodthirsty animal cry, and gave chase. He caught up with the fugitive in a few long strides and gave a violent shove. His victim fell flat and lay outstretched on the dry earth. It was an old woman. She pulled herself onto her knees and frantically begged for mercy. The sight gave him a feeling of exultant power, which he had never experienced before in his life. With brutal callousness, he brought his stick down on her head in two vicious swipes. She sank into unconsciousness, like a heap of old blankets. He kicked her viciously in the ribs and felt her flesh shudder against his shoe. He spat on the prone body and ran off to catch up with the others, who were leaving the village like a pack of blood-crazed wild dogs.¹¹²

These people cease to be human as they move from village to village repeating their senseless assaults and killings, “each time with more enthusiasm. They melted into the form of one enormous thing. A thing which had a throbbing pulse of its own. A terrible, unthinking, unseeing thing. A monster who wanted blood. The more blood it tasted, the more it wanted.”¹¹³ Later someone shouts and suggests the use of fire and a chant immediately arises, “Fire, fire, fire...their eyes glazed with savage excitement, each man hypnotised by the violence...”¹¹⁴ Evidently, the author wants to show the cruelty, callousness and recklessness of the so-called African nationalist leaders represented here by Gumede and Madziwa.

¹¹² P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 38-39.

¹¹³ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 39.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid* 39.

Perhaps Stiff's imagination was fired by how, in real life, ZAPU was operating underground after the Party was banned, as Brickhill states, "By the time that most recruits entered ZIPRA ranks, the party had been banned and hounded for almost a decade and a half. Nevertheless 60% of ZIPRA's recruits reported that they had been members of functioning branches of the ZAPU Youth League before they left the country to join the armed struggle. The largest proportion of these was recruited in the towns and cities, and it was in these urban environments that clandestine structures of the party survived most effectively. But many recruits were members of rural party branches too."¹¹⁵

However, it is not clear whether such violence ever occurred during this time. It appears that there is no documentation indicating that ZAPU members indulged in such senseless slaughter of their own people as imagined by Stiff. For one thing, the communities themselves were politically conscious and would not have been labelled "sell-outs" as portrayed in the novel. Brickhill has observed,

...over 60% of recruits came from families in which one or both parents were members of the illegal party branches. The role of the older generation in introducing the youth to nationalism was clearly not simply the province of a few national figures...The actual process of recruitment reinforces this evidence of the central role of communities and the party itself as a vehicle of the community."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Jeremy Brickhill, "Daring to Storm the Heavens: The Military Strategy of ZAPU, 1976-1979" in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, *Soldiers in the Zimbabwean Liberation War*, 67.

¹¹⁶ Jeremy Brickhill, *Ibid*, 67-68.

Therefore, Stiff's portrayal of African nationalism as anarchy, we believe, is meant to dehumanise and discredit the Africans whom he makes monstrous. He also wanted to sensationalise the issues and to frighten Rhodesian readers.

The image of the African as a savage killer of his people is buttressed by another image of the African as a murderer of innocent white missionaries whose mission is to help the same Africans; and as an abductor of his own African school children. Both images are portrayed lucidly in *The Rain Goddess*. In this novel, the white people are seen, not only as liberators, but also as benevolent father and mother figures for the harassed African. It is not surprising that the Rain Goddess herself is seen to be joining hands with the good forces, the white forces, pitted against the bad Africans.

The image of the African savage and terrorist as a murderer of innocent white folk is represented by Madziwa who incites school children at the mission to rise against Abraham and Mary Hale, the two missionaries running the mission. Madziwa starts this commotion because he wants the two missionaries killed as a cover up for his own part in the village violence. After all, there is no telling what Job, one of his students who takes part in the murderous violence described earlier, might say under interrogation by the police. Madziwa believes that it is these two missionaries who have betrayed what he calls "their cause." Thus, the two missionaries are struck with rocks thrown by students from outside while Madziwa clambers into their house to finish them off: "His face

was dark and diffused with the unmistakable light of murder glowing in his eyes. The billet of wood in his hand was heavy and vicious...He smiled cruelly and brought both legs inside the window and stood on the floor. He raised the club and Dawn [the Hayes' daughter] looked into his eyes and knew that she saw death. She had nothing left with which to defend herself.”¹¹⁷

Although the missionaries survive this particular assault because Saul Jenkins, the police detective, intervenes on time, both Abraham and Mary Hale are killed later by Kephass's group which comes back after training as guerrillas in Russia. Kephass, Khumalo and others, come back to the mission to forcibly abduct the school children for recruitment into their guerrilla ranks. This scene is reminiscent of the press-ganging of the St. Albert's school children in 1973 by ZANLA guerrillas under the command of Thomas Nhari “whose real name was Raphael Chinyanganya,” and the ZAPU press-ganging of the Manama school children in January 1977.¹¹⁸

Ironically, Kephass does not bash to death Saul's and Dawn's baby boy whom he finds in a separate bedroom from the parents. This is ironical because when Jenkins and Ndlela discover the murder of Abraham and Mary Hale, they see that the Jenkins' baby is alive. So Ndlela comments: “I think Nkosi, that you can say your family spirits looked after him well, for terrorists show no mercy to Whites, and if they had found him they

¹¹⁷ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 76-77.

¹¹⁸ Josiah Tungamirai, “Recruitment to ZANLA: Building up a War Machine” in Bhebe and Ranger, *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, 41.

would have killed him. I think Nkosi, that they did not think a child was here, so they did not bother to look for him.” When Saul answers that his baby is alive and so he can ask for nothing more, Ndlela echoes with, “Or I...or I.” Then he is told to look after the child.¹¹⁹ The truth is that Kephass, who is Ndlela’s son, plays with the child for a few minutes, rocks him to sleep and closes the door behind him gently. He neither announces the presence of the baby to the others nor kill him.

In a follow-up hunt for the terrorists, Ndlela shoots his son for various “terrorist” crimes. Although Kephass commits horrendous crimes throughout the book, crimes for which he should be brought to book, his father is portrayed in a way that makes him look bad. He is a collaborator with the white people. He tells Jenkins that although Kephass is his son, he will help the Nkosi to arrest him. He rejects the suggestion that he stay behind while the other stronger and younger people follow the abductors of the children because he regards the murdered Reverend and his wife as his friends too. When finally father and son confront each other after a long drawn battle, Ndlela’s question to him only pertains to white people: “Why did you murder the white missionary and his wife? What had they done to you? Is it for this that I sired you?”¹²⁰ It is as if Kephass’s crime is that he kills two white people, not the many other black ones and not the abduction of innocent children. So the author deliberately portrays this image of an African collaborator pitted against the African savage and terrorist with the other white men refereeing, as it were. It is after all, Saul, who lifts Ndlela up, pulling him “gently away

¹¹⁹ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 239.

¹²⁰ *Ibid* 254.

from the corpse” of his son and leading him away, “supporting him with his strong arms.” This is after Ndlela breaks down crying over his dead son’s chest whom he has just shot.¹²¹

Earlier on, Lot, the African cook for Abraham and Mary Hale, pleads the cause of the white man when he hears that Khumalo has killed Mary: “You have killed the missus...But why?... These white men have only helped the people. They have never harmed them.”¹²²

What comes through to the reader, therefore, is that the African is a senseless killer while the good, gentle white man such as the missionaries Hale and his wife, are the innocent victims. It is left to the forces of law and order, the Jenkins and the Jakes with their good Africans, the Lots and Ndlelas, to defend the victimised whites and protect the weak and righteous African collaborators. It is a terrible portrayal of the issues at the time Stiff is writing, 1973. That image distorts historical events to the extent that white readers would have believed this picture of things and remained complacent about the situation they were in, a situation they were to soon confront.

Even the spirit medium, the “Rain Goddess” is marshalled onto the white man’s side. First, there is her prediction that rain would fall only after “people stop breaking the law;” after “all troubles...stop by the 16th February and, in addition [after] the life of one of the trouble-makers [is]

¹²¹ *Ibid* 255.

¹²² P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 259.

sacrificed by the 1st of March.”¹²³ What the Rain Goddess is looking for is human sacrifice. What renders her role dubious is that her conditions for having rain favour the white man and his laws. In their conversation about the pronouncements of this goddess, Ndlela sounds like the pundit while Jenkins sounds amazed by the coincidence that rain falls at 8:00 one morning, exactly at the time that Madziwa is hanged. Both of them marvel at this seeming mysterious power of the Rain Goddess!¹²⁴ She later allegedly pronounces that another drought will break out and rain only fall after “the leader of the men who call themselves freedom fighters has turned rotten with death.” The rain falls immediately after Kephass is executed by his own father, who actually leads the white men in tracking down his son’s terrorist group and is made the hero of the trackers.¹²⁵

Historically, spirit mediums were known to be on the side of the freedom fighters as Tungamirai writes, “In the north-east of the country voluntary recruitment was facilitated by the participation and support of the spirit mediums...[because] the new generation of mediums was...opposed to the oppressive system of the Rhodesian government...With the help of the spirit mediums the guerrillas were able to carry out their instructions to politicize the masses, to cache arms and to recruit would-be fighters in the Dande area.”¹²⁶ It is, therefore, surprising that Stiff should portray the Rain Goddess as knowledgeable in the white people’s laws, even calendar

¹²³ *Ibid* 89; 115.

¹²⁴ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 115.

¹²⁵ *Ibid* 217; 248-249; 253; 256.

¹²⁶ Josiah Tungamirai, in *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, 41.

dates and times so accurately that rain falls exactly at 8:00 a.m. as a black criminal is being hanged, and so on.

The white soldiers, police and their collaborators are invincible in this novel. For instance, Jake is still alive after what seems to be a fatal fall onto a rock; after being shot at close range and, so on.¹²⁷ As in *Towards the Tamarind Tree*, guerrilla groups who attempt to cross the Zambezi river into Rhodesia are totally annihilated by the Rhodesian soldiers and police.¹²⁸ The Rhodesians claim to have killed many terrorists but do not seem to be victims themselves and as the war intensifies, Saul continues to express unshakeable confidence in the Rhodesian military might as he tells his wife whose faith appears badly shaken, “We will win in the end.”¹²⁹ The only people the black fighters kill are their own people, such as the slaughter of the headman accused of being a traitor, and whose youngest wife is raped. This image complements the other image of tribal hatred between the Ndebele and the Shona.¹³⁰

The very words, “freedom fighters” are presented as an irony. As is the case in *Towards the Tamarind Trees*, again, the African terrorist is incapable of shooting the white people unless they be “harmless” missionaries. At the funeral of Abraham and Mary Hale, more Africans than whites attend: 420 tribesmen to 80 white folk and, of course, it is Ndlela who is given the last word: “Nkosi I know not [why this death happened]. It is said that my son and his followers were bringing

¹²⁷ P. Stiff, 252.

¹²⁸ *Ibid* 130.

¹²⁹ P. Stiff, *The Rain Goddess* 215; 216.

¹³⁰ *Ibid* 122-123; 200-208.

freedom to the people. Is it freedom to live in peace or is it freedom to have a plague of death covering the land, where children are stolen from their parents to help an evil cause, and where white men, who are dedicated to helping the African people, are among the first to suffer outrage? Are all men mad? We respect each other as people, and do not hate. Will killing ever end?"¹³¹

Stiff shows lack of vision when, in his novel, he naively portrays the African as either a savage killer or a wholly compliant individual.

The Second Chimurenga from the Rhodesian Conscripts' View Point

In his novel, *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place*.¹³² Angus Shaw presents the Second Chimurenga from a Rhodesian newspaper reporter's point of view; a reporter-cum-conscript. The reporter is the narrator who does not give his name. He narrates his story using the first person point of view.

In telling the story of the Second Chimurenga, Denys Roberts's voice is sarcastic, Peter Stiff's denigrating, Angus Shaw's amusing and cynical, Bruce Moore-King's mournful¹³³ and Tim McLoughlin in his novel, *Karima*,¹³⁴ pessimistic.

¹³¹ *Ibid* 256.

¹³² Angus Shaw, *Kandaya: Another Time, Another Place* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985).

¹³³ Bruce Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* (Harare: Baobab Books, 2989).

¹³⁴ Tim McLoughlin, *Karima* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985).

Shaw describes several issues concerning the war. His main theme is summarised by a quotation from C.S. Lewis and appears at the beginning of *Kandaya, Another Time Another Place*. The quotation reads: “A wrong sum can be put right, but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on.”¹³⁵ With this in mind, the narrator describes his experiences in the war with the intention of setting the sum right. The language used is consistent with war experiences—it is full of military epithets.

Bruce Moore-King writes in a semi-poetic, semi-prosaic style to describe war atrocities perpetrated by the white boy soldiers who burn down villages in an attempt to cut off supplies to the guerrillas. Language here is consistent with war times as seen in *Kandaya*, and, to a lesser extent, in *Karima*. Dialogues and monologues are full of swearing, general vulgarity and battle specific abbreviations such as RPD, Trog, and so on. The bizarre experiences are well described. Few things can be as bizarre as when Rhodesian soldiers find shelter in dying bodies.¹³⁶

In *Karima*, the story is told by a stranger using the omniscient point of view. The book is really a tale of what took place at Karima village during the war. John Viljoen the District Commissioner in the Prologue of the novel explains this objective.

In Shaw’s *Kandaya, Another Place Another Time*, the narrator and his colleagues call themselves conscripts rather than soldiers. This is the same case in *Karima* where Richard Viljoen, the young 18-year old son

¹³⁵ Angus Shaw, *Kandaya...*, xi.

¹³⁶ Bruce Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* 28.

of the District Commissioner for Mt. Darwin, is said to have been “conscripted” in the war.¹³⁷ So these young men are serving in the war against their wishes. Their General and his pep talk no longer impress the conscripts in *Kandaya*.¹³⁸ It is the conscripts’ negative attitude towards the war that the narrator tries to reveal in his story.

After reading the book, several issues stand out in the reader's mind. One of these is the desperation of the conscripts in the face of possible attack by the guerrillas (or “Charlie Tangos” or CTs standing for Communist Terrorists). There is desperation because of the cat-and-mouse nature of the war—they never know where the CTs are and when they might attack. Two incidents illustrate this point.

In the first instance, the narrator and the other conscripts go to guard Jed Marshall’s daughter. Jed Marshall is a farmer who lives with his daughter Fiona, but he himself has travelled to Harare after leaving his daughter alone on the farm. This is why she needs to be guarded. The conscripts agree to take turns in guarding this homestead throughout the night. However, in the morning Jed Marshall hits a supercharged landmine and dies. Apparently, the guerrillas have planted the mines while the four soldiers are guarding Marshall’s home. The narrator learns much later on, that Kandaya and his people see the four conscripts but decide not to attack them because “they wanted the settler” instead.¹³⁹ Meanwhile the soldiers think that they are providing security for the Marshalls' home.

¹³⁷ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 42.

¹³⁸ Angus Shaw, *Kandaya* 3-4.

¹³⁹ A. Shaw, *Kandaya* 101-105; 151.

The second incident which illustrates the precarious nature of this war occurs when the four conscripts are spying on some villages to see if there are any CTs. They see 31 of them going toward the village. They then realise that they can do nothing about them because they are outnumbered, four to thirty-one.

The methodical manner in which Kandaya selects his targets and chooses the opportune moment to attack is very discouraging to the conscripts. An example of this is the case when Bennett becomes the victim. Bennett is an arrogant farmer who believes that he is invincible, yet he is killed. McCarthy describes Bennett as a man who “had a death wish [and who] didn’t feel good inside his own skin.”¹⁴⁰ His annihilation is testimony to the methodical skill of the guerrillas.

The hopelessness of the situation in which these CTs and the conscripts find themselves is well portrayed in *Kandaya*. For example, when the conscripts begin to track Marshall’s killers, they know very well that the latter are far away by now, yet they follow them to fulfil their duty. The conscripts also realise that those they call Charlie Tangos have command over certain territories after all, contrary to the propaganda they are fed on by their General. The narrator expresses this hopelessness in cynical, sarcastic remarks: “So this was how we were winning this war, I pondered. This was how there wasn’t going to be a majority rule in a thousand years. This was how the terrorist infiltrators didn’t control one

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid* 130-131.

inch of the countryside. This was how there was no such thing as a liberated area. Boy, did I have news for the okes back in Bright Lights if I survived the night.”¹⁴¹

The cat-and-mouse, hunter-hunted nature of the war is especially frustrating for these conscripts, a point emphasised in both *Kandaya* and *Karima*. In *Kandaya* the narrator talks about searching the bushes “to see if we could find any more CT caches.”¹⁴² They do, indeed, find evidence of them, such as cigarette stubs, unburied food tin cans (the Rhodesians always bury theirs), many foot prints, bits of string, a tube of Chinese antiseptic cream whose contents are still fresh, and so on. Then the narrator comments, “Let’s face it, it was cat and mouse. You could feel the CTs were nearby.”¹⁴³

The same situation is described in *Karima* where a Sergeant cautions, “Well, keep your ears sharp: and watch Isaac, for all we know he’s in league with the locals and they certainly know where the terrs are. It’s like cat and mouse job, Jenkins...” Later on it is Richard Viljoen who asks nervously, “Has anyone an idea where we are going?” Thinking to himself, he says, “we could be anywhere...The war is everywhere at night. Date, place, time seem immaterial. Army trucks threading their way all over the country and terrs beating along paths to avoid them. A cat and mouse game except there are many more mice than cats, and the

¹⁴¹ A. Shaw, *Kandaya* 188.

¹⁴² *Ibid* 117.

¹⁴³ *Ibid* 117.

mice kill the cats. And what about the ‘sweet potatoes’ waiting to send us on a free aerial trip?”¹⁴⁴

This last thought is similar to that of the narrator who, in *Kandaya*, equates the war to the dog and flea problem: “The guerrilla fought the war of the flea and his military enemy suffered the dog’s disadvantage—too much to defend and too small, ubiquitous and agile an enemy to come to grips with. Each of the guerrilla’s small victories drew its drop of blood. Militarily I, the enemy, became overextended—and like the dog, I scratched hither and thither, draining my strength to resist any ordinary fever.”¹⁴⁵

The narrator, in *Kandaya*, collects souvenirs of items that have been abandoned by guerrillas and assesses their worth. He reads the ideology of the CTs from their literature that he finds abandoned and he calls it “good stuff;...meaningful and fascinating topics.”

Besides describing his ordeal in the bush, the narrator describes incidents of guerrilla drink and clothes poisoning by Rhodesians,¹⁴⁶ the assassination of Herbert Chitepo; the abduction of Edison Sithole; peace negotiations in a train on the Zambezi bridge; détente led by Henry

¹⁴⁴ T. O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 54; 123.

¹⁴⁵ A. Shaw, *Kandaya* 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* 75-76.

Kissinger and the contacts they engage in with Kandaya's men who also call the conscripts, terrorists.¹⁴⁷ He describes his final contact with guerrillas. In it Samuel Chaya deputy to Kandaya is shot at point-blank range and killed, along with three others of his gang.

Even in these novels written after independence, the guerrilla still remains something that is not taken seriously in spite of overwhelming evidence that he/she is overcoming the enemy. The contempt with which Kandaya, a skilful guerrilla commander, is regarded is evident when only two crates of beer are offered as a reward for killing or capturing him. No one really drinks them, though, as the narrator remains unsure at what point Kandaya is killed, if at all. He does not feature in Zimbabwe after independence.

In *Karima*, the value of terrorists is dismissed off hand, and Mackechnie mocks, "It's a pity the government doesn't give me a foreign currency allowance for each terr you kill." They cannot do that, Reg Sharp answers, because the terrorists are not worth "the rags they stand up in...they're better dead than alive."¹⁴⁸ McLoughlin ably portrays this attitude that keeps the Rhodesian government so complacent that they do not realise that what they call the counter-insurgency is a decisive war that will wrest political power from their hands. McLoughlin and Shaw, thus, do a good job in chronicling the white man's thinking in the pre-

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid* 100; 124-125.

¹⁴⁸ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 39.

independence era, the typical Rhodesian thinking that we have seen described in other novels.

The effects of the guerrilla war on the conscripts are devastating. The narrator, in *Kandaya*, portrays, most vividly, the deteriorating mental faculties of the conscripts. The condition of Panovic is a case in point. He misses his wife so much that he writes poetry to and about her in his letters.¹⁴⁹ The narrator himself goes berserk when a bullying fellow conscript opens his letter.¹⁵⁰ Teenage conscripts are hit hardest by the war conditions to the point where one of them puts a human toe in a jar as his victim's exhibit.¹⁵¹ Then there is the case of Naylor who commits suicide by shooting himself upon hearing that his wife is leaving him for someone else,¹⁵² and Forbes becomes so nervous that he shoots a baboon thinking that it is a CT.¹⁵³

In *Karima*, young Richard is changed by the war which has now transformed him into "part of the fighting machine."¹⁵⁴ He grows critical of it, wanting to know what they are fighting for, a question he answers by arguing that the elders are using the youth for their cause which he considers dubious.¹⁵⁵ People like Fitzpatrick express an even more dubious cause to fight for: "I have a very clear idea of what I am up

¹⁴⁹ A. Shaw, *Kandaya* 179-180.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid* 177-178.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid* 1-16.

¹⁵² *Ibid* 91-92.

¹⁵³ *Ibid* 121-122.

¹⁵⁴ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 161.

against,” he declares, “...animals, savages, who butcher and rape their own people. I mean to get them.”¹⁵⁶ He seems to be echoing Ian Smith to explain the reasons for fighting this war.

The change in conscripts is actually deliberate and necessary—conscripts are supposed to be killer machines: “They shed individual dignity, personal thoughts, private lives, public reputations to become ‘number four,’ or ‘stick man.’ When a man felt anonymity in his bones he felt confident of group success. No thought, no feelings interfered with the mechanical flow of his movements from the flick of his safety-catch to his full-bodied rush in assault. If a man allowed, the army bred an ecstatic aloofness from the vulgar trivia of individual lives.”¹⁵⁷

This kind of change in the conscripts is also well described in Peter Rimmer’s *Cry of the Fish Eagle*. In that novel, Philip changes drastically to become a killer machine that is finally annihilated by a cow hippopotamus. In Bruce Moore-King’s *White Man, Black War*, the crippling psychological effects of guerrilla attacks is well dramatised by the boy soldier who keeps praying and sobbing, and has to be sedated by the doctor (who is called “the medic” in the novel). Some of the soldiers vomit, while the Corporal is so horrified by their condition that in order to keep his sanity, he has to keep joking about Bill’s previous instructions

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid* 39-45.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid* 103.

¹⁵⁷ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 41.

to the helicopter pilot “to reverse fire co-ordinates.” The Portuguese boy soldier finds distraction in his lady ghost story, and all the soldiers get “happily drunk” after one particular attack as they celebrate Christmas.¹⁵⁸

All these incidences of change in character indicate a situation where the youth believe that they are sacrificed by their parents who are keen to uphold their own values. Moore-King’s reason for writing his novel is to help readers understand the conscripts’ reaction to war and how it damages their psyche. He then appeals to the white people to adopt a positive attitude towards black people. However, it is doubtful whether the Elders who send their sons to the war front have accurate information on experiences that the boys go through. These boy soldiers become so brutal and so brutalised by the war that, in the end, “none was wholly normal, and many were no longer human,” a condition that persists even after the war has ended.¹⁵⁹ It is the nature of war to be brutal and brutalising, but Moore-King seems to lament this particular aspect of it because he believes that the Rhodesians are fighting for the wrong cause, a sentiment that is echoed in both *Kandaya* and *Karima*.

In his own way, Moore-King describes well the atrocities of the Second Chimurenga and their effects on the white boys who were conscripted to fight in it. He describes the events in a mournful and exasperated tone of regret, and in a mood full of bitterness and anger at how the High Priest,

¹⁵⁸ Bruce Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* 34.

¹⁵⁹ B. Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* 35.

that is, Ian Smith, could so mislead his people and betray their youth.¹⁶⁰ The author tends to moralise, and in all the sections where he intrudes as an authorial voice that has now learned the truth,¹⁶¹ he laments and pleads with the white people to treat blacks with respect. It is this tone which weakens the impact of the book on readers, and as Andrew Meldrum reports, “Moore-King despairs that his book will not be able to change the attitudes of Zimbabwean whites. [Nevertheless], he believes that it can affect the small but significant group of South African whites who are questioning their system of Apartheid.”¹⁶² This comment was written before South Africa gained her freedom in 1994.

While Shaw’s narrator appears to be one of the progressive liberals, he still remains unconvinced that Kandaya, the guerrilla leader, could be his hero, neither could Chaya, his assistant. Yet these are menacingly skilful guerrillas whose prowess he describes throughout the novel. He makes sure that Kandaya disappears and Chaya is killed before the war ends, an act which denies them the final victory. Angus Shaw, himself appears to be a liberal even though he characterises the guerrillas’ achievements “small victories.” At least he remains realistic enough to acknowledge the independence that comes at the end of the protracted, wasteful war. Because Shaw uses the first person point of view narrative, we do not have information on what happens on the war front after the narrator

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid* 117.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid* 120-131.

¹⁶² Andrew Meldrum, “*White Man, Black War*” in *Africa Report* (July-August, 1989) 67.

leaves for Nairobi. His story resumes when he returns to Zimbabwe to celebrate independence.

Tim McLoughlin is much more pessimistic in *Karima*, and ends the novel in a way that does not anticipate black people's independence, as if he were writing during the pre-independence period. He creates distance between the narrator of the "Prologue," John Viljoen, the District Commissioner in Mt. Darwin, and the narrator of the actual novel, by saying that the narrator is a stranger. The idea is to create impartiality and, therefore, increase the veracity and objectivity of the tale. This is a necessary strategy in telling the story of Karima village because the District Commissioner disqualifies himself as narrator on the grounds of non-objectivity. Indeed, this commissioner's prejudices surface at the end of the novel in which he is one of the characters. McLoughlin himself displays an unnecessary pessimism about the outcome of the war, unnecessary because he writes in the 1980s after the war has already been lost and won (to use Shakespeare's cliché in *Macbeth*). Yet he writes as if the black people's struggle is stillborn.

In *Karima*, the District Commissioner shows his bias against Africans in the "Prologue." He praises the Rhodesian army by describing it as "efficient but not mischievous, much less barbarous."¹⁶³ If he already passes such judgement about one side—his side, evidently not much

¹⁶³ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 13.

objectivity can be expected from him. After Karima village has been attacked and twenty to twenty-one people have died, this same District Commissioner is sent to collect the “facts” of that gruesome event together with the bodies of the dead.

It is not surprising that the District Commissioner does not only automatically blame the “terrorists” for the massacre, but also displays the same logic that Smith and his fellow racists use to condemn the guerrillas. He says: “Terrorists come in the night, kill your people, others run into the bush, and you think the DC who lives over near Mount Darwin has eyes to see where your headman is.”¹⁶⁴ He finds it difficult to accept old man Takurayi’s version of events when the latter tells him that it is the Rhodesian soldiers who have committed the massacre: “This is the work of terrorists,” the DC claims, “we have stories of killings like this every week. Only terrorists could murder your families like this. They are in the area. We know about that. This time we were too late. I am sorry for you, Sekuru.”¹⁶⁵ The argument goes on, with Takurayi insisting that it is the soldiers and “not the terrorists you are talking about” that have committed the massacre.¹⁶⁶ Finally the DC bitterly condemns Takurayi and his adherence to the African traditional custom of burying the dead in the village so that they may later conduct rituals of appeasement to their ancestors. In his condemnation the DC bursts out,

¹⁶⁴ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 190.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid* 189.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid* 190.

“If you are such a concerned old man, clever, caring, in love with your customs, why don’t you teach your people to observe them? Is all this death around ‘custom?’ Your young men have rejected your traditions. They do not care about respect. Politics possesses them now. They want power, not the kindly thoughts of an old man like you. Power over me, over you, over everything that stands in the way of their own progress. They want to rule, and they will get that even if it means cutting to pieces their own women and children. Tell your spirits that. Tell them, don’t tell me, Sekuru. My God looks with anger on murder. He avenges himself on those who want to rule by violence. I will fight violence to protect the innocent. I will fight for you, Sekuru.”¹⁶⁷

This vehement statement shows that the DC has effectively and naturally taken the side of the Rhodesians. This is why the DC cannot retell this story—he is a biased participant in it. So the story is told by a stranger who is the narrator. In the Prologue the DC admits that the white people’s life has been severely restricted by the war and urges that they should try to understand the real causes of it, yet they have done “nothing to understand the Africans’ feelings and manner of thought.” He, therefore, cannot tell the story of Karima village because “I wouldn’t get it right. Throughout the incident I felt trapped in a role which was a burdensome duty, yet I don’t know how else I could have behaved.” He then hopes that “the story as told by another might show on the contrary that I was no victim but offended against humanity in a serious way. The obvious victims are those who suffered. Those who survived and are guilty [the white participants?] might argue that the truth of the story is not known. Certainly it has been contentious right from that Sunday

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid* 193.

morning at Karima when I first met the old man Takurayi.”¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately, it does not sound as if at present he knows how he should have behaved, judged by this statement.

McLoughlin’s own pessimism is partly reflected by his form. At the end of the novel the dream that Takurayi has and the unknown fate of the three children of Karima village who abscond to Mozambique and are presumed drowned in the Mazowe River, make his decisive defeatist statement about the war. In Takurayi’s incoherent first dream, he is sitting next to a fire with “disembodied figures” among whom is a white man whose face is grotesque “because of its limpid pale cheeks. An old wooden cup passed from one to the other, but they refused to let Takurayi hold it.” The cup seems to hold enough drink for him. “He made a lunge for the cut and tightened his grip about its warm wood. The others sank back...He could not see many of them now, but relaxed, he held the cup, and paused to show them he was master of it. He took a sip at his pleasure. But as he held it the cup cracked down the side. Cold liquid spilled through his fingers, the wood fragmented in his hands. He was left holding a few chips.”¹⁶⁹ Takurayi feels defeated as a result.

The second dream is equally defeatist. In it “he was locked in the grip with the white man” who is strangling him. He tries but fails to reach for a knife on his hip so that he could stab the white man in the belly, which would loosen his grip around Takurayi’s throat. Finally, “with a sudden

¹⁶⁸ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 15.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid* 194-195.

thrust he forced the white man off balance, his knife ready to kill, but again his arm was locked by the white man. The hand so squeezed his arm that try as he might he could not fight free. He awoke to the tugging of the DC at his elbow.”¹⁷⁰

McLoughlin uses the dream vision in an allegorical sense.¹⁷¹ Two things happen to Takurayi in the dream: first, although he finally gets hold of the wooden cup, it breaks and gets fragmented in his hands and the cold liquid in the cup spills through his fingers. Secondly, though he shakes himself free of the white man’s grip, the white man, again, locks his arm. So in both dream visions, Takurayi’s efforts are fruitless. The efforts at self-liberation amount to nothing but frustration and despair. This interpretation is supported by the narrator who describes Takurayi’s feelings after waking up from these disturbing dreams thus, “Shaken from his sleep, his people destroyed in the night, himself *alive only to the despair of impotence* [my emphasis], he looked out at the huts gutted and riddled by gunfire.”¹⁷² The sole white man of his first dream could represent the DC who comes to “assist” and “instead of listening to his story, [cleans] up the place like a jackal after a meal.” The same DC is the white man of his second dream vision. He represents the argument they have about who has massacred Takurayi’s people. Just as the white man has the upper hand in the dream, the DC has the last word in their

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* 195.

¹⁷¹ See discussion of the Dream Vision in all its different forms in M.H. Abrams *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6; 46; 184.

¹⁷² T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 195.

argument, reducing Takurayi to nothing. The author, therefore, has the white man have the last word.

It is the white man, again, who has the last word in the case of the young *mujibha*, Cyprian. Cyprian leaves Karima village in search of Mushandi who has gone to Matondo's home to try and contact *vakomana* so that they can avenge the humiliation suffered by his son-in-law. Earlier, Mushandi's son-in-law is tortured, and then castrated by the security forces. Cyprian's mission to locate Mushandi's whereabouts in order to report the massacre at Karima is defeated.¹⁷³ When he gets to Karanda he finds two people, a black shopkeeper and a white van driver. Instead of talking to the black man, he keeps looking at the white van driver and then asks him about Mushandi. This is most illogical given that he is searching for someone who is looking for *vakomana*.¹⁷⁴ The driver then takes Cyprian to the Mission. During the journey, Cyprian learns that the police arrested Mushandi the morning he left Karima; that Chad, Tomson and Solomon who attempted to abscond to Mozambique had drowned while trying to cross the Mazowe River with a group of comrades. As if to make a grand finale to this sad story, the mission man urges Cyprian to "accept...that Solomon and Tomson are dead. Hundreds more have died just like that, helping people through the bush, quite selfless, convinced that the cause will triumph. I doubt that their heroism will be

¹⁷³ *Ibid* 168.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid* 208.

remembered. But without them there would be no Tongogara, no Mugabe,” the missionary concludes.¹⁷⁵

After this talk, Cyprian decides never to return to Karima, to Takurayi. Instead he “felt himself speaking and thinking in a new way. Life itself had become a new thing of the night. He surrendered himself to it. Takurayi would never know, perhaps nobody in Karima would hear of him again.”¹⁷⁶ It is not clear where he wants to go or what he wants to do, but we can assume that Cyprian somehow gets assimilated into this missionary world—the white man’s hand that continues to lock Takurayi’s arm in his dream vision. His fate is uncertain in as much as the following paragraph indicates: “A strange spired building rising amidst cypress trees cut up into the night sky. There were two lighted windows over to the left. The tall dark form of the man loped on ahead towards one of the buildings. Cyprian felt he was walking into danger. It was exhilarating because he was not afraid. This was like one of those sacred places Takurayi talked about. Mushandi had been here. And Solomon and Tomson.”¹⁷⁷ We have heard that Mushandi was arrested and that Solomon and Tomson had drowned, but remain puzzled as to where exactly Cyprian is going/has gone. Wherever it is, he has been annihilated.

¹⁷⁵ T.O. McLoughlin, *Karima* 208-210.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid* 240.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid* 210.

That is why *Karima* is pessimistic. McLoughlin's story is as tall as an iroko tree, to use Chinua Achebe's expression.¹⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

The question of whether or not Zimbabwean Africans can rule themselves surfaces often in the novels discussed in this chapter. The attitude of white people to that question is, perhaps, best expressed in Peter Rimmer's *Cry of the Fish Eagle*, where one character, Dilly, asks another, Freddie, if he does not mind talking about black nationalism with his black boss boy

Charehwa's son, Tererai. In answer Freddie asks, "whyever [sic] should I [mind]? Their politics have nothing to do with me." On being asked further by Dilly whether he does not think that blacks will run the country, Freddie is incredulous and exclaims: "Whatever for? They can't run it better than us, can they? How absurd. Place would be a financial basket case, like the rest of Africa, in six months. No jobs, no money except what the top brass steals from handouts, and no future. Here they'll have a future. It takes a long time to become civilised... No, their politics have nothing to do with me. They must run their kraals and the reserves and leave the rest to us."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ It is Chinua Achebe who says, "After all a novel is only a story and could be as tall as an iroko tree..." Chinua Achebe, "Where Angels Fear to Tread" in *Morning Yet on Creation Day, Essays* (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1975; reprinted 1977 and 1981) 48.

¹⁷⁹ P. Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 303.

Later on when Dilly expresses incredulity at Rupert's farm workers' poverty, the latter responds by telling him that his workers are not really poor because they have food which is rare wealth in Africa. He sees it as a white man's duty to give blacks "a style of life that is fit to live...to carve a farm out of the bush and at least put some food in their bellies."¹⁸⁰ This best summarises the general attitude expressed in the novels towards Africans.

These novels, thus, portray a situation where white people do not even dream that black people are capable of taking over political power in Rhodesia. All kinds of doom and gloom are predicted should there be such an eventuality. Few of the novels end with the country as an independent state, the notable exceptions being *Kandaya* and *Cry of the Fish Eagle*. The latter actually dramatises the gloom pervading in this new African State. For example, Tererai marries a second wife, a fourteen-year-old girl said to be a carrier of the AIDS virus. This marriage is also said to be depriving Thandi, the first wife, of her freedom. The marriage proves to be a death sentence for Tererai who dies of AIDS.¹⁸¹ This pessimism is blackmail to Africans. Not only are Africans portrayed as incapable of ruling themselves, but they are also regarded as incapable of continuing their family trees.

Another blackmailing incident is when Rupert goes to Rowan Martin building to change the electricity from his tenant's name to his own. He finds no pens on the desk, yet he needs these in order to fill in the

¹⁸⁰ P. Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 312-313.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid* 572.

relevant forms. On enquiring, he is told that “all pens had been stolen.”¹⁸² The incident is evidently meant to denigrate Africans as thieves, since Rupert happens to be the only white man in the hall. When he goes to the news agent in the city centre to ask for a ballpoint pen, he is told that there are “no ballpoint pens. Not for weeks. Foreign exchange.”¹⁸³ Finally he borrows one and when he gets back to Rowan Martin building he is told that the “government printers have not sent [the reconnecting forms and that] there will be new forms in ten days....”¹⁸⁴ Again, this is meant to paint the black government as inefficient, in order to fulfil the white man’s mythical prophecy that black people cannot run their country’s affairs.

Rupert claims to be resettling in the country in order to farm because the Africans have found it difficult to cope with commercial farming. There follows a thorough denunciation of the government by Jackson who is talking to Rupert. That denunciation ends in the following statement: “The government’s mismanagement is the best news we’ve had since before Smithy met Wilson on HMS Tiger.”¹⁸⁵ Both Rupert and Jackson settle down to their beers with glee, anticipating a fall of the government, and celebrating the work of RENAMO which Jackson says they started in Mozambique as “a thorn in FRELIMO’s side...[to] give them something to worry about on their home ground so to speak.”¹⁸⁶ To confirm this FRELIMO-REMANO situation, Philip is seen shooting and killing a

¹⁸² *Ibid* 572.

¹⁸³ *Ibid* 573.

¹⁸⁴ P. Rimmer, *Cry of the Fish Eagle* 573-574.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid* 576-577.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid* 575.

FRELIMO veteran who tries to throw a grenade, thus, proving that even in Mozambique Rhodesians never die, since they always have an upper hand in war matters. This is in spite of the fact that historically, RENAMO eventually lost that war.

Peter Rimmer's viewpoint, therefore, is pessimistic. Moore-King shares the same kind of pessimism, which is evident at the end of his novel, *White Man, Black War*, where he portrays Africans attempting to plant maize and ground nuts seeds on land where “massive loads of grey and brown [leaves] haven’t decomposed enough to be of much use to the crop” as manure. The seeds are immediately picked up and eaten by monkeys. Although “the neighbours have a small tractor for ploughing, [they have] no planter, no sprayer, no fertiliser spreader,” and so “lacking sprayers, herbicides or any other modern weed clearing method, the people have cleared their farm the old fashioned way. With a hoe.”¹⁸⁷ Again this is a mockery of African agricultural efforts in independent Zimbabwe.

These defeatist viewpoints correctly summarise the dominating opinion of the white Rhodesian novelists on whether or not black people are capable of successfully organising a military campaign to liberate themselves, and whether they can then successfully rule the country. It has been shown that all the authors, using different approaches, have moulded their content and character in a style that practically indicates

¹⁸⁷ B. Moore-King, *White Man, Black War* 1; 134.

that Africans can neither succeed in implementing their nationalistic ideas, nor can they sustain an independent state.

In the following chapter, attention is turned to some Rhodesian female novelists to see how they portray the issue of colonisation, and how they see themselves fitting into that colonial situation.