

Review

Representations of the land reform programme in selected Zimbabwean short stories and Mutasa's *Sekai, Minda Tave Nayo (Sekai, We Now Have the Land)*: A fait accompli?

Jairos Gonye¹, Thamsanqa Moyo^{2*} and Wellington Wasosa³

¹Curriculum Studies Department, Great Zimbabwe University, P O Box 1235 Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

²Department of English and Performing Arts, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe.

³Department of African Languages and Literature, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe.

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The issue of the Land Redistribution Programme in the Zimbabwean literary geography is vexed and moot. This is because, like the politics which energised it, it is embedded in different ideological, social, economic, racial, gender and ethnic standpoints. It is this that makes some writers see it as a grand act of final decolonisation whose intention was to empower landless black natives. On the other hand, others see its bloody and violent nature and the attendant survival imperatives as something that will have to be addressed in future because it created other imbalances. There are yet others who try to straddle the two extreme positions by looking at the programme's negatives and positives. The research interrogates how this momentous period in Zimbabwe's life is represented in literature and why the different writers take the positions they take. In doing this, the researchers use selected English short stories produced after 2000 and a Shona novel on the same issue. The stories are written by both white and black writers.

Key Words: Zimbabwe Jambanja, Chimurenga, Fast Track Land Reform, Xenophobic dispossession, land imbalances.

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at post 2000 literary representations of Zimbabwe's land reform programme. It analyses four short stories written in English and one Shona novel with the intention of assessing writers' interpretation of the completeness of Zimbabwe's land reform. The paper assesses how Zimbabwean writers fictionalize this phenomenon, internationally depicted as controversial. Whilst selected writers present the 2000 and after land reform as an apparently accomplished fact, there seems to be various inherent weaknesses and controversies the writers diversely grapple to explain away, expose or criticize. This paper examines how and explains why authors writing at the same time about the same histo-

rical phenomenon bring up apparently competing narratives, especially where it concerns gender participation and equity, racial relations, ethnic prejudice and violent or non-violent process.

It is probably trite to state that literature is a product of its time and that it captures the pressures, controversies, failures and successes of an era. It captures the pulse and beat of society. This is why Joseph Conrad, in Davies (1987), aptly points out that "fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing". Zimbabwean writers have tried to fictionalize this momentous, controversial period, in the life of the nation. It is therefore justifiable to choose fiction to assist us discuss these 'land invasions' of the 21st century. In addition to reproducing reality, fiction writers have the propensity to create fictional worlds where everything and every behaviour are possible.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: thamsmoyo@gmail.com.

Writing about colonial fictional myths of the Kenyan Mau, Maughan-Brown (1985) says, "where the propaganda potential of his/her medium is concerned, the writer of fiction has several advantages over the writer of non-fiction". Such a writer can borrow from fact without recourse to concrete evidence or can disguise some facts for a propaganda purpose. Such is the fictional reality we encounter in the stories where, for instance, females could actively participate in land repossession in one story or be completely sidelined in another or where, without denying possibility, white fictional protagonists are champions and advocates of that process which ordinarily targets fellow white farmers. This can be appreciated if we consider Maughan-Brown's (1985) observation that "fiction is the production of ideology" and "... that an ideologically determined selectivity is operative in the production of every aspect of the fictional world offered to the reader". Davies (1987) observes that literature makes sense because of the ideology in those novels; novels "embody ideologies; and they promulgate ideology." Their very origin was necessitated by the need to propagate a particular ideology. This ideology manifests itself ".....in a fixed pattern of imagery and belief.... a set of permitted modes of seeing and saying; with its own horizons, its way of providing certain perceptions and rendering others unthinkable, or aberrant, or extreme. And these are done surreptitiously.... (Davies, 1987). Such an attempt to hide or obscure contradictions is the function of ideology that Althusser (1971) develops in his concept of interpellation. Through interpellation, the targets of ideology are covertly name-called and summoned to acquiesce to the 'obviousness' of their support regarding certain potentially ideological matters (Maughan-Brown, 1985). The research interrogates how short story writers are engaged in constituting their readers as subjects through their selection of ideologically representative characters and through sanctifying the motives and processes of the otherwise contested land reform in Zimbabwe that took place in 2000 and beyond.

It is crucial to state from the start that in the Zimbabwean iconography, land is a site of violence, it drips with blood. It is a metaphor of conquest and dispossession that dates back to the arrival of European settlers in the 1890s and that was the major cause of the liberation struggle. Zimbabwe was a settler colony where a few individual white farmers (4000) owned thousands of hectares of land while millions of indigenous Zimbabweans (8 million) were crowded on rocky, sandy overused land. The land was the primary reason for the 1896 and 1970s *chimurengas* (liberation war). Following independence in 1980 there has been gradual land redistribution based on the willing-buyer willing-seller principle agreed at the 1979 Lancaster House Conference and confirmed in the April 1980 Robert Mugabe Reconciliation speech. After the first decade of independence, Zimbabwe, the erstwhile bread basket of Southern Africa was beset with

the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) related problems, corruption, cronyism and inflation at the back of unbudgeted ZWD 50 000 pay-offs in 1997 to a restive war veteran class. Mounting labour conflicts associated with ESAP lay-offs and general disgruntlement with ineffective government policies strengthened the Zimbabwe Trade Union which from championing job actions and strikes to the creation of a labour, students and civil society supported the allegedly Westminster-funded political opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). No sooner had the government realised that it had created enemies of its former followers, had lost popularity and could even lose power, than it embarked on the populist land policy and a revival of the war of liberation rhetoric of 'land for the people'. Rhetoric about the land (soil) as never having been fully liberated and the white farmers as 'unrepentant' and selfish racists who did not want to share wealth with the black majority was intensified. There was a problem, and the cause of the problem had to be identified and urgent solutions implemented. But the major point of contest remains why the accelerated and seemingly unplanned and violent redistribution of land only took place twenty years after independence. Was it a genuine attempt by the ruling elite to right racially skewed land imbalances? If so, why was there no proper planning so that it ceased to be fast track? Why did this land redistribution coincide with the emergence on the political scene of a strong opposition party that threatened to consign the ruling party to oblivion? Why did this take place at a time the economy was on a free-fall after the Black Friday of 14th of November 1997 when war veterans were given ZWD 50 000 each as a payout for having fought the war which saw the local currency crushing from around ten dollars to about thirty dollars to the US dollar within hours of trade?

Even among the proponents of this land reform programme there has never been full agreement on how to describe or name the process; hence, the three names are often used. The first name, Fast Track Land Reform, suggests an aspect of urgency but within the confines of Zimbabwean law. So-called 'idle' land was identified, gazetted and the former white owners evicted with the assistance of the repressive state apparatus, police and courts. The new farmers would eventually be issued with offer letters. The second name, Third Chimurenga, brings in political justification through linking the current process to two previous wars over land in Zimbabwe. The term sanitises the violence and blood since all wars and revolutions (*chimurenga*) are bloody and violent. In the First *chimurenga*, blacks were defeated but promised a more successful rebellion in future. Nehanda, the spiritual architect of that uprising declared, on the point of hanging "My bones will rise again". In the Second *chimurenga* of the 1970s, the blacks won majority rule but the whites retained ownership of the most fertile lands. The Third Chimurenga should, logically, finally "settle" the land

question, hence the slogan “Zimbabwe shall never be a colony again!” Yet another version for the programme is *Jambanja*. *Jambanja* is an ordinary person’s term to describe the chaotic and lawless manner of occupation witnessed on the formerly white farms. Even those not genuinely interested in land took advantage to cut firewood and poach game for sale. In this version of the process, disorder preceded law. However, people who had been used to forcefully remove the white farmers were in turn removed by those who had sent them. The latter had better political connections and were legally supported. One now had to have an offer letter from the Ministry of Lands in order to remain on the land. Such is the scenario that fiction writers find themselves creating a discourse and a suitable language for bridging literary imagination and historical reality.

As stated earlier, land is an emotive issue and this is worsened by polarisation along political lines. The contested nature of the reform makes it amenable to the vagaries of the emphasis on the ‘spectacle’. This is the tendency in depicting a literary reality to stress the spectacular whether positive or negative. This tends to immobilise and subvert creative ways of generating alternative and dynamic knowledge about this aspect of Zimbabwe’s chequered history. This is because the oppositional renditions to the land reform programme stress one dimension even as it tends to generalise it without a dispassionate analysis of its advantages and disadvantages. On the other hand, those that extol it view the programme as an unmitigated success and overlook the issue of rights and the violence inherent in the realisation of the programme. Scoones et al., (2010) have observed that these conflicting narratives about this period “do not of course come from nowhere; they are constructed by particular people, and are always positioned in a wider political arena.” Implied in this is the fact that the analysis of the Land Reform Programme by literary writers is politically and historically embedded in a situation of “who supports who” in the violent and bloody agrarian arena. Through fiction writers organise support for real national programmes or invite censure of rabid government processes. The land occupations and reoccupations in Zimbabwe are historical phenomena that attract both non-fiction and fictitious discoursing. The Zimbabwean literature about land, like Hyden (1978) observed about the Mau-Mau, can similarly be seen to offer examples of “embedding”, that straddling between logical reality and fictitious imagination, discourse. According to Hyden (1978) discourse on land “constitutes the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyse objectively” and is both interpretive and pre-interpretive because “... it is always as much about the nature of interpretation itself as it is about subject matter which is the manifest occasion of its elaboration”. Thus, the representations of the Zimbabwean land reform programme are equally not unproblematic. Those who support it see it as the final act of decolonisation and that

by its very nature decolonisation is a violent process that is likely to leave in its wake casualties. This is why Chenjerai Hunzvi, leader of the war veterans, blustered that “like in any revolution, the path is always bloody, and that is to be expected, and hence no one should raise eyebrows over the deaths of four white farmers” (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). The resort to war time rhetoric of bellicosity masks the reality that Zimbabwe was in a community of nations supposed to respect rights. The barbarism of this xenophobic brand of land “reappropriation” was as brutal as the whites were in the late 1890s and 1900s except that in Zimbabwe this occurred in the 21st century, when civilised methods of statecraft ought to have been used. But the question that begs for an answer is whether this was a spontaneous show of land hunger or a deliberately created and manipulated process by political Rasputins of Zimbabwe. Scoones et al. (2010) problematize the issue as follows:

There remains much academic dispute as to whether this was a peasant-led movement, emerging from below and facilitated by war veterans and the landless, motivated by a genuine desire to achieve the promises of the liberation war and so create a new democratic revolution, or one orchestrated from the top in a desperate attempt by a political elite to maintain power which resulted in extreme violations of rights and precipitated economic collapse.

At any rate the real losers were the majority of farm workers who had been eking out a living on these commercial farms and, in the main, people associated with the opposition party MDC, and the old and infirm who could not join these invasions. Those that gained the most were people who were card carrying members of the ruling party and security personnel. These often ended up holding more than one farm under different names (Scoones et al., 2010). Hammar et al. (2003) posit the view that the seeming failure of the Land Reform can be viewed as a synecdoche of the failure of the masculinist brand of nationalism that tends to elide women from the equation of land redistribution.

The most egregious feature of this programme is the fact that it becomes clouded in political posturing and xenophobic name-calling. It is interesting to note that politicians, journalists and fiction writers are all engaged in producing fiction of the fast track land reform. The dominant ideology of post-2000 Zimbabwe is sovereignty, anti-white ethnocentrism and anti-minority exclusivity demonstrated in spiteful vitriol against minorities such as the so-called totem-less foreigner, gays and whites. Robert Mugabe, at the height of the land invasions set the tone for xenophobic dispossession when he said his party should:

Continue to strike fear in the heart of the

whitemen, they must tremble. The Whiteman is not indigenous to Africa. Africa is for Africans (Daily News, 15 December, 2000 Under 'Mugabe attacks whites-again').

The appeal to a sterile Pan-Africanism rings hollow when one considers the fact that farm workers and blacks in the cities were stigmatised as totem-less and denied land because of their perceived association with the opposition. This discourse of totemism is an attempt to inaugurate boundaries for purposes of inclusion and exclusion based on arbitrary criteria. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) see this brand of nationalism as problematic because it "marks boundaries as it marks bodies; it excludes some identities and subjectivities; just as it nominates others for inclusion." The dichotomisation of citizens into foreigner, stranger, authentic Zimbabwean and sell out resulted in an uneven dishing out of land to cronies and party members. This created a sense that real land redistribution is yet to be done in a fair, transparent and planned way. Ironically, ZANU-PF insists that the Land Reform Programme is irreversible despite strident calls for a land audit to make sure the right people got the land and that no one owns more than one farm.

It is the intention of this research to interrogate whether writers really engage with and delve into the nitty-gritty of motive or social dynamics at play or simply chronicle and generalise the exclusions and inclusions. The researchers want to criticize the ways in which the writers handle the genuine need for land. Do the writers wrestle with the methods used to make land available, does the end simply justify the means to them? Do they insinuate a sense of finality in the whole process that has, in all honesty, empowered some of the hitherto landless people or is there something unfinished about the whole business?

EVOCATIONS OF THE LAND REFORM PROGRAMME IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES IN WRITING STILL: NEW STORIES FROM ZIMBABWE

The story "Maize" by Chirere (2003) is a fictionalisation of the land Reform Programme as a fait accompli that has benefitted the vulnerable groups like women. Through this story, Chirere dramatises the fact that despite the masculinist nationalism that often characterised the programme, some women achieved personal fulfillment through emotional and often sentimental attachment to the land. This is why the narrator says of the woman beneficiary:

There is a time for everything, she would say to herself...in the middle of her still largely uncultivated acres. She was, nevertheless, satisfied that she had come, beneath her feet

was her land, her soil: soft virgin earth where you could dig deeply without ever striking rock (Chirere, 2003).

The writer is insinuating that in this way part of the land imbalances was righted, that the final act of decolonisation had been achieved. He is intimating that already new social and neighbourly relationships have been created out of the redistribution exercise. To that end there is an acceptance that it is an established fact that cannot be undone. But there is a sense in which the programme is being critiqued. The only farming implement that the woman possesses is a hoe with which to farm competitively. In other words, the redistribution of land, noble as it was, was done without corresponding support to the newly resettled farmers so that they had the resources to use in their new-found land. This is why the greater part of the given land still remains uncultivated. Besides the emotional attachment to the land, and aside from subsistence farming, nothing much can be expected from this farmer. The farmer can be viewed as metonymic of noble and under-resourced and unskilled farmers likely to result in shortages of food in Zimbabwe. This shows the unplanned, arbitrary and fast track nature of the programme such that one cannot but conclude that political imperatives of survival and expediency were at play here. The arbitrary nature is further buttressed by the fact that the man, the visitor to the woman, appears deserving of the land but does not have it. Thus the story presents the Land Reform Programme as Janus-faced.

The story "The Sins of the Fathers" by Charles Mungoshi shows the violent, acquisitive and often whimsical aspect of the land reappropriation. The story captures the fact that high-ranking party officials arbitrarily took land owned by the white man not through the hastily and controversially enacted legal instruments but by using party roughnecks to strike fear into the heart of the white man. Rwafa, a ZANU-PF former security minister represents such avaricious government officials. The story suggests that the programme was meant to benefit these party gurus personified by Rwafa. This is why the narrator says:

As with other high-ranking officials in the ruling party, Rondo's father had had his eye on a certain farm in the Ruwa area, which was presently owned by a white man, a Mr. Quayle (Mungoshi, 2003:149).

Implicit in the statement is that these officials used the genuine need for land to fish in the troubled waters for self-aggrandizement. This has nothing to do with righting historical land imbalances, but sheer political careerism. Rwafa represents a violent and chaotic brand of nationalism that makes nonsense of the law and property rights. Such an anarchic brand of xenophobic dispos-

ession is dramatised by “youths singing *chimurenga* (war) songs and waving ugly-looking clubs. Some even had bows and arrows and spears” (ibid: 150). The same youths were “slogan-chanting” (Mungoshi, 2003). This implies that this is state-sanctioned and therefore not a spontaneous uprising by the ordinary people. Due to the whimsical nature of its execution, it means that any government official could just wake up, gather a few party youths and invade any farm. These were the same people who ended up owning more than one farm and, in the process, created further land imbalances in favour of party apparatchiks.

Ironically, Mzamane, Rwafa’s unwanted Ndebele colleague whose daughter is married to his son, represents an alternative version to the violent brand of land reappropriation. He is also a ruling party official but prefers a more humane approach to land redistribution. He insists that black and white are united by their basic humanity and bona fide citizenship to the territory called Zimbabwe. He says “let us all remember we are humane” (Mungoshi, 2003:152). He refuses the totalising and essentialising narrative that all whites are imperialists who unfairly or violently got their land. But in the poisoned political discourse of ZANU-PF, Mzamane can easily be seen as a sell out, a person who does not measure up to Mugabe’s *amadoda sibili* (real men).

In Alexander Kanengoni’s “The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror”, the writer employs a metaphor of the reflective mirror wherein members of opposing races consider the reversibility or irreversibility of the violence both races have perpetrated in the name of land possession. It delves deep into essential humanity to suggest that beneath the skin, people of all races bear the same emotions and attachments to land. The reflective mirror is used as a metaphor of perception wherein the blacks perceive the whites through the same obscuring lenses the white colonisers used to see them. Both protagonists struggle to simultaneously suppress and express their feelings and connection to the land. This reflects the long standing land dispute pitting the black and white races of Zimbabwe for over a century. In this brief, emotional encounter, Kanengoni threads in the complex matrix of race relations with the land as a determining factor. It turns out the feelings for the land the blacks claim are the same feelings whites have. The question becomes, therefore, should anyone have dispossessed another of land, or if not, should a more reasonable format be used? People’s relations towards the land have always determined their human relations. It is in this highly explosive encounter that both Kanengoni’s narrator and old Fleming bring their horizons together through a hermeneutical process to disabuse themselves of their prejudices. Thereafter, grounds for a better understanding begin to present themselves. Both men begin to examine the barbarity demonstrated by their respective races in the manner they grabbed land from each other.

By granting narrative authority to a black first person narrator, Kanengoni dramatises the subjectivity characterising the black-white relations viz-a-vis the land question in Zimbabwe. The newly resettled narrator-farmer confesses that all along he has believed that all the white farmers he has encountered are all the same - dominating. He has been so categorical in his forthrightness about the so-called proofs of their racial superiority:

You saw it in the elevated look in their eyes; you saw it in the way they wanted to control the discussion, reducing you to a mere listener. The most exasperating thing was their indifference (Kanengoni, 2003).

By using the self-righteous point of view of the recently empowered black, Kanengoni successfully demonstrates that African characters are also masters of self-deception and experts at stereotyping the other - the white counterpart. While that perception justifies land redistribution, it exposes the narrator as a replica of what he detests in the white- ‘other’.

To present the land reform as a *fait accompli*, Kanengoni manipulates Old Fleming’s contradictory character. At one level, he represents liberal and progressive minded whites who have embraced the Zimbabwean government’s call for a correction of the racial land imbalances. He boldly criticises all whites who refuse to see the desirability of allocating enough land to blacks. He also urges Tony Blair’s British Government to accept responsibility for imperialist Rhodes and his British South Africa Company (BSAC)’s land usurpations, or at least to implement the agreement reached at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979 concerning Britain’s commitment to compensate the whites whose land would be repossessed.

To give the whole process a legal veneer and human face, we see Old Fleming offering farming assistance, agricultural and technical skills to his new African neighbours. While it is public knowledge that at the beginning of 2000 the government of Zimbabwe endorsed a violent, oftentimes bloody eviction of the whites, often without institutional technical support, Kanengoni’s narrative depicts an apparently orderly, legal redistribution which is supported by one of the former landowners. By furthering the narrative of the land redistribution using the supporting perspective of old Fleming, Kanengoni justifies the means of land redistribution. It is the white character, old Fleming, who is used to chide the British for renegeing on their promises to support land redistribution, and to admonish the reactionary members of his race who want to futilely resist redistribution or challenge it. On the whole, then, it is some reactionary whites not prepared to coexist with new black farmers who taint the merits of an otherwise well-intentioned, long overdue programme. The black govern-

ment cannot, therefore, be blamed for the British Government's abdication of responsibility.

Kanengoni's framing of old Fleming as a bark from the old tree suggests the near-impossibility of convincing the former racist of the necessity for equitable land redistribution, hence rendering compulsive repossession inevitable. Old Fleming becomes a relic of empire, a representative of the bitter, nostalgic white man whose land boundaries have been tampered with by the upstart African bureaucrat. Old Fleming still harps about the invasion into the Queen's Crown Lands by the Department of Lands people who have come to demarcate land. Kanengoni's desire to sanitise the land reform finds him representing a facade of lawful pegging and demarcation by the Ministry of Lands personnel. But old Fleming, the moral foil of his story, dismisses this demonstration as an invasion of private property. Old Fleming, nonetheless, realises the inevitability of land redistribution. But he has not fully accepted the black compatriot as an equal human being, with an equal passion for skilful farming on commercial basis. He still represents monarchical authority in post independent Zimbabwe which suggests that the concept of empire is difficult to uproot from the colonials' consciousness. Cohn (1983), writing in "Representing Authority in Victorian India", says "in conceptual terms, the British, who had started their rule as 'outsiders', became 'insiders' by vesting in their monarch the sovereignty of India through the Government of India Act of 2 August 1858." The Land Acts in colonial Rhodesia, likewise, transferred land ownership from Zimbabweans to the BSAC. Africans became subjects of the British and the Queen was bound by honour to control and protect them.

Nevertheless, old Fleming is prepared to shed off his prejudices and stereotypical notions. It is old Fleming who tries to initiate communication between his neighbours and himself, a direct rebuttal of what the narrator has suggested in his judgmental opening statements about the whites being domineering and indifferent. The scene ironically presents the African as the one who is actually keeping aloof, avoiding a potentially mutual debate over land. The intention is to present the land as an emotive issue, especially between the races.

The land is thus presented as the most defining factor in the lives of Zimbabweans, black and white. Colonialism in Zimbabwe was characterised by settlerism, a violently disruptive phenomenon. However, for black Zimbabweans, the connection between Africans and the land is something outsiders may not comprehend. Apart from being an economic, political and spiritual source of power and influence, the land is where older generation Zimbabweans have their umbilical cords buried. As the naming ritual in Vera's *Nehanda* dramatises, Zimbabwean children are literally "combined with the soil". In "The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror", the haunting nature of land dispossession causes Kanengoni to

reminisce and complain about how the earlier 20th century forceful evictions of the blacks to create the Beatrice-Charter farms near Chivhu town and others had caused loss of valuables symbolised in his puppy, Machena. A violent dispossession, especially in a context of a restive, overcrowded 'land hungry' population chafing under harsh economic hardships was, therefore, a fait accompli. Commenting on the populations' frustrations with the market oriented land reforms of early independence, Sadomba and Andrew (2006) say such neoliberal policies buoyed by the IMF and World Bank "conflicted with the agendas of the liberation movements which aimed to bring about independence based on return of the land to the indigenous population."

Fixation with the land as an archetypal motif in Zimbabwean literature is once again dramatised in the story "Universal Remedies", another case of "my own reflection in the mirror" (Brickhill, 2003). "Universal Remedies" uses the land as an organizing point, relations and attitudes to which are edifying. The story is a gender conscious piece which presents women's salvation in a space dominated by patriarchy, as linked to their faithful trust in the nurturing and reproductive generosity of the land, thus ironically raising readers' expectations of a greater gender role in Zimbabwe's imminent land reform. Esi and the white narrator are two females sympathetically linked by their sad understanding of land as a nurturing and healing place. The story of their relationship goes beyond gender and race to humanity. It demonstrates the power of fiction to flatten racial differences and dramatise an ideal relationship wherein a white woman becomes whole, sated through her relationship with a black woman. The women's symbiotic and telepathic relationship becomes the backdrop upon which the author introduces the masculine, masochist fast track land redistribution. Women's suffering under patriarchy does not end at being chased from homesteads they built, being blamed for barren relationships, being abandoned to raise children alone by irresponsible husbands but also being excluded from contemporary national programmes such as land redistribution. Esi's obsession with the vegetable garden and tilling the land is synecdochal of the female group's yearning for fuller control, ownership and maternal handling of the land. By denying Esi a role in the post-2000 Zimbabwe land grab, Brickhill is suggesting that the exclusionist patriarchal tendencies of that movement have no space for the tender hearted such as Esi, who want to challenge the patriarchal order of things. We are told, "her mother had often beaten her to try and make her behave like a 'real' girl. But even then she loved to garden, to feel the earth open before her, to plant her seeds and look after them as they grew" (Brickhill, 2003).

While the story suggests that it is possible to be healed and purged of patriarchy induced wounds through tending the soil as do both abandoned women, these very women are rendered mere spectators in the unfolding

national drama of masculine compulsive re-drawing of land boundaries, a drama whose actors are apparently men, or both men and women but in a patriarchal agenda. The politics of land redistribution is reduced to one angry paragraph by the white narrator, thus making it difficult to accept the exercise as a *fait accompli*:

The politics of the country had taken a turn for the worse when the ruling party had decided, for a reason I never understood, that they would never relinquish power, and were prepared to destroy the whole country to accomplish this. They relentlessly pursued their goal, crushing all opposition – whether real or perceived. White farmers left their farms. For a time Esi thought that perhaps she might be able to get some land, but the land was not given to the likes of her (Brickhill, 2003).

The chillingly detached observer outlook above is obviously an outsider's viewpoint, an outsider struggling to grasp the sense of Zimbabwe's *jambanja*, what Staunton calls the perspective of one "living within a culture other than one's own" (Kanengoni, 2003). That merits for an equitable land redistribution exercise exist in Zimbabwe is never doubted since colonialist land policies had ruthlessly emasculated millions of blacks by alienating their lands in order to benefit only 4000 white farmers. The reason the narrator could not realise was the unaddressed land question, the reason for which the First and Second and the Third Chimurenga wars were declared. In the narrative of the nation, the era covered in that paragraph in Brickhill's story is known as the Third Chimurenga or popular *jambanja* movement – a literal 'war for land' formally owned by white farmers. While land hunger was a genuine grievance in Zimbabwe, that land possession moved from government sanctioned, theatrically staged demonstrations to violent, physical takeovers suggests total loss of grasp of the rule of law or a deliberately calculated political move, taking that the MDC party had recently shaken the ZANU-PF edifice of power through a 'No Vote' campaign against the year 2000 draft constitution and in subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections.

Brickhill's story treads on the contested terrain of gender access and equitability, especially to government programmes such as that of land redistribution. Even well placed ZANU-PF women members have complained about the gender insensitivity of the programme, the lack of protection or existence of threats of selective repossession. A most recent example of women under threat is that of Tracey Mutinhiri, a former ZANU-PF legislator who was recently fired on allegations of fraternising with the rival party while insiders say she is being targeted so that the farm she took from the white farmer can be repossessed by more likeable characters in her former party.

THE PROBLEMATIQUE OF THE LAND REDISTRIBUTION IN D. E. MUTASA'S *SEKAI, MINDA TAVE NAYO*

The land question has excited writers of all kinds and styles, including Shona novelists. Mutasa's novel, *Sekai, Minda Tave Nayo* is a historical analysis of the land reform programme in Zimbabwe. It brings in a gender dimension which makes it unique among the Shona literary works that address the land issue. The main character, Sekai, is the heroine of the land reform process from whom the novel derives its eponymous title. This is expressed in the song sung by the beneficiaries of the land reform programme, praising their heroine's efforts to empower them through championing the programme. The title comes from the lines of the eulogy:

(Sekai Minda tave nayo!
Vasikana simukai mushaine,
Ino inguva yenyu.
Sekai, chiedza unacho...
Sekai!
We now have the land!
Girls arise and shine,
This is our time.
Sekai, you have the light...)
(Mutasa, 2008)

Etymologically, the name 'Sekai' can mean either 'to laugh' in joy or 'to mock' in derision. The title could ambiguously address both the celebratory and defiant mood of Zimbabweans at successfully accomplishing the often controversial land reform programme.

The author supports the land reform programme and views it as the ultimate way of correcting the historical imbalances which were a result of colonialism. By assuming a feminist approach, Mutasa seems to be suggesting that the success and morality of the land reform exercise depend on female participation and ratification. He thus encourages women to take advantage of the ongoing land reform programme in order to assert their presence and position in society as they have been a disadvantaged group in society. Through highlighting Sekai's knowledge, wisdom and successes, the author suggests that there is nothing that can stop women from achieving things men can. He makes it clear from the onset that the novel is about encouraging women to be proactive and free themselves. The dedication urges women against thinking that their subordinate role is natural:

mudzimai hazvirevi kuti hamuna kuenzana
nevanhurume.
Imi ndimi chiedza pasi rose,
Ruzivo rwenyu rwakakosha zvikuru, Utungamiri
hwenyu hune umai mukati.
(This novel was written with the intention to show
that being a girl or a Mother does not say

that you are not equal to men.
 You are the light of this whole world,
 Your knowledge is very important,
 Your leadership is motherly intrinsically).

In this highly historical novel, Mutasa makes use of a variety of sources to ensure objectivity in writing about the land reform programme. These sources include politicians' views such as President Mugabe's interview with the CNN News agency on the sidelines of the 1992 United Nations summit, New York, views of renowned academics in Zimbabwe and abroad, documentaries shown on various television channels, articles in newspapers as well as opinions of ordinary people like migrant-settlers from other countries such as Malawi. These references entrench the reality of what is known as the Zimbabwean land question and its contesting perspectives.

The novel reflects the heroine's views and efforts through the epistolary form, using letters written by Sekai's relatives and former school mates. The land reform is, therefore, presented as a long awaited solution to the traditional marginalisation of females. For instance, because she is a girl child, Sekai had faced problems of accessing education unlike her male siblings. Her father had thought educating her was a waste of resources. However, with her aunt, Rongedza's intervention she manages to attain a degree from the University of Illinois in the United States of America and to work as a Senior Lands Officer during the period of Zimbabwe's land reform programme. This puts to doubt the patriarchal views and values that have tended to undervalue women.

Aunt Rongedza confronts her brother and lambasts him for his sexist attitude. She employs proverbs to criticise and warn her brother for being blinkered; thereby setting the stage for Sekai's role in female emancipation that runs concurrent with the land reform programme:

Chenga ose manhanga hapana risina mhodzi.
 (Cherish all pumpkins, there is none without seeds.)
 Ziva mwana waamai kuti shiri haikanganwi
 dendere rayo uye kuti tsindi haidyi yakafuratira
 mhango yayo
 (Remember, my brother: a bird will not forget its
 nest and a squirrel will not feed far from its
 hiding place).
 (Mutasa, 2008:16).

To fulfil the prophetic words of her aunt, after graduating as a Senior Lands Officer, she builds a beautiful, spacious house for her parents in the rural areas and employs workers to help them with the everyday chores. Her father realises his folly and apologises through Rongedza. He shows his remorse and appreciation by offering Sekai cattle.

During her graduation party at her parents' rural home-

stead, Sekai encourages parents to educate all their children, irrespective of gender, as a way of ensuring their own success in life. In other words, Sekai is saying the success of communities and nations do not rest on the male child alone. It is therefore, not surprising when we find Mutasa foregrounding the gender dimension in the land redistribution exercise. He seems to be saying, though there were some loopholes, that there was an attempt to equitably share land.

Mutasa's support for the idea of an equitable redistribution of land to the majority of blacks is narrated through the life and experiences of the main character, stretching from high school up to the time she becomes a Senior Lands Officer. This is shown through their debates at high school. One of her former schoolmates, Zakaria writes to their friend Upenyu, reminding him about Sekai's assertive contributions during their debates on the necessity of carrying out the land reform programme instead of leaving all the land in the hands of a few white farmers:

Saka kana pari panyaya yokuti vanhu vapiwe
 minda kana kusapiwa minda, ini ndinoti vanhu
 vose vane chido kana ushamwari neivhu
 ngavapihwe ivhu iri. Madzimai zvisinei nekuti
 akaroorwa kana kuti kwete, ngaapihwe pokurima
 kana achida. Izvi zvinoita kuti tiise upfumi
 mumaoko eruzhinji. Ko handiti tinodzidza kuti
 kana vanhu vasina means of production,
 handiti nyika haisimukiri? Nyika zhinji
 dzakabudirira dzakaisa upfumi mumaoko
 oruzhinji?

(When it comes to the debate whether people should be given farms or not, I am of the view that those who have love or attachment to some land should be given this land. Women, whether married or not, should be given land if they like. This will make us economically empower our people. Is not that we learn that if people don't have the means of production, the country will not succeed? Most of the developed countries have put their wealth in the hands of the majority). (Mutasa, 2008:20)

Mutasa also critiques the segregation of women during the land redistribution and thus implores the women to take charge of their affairs and fight against the discrimination by men. He gives voice to his female characters to debate an otherwise already accomplished exercise whose gender insensitivity is commonplace knowledge. The issue of gender imbalances has been noted by Moyo et al. (2009). Various women pressure groups even before the "fast-track" programme have voiced concern over the sidelining of women. These include, among others, the Women Land Lobby Group (WLLG) who advocated that a certain quota of resettled land be reserved for women. Their research revealed that

between 2005 and 2006 there were about 339 women throughout the country who had received land in their own right which made up only 19% of the beneficiaries of the land reform programme. However, Mutasa makes it appear that without including women, the programme would not be the success it would be with them. The versatility that women should show is illustrated through Mai Chakurira who confronts ex-freedom fighters who were discriminating against female civilians, who, ironically had contributed meaningfully to the liberation struggle:

Handiti vanhukadzi vairwawo? Handiti mamwe madzimai ari muhurumende vamwe vacho vakatodonhedza ndege? Munonditaurira kuti magamba awa aiva vanhurume vakazochinja kuita vanhukadzi hondo yapera? Ko iwo makomuredzi akabva muno medu afuta nokuda kwehuku dzedu dzataivafidha nadzo...

(Is not that women were also fighting? Is it not that some of the women in government downed planes? Are you telling me that these heroes were men who later changed to women after the war? How about the freedom fighters that left our areas having gained weight from the chickens we were feeding them...). (Mutasa, 2008:37).

It is through the female characters that the writer castigates the wrongdoings that characterised the land reform programme. Another problem faced by ordinary people, especially women, was the partisan allocation of arable land by the freedom fighters and those who masqueraded as guerrillas when, in fact, they had not even been born during the time of the war. This is shown in the altercation between Mai Chakurira and Tirongo who had never participated in the war but were instrumental in the corrupt activities which ensured that the former freedom fighters of the Second Chimurenga benefitted at the expense of the majority ordinary black Zimbabweans. Tirongo says:

Amai nemi mose makamira pamumvuri apo, muchapiwa kuseri uko! Kono ndokwamakomuredhi.

(Mother, and the rest standing there in the shade, you will be allocated land over there! This area is reserved for comrades).

(Mutasa, 2008)

This charade of self-righteousness draws the wrath of Mai Chakurira who tells the young man that he was not yet born when the war was being fought:

Unobvepiko mwana iwe? Uri komuredhi pauri ipapo? Wakarwa hondo uri kupi?...Mwana ainwa mukaka ruri rusvava ndiwe ungareva nhema

dzakadaro!...

(Where do you come from you child? Are you a freedom fighter? Where did you fight the war? You drank milk as a baby and you cannot lie like that!) (Mutasa, 2008:36)

Raftopoulos (2009) notes that this was one of the most salient features of the exercise where youths from ZANU-PF were made to join the land occupation movement and were driven by a combination of grassroots initiatives and centralized coercion and violence.

In this land drama where wrong characters play false parts, Mai Chakurira confronts Shinda, a senior ex-combatant and reminds him of the contributions women made during the war and how they are currently contributing in both government and the nation. This makes him change his earlier stance and allocate her land in the area said to be reserved for the former freedom fighters. While all this sounds as good talk in fiction, the reality of the matter is that land reform has come and gone without really addressing these genuine grievances. What we witness are only nationalist writers' attempts to legitimise a process marred by various controversies.

Shinda later bemoans the partisan allocation of land along political party affiliation. This has been one of the major issues raised, locally and internationally, against the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The land reform programme has been associated with the ruling party, and ZANU-PF has been diversely put to task for leaving out other nationals and people of other nationalities or those belonging to different political parties. This has had the tendency of making certain groups of individuals appear unsuitable for the apparently national programme.

Other issues which discredited those involved in the land redistribution exercise were the rampant practices of regionalism, tribalism and bribery shown by officials in the Ministry of Lands. Moyo et al. (2009) note that the issue of regional exclusion and "belonging" has been one of the major provincial grievances especially on accessing A2 land meant for commercial farming which has been restricted to those who "belong" to a particular province or exclude those who do not belong. This is the case with Gozho, a Gweru based official who denies land to a certain Mr Bhusvumani because he comes from a different part of the country:

Endai munopihwa ikoko, ndiko kwenyu.

VaMasvingo vanopiwa kuMasvingo. MaKaranga okuGweru akasiyana namaKaranga okuMasvingo...MuZezuru wokuShamva akasiyanawo nomuZezuru wokuGuruve. MuNdevere wekuKezi akasiyanawo nomuNdevere wokuTsholotsho...

(Go and have allocated to you there, that is where you belong. Masvingo people will have

allocated to them in Masvingo. The Karangas of Gweru are different from the Karangas from Masvingo...A Zezuru of Shamva is different from a Zezuru in Guruve. A Ndebele from Kezi is not the same as one from Tsholotsho..). (Mutasa, 2008:60).

This infuriates Bhusvumani who reminds Gozho of the spirit of oneness that characterised the liberation war where regionalism and tribalism were shunned by the freedom fighters who brought the independence that people like him are enjoying. Gozho is later beaten up by Busvumani when Sekai is addressing the beneficiaries of the programme on the problems they are facing. Sekai had reprimanded the officials for being involved in corrupt activities.

On bribery, the lands officers are shown demanding bribes from those seeking land. Njanji, a Lands Officer tells Chandavengerwa that without paying money he will not get any land:

Kuti muwane munda munototi mubhadhare chete. Munoziva here, VaChandavengerwa kuti paminda yavako mazuva ano pava nedzimba? Naizvozvo hamungandogari mudzimba dzavamwe vanhu nemusingabhadhari simba ravo.

(For you to get land you just have to pay. Do you know Mr. Chandavengerwa that the plots will have these days houses built on them? Therefore you cannot go and live in those houses belonging to other people without paying for their effort). (Mutasa, 2008:59).

Some of the mistakes that were seen during the land redistribution exercise were that some people just resettled themselves in areas which were not arable, such as conservancies. These are condemned for their ignorance. Those resettled are also shown to lack knowledge on the need to conserve the environment and also the dangers of practices such as randomly cutting down trees and poaching.

Mutasa, like most nationalist writers, is concerned that the land issue in Zimbabwe is wrongly perceived by people in some countries who do not put it in its proper historical context. This can be observed from the discussion that Sekai has with some American nationals like Johnson whilst she was studying at the University of Illinois. From the discussion, one can deduce that the foreigners lack a proper understanding of the country's history. This, regrettably, makes them easily buy the propaganda being peddled in the western media which criticises the land reform programme. Mutasa uses Sekai's address to this foreign audience to argue for the justness of Zimbabwe's land reform programme. By explaining how the early societies of Zimbabwe, prior to their interaction with Europeans, had established well

sustained organizations such as the Great Zimbabwe, Khami, Dlodlo and the Munhumutapa Empires, Sekai is saying Zimbabweans are civilized human beings, whose actions at whatever period are defensible. She also narrates Zimbabweans' long record of nationalism and sovereignty evident in the Rozvi Empire's Changamire Dombo thwarting of the 1692 Portuguese efforts to colonize Zimbabwe. She then explains how colonialism had embittered the blacks by denying them the same status as the white colonial masters. There was also the enactment of colonial laws such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which saw blacks losing their land. Because of this, in the 1950s, the African nationalist parties emerge demanding the freedom for the black majority. The end result was the resolution by Africans to launch the armed struggle which resulted in the independence of the country. The oppressive nature of the colonial regime shocks Johnson who begins to see the correct picture about Zimbabwe. He also gets to know the fact that the Zimbabwean Government was planning to compensate the white commercial farmers for the developments they had made on the farms and for the land which the British Government under Thatcher had promised to pay. The picture about the country becomes clearer when fellow Americans Morrison and Margret who had visited the country's Victoria Falls dismiss the rumors about the state of affairs as depicted in the western media.

Another issue dismissed by Mutasa is the tendency to attribute all the economic problems facing the country solely on the land reform programme. For instance the land reform programme has been blamed for the decline in agricultural produce and the resultant slump in exports and shortage of foreign currency. Some of these views are shared by former school mates of Sekai like Haruperi:

Dai mapurazi asina kutorwa pamwe varungu vangadai vachitirimira fodya yakawanda tobva tatengesa kune dzimwe tobva tawana mari yekune dzimwe nyika

(If the farms belonging to whites were not repossessed altogether, they could have been growing lots of tobacco for us which we would sell to other countries and get foreign currency) (Mutasa, 2008:21).

Instead, Sekai points out other factors contributing to the economic problems Zimbabwe is facing. These include a cyclone which destroyed crops as well as a three year drought and the ill-informed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which was supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Zimbabweans' migration to South Africa is also shown not to be a new phenomenon as this has happened before the current problems simply because the latter has a more attractive economy and bigger industrial base.

Unemployment is also shown not to be confined to Zimbabwe but even to the First World countries. South Africans are also shown to be migrating to other countries like Saudi Arabia, Germany, Britain and Ireland. The problems could have been less if the local people were the owners of the industries.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion, it can be seen that the literary representation of the Land Reform Programme is as controversial as the political imperatives that drove it. A phalanx of factors converged and diverged to produce it. The evocations of the programme in literature are muddled by perceptions of how a nationalist or patriotic writer should deal with the themes that touch on the hyperbolized issues of sovereignty and party survival. On the other hand, the writers whose affiliation is with the opposition view it as unmitigated failure that will need redressing in the future. Those that straddle the two positions look at the ethical aspects of violence in particular on the hapless blacks for whom this redistributive exercise was said to be done. They contend that the issue of citizenship includes all people who subscribe and are loyal to the entity called Zimbabwe. What is clear, therefore, is that because of the political polarization in Zimbabwe, the literary representations of this emotive subject were always bound, inevitably, to be a site of contest representing different persuasions that characterize the society today. What seems to cut across the different shades of opinion is the desirability of the land redistribution; it is the *modus operandi* that is debatable. But for a long time this national exercise will spawn a lot of controversy.

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