

**African
Oral
Story-telling
Tradition
and the
Zimbabwean
Novel in
English**

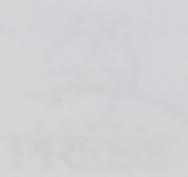


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Email: info@jamescurrey.com
Website: www.jamescurrey.com



African Oral Story-telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English

Maurice Taonezvi Vambe



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA PRESS
PRETORIA

English
Novel in
Zimbabwean
and the
Tradition
Story-telling
Oral
African



Margaret Tsvonai Vambe

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First edition, first impression

ISBN 1-86888-304-3

Published by Unisa Press, University of South Africa, PO Box 392, Unisa, 0003
Printed by ABC Press, Epping

Cover design: André Nel, Unisa Press
Layout and typesetting: Lien Strydom and Thea Bester-Swanepoel



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Acknowledgements

I feel indebted to Professor John Anthony Chennells and Dr Rino Zhuwarara for their relentless efforts in structuring and editing this manuscript at the stage when it was a DPhil dissertation. This book is dedicated to my immediate and extended relatives, both living and departed. Special thanks go to my wife, Beauty and my two sons, Takunda and Tanatswa who endured moments of critical madness in the writing of this book.



Chapter One

Orality in the Zimbabwean novel in English

One of the major intentions of white settler ideology during the creation of the British colony of Southern Rhodesia was to undermine African oral tradition and culture. African oral tradition was perceived as a site of potential rebellion against the white settler values. Colonial officials, Native District Administrators and early white missionaries agreed that for the black people inhabiting the colony of Southern Rhodesia to accept white settlerism, their values and belief systems in ancestor veneration had to be violently uprooted and/or manipulated. This would set the pace for a new cultural beginning controlled by colonial modernity. Father Biehler, a white priest at Chishawasha during the late 1890s, put across his proposals for a radical cultural onslaught on the Shona people in a way which if it had been followed to the letter, would have spelt disaster to the indigenous people. Ironically it would also have been self-defeating to the socio-economic mission of colonialism. In January 1897 Lord Grey responded to Father Biehler's proposal to deal with black people of Rhodesia in the following way:

'Father Biehler is so convinced of the hopelessness of regenerating the Mashona's, whom he regards as the most hopeless of mankind, that he states that the only chance for the future of the race is to exterminate the whole people, both male and female, over the age of 14!' 'This pessimistic conclusion,' Grey continued, 'I find hard to accept.' (Zhuwarara, 2001, p.13).

This negative attitude towards African oral culture had far reaching consequences for the African people in the colony of Rhodesia. In some instances black people were converted to the new religion of Christianity. This suggested that white missionaries had succeeded in infiltrating aspects of African traditional religion. These black converts were used to convert other Africans to the new faith. On the other hand, this frontal attack on African values and oral tradition had the opposite and unintended effect – from the point of view of colonialists – of generating a sense of oneness, unity of purpose and communal identity among Africans that was realized through the revived cultural nationalism of the 1960s.

In their struggles to maintain a sense of cultural identity and autonomy, Africans adapted from their past forms of oral literature such as song, dance and folktales and forged new ones. They even went to the extent of using the Bible to conscientise themselves about the high goals of freedom. Together with African oral artists who used the spoken word to voice rejection of colonial culture, some black writers – products of colonial schools – emerged as cultural producers and popularisers of fiction in Shona, Ndebele and English. This incorporated orality as a stylistic strategy to give a stamp of ‘African’ authenticity to their works of art. At the same time pushing into the public sphere the power of orature to communicate the goals of African liberation in Rhodesia.

African oral story-telling tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English traces the ways in which the African oral storytelling tradition survived in several forms within the narrative interstices of the Zimbabwean black novel in English. It is also a story of the ways orality as art form was used and it continues to be used to construct and represent African resistance to colonial culture and its legacies as variously manifested in post-independence Zimbabwean literature, history, politics and culture. It is a book that represents orality not as the cultural site where the values of the black people are totally distorted by colonialism but as a cultural space where authentic black identities are indisputably formed.

Rationale of the book/stating the problem

Previous works that attempted to understand the interface between orality and the black Zimbabwean novel ended up vilifying orality. Such works chose to see in it an art form incapacitated from within. It was perceived as unable to handle themes of history, culture and the politics of resistance to colonial values (Kahari, 1990). Kahari is further convinced that orature ‘contaminates’ (p. 68) the novel form. On the other hand, Emmanuel Chiwome (1998) merely details instances of orality within the novel without evaluating the contradictions generated by the interface between orality and literacy in the novels he considers. Matshakayile-Ndlovu (1994) seeks to show how orality is reflected in the novels, thereby suggesting that the novels in question are simply mirroring orality. Flora Veit-Wild’s *Teachers Preachers and Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1993) underestimates the relationship of orality to the novel in English when the author argues that none of the generations of Zimbabwean writers she examines is significantly influenced by orality. It is evident from the studies above that orality’s potential to positively influence the black novel is not recognised. Recontextualizing of orality within the novel offers it new and sometimes contradictory modes of ‘literary’ existence. Far from it having negative influences, orality actually introduces the play of contradiction and contingency to the narratives of resistance within the novels.

In literary situations where some black critics of Zimbabwean orature have decided to reclaim the cultural potential that orality possesses for use in forging an idiom of a national identity, the case has been to underplay the contradictions within orality as a volatile cultural space. This is why, despite the fact that *Songs*

that Won the Liberation War (Pongweni, 1982) endows orality with positive qualities, the book is marred by the author's failure to concede that his 'critical' gaze does not allow him to fish out those instances where popular songs were appropriated by colonialism for its own goals. All this points to the problem of having to deal with the complexity of the African oral storytelling tradition in its variety of forms such as songs, allegory, folktale, spirit-possession, fantasy and myth, ancestor veneration, ritual, legends, proverbs, fables and jokes amongst others. These oral forms of African socialities are not unique to Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. They occur universally.

The ways that oral forms are understood and used in Africa and, in particular by Zimbabwean writers, are ideologically different. This calls for a much closer and detailed analysis of the relationship between orality and the Zimbabwean novel. The fact that black writers belonging to different generations, classes and even gender, with potentially different ideological sensibilities, use orality in Zimbabwe can no longer be taken for granted. This is especially so when one imagines that even in the works of a single author there are real and potentially uneven levels of understanding the use of orality. In other words, the picture of the relationship between orality and the black novel is further complicated if it is considered that the social vision and treatment of orality by an author does change or might change with changes in the use of orality in real life.

The question as to whether or not the genres of folktale, fable, fantasy, myth, allegory and spirit-possession can be understood differently from each other is crucial to my exploration of the relationship between orality and the novel in English. Isidore Okpewho (1980) teased out the morphology of the myth and plotted the difference between legend, myth, folktale and fable based on a continuum of time. On his continuum those events closest to real experience and which could be verified, he termed 'legend'. Those stories whose historical status had been freed from the constraints of space due to the wear and tear of time, he termed 'fable'. Though useful to the present book, Okpewho's model endowed each of his categories of the oral genres with a certain stability and fixity of meaning. In many ways this is modified by my proposed usage of the terms. It is important from the outset to establish what this book emphasises in my understanding of the relationship of folktale, fable, fantasy, myth, spirit-possession and allegory and the black novel in English.

The folktale and fabulist imagination

Folktales and fables explain the meaning and existence of social relationships, origin of plants, animals, human settlements and the roots of society's traditions and customs. In the folktale or fable mode, human imagination can afford to be liberated from the constraints of time. As also noted by Okpewho (1980, p. 18) in both the folktale and the fable, setting is timeless and arbitrary and the message is larger than one isolated historical experience. In other words, the capacity of the folktale and the fable modes to be imaginatively stretched in different

directions so as to frame contradictory realities gives them the interpretive power to simultaneously mean different things. We agree with Eileen Julien when she states that the mode of the fable *alienates* (her emphasis) the 'real' world it evokes and this forces us to look at that world from a critical distance. For her fable and folktale makes us aware of that real world, not as the world within which we do and must operate, but as one that can be interrogated, held accountable and ultimately one that can be changed (Julien, 1992, p. 139).

The fantastic in art

The literary qualities of fluidity, instability and liminality that mark the internal imaginative worlds of fables and folktales, which on the surface appear didactic, are concentrated in the genre of the fantastic in art. Though usually found as stories of real or fanciful animals, the fantastic 'traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'' (Jackson, 1981, p. 4). The fantastic story defies literary 'borders' and transgresses the boundaries of the real experience into the realm of the spiritual world. In fact, fable is usually fantastic. But fantasy is also a distinct oral genre in its own right. According to Rosemary Jackson fantasy operates in contradictory ways. It can '*tell of desire . . . or expel desire.*' (p. 3). Fantasy's most powerful creative principle is its capacity to be used in ways that 'interrogate single or unitary ways of seeing' (p. 36) and in the process, favouring the construction of multiple narratives of reality.

Myth and mythopoetic narratives

Where the fantastic in literature subverts the narrative stabilities established by classical realist protocols, a mythic system can be grasped in a process of becoming (Levi-Strauss in Quayson, 1997, p. 67). As narratives that give symbolic expression to a system of relationships between man and the universe, myths can frame communal identities. Myths give these collective structures of feeling something akin to a uniform shape. The same myths exist in the realm of the 'intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural' (Barthes, 1972, p. 123) which enable them to question the meaning in the narratives they construct. The complex nature of fable, folktale, fantasy and myths is that in the context of the Shona culture, the rapid transitions that mark the 'oral-ness' of these genres are often difficult to frame as individual or discrete moments existing outside the other. Performative oral genres can further be elaborated inside the sign system of the other, in the same way it is possible to accompany a dance with a song, or to sing as one dances. For example, the different tunes of the African drum can tell stories of happiness, sadness, birth and death.

The wandering spirit of allegory

Subsequently, whether it is folktale, fable, the fantastic or myth, there is a desire to reveal that there is no single definition of the 'real' in the ways these narratives construct and represent reality. This capacity for orature/literature to say one thing

and mean another is the allegorical dimension in art. The word 'allegory', according to Stephen Slemon (1987, p. 4) comes from the Greek words '*allos* – 'other' + '*agoreuein*' – to speak openly, to speak in the assembly or market'. Not only does allegory have the ability to say one thing and mean another, it also has the metaphoric quality of literature that enables meanings to transcend the obvious 'surface' meanings of the text that are bound up by particular social contexts within which the text is read. In Africa, Leteipa Ole Sunkuli and Simon Okumba Miruka define allegory as a, 'story or poem in which the characters, be they people, animals, birds and events represent virtue and vice in real human life' (Miruka & Sunkuli, 1990, pp. 1–2).

In allegory the style of presenting real human affairs and life in a story or poem appears as if they actually happened elsewhere, at another time and concerning other people or creatures. Allegorical stories comment on human life. As a genre, the allegorical mode possesses neither intrinsic positive nor negative values. It is the cultural and symbolic act of investing allegory with particular meanings in particular historical contexts that animates and elevates allegory to the level of social text that targets a particular audience, who in turn recreate meanings from it, according to their cultural experience and horizon of expectations. Abdul Jan Mohamed writes that in a colonial context, 'colonialist literature' produces stories that are based on a racial allegory in which there is a 'suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the colonizer' (Jan Mohamed, 1985, p. 78). In this colonially inspired racial allegory Africans are depicted as savages in need of taming by the white race. The Manichean economy that informs the colonial racial allegory transforms, according to Jan Mohamed, 'racial difference into moral and even metaphysical difference', (p. 80) in order to justify the conquest of the Africans.

In contrast, African nationalists of the 1960s created allegorical stories of resistance that attempted to reverse the colonially inspired racial allegory that was based on a Manichean polarization of black people and white people. Nationalist allegories made colonialism the butt of their criticism and depicted the power relations in a colonial context in terms of the ruled and the rulers, the oppressed and the oppressors (Miruka & Sunkuli, 1990, pp. 2–5). Nationalist allegories of resistance, according to Emmanuel Chiwome start with what is regarded as the discourse of Otherness, which in negritudinist terms is opposed to the colonialist discourse of Sameness (Chiwome, 1996, p. 7). When used in the interpretation of orature and literature, allegory becomes the song, poem or novels' potential to reveal 'new ways of seeing history, new ways of reading the world (Slemon, 1988, p. 164). Depending on how they are used in the novels, allegories can encourage viewing reality as static or as defined by constant flux. In the latter case, an allegory becomes a 'zone of occult instability' (Fanon, 1963, p. 83) and registers dislocations within identities created by both the dominant social groups as well as the subaltern ones (Madsen, 1994, p. 125). Allegories of the metaphoric type are marked by internal instabilities that tend to increase orature's potential to

enhance a multiplicity of meanings. On the other hand, to interpret orature within the context of metonymic allegories reduces the work into a single meaning. As Stephen Slemon argues, this removes 'heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and thus [renders those allegories] functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to themselves' (Slemon, 1987, p. 11). Similarly, to explain orature within the framework of metaphoric allegory is to consciously or unconsciously accept the arbitrary referentiality of the sign, which is according to Madsen, 'liberated into polyvalence' (Madsen, 1994, p. 125).

Allegories can aspire to reveal stable and unstable identities at the same time. Hayden White believes that there is no narrative that is 'full' since every narrative, like the myth, is also constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but are left out. For White, the instability inherent in oral genres can make one view narration and narrativity through orature as an instrument with which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated or resolved in a discourse of resistance (White, 1987, p. 4). Furthermore, it makes one fully understand the appeal of oral genres as carriers of contradictory realities. By the same token it also encourages one to modify the claim that every idea carried in orature is potentially opposed to the material interests of exploiting classes in society.

Spirit-possession and cultural resistance

Spirit-possession reincarnates the spirit of the deceased or 'departed' ancestors through the living host. Possession of host underpins the essence of the African traditional way of generating knowledge that found its use in the family and national life of the African people (Vambe, 2001, p. 102). The Shona people of Zimbabwe distinguish *Vadzimu* – ancestors who protect the clan, from *Mhondoro* – national guardian spirits and some *shave* or evil spirits and *ngozi* – the avenging spirit. These spiritual distinctions suggest that in Shona mediumistic religion, certain ancestors are preferred and more regularly invoked in situations of national crisis. The cultural symbols associated with them are politically privileged as representative of the 'soul' of the nation. In real life the spirits of strangers can possess a human host. In other words, spirit-possession belongs to the contemporary world of the African people's sphere of thought since spirit-possession is believed to make known the truths about human lives. Spirit-possession is not considered as drama even when it evinces elements of performance such as *impersonation*. Spirit-possession *is real* life, even when it is mediated by a spirit medium who, by virtue of being the possessed, does not know the text that he/she produces while in the state of possession.

But when spirit-possession is deliberately incorporated into the novel, it becomes a locus for the possible multiplicity of cultural meanings that can go beyond not only what the author had in mind, but also against the collective perceptions of life. In other words, when inserted into the novel, spirit-possession has the capacity to simultaneously rehearse a coherent communal narrative of identity while also revealing 'cracks and crevices of a world torn apart mercilessly

into its representations' (Habermas, 1974, p. 241). These 'cracks and crevices' within spirit-possession can suggest alternative versions of reality. Just like fable, or myth, spirit-possession as oral narrative displays a Janus attitude towards the symbolic processes by which it constitutes itself as a narrative with the power to construct, arrange, deploy and assign meaning to reality in different contexts. Possession as oral narrative has the ability to revise its internal meanings in ways not even foreseen by those who construct those narratives.

Orality, cultural memory and the politics of remembering

Whether it is folktale, myth or fable, one is discussing strategies of remembering and recuperating viable values from the past in order to forge new relations between people in the present. Orality as a form of cultural memory is critical in restoring a sense of collective identity. However the complexity of cultural memory is that it is selective and sometimes consciously or unconsciously privileges certain forms of knowledge as the only valid ones. The problem of the slippages within the interstices of memory are more manifest at the point when authors transpose, massage or interface the 'here and now' quality characteristic of orality into the writing of narrative to create a text or novel. Changed contexts in the process of creative transformation from memory to literacy necessarily affect the ways orality operates in the novel. That is why the idea of understanding cultural memory's role in producing alternative narratives of history and resistance is so complicated since the process results in a collective memory whose claims to absolute truths can be contested. In the end, the politics of orality, remembering and memory as sites of struggle reveal memory as always in flux to the extent that there is not only potentially one memory but also multiple memories constantly battling for attention within the cultural space of the novel.

Writing about the role of memory in reconfiguring ethnic American minority identities in their literature, Amritjit Singh and his fellow academics suggest that 'not only do we create and maintain the memories we need to survive and prevail, but those collective memories in turn both shape and constrain us' (Singh et al., 1996, p. 8). The capacity of cultural memory to contest hegemonic histories while consolidating its own values is cogently captured by David Palumbo-Liu who argues that within the novel ethnic memory can present an 'occasion for a subversive revision of the dominant version of history; it gives voice to a text muted by dominant historical referents; and it makes possible an imaginative invention of a self beyond the limits of the historical representations available to the ethnic subject (Palumbo-Liu, 1996, p. 211).

The irony is that in its desire to destabilize other values, cultural memory necessitates a preliminary critique of its claims to be able to represent uncontested truth. This contradictory dimension of cultural memory is emphasized in *African oral storytelling tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English*. A major motivation for that emphasis is that it is from the fractures and fissures generated by the interface between orality and the novel from which unforeseen narratives of resistance can emerge.

The structure of the book

The introduction of this book which is chapter one establishes the literary status of orality in Zimbabwean literary criticism, indicates the organisation of the book and also provides working definitions of the oral genres analysed within the novel. Chapter two explores the role of the traditional African oral artist or *sarungano* in a traditional context and emphasizes the changes that have taken place to that role after the creation of a black literary elite within a colonial and post-colonial situation in Zimbabwe. Chapter three analyses the different ways of understanding the notion of resistance in Zimbabwean critical discourse. Chapter four analyses the ways allegory, spirit-possession and the folktale mode are used to construct an anti-colonial discourse of resistance particularly in *Feso* (1956), *Jikinya* (1979) and *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983). Chapter five critically examines the use of myth, the fantastic and the fable in the representation of the contradictions of the nationalist narrative in *On Trial for My Country* (1966), *A Son of the Soil* (1978) and *Waiting for the Rain* (1975). Chapter six explores the use of spirit-possession in *Bones* (1987) and *Nehanda* (1993). Chapter seven discusses the functions of allegory in Dambudzo Marechera's *Black Sunlight* (1980). Chapter eight explores the role of remembering and the politics of memory in facilitating the creation of alternative histories of the liberation struggle as depicted by Yvonne Vera from a post-colonial perspective in *The Stone Virgins* (1992). Chapter nine is the conclusion and it evaluates the formal and ideological influences and functions of the African oral storytelling tradition within the written mode of the black novel in English.



Chapter Two

The oral artist or *sarungano* in African traditional and modern culture in Zimbabwe

Introduction

It is one thing to define the specific ways in which the oral genres of allegory, folktale, spirit-possession, the fantastic, mythic-legend and cultural memory are understood, analysed and be applied in *African oral storytelling tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English*. It is another thing to underline the significance of the contexts of oral performance and the creative temperament of the oral artist and creative writer as this chapter intends to do. This helps the present writer to identify common threads, differences and similarities in the use of orality both inside and outside the novel. Other factors come into play when considering the transmutations that occur in the use of orality within the novels. One factor has to do with understanding the dynamic use of orality within the changing traditional black communities in Zimbabwe. The other factor relates to the new demands placed upon the use of orality as found in the form of the novel within the modern context defined by colonial relations of production and inequality. These have persisted in the post-independence period in Zimbabwe. Another important factor to consider, when analysing orality, either outside or inside the novel, is the oral artist or writer's creative temperament. This last factor recognises that even oral artists or modern writers of the same colour, generation and class who come from the same society and who have more or less similar social experiences are radically differentiated in their capacities to experiment with orality.

To this extent this chapter examines both the traditional and modern contexts within which orality is used either outside or inside the novel. The chapter recognises the complexity of oral artists as originators of knowledge that then is absorbed by that society to become community property. The chapter argues that the processes that involve the transition from the spoken or oral word in contexts of live performances towards embedding orality in the novels require vast skills as well as creative resources and individual genius on the part of the writer. This is particularly so when it is considered that some of the novels that are analysed in *African oral storytelling tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English* were written when the

Rhodesia Literature Bureau considered as subversive any works of art by black people that did not have a clear and conformist message.

The role of the traditional oral artist in Zimbabwe

The oral artist or *sarungano* is, in the Shona culture, the point of focus in any oral composition or performance. The *sarungano* is the, 'sensitive needle in his society and in the case of the communal narrator, the spokesman for the little people, the underprivileged (Kabira, 1983, p. 35). It is from the *sarungano* that meanings of a story are created and disseminated to the 'listeners' who in turn participate either through singing some parts of the story or passing comments on the story. The *sarungano* depends on individual genius to create credible stories. Whether the stories generated by the individual oral artists are folktales received from past generations or communal legends they are percolated into the communal cultural and memory bank because they have concretised societal aspirations or in addition, have brought to light values that the community has wanted to discourage.

The degree to which oral artists in communal societies won the trust and social esteem of the people depended on the temperament of the artist. In traditional Shona society, what differentiated oral artists from each other and subsequently defined the variety of the skills and creative resources to perform which were at the disposal of the artists was the question of training and preparation that the oral artists went through before practising their profession. In formal training, aspiring artists were gathered around village elders who taught them how to tell stories. In informal training, stories were learnt from community elders, 'whereby the future artist happens to live or move in an environment in which a particular kind of oral art [was] practiced and simply absorb[ed] the skill in it as time goes on' (Okpewho, 1992, p. 21).

In these informal contexts, especially around the fire at night, old women who had experienced a lot in life told stories. Their power to originate knowledge, tell imaginative stories and pass them on to the younger generation as oral narratives depended on their skills to preserve and transmit communal memory and values. Stories could also be learnt from peers while gathering wood or herding cattle. If these stories proved popular, they were absorbed into the communal memory fund and became the moral economy that supplied the code of conduct for most members of the community. The teller of stories or *sarungano* as s/he is known in Shona culture played different roles. In a communal society, the *sarungano* was the repository of cultural values for that society. Frequently s/he was the spokesperson and the ideological conscience of the poor and vulnerable. The oral stories themselves functioned to warn, caution, advise, praise, denounce and urge people to the extent that these oral artists 'ruled' the lives of their patrons. The stories provided the cultural rules that underpinned the community's way of life, or the sum-total of their philosophical outlook. Patrons of the storytellers were children as well as adults who possessed potential to become storytellers.

In the traditional African community those oral artists who lived in a communal society tended to draw their themes from those societies and create

heroes and heroines out of ordinary people and events. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira (1983) observes that

in the narratives of largely communalistic communities, social heroes do not have to be kings, [and] princes . . . Very often a very ordinary member of the society, such as the neglected woman . . . becomes the saviour of the community. In other narratives a little boy saves his community from total disaster; a girl who is hated by her family saves the community; a little bird destroys the elephant which has been threatening her people. (1983, p. 1).

In African orature, sympathy is earned by the underprivileged who work to tame nature for their social good, or fight social enemies who attempt to destroy communal harmony. But the same 'little' people can also be criticized in some oral stories for lack of initiative. In the communal society, the paradox of the status of the traditional oral artist is that he/she could manipulate facts to advance the interests of the poor or even the powerful in society. It is for this reason that every oral artist or *sarungano* has to be studied in his/her cultural and political context. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira further supports this idea when he writes that 'every artist should be studied within the context of his community and in relation to the historical development of the society which has created him. And since this development has not been homogeneous the oral artist has tended to reflect different social values at different periods of history' (1983, p. 3).

The imagination of the traditional oral artist is thus grounded in the collective and organic values, beliefs and worldview of the community for which he/she composes his/her art even when he/she possesses poetic licence to differ with the community.

Ngano art within Zimbabwean orature

Writing about the Ngano art as a distinct genre of Shona orature, George Fortune believes that *ngano* played a vital role in Shona traditional life. Fortune (1980) writes that 'a perusal of the *ngano* will show that they are didactic in nature, enshrining lessons for life and also that they provide entertainment and relaxation for their audiences' (p. 1). Another scholar of the *ngano* genre, James Mahlaule (1999) comments that the *ngano* is used in the Shona communal society of Zimbabwe to resolve local social problems. In other words, *ngano* art becomes in the creative imagination of Shona oral artists, the literary battlefield for different social values contesting for supremacy. In this process of struggle to maintain, consolidate or even contest the hegemony of values that define particular social formations, the slightest attempt to preserve the *nganos* by retelling them is a creative process that introduces new elements to the stories. Thus, in the *ngano* tradition of the Shona people, oral artists adapt old forms for new content. They also create complex narratives whose potentially multiple meanings can be lost if the *ngano* is interpreted in a single way.

For example, there was/is no single and agreed ideological position about the cultural potential of the use of orality as understood among Zimbabweans or within

the camp of black writers. In Rhodesia, (now Zimbabwe) some colonial critics and missionaries even viewed African orature as primitive, monotonous, simplistic and dependent on clichés (Chiwome, 1996 p. xiii). In particular, white missionaries at Chishawasha sought to replace African oral narratives of heroic resistance to colonial domination with biblical stories. The influence of missionaries on African oral tradition also gave rise to forms influenced by the harmonies and poetics of the Christian hymns. The dissociation of African sensibilities from their orature was further aggravated in the 1930s when the Shona language was invented from the local dialects of Zezuru, Karanga, Ndau, Korekore and Chinyika. The ‘invented’ Shona language became, ironically, the language of popular resistance against colonialism within Shona communities in Zimbabwe during the colonial rule and the liberation struggle. This Shona language continues to be used to protest against the material inequalities between black people and white people as well as amongst black people themselves in post-independence Zimbabwe.

The modern *sarungano* in Zimbabwe

The tradition of oral storytelling has continued into the post-independence period and has increasingly developed into songs that castigate avarice in the new black leadership. The best African oral artists in Zimbabwe have used their creations to resist tyrannical rule. The oral artists have in this fundamental sense imposed the yardstick upon which black writers can be judged. Writers such as Solomon Mutsware and Chenjerai Hove have also used the word of the mouth to create stories that contain values of resistance to oppression. Because of their exposure to colonial education these writers-cum oral artists picked certain themes and forms such as realism from the white colonizer and they fused these with those from their traditional culture. African writers in English in Zimbabwe have continued the tradition of oral storytelling at conferences and sometimes at commissioned cultural galas. Their professional positions in education, at universities and other western derived institutions and their ideological inclinations towards the petty bourgeoisie has meant that as cultural producers, the modern *sarungano* using the novel, radio and television have had, as their audience/readers, people mostly of their class who have access to modern technology such as the novel, radio and television. The modern *sarungano* who use the novel, compose their works in solitude and these works have individual copyright and thus, remain communal property in a very limited sense. The modern project of professionalising storytelling by investing the power to create meaning in the individual author, who is separated from his/her readers, has tended to invest a lot of ‘authority’ in the writer. The commercialisation of the imaginative process has in some cases meant that writers popularise views that do not necessarily coincide or consolidate the struggles of the ordinary people.

The best of the modern *sarunganos* using writing as a creative mode in Zimbabwe have incorporated into their written works of art, the African people’s oral forms and worldviews of resistance against foreign domination and domestic tyranny. The African oral narrative or *ngano* has shaped the black novel in English

in terms of how the writers draw upon vernacular speech patterns and exploit the rich rhetorical devices of the living African oral tradition. Proverbs, repetition, rural images have been embedded in the black novel in ways that validate African people's specific experiences although as Solomon Iyasere states, oral literature has been brought into the novel 'selectively, adding and transforming [it] to bring a form of artistic novelty to their usage' (1975, p. 118). It is this interface between African oral storytelling techniques and the written tradition of the Zimbabwean novel in English that the present book is about.

The interface of orality to the Zimbabwean novel in English

Since orality serves multiple and sometimes apparently contradictory functions in the life of the African people under colonialism, it is not surprising that the same paradoxical uses of orality can be traced in the black novel. The incorporation of oral storytelling techniques within the black Zimbabwean novel complicates the relationship of orature to other discourses like realism in the novel in the sense that the black writers of Zimbabwe attempt to capture a distinct African mode of thought and feeling that helps them to create a new spiritual coherence for the continent. The writers also attempt, in the words of Abiola Irele to, 'elaborate in literature . . . a continuous stream of the collective consciousness, from the traditional to the modern . . .' (Irele, 1981, p. 174).

But, writers are not mere slaves to tradition, waiting passively to be influenced by orality. They select some aspects of orality and fuse these with the new ideas that either confirm, modify or even reject the old elements of tradition in their bid to transform their works into something new. This process is often contradictory as it involves the simultaneous desire to recuperate new spiritual coherence from the past while at the same time transforming those cultural identities in the forge of present social struggles. This ambivalence is signalled by Abiola Irele – but not further developed – when he fruitfully suggests that the relationship of indigenous oral resources to the modern African novel is one 'not so much of an abiding, permanent, immutable stock of beliefs and symbols, but as the constant refinement and extension of these in a way which relates them to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and significantly new' (Irele, 1981, p. 174).

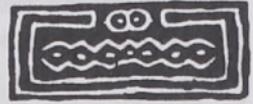
In other words, that which is 'continuous' and gives 'significantly new' meanings to orality in the African novel cannot, in the words of Paul Gilroy, be simply thought of as an 'unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time' but must most importantly be understood also as the 'breaks and interruptions' with the African literary tradition. This fact alone would then suggest that the invocation of that tradition is, itself, a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of colonial modernity. As Gilroy elaborates further, we ought to see orature as a changing rather than an unchanging same. This is so because 'the syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these

[oral] forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute authority' (Gilroy, 1993, p. 101).

This observation is significant to *African Oral Storytelling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English* because the book focuses on Zimbabwean oral culture and how it is validated in the new form of the novel. The recontextualization of oral literature within the novel necessarily forces the novel to be interpreted in new but multiple ways. This form of intertextuality also ironically means that the promotive aspects of orature as potentially realized in real lived experience are sometimes compromised by print whose meanings can only be animated, not sensorily but via rigorous interpretation of a message fixed on paper.

Conclusion

African Oral Storytelling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English therefore seeks to explore, how, in the words of Eileen Julien, 'the category of African orality permeates literary criticism, how it is subject to ideological pressures' (1992, p. 7) and how it has come to define the scope of our interest of Zimbabwean novel in English. This process involves seeing orality in the novel not only as a sign of proving the authenticity of the black Zimbabwean novel in a narrow sense but instead, orality can be perceived as a cultural and symbolic technology through which different forms of resistance are constructed, represented as well as questioned.



Chapter Three

Orality and resistance in post-independence Zimbabwe

Introduction

The basic assumption underlying African *Oral Storytelling Tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English* is that whether orality is found in performance, or within the novel, orality is a volatile cultural reality. Orality's inherent elasticity, its capacity to be stretched in different directions, to be framed, to capture and to represent different meanings, all at the same time, suggests that orality can be used and even manipulated to author alternative narratives of resistance. Orality rejects the idea of single truth explaining events and social processes. The power and 'uncertainty' within oral narratives allows one to reveal the limits of resistance narratives based on open, organized revolt or military resistance. The power of orality over the conventionally written down definitions of resistance derives from the fact that in oral contexts, tone, the presence of an audience and the mood at actual face-to-face social occasions can be manipulated by oral artists to generate new spoken facts that are equally replaceable with newer oral facts. This instability within oral forms engages in 'problematizing what is true, and establishing how and with what evidence a story becomes true' (White, 2000, p. 33).

In recognition of this versatility of orality, this chapter discusses the different ways that resistance has been defined in post-independence Zimbabwe. The aim of the chapter is to further provide a different background to the analysis of the interface between orality and the black novel in English. The chapter argues that conventional definitions of resistance in post-independence Zimbabwe are based on conventional historians' assumptions that the history of resistance is to be found in written documents. The reality is that whether found outside or inside the novels, orality destabilizes our notion of resistance. It is this that the chapter intends to bring out by reflecting on the paradoxes of conventional definitions of resistance in post-independence Zimbabwe.

The limits of military resistance

In Zimbabwe, the earliest forms of resistance against foreign occupation took on military forms. Before its progressive decline from the sixteenth century onwards,

the Mutapa State expelled the Portuguese in Zimbabwe from the Zambezi valley (Mudenge, 1988). This history of military resistance is significant in Southern Africa because the Mutapas were fighting both internal and external forces. That legacy of military resistance was carried over into the nineteenth century when the Shona people first fought against the Ndebele people's attempt to appropriate the Shona people's land during the 1830s. Also military resistance was demonstrated by Africans when the Shona united with the Ndebeles against the British settlers in 1893 and the famous Shona-Ndebele uprisings of 1896–1897. The revolts were crushed but they had sent warning signals to the British settlers that Africans were prepared to fight for the control and retention of their land.

African military forms of resistance of the early twentieth century in Zimbabwe are also celebrated in black people's orature and within the black novel in English in Zimbabwe. Rino Zhuwarara (1994, p. 11) observes that in Zimbabwe, '[o]rature constituted a part of counter-culture of resistance throughout the colonial period.' Though correct, such a view does not reveal *what* forms of orature were privileged by Africans to construct *what* kinds of resistances directed against *which* social forces to achieve *what* social ends. The understanding is that 'resistance' refers to military activity during foreign occupation and in the liberation struggle of the 1970s. For example, Terence Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia: A Study in African Resistance* (1967) is a controversial book meant to describe the military organization of the Shona and the Ndebele in the first Chimurenga of 1896–7 in order to create a discourse of resistance in the 1960s. Ranger's exclusive focus on the religious inspiration of the military organization of African resistance in the war credits Africans with the capacity to organize a major anti-colonial war in the twentieth century, even though that focus tends to reduce the diversity of the causes of the first Chimurenga. This encourages a parochial understanding of the complexity of the theme of resistance in Zimbabwe.

Flora Veit-Wild who ploughed through creative works searching for instances of organized African military resistance against colonialism concluded that, 'there is little of protest literature in the proper sense' in Zimbabwean literature (Veit-Wild, 1993, p. 7). In order to develop and sustain her thesis of the 'myth of literature and resistance' (p. 262), Veit-Wild advances the theory of historical exceptionalism based on selective remembering and amnesia. However, Veit-Wild modifies her earlier assertion that there is little resistance in the black novel, when she argues that, '[o]n the level of the concrete political effect the only literary example (of resistance literature) is the "Ode to Nehanda" in *Feso*, which was used at political assemblies in the early days of radical nationalism' (p. 264). The understanding of the meaning of resistance grounded in a battle has been done at the expense of analysing some subtler forms of resistance. We need to move away from perceiving resistance only in terms of military engagements. Such a shift is necessary in order to appreciate and anticipate contradictions within resistance narratives that we construct. An ideological shift of that nature might even begin to signal to and for us

just where the West may, perhaps insidiously, have drawn close to us; it presupposes that we know what remains Western in our very ability to think against the West and that we measure to what extent our rebuttal against it is perhaps yet another trap it uses against us and at the end of which awaits us, quietly and elsewhere (Mudimbe, 1992, p. 23).

Military resistance is instrumental in stimulating patriotism. Through it, Africans forge a sense of community that is prepared to fight against a visible enemy and die for a common cause. This mode of struggle sometimes omits the uncomfortable fact of collaboration.

Labour unrest and the 'peasant option' as instances of African resistance

We need to explore cultural instability within the categories of 'resistance' and 'collaboration' so as to reveal the different meanings that the two terms can potentially mean in socially different contexts. African initiative within the capitalist system may be viewed as 'collaboration' with the system but this just goes to show the complexity of African resistance that existed partly inside the colonial order and was not always against colonial interests. In fact, Terence Ranger notes ironically that some Africans fought the colonial system in order to take control of its modern forms of administration to make them work for their own good. In the African people's relationship to white settler technology, 'there is a strain of repudiation but also desire: a rejection of white mastery but a longing for African control of modern sources of wealth and power in an African environment' (1967, p. 353). This paradoxical relationship of antagonism to and dependency on colonial institutions that characterized African resistance is what Ranger later on calls the 'peasant option' when describing the enterprising and initiative of the Makoni peasants in Rhodesia.

Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe (1985) registers Ranger's recognition of the power of dominant social groups to re-order the culture of the less privileged social groups. The notion of 'peasant option' identifies the political dynamism in the subaltern African groups who appropriate the technological and sometimes the cultural resources made available by colonialism in order to forge a new idiom of resistance. The paradox of the new form of resistance is that it shows Africans who belong to a colonial modernity which they at once, despise and love. Africans organized their lives in ways that interrogated as well as confirmed the economic and political ideologies of those they fight.

Van Onselen (1976) has also shown that African women who moved into towns from the rural areas sometimes seized niches in the expanding and poorly organized urban economy as prostitutes and landlords, providing essential services to male migrant labourers. Van Onselen's study brings out the basic ambiguity in colonial relationships in which the women were both subverting the cultural project of colonialism and African patriarchy while subsidizing the economic one. 'Sometimes', argues Jean-Francois Bayart (1993, p. 249), '[t]he "small men"', also work

hard at political innovation and their contribution does not necessarily contradict that of the 'big men.' African resistance in a colonial situation challenges the institutions and ideals of racial, sexual and ethnocentric stereotypes produced by the European ideology of 'Enlightenment'. At the same time, Africans use the very tools and techniques developed by the same project of European 'Enlightenment' to achieve some form of independence within the capitalist system.

Labour unrest that characterized the birth of a manufacturing industrial sector in Rhodesia was yet another form of contradictory resistance. For example, the Rhodesia Bantu Association formed in the 1920s by educated Africans pushed the colonial government to provide land to Africans, extend voting to black people and enrol more black people in European schools. But the demands of the educated Africans were limited to a quest for a few reforms of the system. Misheck Sibanda (1989, p. 40) argues that the forms of African labour unrest in Rhodesia 'did not seek to challenge the potential superstructures and economic structures' because the main emphasis of the African people's struggles then was to the redress of concrete economic grievances and an expression of the politics of compromise, accommodation and survival within a new political situation. It had to wait for the liberation struggle of the 1970s to violently challenge the colonial system, although that nationalist resistance of the 1970s was also fraught with its own contradictions.

Hegemonic tendencies in the Zimbabwe national liberation struggle

Leroy Vail and Landeg White (1986) stress in connection with the paradox of African resistance in a colonial context that '[t]he moment we go beyond the kinds of organized resistance that are politically or militarily visible and try to deduce from people's behaviour their attitudes, perceptions, and cultural values, we find ourselves in areas where terms like 'resistance' [and] 'collaboration' . . . lack the necessary nuance' (p. 195.)

The 'political' implications of the above statement can only be fully realized and appreciated when we apply to the Zimbabwean resistance Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony. In his study of power relations within a capitalist system, Gramsci observed that for a group of people to rule over others, the dominant group must practice 'domination' and 'intellectual and moral leadership' (p. 215). To suggest that a group of people or class 'leads' and 'dominates' implies the simultaneous use of force and persuasion in order to achieve and consolidate the dominant class's hold on power. What is lived by the rulers and the ruled is a negotiated version of authority without force predominating excessively over consent. Sometimes that force is made to appear as though it is based on the consent of the majority or is performed against political opponents in the name of the people. The notion of hegemony suggests that the ruled fight those that rule them but also that some of the ruled's interests have to be satisfied within the system that they are fighting. This is so since '[t]he fact of hegemony presupposes that

account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised . . . the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic corporate kind. But such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential' (1971, p. 216).

What this means is that the very margin that is the historical experience of the less powerful people who are attempting through resistance to become the 'dominant' social force is itself a liminal cultural space that is characterized by political instability. Power relations within this cultural space in the post colony cannot, according to Achille Mbembe, simply be perceived as 'a relationship of resistance or collaboration but it can best be characterized as illicit cohabitation, a relationship fraught by the very fact of the [rulers] and [the ruled] having to share the same living space' (Mbembe, 1992, p. 4).

An understanding of the notion of resistance in terms only of an anti-colonial military struggle thus oversimplifies the ambivalent relationship and crucial contradictions between the ruled and the rulers. James Ogude argues that a refusal to see the complicated relations within the subaltern classes robs the ruled of any historical agency outside the grand regime of resistance narratives. Summarizing Mbembe's idea of the instrumentality of political power within the post colony, Ogude (1999, p. 66) notes that 'because a post colony is also a regime of 'pretence,' the 'subjects' have to learn to bargain in this market marked by ambivalence; they have to have the ability to manage not just a single identity for themselves [which binarism reduces them to], but several, which are flexible enough for them to negotiate as and when required'.

In Zimbabwe, these internal contradictions of African resistance within the struggle for independence are the subject of Norma J. Kriger's *Zimbabwe Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (1992). Kriger's study is based on peasant voices in the Mutoko district of Zimbabwe. The book argues that there were social conflicts within African peasant communities that were based on gender, generational and class differences. These conflicts occurred whether or not there was a war in progress. Kriger's formulation of the notion of resistance within African peasant communities in Rhodesia eschews the nationalists' notion of a single mode of resistance within the national liberation struggle. Kriger states that African peasant communities were not hermetically sealed from the social conflicts that characterized the guerrilla movement that used both violence and persuasion (consent) against the black Africans from whom they came and for whom the war was purportedly waged. Kriger makes a useful ideological shift from the position of *culturalism*, which would, according to Anthony Chennells, suggest that in Africa, peasants are, 'culturally authentic [beings] barely implicated in the particular historical processes which colonialism has set in motion' (Chennells, 1999, p. 113).

David B. Moore further brings into play Gramsci's concepts of coercion and consent to interpret the ambiguities within the Zimbabwe liberation struggle. For Moore, the new 'ruling' class within the Zimbabwe African National Liberation

Army (ZANLA) guerrilla movement began to create its, 'monopoly on violence from the very conception of the guerrilla war' (1995, p. 376). David Moore underscores as significant the fact that African people's ideological resistance against colonial political structures was itself deeply characterized by tension-ridden relations among the guerrillas, between the guerrillas and the civilians and among the civilians. These ideological tensions, according to Moore were to be, 'resolved by a tension-ridden combination of coercion and consent' (p. 376). Moore's article calls attention to the fact that in Zimbabwe, the nationalist struggle was conceived as resistance to colonial economic and political structures. But the distinctive identity of that national resistance is, ironically, its fractured self.

Within the national struggle there were other forms of resistance against the homogenizing tendencies of nationalist resistance. Neil Lazarus expresses cogently the dilemma of the discourse of nationalist resistance within the post-independence period when he argues that '[t]he harmonizing rhetoric of anti-colonialism could not survive in the universe of independence, for independence became the stage for the violent uncoupling of the diverse strands that had coexisted within the anti-colonial movement' (1990, p. 5). Resistance narratives work to destabilize the legitimacy of dominant views but in doing so, these same counter histories necessitate a preliminary critique of their own ideological claims. Such an argument recognises shifts in the potential meanings of what resistance is and can be. It also acknowledges that the values that people fight for in different times are not fixed.

Post-colonial cultural resistance

The idea of national culture as a fluid cultural arena or 'zone of occult instability' (Fanon, 1963, p. 183), continues to influence the ways in which post-colonial 'cultural' resistance is defined. Elleke Boehmer suggests that 'a literature which identifies itself with the broad movements of resistance to and transformation of colonial societies unambiguously invites the term, post colonial' (1995, p. 184). This view is supported by homi bhabha, who, in *Nation and Narration* (1990), argues that the 'broad movements of resistance' which define national culture exist on the cusp of the struggle between fixed values and the self-reflexive fluctuating movements of the people's history that constantly interrogate and transform national culture's desire for stability.

There is no conflict-free zone within national culture and to this extent, the oppressed people's very narratives of resistance are, in Jameson's understanding, 'profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol' (1981, p. 90). In other words, national narratives of resistance borrow their cultural resources from various sources: indigenous oral traditions, Christian symbols and colonial and post-colonial institutions. The post-colonial struggles of the African people are themselves neither the ideological sites where the subalterns retrieve their authentic identities nor the cultural space where the less advantaged people's

identities are simply and completely distorted by oppressive social groups (Vambe, 2000, pp. 73–86).

Cultural resistance is then, according to Stuart Hall, not an ideological plane 'where . . . once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost' (Hall, 1994, p. 460). This implies that the ordinary people's narratives of resistance are themselves characterized by internal contradictions and sometimes those narratives borrow the cultural resources to fight oppression from the very dominant classes that they struggle against. Bill Ascroft and others who subscribe to the same school of thought argue that one of the effective strategies that African writers have used to recuperate subaltern identities within the many discourses within the colonial and post-colonial cultural spaces has been to install within the novelistic structure, some aspects of African orality. The use of glossed and untranslated African words, myths, folktales and the fantastic confers onto the novel a sense of African authenticity and is meant to serve particular ideological purposes. True as it may be that orature forces the novel into novelty, Gareth Griffiths, however, timeously cautions us that '[e]ven when the subaltern appears to 'speak' there is a real danger as to whether what we are listening to is really a subaltern voice, or whether the subaltern is being spoken to by the subject position they occupy within the larger discursive economy' (1992, p. 75).

This point takes cognisance of the fact that the people's voice in and through orature can be appropriated to serve material interests other than theirs.

For instance, during colonial days in Rhodesia orality was ironically appropriated by the Rhodesian Airforce to further their propaganda against the liberation forces. Chiwome writes that Thomas Mapfumo's song

'Bhutsu Mutandarika', . . . released in the mid-1970s at the height of the war of liberation, mocked minority regime soldiers, taunting them as clumsy in their heavy boots. The ruling regime used the same allusive song to taunt their adversaries, the freedom fighters, who wore boots suitable for the jungle terrain in which they lived and operated. Mapfumo's song was meant to be subversive, but the target of the subversion saw the possibility of using the highly allusive song to legitimise their rule. The effect of their recontextualization of Mapfumo's song was quite harrowing on some of the freedom fighters. In this case, the oppressive government used popular music sensibilities in attempting to identify itself with the masses in order to win over their allegiance and thus win the war (Chiwome, 1990, p. 246).

As this excerpt suggests, orality occupies a highly volatile cultural space. It is not an 'incontestable reservoir' (Chinweizu, 1980, p. 2) of African values and sensibilities perceived as static. It could be used by different people with different social interests to articulate and further different cultural goals.

Furthermore, the presence of the Chishawasha readers in some African primary schools was evidence that missionaries had also gathered, represented and fed

some Africans what missionaries thought were stories from an 'authentic' African oral tradition. The irony is that invented oral traditions designed for consumption that were given to Africans, courtesy of white educationists, created within the educated Africans, ambivalent attitudes towards resistance against the system. Some educated Africans condemned some African values, talked of their people as 'primitive' and celebrated individual achievement and personal gain outside the context of a wider collective (Mugomba and Nyaggah, 1980, p. 4).

But also during the same colonial period, some African-led Independent Churches fused Christian imagery with Shona myths and legends to express resistance against both Christianity and colonial education. Matthew Zvimba's *Shirichena* church supported a syncretic ideology that relied on resuscitating Shona cultural symbols associated with the Nehanda and Kaguvi spirit mediums. These fused with stories of Christian heroes such as Jesus in order to forge a new idiom of resistance to the threats of destruction of African cultural values. Zvimba's church sought cultural empowerment from African traditional religion as well as the Christian church. This implies that although initially the Bible appeared as a form of control, it allowed Africans or the colonized to judge that same colonizer against the standards set by the Bible.

During the period of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe (1972–79), progressive and nationalist teachers and critics of literature in some colonial schools experimented with orature in the academic courses on creative writing which they developed with their students. Toby Moyana's students gathered African folktales, songs and family history and then used them to give 'traditional symbolism' to their short stories and poetry (1989, p. 67). The challenge that Moyana's students faced was how to place the ambivalence towards orality that was displayed by the 'progressive' educated Africans. The paradox of Toby Moyana's oral history project was that neither the teacher nor his students were open and flexible enough to question the traditions of orality that they were using. There was a mistaken view in Moyana and his students that the African orality they gathered represented the authentic identity of Africans that remained impervious to colonial influences.

Toby Moyana's work in the 1960s was further consolidated in the 1970s by African popular nationalism that made use of songs to articulate the political and economic grievances of Africans. Alec Pongweni's *Songs that Won the Liberation War* (1982) contains popular songs composed by ZANLA and Zimbabwe African People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). The songs not only conscientised the ordinary Africans on the necessity of the struggle but also encouraged defiance against the colonial system in the rank and file of the masses while at the same time projecting the idea of a free Zimbabwe where black people would rule themselves. Emmanuel Chiwome notes that 'during the Second Chimurenga oral traditions manifested themselves as part of the ideology of liberation from colonialism' (Chiwome, 1990, p. 241). Orality stood as a record of the people's participation in the creation of a nation. In addition orality in its various forms registered the manifold contradictions of the process of the liberation struggle.

The uniqueness of African orality coming out of colonial Zimbabwe is that it drew on pre-colonial sources of inspiration in constructing an anti-imperialist discourse, while showing the desire in Africans to experiment with modern ideas of democracy, nationality and ethnicity that had been introduced by white settlers. Through orature, Africans fought for the national principle that included the recognition of colonially created territorial borders. Africans also agitated through orature for one man, one vote and for the restoration of the colonially inspired idea of Parliamentary democracy. Consequently, while Africans were fighting some negative aspects of colonial culture, they also felt 'free' to appropriate for their own purposes some of the cultural and oral forms introduced by colonialism.

To further complicate the role that African orality played within the colonial context, black women used songs to complain against the *Chibharo* (forced labour) system that took away their men to work in colonial mines and plantations. The same black women also used complaint genres such as *jikinyira*, *nheketerwa* and *mavingu* to push black women's rights into the public domain within households existing under African patriarchy. While weaving into their songs new patterns of meanings, some black women singers turned to a validating tradition provided by male singers and drew selectively on indigenous rural song traditions in order to champion their rights while others slotted their songs into an existing set of images, feeding into the African male stereotypes of loose and dangerous women (Gunner, 1994, pp. 133–4).

This picture of the instability inherent in orality and the arbitrariness with which it was used by opposing social forces in a colonial context radically modifies the notion that projects organized military resistance narratives as stable, natural and beyond ideological contestation. Given this volatile experience of orality in its performance contexts, one is bound to question those literary critics who view orality as inherently revolutionary or incapacitated from within. The next chapter focuses on the multiple ways in which the genre of romance that manifests itself as allegory, the folktale and spirit-possession are used in *Feso*, *Jikinya* and *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* to construct an anti-colonial resistance discourse in Rhodesia.