Zimbabwe’s Story of Pain and Struggle:
Historicity in Bones and Red Hills of Home

By

Jenjekwa Vincent
Research Article

Zimbabwe’s Story of Pain and Struggle: Historicity in *Bones* and *Red Hills of Home*

Jenjekwa Vincent

Lecturer in English Department, Morgenster Teachers’ College, Zimbabwe.

E-mail: vjenjekwa@gmail.com, Tel: +263775376045

ABSTRACT

This paper critiques Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones* and *Red Hills of Home* within the framework of Historical Criticism. It would be argued that Hove’s writings are historical, dwelling on the pain and struggles of Zimbabweans in their fight against colonial domination. The struggle of women against colonialism and male chauvinism is equally pronounced. The two pieces of work carry a sense of cautious optimism: euphoric at the demise of colonialism and cautiously optimistic about the capacity of the new dispensation to deliver the expected change. Already indicators abound in *Bones* and *Red Hills of Home* that independence is the beginning of yet new forms of challenges manifested through corrupt political leadership which blatantly betrays the ideals of the struggle, intransigent old structures of government deeply soaked in the nostalgia for colonialism and an economy still tethered to the imperial powerhouse. Though Hove claims to be out rightly historical in his writings, his version of history, in some cases, is rather rudimentary because it has gaping holes in terms of certain historical facts about Zimbabwe. This would be understood against Hove’s own artistic concerns and his standing as a social being.

Keywords: History, Zimbabwean literature, Colonisation.

INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to examine critically Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones* (a novel) and *Red Hills of Home* (a collection of poems) as literary products focusing on Zimbabwe’s history of colonialism, the struggle for independence and the independence period itself. Hove is inspired by the compelling need for Africa to tell her own ‘story’. Colonialism disenfranchised Africans of the voice and space to tell their own ‘story’. The ‘story’ was told by dishonest, external and prejudicial colonial voices (Achebe, 1975). Africa has been gagged and Hove seeks to break the silence and be the voice of the voiceless. In Hove’s view, literature is about reality presented by the artist imaginatively. *Bones* and *Red Hills of Home* depict the historical realities of Zimbabwe during the colonial, independence and post independence period. Through the two works of art, it will be revealed that a writer cannot stay free from subjective assessment of historical developments because he is human.

The Vultures, Disease and Locusts: Colonial Incursion into Zimbabwe

Through the voices of the spirits in *Bones*, Hove is able to give a picture of the disruptive effects of colonial incursion into Zimbabwe. Hove seeks to reassert the pride of the African by retelling the African’s story in a way which does not seek to justify the African’s enslavement through colonialism. Much of the history of Africa’s pre-colonial and colonial periods has been peddled from the side of the coloniser. The myths and smokescreen of the white man’s burden to civilise Africa are demolished as Hove artistically depicts the deceptive entry of British colonial ringleaders through duping unsuspecting African Kings and chiefs. If anything, colonialism resembles the vultures which celebrate death because they feed on carcasses. The spirits warn thus: “Do you not see the vultures flying over the corpses that are not yet?” (Hove, 1988: 47). Colonial lies are seen in metaphorical terms as “the clouds which fake the flight of vultures”. White settlers are also seen as locusts which “chew and nibble at anything” to underscore the greedy behind colonialism and its conquest which occupies every facet of life. In the poem, “The Uninvited Guest” in *Red Hills of Home*, the colonisers are seen as uninvited guests who push the Africans “against the wall”. This refers to the total displacement of the African from his birthright. The real agenda of colonialism was economic and the spirits urged the people not to wait but to take up arms and fight. Indeed, the spirits, through spirit mediums, mobilised the people to fight and this is true even in the Second Chimurenga (Chung, 2006). Raftopolous and Mlambo (2009), and Rodney (1972) concur that colonialism was an economic driven adventure into Africa which left Africans with no choice but to fight. This confirms that Hove’s prose and poetry is historical and not fictitious since it focuses on real historical events.
It is also a historical fact that colonialism was passively and naively received by African communities. Kings were cheaply bought by small niceties like sugar. Offers and promises of guns are among the baits used to win the hearts and minds of the African people. Some chiefs even boasted of the gifts for example in Bones, it is stated that Manyengavana heard one King “boasting about the strange gifts” (Hove, 1988:51). These Kings in the eyes of the spirits become, “those of us with a big desire for meat” (Hove, 1988:49) who will go to the whites in hiding and ask for a piece or two of meat. These collaborators are detested by Hove for they are on the wrong side of history. In an indirect reference to King Lobengula, the spirits declare that the whites, can say all the nice words of humility, but I see in their green eyes much mischief even as they go to give a few gifts to the king. The holy King accepts the gifts... (Hove, 1988: 50).

Such naivety of the Kings and chiefs is castigated by the writer because it aided the economic dispossession of Africans. This capitulation of African chiefs and kings is also indicative of the deceptive strategies employed by colonial agents like Rhodes to conquer Africa.

It is only reasonable to identify one of the spirits as the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda who led the people in Mashonaland in the first uprising. After defeating the Shona and Ndebele in the first Chimurenga, the white settlers celebrated and consolidated their victory as they “bound survivors in heavy chains so that they will not rise again” (Hove, 1988: 53). One of these survivors is believed to be Mbuya Nehanda (Mudenge, 2011). Historically, scholars believe that Mbuya Nehanda was taken prisoner of war and executed but not before she prophesied that even if they killed her, her bones will one day rise to fight. The power of her prophecy as presented by Hove can be discerned:

... you can torture me,
spread my bowels for the jackals to eat
and tear them to pieces,
mutilate my body with your anger,
throw my brains to the vultures,
leave the remains of my body in the playground
for your children to play with,
cut my ears to decorate your own ears,
cut my fingers,
use them to wipe your own sweat...
my bones will rise in the spirit of war
(Hove, 1988: 53).

This speech, creatively recreating the speech of Mbuya Nehanda as she faced the gaols, is a clear indictment of colonial brutal and inhumane treatment of Africans seen metaphorically as the cutting of an African’s ears to decorate the white men’s. This prophecy by Mbuya Nehanda also became vital in the Second Chimurenga when politicians would recite a poem in Feso by Mutsvairo (1982) on Nehanda Nyakasikana to arouse nationalist sentiments. So pronounced in Bones and Ancestors is the efficacious role of ancestral spirits.

While Mbuya Nehanda was bound by chains and executed, the surviving Africans had to contend with heavy chains in the form of brutal repression and exploitation of the human and natural resources as colonialism consolidated its grip on the African soil. This is clear confirmation that Hove’s writings are historical and revolutionary.

The spirits are therefore a fictional recreation of the voices of the ancestors during the days of colonial incursion into Zimbabwe and Hove shows clear appreciation of this phase of Zimbabwe’s history.

It is observable, however, that in Bones, Hove omits some critical historical events and in the process he seems to oversimplify history. The narrative which deals with the advent of colonialism seems oblivious of the role of missionary activities which served as a precursor to colonialism. Historically, it is argued that Lobengula’s granting of hunting concessions to Rudd on behalf of Rhodes was partially because of the role which Moffat, a missionary, who had a long history of association with the Ndebele leaders played. The spirits speak and warn of impending danger and destruction in Bones but it seems the people do not take heed, perhaps because of the seeds of doubt which had been sown in the people by preachers like Moffat. It is a serious omission to ignore the destructive role of Christianity on the pre-colonial African communities.

Hove seems to have ignored that when Mbuya Nehanda and Kaguvi were taken prisoners of war, they were advised to renounce their spirituality. Mbuya Nehanda stood firm in defiance as she faced the hangman but, sadly, Kaguvi capitulated and was baptised (Ranger, 1967). With the efficacy of traditional African spirituality attacked, African communities were left vulnerable. Chinua Achebe (1959) and Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1965) in Things Fall Apart and The River Between, respectively highlight the critical but destructive role of religion in the colonial conquest of African communities. Though “Red Hills of Home” depicts the spiritual assault the Africans suffered when sacred shrines were desecrated by foreigners, it appears Hove does not seek to give African spiritual denigration prominence. Such an omission does not augur well for an artist who claims to have history engraved in his heartbeat (Hove, 2002).
It is ostensible that Hove is out rightly anti-colonial in his depiction of history and seeks to foster an anti-colonial perception in the readers. Any probable shortcomings within the African way of life seem to be conveniently ignored. There is a marked difference in his depiction of African colonial societies from writers like Chinua Achebe who sought to expose Africa’s past with its imperfections. This idealistic portrayal of Africa’s past could be one weakness of Hove’s depiction of history in Bones and Red Hills of Home.

Manyepo’s Farm: A Microcosm of Zimbabwe under Colonial Rule

Bones is mainly set on a white man’s farm sometime during the Second Chimurenga period. The chains of slavery around the necks of Zimbabweans have continued their chaffing grip and the farm is a concrete manifestation of the colonial agenda of expropriating natural heritage from the black indigenous people. The poetry in Red Hills of Home expresses the African’s history of pain and suffering under colonialism. The farm portrays the ironic contradictions which characterise colonialism. Just like Orwell’s (2000) Animal Farm, the depiction of a farm allows for a closer scrutiny of issues which affect the macro-situation. It is ironic and a lie that the farm is referred to as Manyepo’s farm yet the farm belongs to the dispossessed indigenes. This is reflective of the renaming of Zimbabwe to Rhodesia as if no one possessed it before Rhodes and the Pioneer Column came to Zimbabwe. Because the farm is therefore not by right the white man’s, Hove gives the white man the name Manyepo, which means lies in Shona to underscore the colonial lies which camouflaged colonialism.

The growth of the colonial agricultural system marked the demise of traditional African subsistence farming. The farm is a colonial enterprise which mirrors the economic dimension of colonialism. Manyepo’s farm is indicative of the sad reality that the whole colonial enterprise is not a charitable or philanthropic escapade into Africa, but an ostensibly exploitative economic venture. The village of Muramba upon the creation of Manyepo’s farm, leaves everything to go and take refuge at Manyepo’s farm. Marume, a former resident of Muramba village, in his false-conscious musing about his predicament says:

I am not going to go to that reserve where dogs and people eat from one plate. The reserves are not even fit for donkeys to live in (Hove, 1988: 20).

This is indicative of how deprived Africans were from colonialism. Colonial expropriation reduced Africans to the level of animals. The fact that the Muramba villagers took even their dogs indicate poverty, and the villagers’ resolve not to go back to their rural homes which are home no more because of hunger and the threat caused by colonial ‘bulldozer’.

Colonialism as seen by Hove means death to the African hence the significance of the colour red which stands for blood in “Red Hills of Home”. The Poem “Red Hills of Home” portrays this dislocation as synonymous with exile. The bulldozer, which symbolically represents the whole colonial institution with its indiscriminate plunder of African resources and forced migration of the African, has mercilessly damaged the land in the name of industrialisation and created red hills. Red hills, with the colour of blood, signify the imminent threat of death to Africans hence the threat of relocation as shown by the last two lines of the poem Red Hills of Home:

Red hills and the pulse of exile
telling us this is home no more
(Hove, 1985:2).

Muramba reserve is a clear result of colonial policies of dispossessing Africans of their land. After having been driven out of prime land, the mandatory taxes like hut tax, paid by the blacks made it a must for the villagers to leave. Even the foolish and naive Chisaga reflects on the cruelty of Makaza, the white district commissioner

who comes in his land rover to tell us that by the end of tomorrow, we must move because he is building a road where we live. If we do not move, Makaza drives bulldozers over our grass huts with a smile on his face. Then after he has destroyed our homes, he comes the next day on his horse, to ask for taxes (Hove, 1988:40).

Hove, in this case, is really exposing colonialism for what it was: a brutal capitalist project which sought to suck the blood and sweat of Zimbabweans. This is why some anti-colonial scholars like Rodney (1972:223) view colonialism as “a one-armed bandit” because any perceived benefits from colonialism is merely a by products of exploitation.

The disillusionment shown by Hove towards colonialism is also reflected in the poem “Mosquito” in Red Hills of Home, where Hove chides the white man for being worse than a mosquito which honestly sucks human blood unlike the white man who hypocritically pretends to be drinking red-wine when they have metaphorically
suceeded black blood through exploitation. The irony is that work to the black man now kills. The working conditions are pathetic and harmful, Marita "works until she cannot sleep at night. She groans and says she has things crawling in her blood..." (Hove, 1988: 23). To cap it all, there is rampant physical violence against Africans as whites are driven with the clichés they brought from Europe that Africans were “half devil and half” child (Kipling in Pu and Liu, 2012: 685) and would only understand through a kick on the butt (Fanon, 1968). Chisaga observes that “Manyepo can kick you and shame you in front of your own people” (Hove, 1988:39) and he constantly accuses the workers of lying like children.

Apart from the economic havoc wrecked on African societies by colonialism, on the social front, relationships faced new definitions. Men who were associated with masculine work in the traditional way of life suddenly find themselves in roles they could easily define as demeaning and taboo. This is the reason why Chisaga is a cook whilst women like Marita and Janifa toil in the fields to fend for the family. This inversion of roles affected the African social fabric as it implanted a subservient mentality especially in men as they found themselves converted to ‘women’. Colonialism sought to emasculate African men to guarantee that submission to colonial rule became total. It invaded the whole universe of the African and became an overwhelming force in changing perceptions. Manyepo’s farm becomes a microcosm of the disruptive role of colonialism in terms of social relations.

This inversion of roles of men and women had a positive unintended consequence of making women realise their potential in terms of the roles they could play at home and in the community at large. This role finds its loudest manifestation when women went to join the liberation struggle to fight against the whites. Though Scholars like Nhongo-Simbanevagi (2000) argue that the involvement of women in the struggle was at the whims of men, it still remains valid to say that women gained in self confidence from such an involvement just like how the involvement of Africans in the Second World War created a new perception about whites, mainly that whites were mortal beings capable of being subjected to the same brutality they were subjecting Africans to. It is also clear that women realised that theirs was double trouble which came from the patriarchal organisation of society and the exploitative nature of settler government through white settlers like Manyepo. At Manyepo’s farm, for a month, women worked for nothing as part of their interview. This gives a clear picture of the nature of the colonial regime.

A small number of Africans was compromised as the whites sought to exert control on the blacks through divide and rule. It is understandable that this heavily dominated farm community has in its midst people like Baas Boy, Marume and Chisaga who wallow from brain washing. Chisaga is “as fat as a baobab” from eating left-overs from Manyepo’s table (Hove, 1988:20). Baas Boy, Marume and Chisaga have been emasculated and turned into robots which are switched on and off by the white master. There is no doubt even from the name that Chisaga (a small but over packed sack) is a target of the writer’s attack. Chisaga whose name connotes a useless sack at the mercy of the person who would carry it, is like Nnaife in Emecheta’s (2008), The Joys of Motherhood who is a mentally colonised man who has no sense of self worthy and true consciousness to the extent that he does wash the white women’s undergarments. This humiliation is also seen in the poem “A BOY” in And Now the Poets Speak ( Hove in Kadhani and Zimunya, 1981: 29) where a man who has worked for thirty years is not entitled to a pension and is forever called boy by “milk-plastered lips” of the white men’s children. The effect of such inhuman treatment is the destruction of the African’s sense of self belief because of such actions of the likes of Manyepo “Who rob your humility/Implanting slavery and hate” (Hove in Kadhani and Zimunya, 1981:29). Hove shows his awareness of the emotional effect of colonialism on the African.

The Baas Boy has terrible skewed consciousness. His prejudice against his fellow black men, particularly women, is shocking for example where he verbally attacks women thus:

You women up there stop gossiping about the latest love potions and get on with the work. You were not brought here to share your gossip with baas Manyepo. He brought you here to work. If you are too old to work, then say so and baas will get someone to take your place (Hove, 1988:19).

Because of the ‘crumbs’ which the overseer or foreman gets from Manyepo, he has deserted his people to be complicit in the exploitation of African resources.

The employment of Chisaga, as a ‘boy’ can also be seen against the background of perverted interest of white men in black women which the white women countered through hiring men to do traditionally work reserved for women. Though he is a victim of colonial denigration, it seems he is a willing horse to serve Manyepo because it guarantees him an important status on the farm. This perception of whites as invincible demigods is also evident in Marume, whose name depicts a fake model of a man. He misconceives his situation of oppression under Manyepo through misplaced reasoning that “a chief’s son is a stranger, a commoner, in other lands’ (Hove, 1988: 25) oblivious of the fact that he himself is a displaced chief’s son and Manyepo, not only a stranger, but a stranger who has usurped the former’s inheritance and chieftainship and treated them as a subhuman species.
This creation of a complicit class of purveyors like Nyati (Chung, 2006) was a colonial trick meant to repress and possibly delay the organisation and subsequent liberation of Africans. Those who were in the employ of government found themselves ‘duty bound’ to protect the hand that fed them. Coupled with minimum levels of political consciousness, individuals like the husband of the Unknown woman or husband to “daughter of Samanyanga” betray the struggle by selling-out the freedom fighters when they came to look for medicine at the hospital where he worked. So historically realistic is Hove that he refers to ZAPU which was one of the political parties to emerge in Zimbabwe as nationalist sentiments gripped Africans. The sell-out husband shows the extent of his mental colonisation when he angrily responds to his wife who has called the freedom fighters “The children of the soil” (Hove, 1988:55) by saying,

Listen to your evil Zapu (sic) spirit. Do you think a few armed gangsters will fight a whole army and win? You must be mad, raving mad. I am a government worker and I do not want to get mixed up in such things (Hove, 1988:55).

Sadly like the case of Mugo in Ngugi’s (1966), A Grain of Wheat the truth about this husband’s role in the struggle comes only after the war. This is not fictitious but true of the strain families faced during the liberation struggle as a result of different allegiances between husband and wife. Even in “War-torn Wife” and “War-time Wife”, in And Now the Poets Speak, (Hove in Kadhani and Zimunya, 1981) captures the strain women faced as a result of the war.

The false consciousness and naive submission of these male characters can maybe be understood against the background of how colonialism presented whites. They posed as demigods who literally had total control over the Africans. The denigration and corruption of African languages and culture through the use of pidgin is all part of the process of disempowering the African because control is not simply a process of possessing power over certain people to be able to instruct them to do certain things. Control can also emanate from language’s ability to influence, shape and determine a people’s wants.... by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they see or imagine no alternative to it or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial (Lukes, 1974 in Donnacha, 2002 cited on www.linguapax.org/congres/taller/taller4/MacDonnacha.html Accessed on 25.04.12).

In a way therefore, the depiction of history by Hove is to show the complex nature of the institution called colonialism.

There is however an incipient rise in consciousness in characters like Muringi and Chatora who feed Manyepo’s dogs on human waste and prove that a dog is a dog. Perhaps Hove is contending that the revolution against colonialism is historically known as a process which took time starting with such acts of passive resistance right up to the armed struggle. This is clearly historical.

Of importance to note also in Bones is the role of women in the whole drama of colonial domination. Not only do women suffer from colonial exploitation, they are also victims of traditional patriarchal system driven by male chauvinism. Marita, having stayed for many years with her husband without conceiving a child, is ostracised and branded witch, hence in her reflections she says:

Then names came...you witch, you day-witch, you who eat the roots of your own womb, devourer of herbs which no herbalist can reverse... (Hove, 1988:14).

It is this male chauvinism which Bones relentlessly attacks through the consistent portrayal of men in negative light. Chisaga is ridiculously presented with his stupid consciousness and obsession with sex to show his desire to show conquest against ‘stubborn’ women like Marita. So narrow minded is Chisaga that the bequeathing of household utensils to Janifa by Marita is seen as a sign that Janifa is Marita’s successor in servitude. There is no due regard to her feelings and this result in Janifa being raped. Marita’s actions in leaving her utensils to Janifa become enigmatic. They can be seen as a gesture to show that the struggle continues even after Marita. Unfortunately, Bones inadvertently seems to suggest that women are weak as Janifa cannot handle the pressure from various angles including from the settler soldiers and she loses her mind. One can also discern the male chauvinistic tendencies in Manyepo. He is so cruel with Marita and other women maybe because Marita stands up to speak against his male authority. Manyepo takes advantage of the state of disempowerment the women are in to further his capitalist motives.
Hove’s literature becomes historical and seeks to expose colonialism for what it is: an “uncivilised civilisation” which comes to strangle the decent civilisation of Africa. This is the reason why in the poem *Red Hills of Home* the persona is bitter about the sacrilegious changes brought by colonialism:

Here on this bit of ground
earth once lay pregnant but now
the sacred hill bleeds
robbed even of her decent name,
her holy cows are milked
by hunger- laden mouths
whose mouths eat man....(Hove, 1985:2).

So uncivilised is colonialism that its advent takes Africans far back in terms of development. Hove further captures this uncivilised nature of colonialism in his poetry on the liberation struggle. Colonialism with its indiscriminate and bloody war machine turns human beings into ‘mincemeat’ as captured in the poem (11) *Remember Nyadonia* in Wild’s (1988:48) *Patterns of Poetry* where Hove writes that,

They go on to say
Nyadzonia was worse
For shade if you looked
You hid in the flesh of man
Man, only man that’s black.
And for toys if you wished
You picked a new born baby
Well sliced for your mincemeat...

It is with revulsion to note in the poem that though Nyadzonia massacre was heinous, it was only ‘worse’ and not worst and yet one can feel the fresh pain in the persona. In yet another poem on the massacre, “Nyadzonia” in *Red Hills of Home*, Hove moans: “Oh the smell of pain/Nyadzonia! Nyadzonia” (Hove, 1985:65). The same emotions of horror and pain are echoed in *Bones* through Janifa’s observations of the state Marita was in after having been taken for interrogation by colonial soldiers:

They brought you here half dead, smelling of real death blood,
not the kind of blood that comes from a goat’s slit throat,
that is the blood of meat, not the blood of death which I smelt
from the wounds on Marita’s body (Hove, 1988:62).

Events at Nyadzonia are also a reminder of the complicit role played by fellow Africans during the war against colonialism. This betrayal of fellow Africans by their fellow brothers and sisters often resulted in gruesome massacres of women and children in refugee centres outside Zimbabwe. One such case is the case of Nyadzonia in Mozambique. Chung (2006) observes that the Nyadzonia massacre was a result of a sell-out known as Nyati. Nyati’s terrible betrayal is also depicted by Nemi Tichapedza in his poem “Nyadzonia” in *And Now The Poets Speak*:

Nyadzonia was filled with life and movement
Vibrating with songs, sounds and echoes
Of Chimurenga
And brothers were forced to sup the bile
Of the struggle
Sisters were even harder,
Rejecting the foreign laws.
But Nyati!
After sharing a common pace
Why did you wish them dead?
To ring the bells that called
And called for them to be heard no more?

This confirms that Hove captures historical reality as seen by the eyes of the ordinary man, especially the oppressed black indigenous inhabitants of Zimbabwe.
Of interest to note is the depiction of the freedom fighters as "children of the soil" (Hove, 1988:55). This is a term fraught with nationalist sentiments about Africa being a birthright. This shows the strong bond between the African and land, a relationship which is sacred and sanctified at birth through the burial of the umbilical code in the soil. Dzvairo in Kadhani and Zimunya (1981:13) in the poem "Birthright" views the ritual performed at birth as a commission given to the African to guard jealously the land as an infinite heritage:

They took my umbilical cord  
And buried it  
In the fertile soil of the field nearby  
Mingling me with the soil  
On which blood was to fall  
Giving me birthright  
To guard dutifully and jealously  
With pride and reverence.

It is also an admission to the critical omnipotent role of the dead ancestors who are buried in the soil and still maintain links with the living through giving insight, foresight and protection.

It is Hove’s design to depict colonialism in a way which seeks to show its ugliness. Colonial brutality verges on nauseating cannibalism and madness, hence human beings are turned into 'mincemeat' to show the brutality (Hove in Kadhani and Zimunya, 1981). This colonial madness and barbarism is why in the poem “Death of a Soldier” in And Now the Poets Speak Hove credits the slain freedom fighter with “christened hate” to show that the soldier is justified in hating whites. The soldier dies to “haunt the soulless” who happen to be the white settlers. Padmore (1936), a Pan-Africanist, cited in Rodney (1972:223) declares that "The black man certainly has to pay dearly for carrying the white man's burden"; indeed the white man is soulless if colonialism is anything to go by. Nyoni in Pu and Liu (2012:685), argues that the myth of Africa as a dark continent and a burden for the white man is captured in Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” which urged whites to

Take up the White Man’s Burden  
Send forth the best ye breed  
Go send your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need...  
Your new-caught sullen peoples  
Half devil and half child  
(Kipling in Nyoni cited in Pu and Liu, 2012: 685).

Kadhani and Zimunya (1981:27) in an apparent rejection of Kipling’s thinking, depict colonialism as a “BLACK MAN'S BURDEN”, a complete rebuttal of colonialism as a civilising mission for Africa.

Colonialism being a vehicle of imperialism does not spare any facet of the African’s life because “Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world...” (Ngugi, 1981:2). The poem “Red Hills of Home” captures this cultural dimension of colonialism shown when the red hills have now been robbed of a decent name and have probably been given a colonial one. Ngugi (1981:3) is very critical of this cultural imperialism especially in the area of language because the net effect is to

annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.

It is almost an uncontested fact that Hove seeks to show the history of colonialism as a history defined by the West’s adventure to take Africa backwards. There is a clear indication that in both prose and poetry Hove is constantly seized with the history of how Zimbabwe was subjugated by colonial rule.

Part of Hove’s objective in his writings on colonialism is to show the entrapment of peasants and workers in Zimbabwe during the war of liberation. These peasants and workers are torn between the need to support the colonial establishment and supporting the freedom fighters. Supporting either of the two entails severe consequences should one be caught. This entrapment is shown through Marita who when asked by the freedom fighters whether Manyepo is good or bad chooses to protect him on unrealistic reasoning in her rhetoric question to Janifa: “What do you think his mother will say when she hears that another woman sent her son to his death?” (Hove, 1988:64). One can also discern in Marita’s actions the fear of a backlash from the settler forces once they get to know it. This might be part of the reason why scholars like Zhuwarara (2001) argue that Hove’s presentation of women in Bones is not realistic. Marita is seen here as an idealistic woman especially if one looks at the abuse she has suffered under Manyepo. Manyepo has inflicted both visible and invisible wounds and scars on women as confirmed by Marita when she declares that,
Most of us women are one big scar, a scar as big as the Chenhoro dam from which farmer Manyepo waters his crops, vast, never drying. I will say to you, I am one big wound, my child (Hove, 1988:13).

She is given only a cup of beans as her ration for food because she has no child on the farm hence her protection of Manyepo can only be explained in idealistic terms. Historically, scholars like Raftopulos and Mlambo (2009) argue that women suffered the worst under colonialism. Through Marita’s presentation with cracked feet and bare breasts (Hove, 1988) labouring relentlessly on Manyepo’s farm, colonialism is seen to defy any definition of civilisation. Manyepo is like Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, who sets out as an emissary of “pity and (sic) science and progress” (Conrad, 2012:49) but gets to Africa and presides “at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites” (Conrad, 2012:102). Marlow eventually confirms that Kurtz had lived in Africa as a dark shadow, “darker than the shadow of the night” (Conrad, 2012:152). Similarly, real darkness lurks in Manyepo’s heart and disproves any grandstanding about civilisation.

It is also interesting to note that Ian Smith, one of the colonial prime ministers of Rhodesia, had a farm in Shurugwi which had, in its proximity, the Gwenhoro Dam. By giving Manyepo’s farm as Chenhoro, perhaps Hove wants to create echoes of reality in the readers to reinforce the historical realism in *Bones*. One can even suggest that Manyepo represents Smith who presided as prime minister over Zimbabwe during the times of nationalist struggle for independence until he was defeated in the elections of 1980.

In the depiction of the Second Chimurenga, it is without doubt that *Bones* and poems in *Red Hills of Home* capture history. The history is captured from both the oral traditions and the factual accounts of historians who have minimum biases. Freedom fighters during the liberation struggle were a subject of counter propaganda from the colonial government and from the side of the fighters themselves. Janifa in *Bones* says,

> Do they not say terrorists eats people without roasting them?  
> Do they not say a terrorist takes the wives of other men, sleeps with them before the eyes of their very husbands, then asks them to roast the children for him? (Hove, 1988: 10).

The sell-out husband shows how the settler regime portrayed the freedom fighters: misguided, ill-equipped and poorly trained whilst the freedom fighters seen from the nationalist side are presented as rational and reasonable guarantors of freedom. It is only logical to say that Hove seeks to make readers believe that indeed freedom fighters are liberators given the exploitation and brutality perpetrated by the colonial regime. Whilst Marita comes back from interrogation by soldiers “torn like a piece of cloth” and bleeding from the ears (Hove, 1988:60) and having been raped, on the contrary, freedom fighters do not harm anyone when they visit Manyepo’s farm. Hove seems to peddle the myth about the civility and fairness of freedom fighters which is however disputed by more realistic accounts of the war in *Harvest of Thorns* (Chinodya, 1989) and *Effortless Tears* (Kanengoni, 1993) where the freedom fighters quarrel among themselves and even order gruesome executions of parents by their own children.

Perhaps *Bones* glosses over the weaknesses within the band of freedom fighters to pursue the writer’s objective of showing that the Second Chimurenga is a manifestation of the ‘resurrection’ of ancestral bones rising in the spirit of war. Hove therefore seems to buy into the polarised ideological propaganda between the settlers and nationalists. He does seem to present both the settler soldiers and freedom fighters in a biased fashion. *Bones’* depiction of the struggle for Zimbabwe is therefore, to a limited extent, partisan.

The historicity of *Bones* and *Red Hills of Home* goes beyond the liberation struggle to give a glimpse of the aftermath of the liberation period. Floodgates of hope are opened in the formerly oppressed masses when independence comes. Even mothers whose children had gone to the war like Marita go to look for them. The liberation period, however, seems to be an antithesis in terms of expectations. Those who have taken the reins of power seem not to have taken conscious and deliberate effort to go to the peasants and the generality of the population to address their challenges and heal the wounds, but instead seem to engage in corrupt self enriching practices as depicted in the poem “Entrance Next Door” in *Red Hills of Home* where the magistrate is in jail for having raped a witness in a rape case and in “Inaugural Thoughts” the state president meditates his own selfish destiny:

> I am renewed  
> in newly-made headloads of commitment.  
> When my old load wears out,  
> new legs grow like a lizard’s tail.  
> Then these treading feet  
> continue the same old song  
> heard from afar  
> (Hove, 1985:50).
It is such critical people like the president that Hove seems to be reminding of their obligations to serve the people. In the poem “If you stay in comfort too long” in Red Hills of Home Hove reminds the leaders of their roles in case they get lost in the comfort of their newly found riches:

You will forget
the thirst, the cracked dusty lips
of the woman in the valley
on the way to the headman who isn’t there
(Hove, 1985:3).

It is disheartening to note that structures of government seem to be entirely in the hands of colonially brainwashed elements that are still soaked in the inferiority complex and self hatred induced by colonialism. Historically, Chung (2006) notes that new government programmes like Education with Production were frustrated by colonial remnants holding positions in the civil service. The disregard for Marita and her resultant pauper’s burial are things least expected in a free Zimbabwe. Some elements still smart from colonial nostalgia because the mortuary attendant says,

It is strange what this independence of ours has brought
into some people’s heads. This stubbornness couldn’t
have been heard during the time of white man’s rule:
the woman would be sitting in prison now, waiting for
tomorrow morning. But now anybody can stand up and
say they rule the piece of land on which they stand. Shit
(Hove, 1988:81).

Such pathetic colonial nostalgia is a historical reality which faced the new independent Zimbabwe. It is only the Unknown Woman who feels for Marita and wants to take her body for burial. Given the magnitude of negativity shown by Hove in male characters, it might also be sensible to suggest that Hove does not seem to have confidence in a government which will be run by men.

In the poem “Independence Song” the persona observes that

We had a noose round our necks
So we tugged,
And cut the choking rope,
Independence came,
But we still had the noose
around our neck
(Hove, 1985:35).

Hove in the poem, further notes that Africans should blame themselves for begging to be dragged on by the former colonisers “in the name of development” yet “the land is here” (Hove, 1985:35) in Africa. Perhaps one can also argue that Hove in the poem “Independence Song” is being simplistic about the dynamics of power in the post independent era. Land rights still remained with whites and any resettlement exercise was to proceed on a willing buyer willing seller basis (Alexander, 2006). This was so because the independence was a compromise arrangement between the warring parties. To further show that the challenges which compounded the reclamation of Africa’s stolen heritage, at independence, the colonial government’s debt was “passed on” to the new government (Bond and Manyanya, 2002:44). One feels that if justice was to be done, the new government should not have taken responsibility for actions of the oppressive colonial regime. The oppressed cannot and should not assume responsibilities over what their former oppressors did to them. It was only fair that land would revert to its rightful owners without any payment.

Hove’s reasoning in “Independence Song” that the land is here in Zimbabwe, seems euphoric and contradictory to his more realistic depiction of land ownership in Bones after independence. The failure of independence to address the critical issue of land is shown when Manyepo brags in his open declaration that, “There is nothing the government in the city can do. I rule here...” (Hove, 1988: 99-100). The fact that Manyepo still holds the land which was the prime target of the liberation struggle is an indictment of the independence which appears to be hollow and sham. Janifa in her reflections about Marita after her death observes that, “Things are still as they were when your feet walked here”. Ngugi (1986) argues that the changes which occurred in newly independent African states were only on superficial level as the erstwhile colonisers maintained their grip by proxy because
The class that took over power after independence was an underdeveloped middleclass which was not interested in putting the national economy in a new footing, but in becoming an intermediary between Western interests and the people, a handsomely paid business agent of the Western bourgeoisie (Ngugi, 1986:8).

Greedy politicians take precious time to discuss ways of enriching themselves and Hove sarcastically refers to the post independence parliament in the poem “Child’s Parliament” in Red Hills of Home because,

Over the radio
We hear there is a crisis
Members of Parliament demand higher salaries,
So there is no debate about us
(Hove, 1985:43).

These greedy politicians-cum businessmen like Gitutu waGatanguru in Devil on the Cross are depicted as those among the Africans who went at night to free the devil from the cross Ngugi’s (1986). The disillusionment Hove shows in his writings is shared by his contemporaries like Musengezi (1984) who lampoons in the play The Honourable MP, selfish politicians who take advantage of their positions to self enrich themselves. MP Pfende has been away from his constituency for two years and returns to lie to the electorate that he was “travelling all over the world begging for money to develop my constituency” (Musengezi, 1984:41) and yet he was having a good time with prostitutes in Harare. Hove is thus living up to the definition of a writer as the conscience of society.

Manyepo’s farm is therefore a microcosm of the Zimbabwean social, economic, religious and political landscape during the colonial and post colonial period. Through Manyepo’s farm, Hove manages to effectively portray the land question, which question lies at the heart of the armed struggle for Zimbabwe as well as the repression of women under a male chauvinistic society.

In Bones and Red Hills of Home, Hove is conscious of history and has the conviction that the voiceless have to tell their story, a story of dispossession, suffering, disease and death. His characters and personas are fairly typical of the characters that are caught up in the maze of colonialism. Though there are some historical omissions for example on the decisive role of Christianity in the colonisation of Zimbabwe, Hove’s account of history is largely reliable. His characters are to a large extent representative images of the generality of Zimbabwean sons and daughters reeling under colonial subjugation.

REFERENCES


