Chapter Four

Romance and national resistance

This chapter analyses how the genre of romance is used in *Feso* (1995), *Jikinya* (1979) and *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983). In some Western literature and popular culture, romance has been explained as a ‘drug’, an unwanted distraction that gets in the way of people’s ‘genuine feeling and responsible thinking’ (Leavis and Thompson quoted in Storey, 1996, p. 29). In the context of the colonization of the third world countries by Western powers romance was used by imperial powers to present to their people imperial ideas in their nationalist, racial and military forms. As John Mackenzie puts it, as a colonizing genre, European romance was ‘replete with militarism and patriotism, in which violence and high spirits became legitimised as part of the moral force of a superior race’ (Mackenzie, 1984, p. 206).

The most important aspect of romance is that it shows humanity’s capacity to overcome and order nature and circumstances. In Southern Rhodesia, imperial romance depicted Africa and the black people as savages – something that the white settler community had to re-order and push to a higher level of being and existence. European colonizers exploited their history as romance and showed them taking control of a continent that they viewed as a manifestation of primordial chaos. In the narratives of that romance, white settlers denied Africans a recognizable human identity, outside the stereotypes implied in such terms as ‘barbaric’, ‘uncivilized’ and ‘savage’ which were used to describe and legitimise the oppression of black people. Imperial romances also projected the colonial system as ‘rationalistic’ and the white men as natural leaders imbued with spiritual power and authority to re-order African people’s lives at will. Whites invariably plotted as romance, histories of Europe’s gradual control of Africa. Whether the histories are reminiscences of the suppression of anti-colonial resistance, travellers diaries or more formal histories of Africa under colonialism, all show to a greater or lesser degree how the civilization and reason which Europe has at its command have begun to shape and direct savage and irrational nature, captures the major tenets of imperial romance’ (Chennells, 1997, p. 53). This also applies to the writing of history in Rhodesia.

In the same colonial context, African writers whose works opposed the dominance of colonialism in the political, economic and cultural spheres of the
African people’s lives also exploited the same genre of romance to imagine peace, security and ease precisely to counter the difficulties faced by Africans. By plotting their own history of nationalist resistance as romance narratives, Africans were then able to generate and spread an awareness of themselves as potential heroic actors in history. Through these narratives Africans depicted colonialism as a political force that had ushered disorder into their lives which therefore had to be overcome and transformed. In the romance of national struggle Africans became active agents of history, taking control of their destiny. African writers adopted, ‘the mode of emplotment of romance as a narrative form to be used to make sense out of the historical process conceived as a struggle of essential virtue against a virulent but ultimately transitory vice’ (White, 1973, p. 150).

The African voice’s attempt to subvert imperial romance is further captured by Anthony Chennells who asserts that ‘within a colonial situation the act of black writing is always dialogic for it is a refusal to accept colonialism’s assumption that blacks are silent unless they are heard through the agency of whites. The black-authored book is the site of an alternative and therefore subversive authority . . . ’ (Chennells, 1997, p. 56).

Although this observation is largely correct of the novels analysed in this chapter, it ought to be remembered that the ‘dialogic’ quality that defines the black novel in a colonial and post-colonial context also reveals the novel’s formal capacity for ideological conformity or enforcement. Subversion in the ‘black-authored book’ does not accomplish an automatic, clean and unambiguous negation of colonial values, ideas and institutions. In using romance, the authors are confronted by an unstable oral genre so that the novel’s complex dialogic processes ‘ . . . makes possible incorporation . . . as well as resistance’ (Pechey, 1989, p. 54). Solomon Mutswairo in *Feso* and Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe and Geoffrey Ndhlala in *Jikinya* respectively have attempted to redeem the notion of romance from its traditional conception as a ‘constrained and mechanical mode of expression’ (Slemon 1988, p. 157). Allegory, folktale and spirit-possession are the specific narrative aspects of romance that Mutswairo and Ndhlala have appropriated and used as literary strategies against the reconstruction of the colonised by the coloniser.

**Allegory in Feso**

*Feso* (1995) allegorises the life of the Shona people before the coming of colonialism in Zimbabwe. Set in the Mazowe valley, in an indeterminate Shona past, the novel tells the story of two Shona groups: the Vahota people under their generous chief Nyang’ombe (owner of cattle) and the Vanyai people under their cruel chief, Pfumojena (white spear). The beginning of *Feso* recalls for the reader the formulaic narrative structure of the traditional Shona oral story or ‘Ngano’. In the distant past in which the story is set, the Shona people are said to have lived an ideal life of plenty, happiness, economic prosperity and peace (p. 21). The Shona owned the land, which for them signified a glorious past in which men and women
were in harmony with nature. The ownership of that land also presupposed a stable identity. Loss of land signalled loss of identity whose recovery also implied the recovery of the tribal collective identity.

The persistent image of the Shona past as a golden era of plenty in Feso re-connects with the Shona myth of *pasichigare* and *Guruuswa*. In these two myths, the Shona people are depicted as having a common ancestry, history, values and shared social ideals. From the beginning of the novel, land becomes a physical space for cultural and political contestation between the VaHota and the Vanyai people. Later in the novel, the war between the VaHota and the Vanyai is meant to allegorise the Shona people’s struggle against the Ndebele and the White settlers. The writer bemoans the loss of political independence of the Shona people and emphasizes the role of outside social forces in the destruction of the Zezuru way of life when he writes that ‘for centuries the Zezuru people of Mazowe enjoyed their freedom and lifestyle without fear of outside enemies, or of being dispossessed of their land by anyone’ (p. 18).

The creativity, fertility and life of plenty that characterizes the rule of Nyang’ombe over the Vahota people operates in the novel as a counter-discourse to the poverty and life of physical suffering that the Vanyai people have to endure under chief PfumoJena. As an antinomic narrative, the life of ease and plenty of the Vahota people also comments on the hunger and landlessness of Africans in Rhodesia. After the passage of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1950, white settlers made further severe cuts on productive land previously owned and settled by Africans. Mutswairo also recreates the image of a unified pre-colonial Shona past so as to contest colonial mythologies which, according to Achebe (1988), portrayed the African past as one long night of savagery from which white people acting on God’s behalf had redeemed the Africans. Though romanticized, the allegory of a unified, collective and homogeneous Shona past is also meant to provide the writer with a coherent framework within which African history could be re-written in order to correct its distortion by colonial historians. Taken in the context of displacement and fragmentation, as pointed out by Stephen Slemon, allegory is the oral mode best suited to piece history together because of its ability to provide the, ‘post-colonial writer with a means of foregrounding such inherited notions and exposing them to the transformative powers of imagination and in doing so post-colonial allegory helps to produce new ways of seeing history, new ways of ‘reading’ the world’ (Slemon, 1988, p. 164).

Through this act of imaginative rediscovery of the golden Shona past that *Feso* provides, Mutswairo is able to offer an ‘imaginary fullness’ of the life of Africans as it would have been, had it not been disrupted by colonial forces. That picture of a stable identity of Africans in the past implied in the coherent form of the Vahota narrative attempts to project a positive image of Africa that is different from the negative one popularised by imperial writers like, for example, Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. As both a literary and political strategy to challenge colonial racism, the idiom of African people’s ‘difference’ and their ‘otherness’ as
opposed to European 'beingness' is a form of resistance that historically belongs to the structure of feeling associated with continental negritudism. The ideological significance of the philosophy of negritudism was to impart to Africans who had been psychologically emasculated by colonialism a sense of renewed confidence in being black. The significance of the ideology of cultural nationalism that Mutswairo revives in Feso should therefore not be underestimated because, such notions as the 'African world view' and 'African personality' during their heyday, 'played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racism' (Hall, 1996, p. 111).

However, the paradox of the project of cultural retrieval that insists on recovering a pure, authentic and unchanging identity for Africans is that it is a notion that is triggered by the colonial order or system of knowledge. The discourse of 'difference' and 'otherness' ironically maintains the fixed binaries implied in the description of Africans and Europeans as belonging to a single identity. The binary understanding of the African past and present also 'normalizes and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past' (p. 117). Consequently, an African writer such as Mutswairo who responds to colonial myths with counter Shona myths of origin as a way of trying to prove the superiority of the past culture of Africans ends up elaborating an 'alternate genealogy' of blackness. This is a condition that entraps the language of resistance in reverse discourse. And, as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, the limitation of reverse discourse is that

the terms of resistance are already given[them], and their[i.e.; cultural nationalists] contestation is entrapped within the Western cultural conjuncture [they] affect to dispute . . . .Railing against the cultural hegemony of the West, the nativists are of its party without knowing it . . . . In their ideological inscription the cultural nationalists remain in a position of counter-identification . . . which is to continue to participate in an institutional configuration . . . one officially decries . . . . (Appiah, 1992, p. 59).

In Feso, the life of the Vanyai people under chief Pfumojena is underpinned by internal violence. Pfumojena rejects the wise advice that he receives from his counsellors such as Sarirambi, to work for peace. Those of the Vanyai people such as Mutowembwa and his rebellious group who do not endorse Pfumojena’s corrupt authority are either summarily executed or exiled (p. 62). Pfumojena manipulates the legal and religious codes of the Vanyai people in order to shore up his unpopular authority as well as to find a pretext to eliminate his potential enemies. By showing the internal strife within the life of the Vanyai people, Solomon Mutswairo ironically succeeds in undermining his own desire for the novel to recover a unified utopian 'African world view'. To identify this as an ideological achievement – though unintended - is not to celebrate the forces of division within the pre-colonial Shona society. It is to recognize on the part of Mutswairo, the continuing tension and dynamism that defined that society. It is also to accord the
pre-colonial African societies historical agency and reveal the essence of the Shona people as conscious historical actors who worked to shape their own destinies.

The violence that characterises Pfumojena’s rule also emphasizes the disunity among Shona people forcing them to generate a vision of political unity that transcends it. On the bigger political level provided by the colonial context, Pfumojena’s violence on his people allegorizes the violence that is carried out on African people by other African people under neo-colonialism. Fredric Jameson’s asserts that all Third World texts are to be read as national allegories. The distinct feature of that allegory, according to Jameson (1987, p. 87) is that ‘... the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society.’ Jameson’s understanding of national allegory goes beyond acknowledging the single enemy of Africans as colonialism. The complexity of national allegory involves a multiplicity of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region and religion. National allegories inherently possess profound overlaps that ironically suggest in some cases, ‘bourgeois nationalisms of the so-called Third World will have [no] difficulty with postmodernism; they want it.’ (Ahmad, 1992, p. 102). Unfortunately, these paradoxical modes of being of national allegory have not been developed in Feso’s depiction of the African people’s anti-colonial struggles.

In Feso a common consciousness of direct resistance to Pfumojena’s rule and by extension, to that of white settlers is articulated through a petitionary chant uttered by one of the victimized Vanyai old men. Through the chant or ‘Ode to Nehanda’, the old man is transformed into a political force representing the voice of African nationalism. He evokes images of the pathos of African people’s predicament by juxtaposing and contrasting images of indulgence linked to Pfumojena’s court with those associated with loss and want that have become the experience of most Africans under the colonial system. The old man uses ‘debased’ language to denounce and subvert both Pfumojena and the white settlers’ authority in the novel. Pfumojena and his political sycophants are described as ‘fat ... pigs’ (p. 88) while the ordinary Vanyai people who generate that wealth which is enjoyed by Pfumojena are portrayed as being as ‘lean as diseased dogs’ (p. 88). The choice of idiomatic expressions such as, ‘... everywhere they stand as on hot ashes’ (p. 87) accentuates the intensity of suffering among Africans groaning under the exploitative system of colonialism. The idiomatic expressions also create an elegiac mood that is intended to elicit immediate response from Nehanda in order to inspire her people to fight the colonial system.

The ‘Ode to Nehanda’ is so central to the ideology accommodated in Feso that it deserves quoting at length.

In every house and every village our people are being pulled out, punished: in every place and court that they are accused, they are treated like flies; killed without reason – without an honest trial. Today all the wealth of the land has been taken. The top dogs, the kindred of Pfumojena, share the spoils. Today they are eating the fat of the land. And we are reduced to eating the pus of our wounds.
Today they are as fat as dogs. And we as gagged, strangled with bindings: Where is our freedom, Nehanda? Won’t you come down to help us? Our old men are treated like children in the land you gave them, Merciful Creator! They no longer have human dignity. They possess nothing. A great calamity has befallen them. Holy, Father, Merciful Mountain! Wont you hear our cry? What foul crime have we committed? That you abandon us like this? Nehanda Nyakasikana, how long shall it be? That we, the Vanyai must suffer oppression by this cursed Pfumojena who is devouring our people and our land (pp. 87–8).

The ‘Ode to Nehanda’ belongs to the genre of clan poetry or Nhetembo Dzamadzinza. In Shona orature, clan poetry invoked the power of departed revered ancestors such as Chaminuka and Mapondera to intervene in the political struggles of the Shona people for survival. Appeals to ancestral intervention during both the First and Second Chimurenga in Zimbabwe strengthened the forces of ‘tradition,’ while at the same time investing that ideology of tradition with political authority to legitimise and ratify the aims, ideals and political direction of the nationalist struggle. The ‘Ode to Nehanda’ works to restore the power of traditional authority as an ideology of the nationalist struggle even as the same ode claims that Africans are fighting to realize modern aspirations such as industrialization, equality, collective and individual freedom of expression.

The main achievement of the poem lies in its ability to hold and balance in a single nationalist ‘vessel’ the paradoxical projects of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. It does not see them as antagonistic to each other. As Paul Gilroy correctly argues, there is a close relationship of ‘dependency and antagonism’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 48) between the twin concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. What this means is that a writer such as Mutswairo who situates his voice of protest and critique of modernity within the cultural forms supplied by Shona oral tradition is paradoxically, but significantly affirming both. In an ironical sense, the very idea of using allegory implied in the ‘Ode to Nehanda’ in order to criticize colonialism is part of the discourse of modernity’s reinvention of that oral tradition.

The ‘Ode to Nehanda’ also affiliates itself to other poetic sub-genres of the Shona oral tradition such as the jikinyira, nheketerwa and mavingu. This admixture of oral genres present in the Nehanda poem enables the old man to assert, denounce, praise and appeal to Nehanda, or kutuka midzimu (challenging the ancestral) so that her spirit participates in the process of imagining, constructing and nurturing the new nation. The incorporation of the oral sub-genres not only attempts to capture and retain Shona orature as performance it also validates the new existence of orature within the extended literary form of the novel. The use of the ode form in Feso also denies interpretive finality to the novel because the style of the ode introduces an instability to the meaning of a romance narrative normally enclosed within its teleology that lies in its comic resolution or the successful outcome of its mission.

The inclusion of the ‘Ode to Nehanda’ in Feso also means that a complete transference of orature and its absorption into the mode of ‘realism’ does not take
place and that the novel remains suspended between the fantastic elements of romance and realism. This act of foregrounding two ‘opposing’ discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other, forestalls the possibility of reading the novel in a single direction. It also prevents the act of naturalizing the text to an established system of representation. As Michael Bakhtin (1981) points out, the novel is the most incomplete of all literary genres. It takes in elements from orature and parodies others. The act of combining various ‘speech types’ in the novel is according to Bakhtin useful for the novel to resist canonization and instead, promote the polysemy of the symbol. Specifically commenting on Dostoevsky’s writing as an instance of dialogic art, Bakhtin argues that the elements of realism and the fantastic dimensions of the romantic mode are involved in a continuous tension that generates new levels of meaning. These ‘opposed’ discursive systems of symbolic representation are never set in motion along a temporal path or in an evolving sequence: they are, rather spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant but not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel (Bakhtin cited in Chennells, 1997, p. 56).

Transposed to the Feso national allegory, Bakhtin’s insights would suggest that the ‘realism’ of the ‘Ode to Nehanda’ is its figural quality of instability, its refusal to take colonial ‘truth’ for granted and its consequent revelation of social meanings as unstable and its constant interrogation of the category of the ‘real’. This quality invested in the spiritual authority of this Ode enables it to trace the unsaid and unseen of the Shona culture and bring to the surface the silenced, the invisible, the covered over and made absent of that culture. This in turn, allows the national allegory to be re-activated and continuously re-interpreted in different historical periods as a cautionary tale against tyrannical rule in the past, present and future of the African people in Zimbabwe.

Solomon Mutswairo’s significant achievement resides in the fact that through the use of orature as a cultural form, he has been able to further the cultural debate on the troubled question of the changing identities of Africans. This achievement is greater if judged against the stance of some critics of Zimbabwean literature, who, during the period of the run up to independence believed that African orature should be repressed. They argued that orature prevented a ‘rationalistic’ engagement with the reality of independence and modernization (Kahari, 1974, p. 61).

In the context of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, the ‘Ode to Nehanda’ in Feso was considered by the colonial powers to possess a dangerously mobilizing effect on Africans fighting against the system. This caused the novel to be banned from use in African secondary schools. But, as Flora Veit-Wild observes, even when Feso was banned, the novel was appropriated by ‘militant nationalists who recited poems and paragraphs from the book at public meetings. The hymn to the spirit medium Nehanda, leading figure in the First Chimurenga became
especially popular’ (1993, p. 139). Although *Feso* was originally based on Shona oral tradition, the novel’s use in the armed struggle meant that it was being re-absorbed and re-appropriated back into that oral tradition from which it had come. In its new oral context of the political struggle, the novel was invested with new and radical nationalist meanings. The wider political and cultural implication of this process of literary ‘trafficking’ between orature and the novelistic form to African literature is that although the novel is by origin a bourgeois form (Watt, 1957), in Zimbabwe it was being appropriated by the ‘masses’ to articulate resistance to forms of social and political oppression.

Two important factors further account for the paradoxical nature of *Feso*’s existence as both a performed and read text. To some extent the cultural authority invested in the ‘Ode to Nehanda’, provided the African people with the framework to express a consensus of beliefs. These beliefs are philosophical and metaphysical givens about the nature of reality and the relationship of literature to that reality. Solomon Mutswairo’s early social background is one of a peasant in Mazowe and as such, he was also familiar with the Shona stories about the legendary Nehanda’s military and organizational prowess during the First Chimurenga in Zimbabwe. Because Mutswairo’s oral background is part of his dynamic modern consciousness, he could partially represent the political aspirations of his people especially as they are articulated through the Ode.

Mutswairo’s educational background in Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and United States of America also exposed him to bourgeois aspirations. The ‘autonomy’ that he enjoyed as the author of *Feso* enabled him to advance his own views about the nature of the nationalist struggle. For Mutswairo while writing tended to promote the ‘modern’ individualism through which the lone writer could go against the collective interests, it did not prevent him from understanding the nature of political feeling of the desire for independence that was cherished by the African people for whom he was writing. Despite being a ‘bourgeois’ writer, he was still able to recall the significance of ‘traditional’ literature. This conflation of the ‘bourgeois’ identity with that of the ‘peasant’ one is reproduced and revealed through the fusion of the spoken and the written word. Although the ideologies of orature and the novel, of the bourgeois and the peasant identities are contesting for dominance in and through *Feso*, Mutswairo has not allowed either one of them to take precedence over the other.

Instead, the intertextuality of the novel is ‘resolved’ by way of embracing the so-called ‘contamination’ by orature as a literary strategy. This ‘impure’ identity of the novel paradoxically enables it to imagine different kinds of audience at once: the lone reader in his isolated room, the performer or ‘mass’ reader at the political rally and ordinary peasant reciters. It also made the novel anticipate the versatile/varied nature of the Zimbabwean audience; the bourgeois, the peasant and the radical cultural nationalists that are all addressed by the novel. In this sense, *Feso* displays an inherent capacity for generic self-criticism and self-interruption that, to use Graham Pecheys’ words, reflects the ‘heteroglot struggle of languages
political awareness of resistance to colonial domination. Ironically, in *Feso*, the cultural symbol of Nehanda is being used to promote a male-dominated nationalism that is also insisting on maintaining a hierarchy of superiority and subordination between African men and their women.

When *Feso* was articulating the national allegory of resistance to colonial hegemony, the novel was also busy reaffirming the ‘proper’ social position befitting the African woman after independence. This is the case in *Feso* where the romantic quest for a wife by chief Nyang’ombe is fulfilled when Pfumojena is defeated and Nyang’ombe wins Chipo (gift from Heaven). As a foundational text to African nationalism in Zimbabwe, *Feso*’s narrative proceeds by linking romantic personal fortunes to the grand design of nation building. In this subplot of a romance that parallels the allegory of nation building, the socially accepted and celebrated image of the Shona woman is primarily that of biological mother for the nation, passive and subservient to Shona men. In this world of ‘queenly’ subservience, Chipo and Rumba are promised a life of ease because of their dependency on men. Even the stories that Feso, the hero of the novel tells to Chipo and Rumba on their way back to Chief Nyang’ombe after the conquest of Pfumojena enjoins African women to believe that in marriage, there will be safety with dependence and that there will be power with subordination.

So, to give Jameson’s formulation of ‘national allegory’ a new twist, it is possible to argue that what makes the *Feso*’s allegory distinctly ‘national’, are its complex internal contradictions. These exist in the novel as an internally fractured literary narrative. While on one hand it is used to fabricate a progressive idiom of national resistance to colonial values, on the other hand allegory is simultaneously exploited in the same novel to confirm patriarchy and its constituent social practices and ideologies of female oppression (Storey, 1996, p. 51). These ideologies of female oppression are sanctioned by those negative aspects in the Shona people’s cultural traditions and accentuated by the social discrimination African women experienced under colonialism. But whether the ideology of female oppression emerges from some aspects of the Shona tradition or are further reinforced by the inequalities between Africans and white settlers in a colonial context and between African men and women within the black communities themselves, in *Feso* Mutswairo seems keen to revive a conservative notion of the nation. These contradictions persist in *Jikinya*, a novel that uses the folktale mode to imagine the birth of a new African nation in Rhodesia.

**Folktale in Jikinya**

*Jikinya* tells the story of the African uprising against white settlers in the nineteenth century, ‘somewhere in the warm heart of Africa’ (p. 1). This setting which the novel declines to give a specific name to could very well be Zimbabwe because the novel goes on to concentrate on two Shona groups: the Ngara and Changani people. In the encounter between the Africans and white settlers that the novel re-enacts, the Wilsons (a white family) lose their lives and leave behind a white
baby girl. A Ngara family rescues the white baby girl (Chedu and Tsitsi) and she is then raised the Ngara way. When the white settlers make an attempt to retrieve this child, she dies in the thick of the battle between the Ngara and the Changani on one side and the white settlers on the other.

*Jikinya* uses a folktale mode to frame the conflicts between the Africans and colonial forces and is based on the Jikinya legend derived from Shona oral tradition. In order to be able to identify the major modifications that Ndhlala has made to the Jikinya story of the Shona oral tradition, it is significant to briefly highlight the outstanding features of the original story as it is retold in Shona orature. In its original state, the Jikinya story is meant to both entertain and caution. Four sequences or stages define the internal movement of the story. Firstly, a beautiful girl hears the sound of a drumbeat, is enticed by it and wanders out alone towards the far-away fairyland from whence the drumbeat is coming. Secondly, the beautiful girl reaches the fairyland of wild animals that capture her. Thirdly, the beautiful girl successfully pleads with the animals not to eat her until she sings to them one of the melodious tunes from a song she has just composed. Fourthly, in the thick of the dust generated by the feet of the dancing wild animals, Jikinya escapes into safety and freedom. Two major highlights of the Jikinya story relate to her passage into the fairyland of wild animals and how she frees herself from that condition of captivity.

Jikinya’s passage from the ‘real’ world of the village life into the fairy world of the animals in the story suggests to a listener of the story, a sense of a threshold crossed. The heroine’s descent into the forest world of fairy animals in the story signifies a break in consciousness, isolation and immobility, that epitomises a spiritual dislocation. In her condition of captivity, Jikinya momentarily experiences, ‘individual loss, or confusion or break in the continuity of identity (Frye, 1976, p. 104). The forest in the folktale is depicted as a space that generates confusion of identity and restriction of action. It is a place of cruelty and imprisonment. Together with the spirit world, the forest embodies the chaotic and anxiety-generating forces of nature. As Ato Quayson argues, ‘the bush is the antithesis of settled communities and is conceived of as the problematic ‘Other’ harbouring all sorts of supernatural forces’ (1997, p. 46). But the same fairyland of the folktale that Jikinya enters into is also a liminal space harbouring immense potential for a hero or heroine with the requisite skills and courage. As an area of fluid identity, anti-structure and ambiguity, entrance implies that the heroine is transported to a site where plurality of meaning is generated. Jikinya becomes both captive and fighter.

Liminality as a ‘zone of occult instability’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 183), is a space of becoming and assuming double identities: one of vulnerability and the other that affirms the desire to engage the subterranean spiritual resources available in one’s culture in order to strike back at the source of the threat to individual and community well-being. According to Northrop Frye, themes of descent in romance narratives show movement from ‘this world to a lower one’ as implied in Jikinya crossing the village boundary into the fairyland. The ascent from the lower world
of imprisonment to a higher world of freedom is signalled by the protagonist’s ‘escape, remembrance, the discovery of one’s real identity, growing freedom and the breaking of enchantment’ (1976, p. 129). On the other hand, the reverse movement from the lower world to the higher world does not confirm an unproblematic return to the original identity or an unqualified embrace of a totally new identity. The movement of a protagonist within the fluid boundaries of the liminal space is a transitional gesture. It reveals states inchoate and unfinished.

In the original Jikinya story the girl frees herself from captivity by way of singing a song to the wild animals. The ingenuity of the girl transforms her into a fighter. The fact that the girl uses oral resources from her culture is meant to emphasize that resistance of the oppressed comes from within culture and is projected outwards by way of struggle. The Jikinya tale of the Shona oral tradition ends on an optimistic note. It asserts faith in the human capacity to triumph over social odds. It also reaffirms a communalistic ethic by re-integrating Jikinya back into the freedom assured by village life. The story maintains the mythopoetic structure of Shona cautionary tales in which heroism is accorded to weak and oppressed members of the community who are fighting social tyranny. The story underscores the fact that in traditional African society, heroism derives from the ‘processes of adventure and confrontation of challenges to which the hero is exposed to (Quayson, 1997, p. 52). The metaphysical dimension of the Jikinya story is to make the listener recognize that the world of fantasy and make-believe in the folktale is logically equivalent to the ‘real’ world in terms of the dislocations potential in both.

In Jikinya, the author has appropriated the resistance and fighting spirit embodied in the Jikinya legend for purposes of framing African resistance against colonial occupation in Zimbabwe. The novel begins with the struggle of African people to regain their land from white settlers. African resistance is also a struggle to recover an identity rooted in the ownership and control of the land. As the omniscient narrator puts it, the African struggle is a defensive one aimed at stopping colonial aggression, restoring African ‘dignity’ and ‘land’ (p. 1). By taking up arms against colonialism, Africans have chosen to reclaim their own humanity through struggle. Africans have also decided to appropriate that power to recreate history and to reshape their own destiny that had been sidetracked from them by the forces of colonial settlerism.

Although Ndhlala may or may not have been influenced by Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (1963), he seems in Jikinya to heed Fanon’s warning to African writers that those intellectuals who spend time romanticizing their people’s past, are actually working against them. Fanon argues that ‘the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities’ (Fanon 1963, p. 181). The ‘truths’ and ‘realities’ of the emerging African nation that confronted Ndhlala in the 1970s are that Africans could no longer defend their human dignity by merely showing the moral ‘superiority’ of their past culture to that of colonialism. The main achievement of
the novel here is to show Africans vindicating their being through struggle. It also reveals that as an historical option, resistance opened the possibility of freedom associated with the restoration of lost lands. In addition, with the intra-party factions that characterized African politics of the 1970s, the ‘realities’ that Ndhlala had to encourage were the need for political unity and reconciliation among Africans themselves. In Jikinya this discourse of unity, reconciliation and resistance is further framed and elaborated upon, by Tichafa’s folktale of the invalid girl.

Geoffrey Ndhlala complicates the notion of ‘resistance’ in Jikinya, by making a radical shift from elaborating a political narrative of militant struggle towards adopting an ultimate moral narrative of the unique goodness of the Ngara people. This moral narrative is constructed around a subplot implied in the folktale that Tichafa tells of the Ngara people at the point of their assuming communal responsibility for the welfare of the white girl Jikinya. In Tichafa’s tale, a woman gives birth to an invalid. The baby girl is put to death upon the instruction of one village elder. In a surprise turn of events, the elder, his wife and sons catch a strange disease and they all die painfully. Tichafa’s tale operates mostly to subvert colonial history and mythologies that spoke of Africans as savages and uncivilized human beings. As a deconstructive narrative strategy, the tale denies colonial discourse the power to represent Africans as its subalterns. By emphasizing the humanity of Africans who have saved and brought up Jikinya, Ndhlala shows that the biological forces of nature are not superior to the social forces of nurture in the formation of identity and socialization of members of the society with its values and mores.

Thus, what is implied in the moral narrative generated by the tale is a political statement to the effect that Africans continue to fight even after their temporary defeat in the First Chimurenga. For Ndhlala, heroism is not only achieved on the battlefield but is also extended to include the sum total of the humanistic values that promote the life which the Ngara people uphold in their ‘simple’ and unassuming way. The moral narrative derived from Tichafa’s folktale also operates in ways that attempt to provide the novel with a stable philosophical and moral universe that informs the daily conduct of the Ngara people. The Ngara people’s moral conduct also relates to and is fundamentally rooted in the ‘moral economy’ of peasant sensibility of sharing. Its function in Jikinya, is to present and confirm the existence of the simplicity that interrogates the complex in order to recall it to its essentials and fundamental humanity that has made its existence possible (Chennells, 1997, p. 41).

The moral narrative derived from Tichafa’s tale has other important functions in the novel. In bringing Jikinya into the communal fold of the Ngara people, Ndhlala attempts to recast the nationalist romance narrative as comedy. A comic resolution of social struggle insists on a happy culmination of social processes, the restoration of a new social order and the sardonic ‘sealing’ off of historical possibilities. Hayden White states that the ‘mythos of synecdoche is the dream of comedy, the apprehension of a world in which all struggle, strife and conflict are dissolved in the realization of a perfect harmony, in which all crime, vice and
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In a certain sense, Tichafa’s folktale in *Jikinya*, attempts to impose a restoration of a unity and reconciliation of the social elements formerly at odds with each other. This ideological attempt to suggest a ‘genuine peaceful order’ results in the author manufacturing the naïve myth of African generosity. In this myth, the Ngara people are portrayed as people favoured by nature. Their life is static and their response to social forces that disrupt their existence is depicted as uniform.

As a political concept, the myth of the fundamental goodness of the African people that is resuscitated in *Jikinya* is juxtaposed alongside the European colonization with all its greed and inhumanity towards Africans. What Ndhlala implies is that in colonizing Africans, white settlers are destroying something of value to humanity. But this moral lesson is internally dislocated and weak at the point where it claims to be strong. It is complicit with colonial discourse in depicting Africans as a unique human species endowed with certain qualities of generosity which other races are not ‘naturally’ endowed with. This is the language of the reverse discourse of negritudism which one of the eminent critics of African literature, Chidi Amuta has criticized because it falsifies African pre-colonial reality by portraying it as an unchanging entity, a ‘fairly homogenous, immutable and eternal mode of perceiving reality’ (Amuta, 1989, p. 38).

Consequently, the idealization of the Ngara people, especially after their initial crisis that involved a war with settlers, reveals the contradictions between Ndhlala’s subjective ideological position and what the African masses know and how they interpret their reality. While the ordinary masses are in the 1970s giving shape to the ‘fluctuating movement’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 183) of the struggle, what one sees in and through *Jikinya* is a promotion of a contradictory and yet ‘modern’ individualism by which the educated Africans like Ndhlala interpret the African reality as fixed. This modern individualistic consciousness is as much mystifying and distorting of the ‘African reality’ as the colonial racist mythologies were. Incongruously the picture of a homogenous ‘African reality,’ implied in the novel’s moral narrative, is disrupted and destabilized by the metaphysical influence or imperative of the internal dislocations within the Jikinya folktale.

Those dislocations inherent in the original Jikinya folktale reassert themselves in the novel by introducing fluid elements of meaning to the absolute authority implied in the moral narrative of the novel. This fluidity denies the author a comic resolution to the historical events he depicts. The vulnerability of the moral narrative is further undermined by the vulnerability of Jikinya herself. In the folktale that the novel reproduces, Jikinya’s song is appropriated by the hyena that ends up devouring her grandmother and threatening her life as well (p. 24). What is evident in this narrative is the metaphorical transference of the internal crisis implied in the Jikinya folktale and its projection onto the political level of the nationalist struggle that the novel depicts. On a literal level, the two wars that the Africans fight against the white settlers seem to encourage a pessimistic
interpretation of the African predicament. It is immaterial whether the Ngara and Changani people accept Jikinya (which they do at the end of the novel) or do not, as they are confronted by inescapable and implacable colonial forces.

Ndhlala seems to be suggesting that the colonial phenomenon does not offer to Africans a wider choice of historical, moral and practical options. The only ‘road’ that is open to Africans and which imply positive political action is one of struggle. Africans just have to fight to survive the brutal conquest. It is at this point in the novel that the question of Jikinya’s orphan state becomes significant. Just like Jikinya, Africans in the 1970s were symbolically ‘orphaned’ because they did not control their land. The narrative is interpreted as universalising the theme of orphanhood symbolized by that of Jikinya. Ndhlala ignores the horrors of Rhodesian rule that affected black people in a multitude of negative ways. In the process, the author oversimplifies a complex historical process.

If the internal dislocation of the Jikinya folktale is to be interpreted as possessing a potentially alternative and redemptive meaning, it is to ‘force’ Ndhlala to make an ideological shift from a comic plot to a tragic mythos in *Jikinya*. For the author, the recasting of history as tragedy paradoxically ‘reveals again and again . . . that the secret of history is nothing but man’s eternal contest with and return to himself’ (White, 1973, p. 194). As Hayden White further notes with regard to the question of historical realism as tragedy, history is conceived as open-ended and, ‘not regarded as totally threatening to those who survive the agonic test. There has been a gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest’ (1993, p. 9). In the process, *Jikinya* simultaneously subverts the moral certitude implied in both the author’s previously idealized picture of the Ngara people and the authority that Mr Brown, the white missionary, and the rest of the white soldiers think they possess.

Mr Brown for instance, learns to respect the Ngara society but his respect is portrayed as a half-hearted gesture because he fails to transcend his own racism. It is he who shows the way to the white captain who is more than willing to provoke war with the Ngara and Changani people. The war at the end of the novel that a unified Ngara and Changani people wage against white settlers ceases simply to be one in defence of African land. It is also a war to affirm Jikinya’s humanity. What Ndhlala succeeds in doing here, is to transform Jikinya into a site for testing the reconciliation between the Ngara and the Changani people. Published in the late 1970s, *Jikinya* possesses an allegoric structure that demands that its readers ‘read’ its message of unity into the political struggle for independence by Africans in that period. The novel’s message of unity is a commentary on the internal ‘ethnic’ divisions among Africans in Rhodesia that threatened to derail the cause of African nationalist struggle in the 1970s.

Largely read in Zimbabwe after 1980, when the revolution was consolidating itself in Africa the novel also suggests the possibility of reconciliation between Africans and white people and in this way, can be said to anticipate the policy of reconciliation that was to be pursued by the Black Nationalist government after
independence. But unlike Feso's romance that provides a happy culmination to the fight against evil social forces and hence suggests the possibility of perceiving coherence and viability of the Shona life, folktale in *Jikinya* is used to present historical time as relative and temporal. This implies that the novel, just like the folktale on which it is based, possesses and constantly activates an internal self deconstructive strategy that ensures that no single meaning of the text ever settles or establishes itself as the dominant one. The influence of the ‘realism’ of the folktale mode in *Jikinya* therefore, is to enable Ndhlala to effect at the end of the novel, what Drew Shaw has called the ‘absence of closure’ so that ‘questions remain unanswered and the reader is not presented with any absolute or authoritative “truth” and is sometimes actually invited to doubt the validity of what he or she is presented with’ (Shaw, 1999, p. 11).

In the Jikinya folktale, rejection of fixed lines, borders and boundaries introduces the double-voiced nature of the novel so that while inviting to the former colonizer to recognize the negative impact of his policies on Africans, the novel also speaks against the same colonizer, rejecting his values as anti-life. The novel ‘speaks’ to Africans, encouraging them to undermine the colonial status quo so that through the Jikinya folktale, Ndhlala re-appropriates the initiative to create a just society. Ndhlala also appropriates the English language in order to make it carry the freight of the African people’s consciousness of resistance to the imperial power. The effects of double-voicedness or heteroglossia in the narrative expresses what Mikhail Bakhtin, describes as ‘simultaneously two different intentions: direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intentions of the author’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

Furthermore, the inherent dislocation within the internal structure of the Jikinya folktale generates aspects of meaning that even the author had not anticipated when writing the novel. It is also arguable that the dialogical processes are not sustained up to the end of this novel. By making the eponymous protagonist in the novel a white woman, the writer attempts to install a female-centred perspective of resistance within the nationalist struggle that he depicts. Jikinya is of course permanently a Ngara and only artificially white. But her presence in the novel further complicates the nationalist narrative of resistance whose moral economy is based on a racial allegory that invariably pits black people against white people. This implies a will-to-challenge the male-dominated meanings of the nation that the participation of the Ngara and Changani men in the war of liberation predominantly signifies. But the female-centred narrative is not developed and elaborated on its own terms. It seems to me that as a foundational text of African nationalism in Zimbabwe, the novel’s major concern was to project a desired nation controlled by African males. In that new nation, African women occupy subordinate social positions.

**Spirit-possession in *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe***

The problem of imagining the new African nation in conservative terms can be traced more precisely in *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, a novel that imagines
the birth of a new African nation through the cultural prism of ethnicity. In the novel, the privileging of ‘ethnic moments of identity’ (Ogude, 1999, p. 13) over the identity invoked by the notion of nation, ironically threatens the existence of that very nation in whose name an ethnic awareness is being promoted. *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* raises the question of the survival of the Shona people in the light of the invasion of Zimbabwe by the Ndebele in the 1830s and the white settlers in the 1890s. The novel evokes the Shona religious myth of spirit-possession in order to show the Shona people’s resistance to both the Ndebele and the white settlers.

According to Shona beliefs, living people are the spiritual conduits through which ancestors speak to their descendents. Ancestor worship itself is in Shona philosophy, recognition of the extended responsibilities that the departed ancestors have to the living and the unborn. Unlike the biblical account of human creation and origin that claims that heaven or hell are the terminus or destination of human/spiritual life, spirit-possession affirms man’s triumph over time and space. The emphasis of spirit-possession is on human communication that is the precondition for the regeneration of the Shona people. In spirit-possession, the sense of what constitutes reality for the Shona people goes beyond what is visible and tangible. As Laurenti Magesa states, ‘Ancestorship is an act of communion in remembrance that is also actualization or resurrection. It constitutes making present among us here and now those who are remembered. Ancestors and their descendant so near earth are in continuity’ (1997, p. 78).

Although David Lan is specifically writing about the Mhondoro spiritual religion of the Shona people, when he observes that

> [t]he possession rituals construct an ideal alternative society which persists after the rituals have been completed, a society based on the ideal of ‘one lineage, one territory’, the ideal of pure descent in which any challenge to the ownership of the territory by ‘strangers’ is diffused by transforming them into descendents of the mhondoro, ancestor of the royal lineage and of the spirit province within which they live (1985, p. 116),

he might have been commenting on all-embracing African cosmology. This theme is taken up in *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, by Mutswairo when he uses spirit-possession in an attempt to forge a new spiritual coherence for the Shona people in Zimbabwe.

In the novel the great spirit of Chaminuka possesses Pasipamire. While in that state of possession, Pasipamire spiritually journeys back through mythical time to Guruuswa, the assumed historical point of origin of the present ethnic groups making up the Shona nation. This ‘leap from fact and history into myth and metaphor’ (Cooper, 1991, p. 61) enables Pasipamire to restore Shona history, beginning with such founding fathers of the Shona nation as Murenga Sororenzou ‘ruler of Govanwa in Guruuswa and Nembire, the Shona great patriarch (p. 17). The world of the Shona past constructed by Murenga and Nembire belong to a
higher moral order. It is, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's words, 'a world of 'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history, a world of fathers and founders of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 13). While Bakhtin emphasizes the multiple narratives within the nation, Solomon Mutswairo, through retrieving a unified ethnic identity of the Shona people, attempts to naturalize the Shona people's claim to the ownership and control of land. As the spirit itself says when possessing Pasipamire: ‘This land is given to us in trust and no stranger will ever be permitted to take it away from the children of Nembire. It is an inviolable legacy for us and our children's children (p. 18).

The view and conviction of the Spirit is meant to oppose the white settlers' nefarious claim that at the time of colonization of Zimbabwe, the country was empty, uninhabited and therefore belonged to any one who dared 'tame the jungle.' By going back into the history of the people, Chaminuka: prophet of Zimbabwe attempts to reverse colonial myths that portrayed Africans as a people without history or culture. The main achievement of Mutswairo in the novel is to remove the idea of spirit-possession from the realm of the magical, supernatural and mysterious to which it had been pushed in colonialist historiography. The novel also historicizes spirit-possession and makes it carry the values of cultural resistance of the Shona people. Mutswairo's concern to retrieve a 'pure, authentic' Shona account of their history is motivated by the desire to establish what Boehmer calls, 'a restorative connection with that which colonialist discourse had denied - the internal life of the colonized, their experience as historical actors' (1995, p. 195).

Thus, unlike narratives from the empire such as the ambivalent A Passage to India by E. M. Forster whose impulse is to simultaneously promote and at the same time criticize imperial values, the spiritual journey in Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe is meant to recover the repressed political and cultural potential of Africans so that they can reforge their own identities and redirect the course of their history. In this basic sense, the imperial journey into the 'interior' of African land typical of imperial narratives is in Mutswairo's novel, reversed and replaced by a spiritual journey undertaken by Africans who appropriate narratives that recover their past in order to explain who they are. Narrative space becomes the locus of repossession where recuperation of Shona identity is accomplished by reappropriating devalued African folk wisdom. Elleke Boehmer (1995) notes that in some post-colonial novels 'occupation and settlement plotted from the colonial centre to the colonies have been supplanted by journeys from the hinterland to the city – with the extra inflection of the final moment of homecoming and return . . . Incorporating indigenous cultural material, defiant of Western authority, the post-colonial quest seeks mastery not in the first instance over land or other peoples but history and self'' (p. 202).

The paradox of Pasipamire’s spiritual journey into the Shona past is that it invests the 'tribe' with the meaning of nation. In this novel the notion of ethnicity is in James Ogude's words, made to 'stand for itself and the nation simultaneously' (1999, p. 7). In the Shona nation that is promoted in the novel, both the Ndebele
and white settlers are constructed as ‘strangers’ and political outsiders. And yet, by the time the novel was published in 1983, it was no longer critically sensible to talk of the Ndebeles as political outsiders or *mafikizolo*. Ndebele men and women fought, shed blood and died in order to liberate the land of Zimbabwe that had been colonized by the British a fact which reinforces the historical notion that no nation is ethnically and racially pure.

The imagined community that is the nation transcends race and ethnicity all over the world. By refusing this transcendence, Mutswairo popularises a divisive rhetoric of political exclusion which effectively refuses to allow other social groups to participate in constructing the new Zimbabwean nation. To do so, the author uses spirit-possession as an ‘apparatus of cultural fiction’ (Brennan, 1990, p. 49) to construct, project outwards and legitimise the ethno-romance of Shona hegemony over other social groups in the country. Consequently, the spiritual journey into the Shona past by a possessed Pasipamire generates ambivalent meanings: on one hand the journey signals the return of the repressed in the history of the African people and on the other hand, that aspect of the African history that is ‘returned’ also contains narratives that seek to create and dominate other ethnic groups.

The historical claim made in the novel that the Shona people are the only rightful owners of the land in Zimbabwe is further supported in the novel’s evocation of the rainmaking powers that are bestowed upon Pasipamire by the ancestors. Shona peasants depend on land for growing crops, grazing their cattle and burying their ‘dead’. Failure to recognize this presumed natural covenant between Shona people and their land is assumed to visit misfortunes on the Shona themselves. But also in traditional Shona thought, it is believed that ‘... the right of ownership in land is demonstrated and proved by the ability of a particular set of ancestors to control its fertility. The people whose ancestors bring the rain own the land’ (Lan, 1985, p. 98). In *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, it is the Shona ancestors such as the spirit of Chaminuka himself, that evokes the power to bring rain, thereby affirming the Shona people’s ownership of that land.

The ideological achievement of the author in re-installing the ritual of rainmaking in the novel is also ambiguous and controversial. The evocation of the rainmaking rituals enables the writer to debate the land question that was the major cause of the First and Second Chimurengas in Zimbabwe. Mutswairo also creatively succeeds in investing an age-old ritual of rainmaking that is otherwise ‘innocuous’ from the outside with the nationalist meanings associated with the politics of resistance to colonial control of African land. And yet, in the process, the writer ironically threatens the idea embodied in the collective identity of his desired African nation through constructing an idiom of ethnic particularism and tribalism that attempts to silence other Africans like the Ndebeles.

In the narrative, the Shona are portrayed as having a history of struggle. They are also endowed with the powers to conjure up rain and see into the future as well as predicting the downfall of the Ndebele Empire and that of the white settlers. What Pasipamire is able to foretell is also the ascendancy of the Shona people over
the newly created nation in a scenario that presupposes that if the Ndebele and the white people have disrupted the ‘authentic’ pre-colonial Shona identity that derives from Shona hegemony, the period of the restoration of communal health for the Shona people is supposed to come when the ‘rooster will emerge from the ashes to restore power and dignity, peace and prosperity to the troubled nation of the Mbire’ (p. 95). In post-independence Zimbabwe, the ‘rooster’ is the political emblem of Robert Mugabe’s nationalist party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Patriotic Front (PF). The notion of nation is misconstrued as simply an entity that can be physically inherited. Even when ‘nations’ command profound loyalty based on imagined cultural links, this paradoxically demonstrates that they are fictions. Though, as Raymond Williams reminds us, the term ‘nation’ carries with it contradictory meanings whose sense relates to local community, domicile, family and condition of belonging. Because ‘[n]ation as a term is radically connected to ‘native’ we are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial’ (Williams quoted by Brennan, 1990, p. 45).

What Mutswairo in this novel makes it difficult to understand is the fact that a nation is also a social construct defined by competing material interests. As a result, the class, gender and generational struggles that in post independence Zimbabwe characterize the Shona people have been obscured. Instead, in the novel, resistance to the ‘rooster’ is viewed as a fight against the wishes of the Shona ancestors and it invites the supposed retributive natural drought that now ravages Matabeleland (p. 187). Consequently, the narrative’s mode of constructing a new African nation through the idiom of spirit-possession, rain-making rituals and prophecy justifies and confirms Louis Althusser’s famous assertion that fiction renders visible the ideologies of the ruling class by displaying the internal contradictions of those ideologies (Maughan-Brown, 1985, p. 13).

Irreconcilable differences arise from Mutswairo’s adoption of an ethnic perspective to address the problems of African identities in the period before and after independence in Zimbabwe. The use of spirit-possession as a marker of the ‘authenticity’ of the Shona identity creates a false picture of a homogeneous Zimbabwean past. With its internal class, gender and even ethnic conflicts Zimbabwe’s past is too complex to be collapsed and understood as a single and static identity. Despite Mutswairo’s determination to reclaim the Shona past, he fails to do so in real terms for as Boehmer argues in postcolonial society coming to terms with the corrosion of tradition during colonial occupation, cultural purity was not on offer. Indigenous myth could not give automatic access to a national essence or ‘soul’. Yet, far from syncretism being a disadvantage, the powerful mutating energies of mixed genres . . . made available symbolic languages with which to signify . . . (Boehmer. 1995, p. 202), resistance to colonial culture. Thus, by spreading a divisive rhetoric of Shona ethno-nationalism, Mutswairo’s novel is deeply implicated in giving ethnicity impetus to reproduce itself as a disruptive
social ideology. This view is reinforced by James Ogude’s (1999) observation that in Africa, in the struggle to realize sectarian ambitions, black people are implicated in promoting ethnicity even when the ethnic discourse originated with colonialism. Black people have also found ethnicity useful in protecting internal rights and as a defence against external threats, whether real or imagined. Ogude further argues that ‘in the invention of ethnicity and its appropriation into competitive politics, the elite have emerged as the most eloquent articulators of the cultural characteristics of their ethnic identities through written histories, accounts of traditional ways of the tribe, and through written ethnic literatures’ (Ogude, 1999, p. 40).

Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe denies the fact that ethnicity is a result of competitive politics and the fear of being economically excluded from participating in decision about the new form and content of the new African nation. However, as Gerhard Mare reminds us ‘Political ethnicity (ethnic nationalism) moves social identity to political agency, provides the means for political mobilization, and submits the ethnic identity and group to another set of rules those of competition for power’ (Mare, 1992, p. 40). In short, the problems generated by ethnicity have been given impetus in Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe. This is an instance in which the writer’s social vision can be co-opted by dominant ideologies to promote sectarian interests that divide the nation. In that regard, Mutswairo’s novel and the way in which the author uses spirit-possession undermines the notion of resistance to colonialism.

Conclusion
It ought to be reiterated that Solomon Mutswairo and Geoffrey Ndhlala have in their novels used allegory, folktale and spirit-possession in order to fabricate a nationalist discourse based on resistance to colonial oppression. The value of that national resistance is based on the desire to advance ideas of freedom, independence and individual as well as collective rights that have been projected as attainable within the principal idea of African nationhood. In Feso, Jikinya and Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe allegory, folktale and spirit-possession are used respectively, to imagine a distinct African nation with common roots of origin, common ideals of freedom, harmony and peace for all black people. In the novels, allegory, folktale and spirit-possession are invested with the capacity to subvert and challenge colonialist myths that were crafted to inform the colonized people’s notion of history. These oral genres are also further exploited in the novels in ways that reveal the ideological ambivalences of the writers’ attitudes towards the idea of the ‘African nation’ which they intend to promote. While on one hand, allegory, folktale and spirit-possession are used as oral modes best suited to contesting the hegemony of the colonial system, on the other hand, they are used in the same novels to suppress the voices of some subalterns such as those of black women or some minority groups in Zimbabwe.

Resistance was also figured as a quest for modernization under African control which could be projected outside into the global arena as a nation with a distinctly
African identity. The major achievements of Mutswairo and Ndhlala are firstly, to demonstrate through allegory, folktale and spirit-possession that nationalist resistance did to some extent subvert and challenge the colonial order. Secondly, the two authors also succeed to a large extent in bringing to the centre of African cultural debate the unresolved questions of the identities of African people using orature. This aesthetic achievement is to be measured against the background of some Zimbabwean critics of literature who insisted and still insist in a move that smacks of shortsightedness, that is, on repressing the cultural and expressive potential of orature.

The paradox of the discourse of national resistance promoted by Mutswairo and Ndhlala is that in significant ways, it is still deeply embedded and implicated in supporting the modes of reasoning, values, institutions and ideas of the very colonial project that national resistance sought to overthrow. Solomon Mutswairo's Feso plotted the nationalist struggle as romance. The novel ended by re-establishing a social and moral order ruled and controlled by Africans. When the novel was re-read in 1980, it was interpreted as a confirmation of the emergence of the new African nation whose successful outcome was African political independence. But reading it in the new millennium shows us that the novel's romance plot is incongruous. The novel's dialogical processes that are completed outside the text force the reader to recognize the suppression of women in the early eighties as that which the new nation implied in Feso could not accommodate. Similarly, the publication of Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe in 1983 coincided with the new black-ruled-state's ruthless suppression of ethnic dissention in Matabeleland. Mutswairo's ideological shift from advocating a militant solution to the problem posed by colonialism in Feso and his uncritical embrace of the 'resistance' politics of ethnic absolutism in Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe demonstrates the complicity of his 'tribalized' reason that is essentially a product of colonialism's discourse of 'otherness'.

Geoffrey Ndhlala's Jikinya is simultaneously plotted as both comedy and tragedy. And yet the dislocations inherent in the Jikinya tale on which the novel is based deny the novel the possibility of being read with a single focus. Also, the two wars fought by Africans in the novel 'force' the author to shift from imposing a comic or happy resolution on his novel. Instead, the author recognises the internal contradictions within the emerging African nation. But the split image (fighter vs. passive woman) of African womanhood that the discourse of national resistance in Jikinya unconsciously rehearses, re-activates and installs at the heart of the African nation that the novel imagines and shows the 'vagaries of national discourse that are reflected in changing portrayals of women as victims of social backwardness, icons of modernity, or privileged bearers of cultural authenticity' (Gunner, 1994, p. 112).

It can therefore, be safely concluded, that Mutswairo and Ndhlala are representative of that class of African writers that Jean Francois Bayart (1993, p. 119) has dubbed 'conservative modernizers.' The two writers are aware of the need
to contest the hegemony of social oppressive systems and yet they, themselves, would want to preserve for their class certain privileges in education, the cultural and political power structures of the new nation. Conservative-modernizers are in Ernst Fischer's words 'the very embodiment of social contradiction, hopeful of sharing in the general enrichment [brought by colonialism] yet fearful of being crushed to death in the process, dreaming of new possibilities, yet clinging to the old security of rank, and order, its eyes turned towards the new times yet often so, nostalgically, towards the good old ones' (Fischer, 1963, p. 53).

In contrast to Mutswairo and Ndhlala's desire to project a unified nationalist discourse of resistance, fantasy, folktale and myth are used in *On Trial for My Country*, *A Son of the Soil* and *Waiting for the rain* to construct a language of resistance that deconstructs the homogenizing tendencies within African nationalism. The emphasis of the following chapter is on differentiating trends within nationalist thought in the black novel in English.
Chapter Five

Myth and the creation of national consciousness

The discussion in chapter three centred on Feso, Jikinya and Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe. Romance was used to conceptualise and construct the birth of a new and modern African nation in Zimbabwe. With Mutswairo and Ndhlala, nationalist resistance implies the construction of a resistance discourse predicated on the struggle against a single enemy identified as colonialism. There is evidence of an attempt by the two writers to project African resistance against colonialism as uniform. The use of allegory, the folktale and spirit-possession suggested the possibility of re-interpreting African resistance in a multiplicity of ways. However, these two authors did not pursue, develop or amplify this trend in order to expose the fractures and contradictions of anti-colonial resistance. Instead, romance was used in the novels to resist colonial oppression, as well as to accommodate patriarchal ideologies of female oppression.

In contrast, this present chapter explores how a reading of On Trial for my Country (1966), Waiting for the Rain (1975) and A Son of the Soil (1976) helps the reader to shift from an emphasis on military resistance to ideological resistance against colonialism. This chapter underscores the ideological fractures within African nationalism in a bid to reveal variations in the authors’ constructions of resistance in the novels. The chapter argues that although the tendency to use orality to project what is assumed to be a ‘unified African reality’ persists in Stanlake Samlange’s On Trial for my Country and Wilson Katiyo’s A Son of the Soil, Charles Mungoshi’s Waiting for the Rain signals a new shift that reveals the contradictory ways in which myth is used to construct a contradictory discourse of African resistance to colonialism.

Earlier it was discussed that myth is a narrative that gives symbolic meaning to the relationship between people and the natural environment in which human beings participate consciously to transform that nature and their social condition so that these move towards a desired goal. As a structural organizing principle in literary works of art, myths provide the imaginative frameworks within which to conceive the possibilities of originating new forms of life and social organizations. As ‘charters’ (Malinowski in Quayson, 1997, p. 49), myths supply to human beings the rationale to dominate others or resist social tyranny.
White settler writers used myths to justify their conquest of the indigenous African people. In white settler mythopoeses, Europeans were portrayed as, ‘an heroic people’ while Africans were depicted as, ‘savages’ and therefore a mentally retarded human species that needed the heavy hand of white settlers in order to appreciate the ‘advantages of progress’ (Chennells, 1982, p. 222). White settler novelists constructed, through fiction, mythic narratives that rationalized conquest as a god-willed movement into untamed raw terrain. Anthony Chennells writes that in the novels by white settler writers of Rhodesia,

[t]he myth of Black barbarism retiring before White Civilization is embodied in the mythologies of the 1890s and, in several novels, the occupation of Mashonaland, the invasion of Matebeleland and the white settler victory over the rebels are made to run into a single action, where men define themselves and their civilized mission in a continuous battle against the forces of a cruel disorder appropriate to the heart of Africa (Chennells, 1982, p. 221).

White settler writers also used pernicious myths to deny Africans recognizable capability to create history. In the process, the ‘colonial authorities constructed an African reality and then acted as if that reality existed in the perception of everyone concerned’ (Ibid., 1999, p. 112).

During the liberation struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in Rhodesia, black novelists appropriated African ancestral myths of origin to contest the hegemony of white settler discourse. Using the mythologies of their own people and the mythopoeses that they constructed black novelists projected images of a proud and confident African people struggling to restore their dignity and identity that had been undermined by settler values. African writers drew inspiration from past mythic narratives that celebrated the heroic resistance to colonialism by their own ancestors. In their desire to retrieve the essence of an ‘African world view’, black writers found out that the myths and the African world view that they sought to recover were neither static nor an ‘embodiment of nature and cosmic principles ... [representing] the ... natural ordering’ (Soyinka, 1976, p. 15) of their societies. Some black writers in Rhodesia came to the realization that myths of resistance represent a continual process of growth, contradiction and elaboration. As such, the ‘literary borders’ of those African mythic narratives were porous and their internal flexibility allowed the myths to accommodate new realities.

With regards to the continual processes of transformation in mythic system, Claude Levi-Strauss suggests that a mythic system can only be grasped in a process of ‘becoming’ and ‘not as something inert and stable but in a process of perpetual transformation. This would mean that there are always several kinds of myths simultaneously present in the system, some of them primary ... and some of them derivative (Levi-Strauss, 1997, p. 67). The perpetual transformation inherent in African myths of resistance invests them with an ambivalence or ‘double simultaneous postulation’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 146). Myths come into being, change
and ‘disintegrate’ in order to be re-constituted in a new form. It is this instability that is inherent in myths that enable them to be appropriated by different social groups of people to serve particular ends in specific historical contexts. As a mode of signification, myth is at once, ‘intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural’ (Barthes, 1972, p. 123). Myths embody in their ‘singular’ form ideological opposites such as harmony and rupture. They can challenge or show the impulse to rebel but also the desire for conformity to established social ideologies.

The contradictory reality principle internal to mythical narratives is that they are mobile to the extent of, ‘stating two opposites and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both’ (Barthes, 1972, p. 153). Barthes’ insight into the principles of myth today is useful for showing that even where the African myths of resistance display a desire to recover a collective African consciousness, they also depict the possibilities of an individual challenging the mythic system so as to initiate a new basis for the collective values. Simon Gikandi sheds further light as he argues that

the apprehension of myth is not always uniform. While the collective dimension of myth cannot be dismissed entirely, it is also important to underscore the subjective element in mythologies. For while a community may express its identity through its mythologies, it is also true that individuals may often find themselves locked in struggle with their community as to the meaning of such myths . . . (Gikandi, 1987, p. 165).

Of special interest to this chapter are those African myths, which while they are used to construct a discourse of resistance, can also be used to refuse to see/reflect the African reality as stable. An analysis of African resistance myths that display internal fault marks and tensions brings out the ‘colonial presences and (show) how those presences are resisted or accommodated . . . ’(Chennells, 1999, p. 111) within the texts.

**Fantasy in On Trial for my Country**

*On Trial for my Country* (1966) attempts to give voice to a silenced nationalist discourse by taking control of a ‘literary discourse that was dominated for ninety years by settler or metropolitan models’ (Chennells, 1990, p. 19). The novel’s publication in 1966 coincided with the highly publicized Battle of Chinhoyi on 28 April 1966 at which seven ZANLA fighters, perished in combat with the Rhodesian forces, thus marking the start of the armed struggle in Zimbabwe. Those who read the novel before its ban could arguably say that *On Trial for my Country* entered into public life as a nationalist text. The novel explores Cecil John Rhodes’ machinations that resulted in the colonization of Zimbabwe. But the author’s main emphasis is to reconstruct the story of the colonization of Zimbabwe from King Lobengula’s point of view. This, the narrative does by way of employing the fantastic as a literary strategy to retrieve the silenced story of African nationalism.
In a critique of *On Trial for my Country*, Musaemura Zimunya (1982) charges that Samkange’s style in the novel reads like a ‘loose newsreel experiment while dictionally, the absence of any authentic, focal voice and the persistence of the crude prose serve to re-emphasize the naïve haphazard-ness of the whole structure’ (Zimunya, 1982, p. 16). Zimunya attacks Samkange’s novel because he believes that it fails to conform to time and space that are organized along lines of order and stability. The point that escapes Zimunya is that Samkange emphasizes more the contingency and instability of fantasy rather than simply dwelling on a comic plot of classic realism whose movement, begins with ‘initial stability, interruption, and movement to a new stability and closure’ (Abercrombie, et al., 1992, p. 121).

The fantastic is produced within as well as being determined by its social context. It struggles against the limits imposed by its context and it is articulated by that very struggle. Rosemary Jackson describes the fantastic as a ‘literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss’ (Jackson, 1981, p. 3). Samkange has used fantasy in a way that seeks to interrogate the category of the ‘real’. The novel begins with the narrator, Samkange’s departure from the Methodist church in Bulawayo where his father was a church minister. The narrator experiences *chidzimira*, a dreamlike initiation into the subterranean spiritual world of the cave. In Shona mythology the cave is the abode of departed ancestors. Gobinsimbi emerges from the cave with a communal narrative of African resistance against Rhodes’ imperial dream. The cave in *On Trial for my Country* also functioned as a place of political sanctuary for the freedom fighters during the First and Second Chimurengas in Zimbabwe.

In the novel, the narrator’s movement from the white Christian Methodist Church into the cave marks his descent into the world of ancestors that is interwoven with the folkloric conception of the depths of the earth as the maternal womb, which at the same time absorbs and gives birth to a new vision of life. In the cave, the narrator is transformed into a ‘sacerdotal medium, a divine interpreter of human affairs’ (Zimunya, 1982, p. 12). He has to receive from Gobinsimbi, the story of how Lobengula resisted but was finally cheated by Rhodes. Although Gobinsimbi is dead, his ‘return’ in the form of the voice that reconstructs the discourse of national resistance transforms his national spirit into a mythic focus of the relationship between the living and the dead, a reminder of the bond that ties life and death in a never ending cycle of renewal. As Musaemura Zimunya observes, Gobinsimbi’s spirit points to the ‘link between the past, the present and the future – history’ (p. 12).

Through Gobinsimbi’s memory, the reader comes to understand Cecil John Rhodes’ imperial motives for colonizing Zimbabwe. Gobinsimbi’s spirit defies the unities of time, place and language barriers (p. 25) and can translocate temporarily and spatially to attend the ‘trial’ of Rhodes at Bishops Stortford. In stretching to its limits the expressive potential of the fantastic, the author hopes to reflect Rhodes’ grotesque imperial vision and in the process, expose the discourse of ‘civilizing’ or modernizing Africans that it contained as a fallacy. Rhodes’ imperial
convictions that are captured in his thinking that ‘... the British, are the finest race in the world and the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race...’ (p. 28) are further challenged by Lobengula’s voice in the novel. He argues that Rhodes abused his trust in order to control the potential material resources of Zimbabwe. When confronted by Rhodes’ forces, Lobengula escapes his royal home and in the process avoids a blood war that could have hurt his people more since they did not possess fire arms. In opting for peace and not war with the British, Lobengula was attempting to salvage some dignity and respect in a situation in which the historical confrontation between the capitalist forces of colonialism and those of the Ndebele sovereignty appeared inevitable. The success of the novel here is that it attempts to redefine the heroic vocation of the Ndebele King who should then be seen as attempting to protect his people who are pitted against a formidable enemy with superior military technology at its disposal. Even before the disappearance of the King, the Ndebele people historically put up a heroic fight. To take this line of thought is not to defend the Ndebele King but to recognize the power of the imperial forces ranged against the Ndebele kingdom. Given the pressure of interest and drive towards the acquisition at all costs of ‘African possessions’ (p. 30) shown by European nations in the 1880s it should be concluded that the Ndebele king admirably held off both the Portuguese and British fortune seekers for some time.

On one level, Gobinsimbi’s dreamlike voice can be taken as an aspect of African communal memory so that the narrative of On Trial for my Country is seen as one that stages a literary encounter between two modes of representing reality: one written and the other oral. In his own testimony Rhodes insists that the ‘one’ (p. 36) or ‘X’ (p. 46) that Lobengula puts as a mark on the Rudd Concession entitled the white people to control the King’s country. The imposition of a system of writing whose meaning the Africans did not understand also made possible the conquest of Zimbabwe. This alien system was used by white settlers to define what was considered the only legitimate human record. Orthography attempted to fix meaning for all times so that those meanings could not be contested. Writing implies authoritarian stasis so that as colonial settlers codified orature, they attempted to deny it flexibility. In the process the African community no longer contributed meaningfully to the authorization of their own cultural identities. Writing was also used to deny African oral history the status of knowledge and the power to become a foundation on which a viable national consciousness could be erected. Samkange then consciously undermines colonial documentary evidence by installing at the centre of its cultural consciousness a mythic subtext grounded in fantasy. This fantastic ‘realism’ challenges the ‘truth’ carried in colonialism’s written word or sign. However, the irony is that Samkange has to appropriate that very same mode of writing and the English language brought by colonialism in order to structure the national consciousness of resistance that subverts the system of the ‘modern’ implied in the colonial agenda. Subsequent to that appropriation, the value of permanence that is guaranteed by codifying the fantastic into the system of writing paradoxically implies acknowledging the authoritarian nature of writing.
By the end of the novel, the fantastic language of Lobengula that Gobinsimbi recreates, subverts the certainties of Rhodes’ dream and promises that even when the Ndebele people have been defeated in 1893, they are bound to rise up again and fight colonial culture in future. As a counter discourse to colonialism, the novel ‘produces a Lobengula who has a case and argues it with dignity and force’ (Chennells, 1990, p. 20). It is important to note here that the Lobengula that Samkange constructs for his novel claim to speak with the authority of the departed ancestors such Gobinsimbi, the son of Dabulamanzi of the Khumalo clan whom men now call uMafavuke (p. 8) The argument advanced by this Lobengula, implies that there is only a single African ‘truth’ about what happened in the colonization of Zimbabwe. In the novel that truth has to come from the mouth of a defeated Ndebele royalty and not from the subaltern such as the Amaholi within the Ndebele society.

Fantasy reveals a nationalist discourse of resistance that the novel is seeking to express as arbitrary. What is implied in the fractures within the fantastic element of the novel is that as a shifting construct, national consciousness of resistance is another category of the ‘real’ which fantasy interrogates. In this regard the fantastic element could be said to have gone against Samkange’s desire to neutralize and naturalize the transgressive impulse of his literary fantasy by presenting Lobengula as the only credible source of a nationalist narrative. The reality that is not amply explored is that the fantasy, upon which On Trial for my Country is based, is structured upon contradiction and ambivalence. The mode of existence of fantasy is contradiction and this contradiction ‘serves here not in the embodiment of the truth, but in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its testing (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 15). Rosemary Jackson further notes that fantasy’s dialogical nature lies in its capacity to fracture ‘single or binary/unitary ways of seeing’

The fantastic exists as the inside, or underside, of [classical] realism, opposing the novel’s closed, monological forms with open, dialogical structures as if the novel had given rise to its own opposite, its unrecognizable reflection . . . Structured upon contradiction and ambivalence, the fantastic traces in that which cannot be said, that which evades articulation or that which is represented as ‘untrue’ and ‘unreal’ (Jackson, 1981, pp. 23-37).

Samkange has partially succeeded in reconstructing the discourse of resistance to colonialism by using the literary strategy of fantasy. The shift from myth/fantasy into history has tended to project his brand of nationalism as natural. However, the incongruity implied in the novel’s attempts to impose stability and closure on the narrative of national consciousness is embodied in the ambiguities of the novel’s title because

[w]hen it [the novel] was written the ‘My Country’ of the title was an acknowledgment that both black and white had a right to call the country theirs even while the ‘Trial’ uncovered the combination of chicanery and weakness which had given the whites that right (Chennells, 1990, p. 20).
The irony of it all is that fantasy locates two trials to establish whether or not both Lobengula and Rhodes are culpable in the colonization of Zimbabwe. It is quite evident that in *On Trial for my Country*, Samkange uses fantasy to construct a narrative that contests imperial values and ideas. The novel imposes a classical realist narrative that validates nationalism in whose name the novel resists colonial domination. *On Trial for my Country* also, ironically 'bend[s] over backwards to avoid offending whites' (Chennells, 1990, p. 20). Whereas motives can be recalled and judged with precision, the fantastic dimension in the novel refuses to judge conclusively on behalf of either side. The fantastic element of the novel thus ensures that the novel is continually reinterpreted in different historical contexts. So, whether the novel is read from the perspective of black or white Rhodesian nationalism, it seems that the figural instability of the fantasy trope it carries continues to deny that there could be any permanent unified white or black nationalism in Zimbabwe. It is this internal dislocation of national resistance that is the subject of Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain*.

**Mythic-legend in *Waiting for the Rain***

In *Waiting for the Rain* Mungoshi problematizes the myth-legend and shows how the colonial context reveals contradictory African narratives: one of resistance and the other of African complicity in the colonial agenda. *Waiting for the Rain* depicts the life of the Mandengu family in the 1950s in Rhodesia. The novel explores the social, psychological, economic, cultural and political reasons for the break down of the African family in the period under colonial rule in Rhodesia. Commenting on this surface plot of the novel that registers the alienation of the African characters from their environment, Flora Veit-Wild concludes that in *Waiting for the Rain*, 'there is no way out, no hope of improvement, and no way back' (Wild, 1993, p. 293). This pessimistic reading of the novel is significantly modified by Rino Zhuwarara who argues that the surface fragmentation in the novel ‘is qualified by mythical cultural patterns insisting on an African identity that can never be wished away or destroyed by the new era, hence the title, *Waiting for the Rain*’ (Zhuwarara, 1994, p. 11). Rino Zhuwarara is implicitly trying to make connections between the mythic - legend and the discourse of national resistance.

The ‘African identity’ that is reconstructed through the mythic-legend of the novel is not single or uniform. Mungoshi in this novel, uses the mythic-legend not only to construct a discourse of national resistance but also to suggest that the colonial margin that is the cultural space inhabited by Africans is not a unified position but physical, intellectual and psychological sites each with its own dynamics, contradictions and tensions. In the words of Obioma Nnaemeka, ‘[t]he so-called margin is an immense heterogeneous space punctuated by boundaries and edges which define the limits of numerous different pockets of realities’ (Nnaemeka, 1990, p. 141). In *Waiting for the Rain* Charles Mungoshi gives us ‘different pockets of realities’ depicted through the contradictory use of orality.

Through Garabha, beating the drum on the occasion of Lucifer’s going to England, the reader is able to access the mythic narrative of resistance that frames
Garabha’s drumming brings the Mandengu family together. It enables them to set out on a spiritual journey that retrieves the family history beginning with the legendary, Samambwa. In the mythic-legend that Garabha reconstructs, Samambwa is depicted as the founding father of the Mandengu family. In that myth of origin, Samambwa is also cast as a contradictory heroic figure. He survived the extermination of his people by ‘some other tribes in the north’ (p. 128) and together with his many dogs moved to the Great Northern Shore. What Mungoshi celebrates in Samambwa a ‘terrible hunter,’ is his adaptability and his capacity to survive the exigencies of existence. It is these subterranean spiritual resources that guaranteed for Samambwa the capacity to transform his own life and ensure the continuity of his family line.

Indeed, in Shona myths of origin, hunters are highly esteemed for their role in founding kingdoms. Abiola Irele says that in the processes of founding pre-colonial nations, ‘the trials and terrors, [and] the forces that hunters confront in their adventures, set off on one hand the fragility of man, but on the other, by an ironic reversal emphasize the very strength of his moral and spiritual resources through which he triumphs over nature’ (Irele, 1991, p. 181).

Samambwa’s triumph is concretised in his creation of his own lineage. As the omniscient narrative voice says, ‘He came to another country where the chief of that land asked him to live with them and help them fight their enemies. He stayed long enough to be given two wives . . . [and had] several children with them . . .’ (p. 128). From relative obscurity and after having wandered in solitude for years, Samambwa is able to settle down and found his own lineage and community, a feat aptly captured by Florence Stratton as she observes that ‘Samambwa’s story traces the comic pattern of a journey from undeserved isolation into community. Through marriage, the traditional comic symbol of regeneration and concord, Samambwa not only acquires immortality for himself, but he also revitalizes his own almost extinct family line and establishes another’ (Stratton, 1986, p. 23).

However, the mythic-legend in which Samambwa is the hero has its own internal schisms. The fact that Samambwa survived some ‘other’ tribes undermines the notion of essential unity among Africans in pre-colonial Zimbabwe that Jikinya, a novel published after Waiting for the Rain tries to idealise. Not only was Samambwa an ill-tempered man, but ‘he couldn’t live with people any more . . . [When] [h]e found he was growing too feeble with old age . . . he . . . [threw] himself in his pool’ (pp. 128–9) and drowned. What is quite evident in this act is the anti-life action of suicide. In traditional Shona society however, some old chiefs took their own lives by way of drowning themselves in a pool of water. As people who were believed to have the power to conjure rain when they were still alive, the act of drowning oneself was condoned under the conviction that the Chiefs would, when dead, bring more rain to their descendents.

Writing about the Indians, Biodun Jeyifo (cited in Quayson, 1997, p. 60) argues that ritual suicide could be likened to a ‘snake biting its own tail’, which in some Indian cultures is a symbol of fertility. Given these contrasting interpretations of
suicide, the mythic-legend of Samambwa contains a contradictory life principle in which the ‘regressive and the progressive . . . the subjective and the objective aspects of myth integrate . . . ’(Zimunya, 1982, p. 91). Rino Zhuwarara (2001) further captures the contradictions within the character of Samambwa when he, Zhuwarara, states that Samambwa is portrayed as a ragged, anti-social restless wanderer embodying the nomadic spirit of a pathfinder and a pioneer:

He [Samambwa] . . . is a giant whose sheer size impresses and overawes, thus coming across as both attractive and intimidating . . . His sheer energy, his implacable sense of independence and determination and his pioneering spirit are qualities which are conspicuous by their absence in the Mandengu generations belonging to the Rhodesia of the 1970s. He remains in his own paradoxical way a hero of some sorts for the Mandengus, a possible source of pride for them as well as the family identity. In brief, he is a paradoxical ancestral figure symbolizing a past and a life that is double-edged, both inspiring and intimidating . . . (Zhuwarara, 2001, p. 63).

It is these contradictions in the Samambwa mythic-legend that Mungoshi has used to trace the fractures in national consciousness in Waiting for the Rain.

In the novel, below Samambwa in terms of social hierarchy, is the Old Man who is the active purveyor, promoter, protector and the symbolic voice of national resistance. This voice finds expression in the drum culture that is the extension of the philosophy of the Old Man. The drum is the ‘collective hieroglyph’ or mythology of the Old Man’s culture (Zimunya, 1982, p. 69). Through it, the Old Man attempts to name reality in ways that contradict the ‘mine, mine, mine’(l14) individualistic philosophy espoused by colonialism. The Old Man’s drum culture stands for the African people’s defiance against the colonial system. It becomes a form of spiritual scaffolding that provides reassurance about the undying testament of the ‘traditional’ African culture (p1) in the face of the onslaught from white missionaries. Amilcar Cabral recognises this spiritual resiliency among the African masses when he observes that the ordinary men and women reveal an indestructible character in their cultural national resistance when confronted with the colonial system (Cabral, 1973, p. 59). The Old Man has vindicated this philosophy by fighting in the First Chimurenga whose major aim was to oust foreign rule.

The Old Man believes that the war against white settlers was more of an ideological confrontation than simply political uprising to recover lost lands. The Old Man also thinks that the young men like John who are spearheading the Second Chimurenga will lose the battle before it is even begun. John has, according to the Old Man, sold his brother Paul to the colonial forces and proceeded to take the latter’s wife and house (p. 114). But more importantly, according to the Old Man, John will die like Kwari, because John fights the white men and yet prays to the white man’s gods’ (p116). In the novel, Kwari sends his fellow African men to die in the Kaiser’s war. Kwari is later shot by the very white men he fought for and
sacrificed African lives for. The Old Man’s voice in *Waiting for the Rain* suggests that in the contradictory process of struggle against colonialism and accommodation to it, the younger nationalist leadership epitomized by John have been

> [m]aking so much noise with the enemy’s drum that we can’t even hear the beating of our own gullible little miserable hearts. Each time you drink that tea, to whose god do you give praise? Each time you listen to that talking box, on whose altar are you making the sacrifices . . . These are the questions John and his friends should ask themselves . . . (p. 116)

For the Old Man, the colonial values influence the modes of reasoning as well as the aspirations of the very African nationalist leaders who are fighting the system. The consequence of this hybridisation, as the Old Man sees it, is that the African people in whose name national resistance is mounted are bound to lose, as their own material interests would not be recognised in the new order.

One is bound to admire the ideological solidity of the Old Man who wants to stick to his own values against the intrusion of foreign values. However, the incongruity is that the language of authenticity implied in the Old Man’s philosophy of ‘let me play my own drum’ (p1) and with which he uses to fight colonialism is largely a colonial invention. The drum culture, as previously discussed with regards to *Jikinya*, is appropriated by the ‘hyena’ which symbolizes the colonial system. It no longer functions as an authentic and automatic repository of distinctively African values and identity. The language of cultural seclusion that the Old Man advocates inadvertently reinforces and justifies separate and unequal development which is the ideology of white settlers in Rhodesia. Dudley Kidd (1904) appears to advocate a measure of this African authenticity when he wrote to the colonial government stating that

> [i]t would be an excellent thing if natives could be left alone to some original and natural mode of civilization suited to their natures . . . The natives must be more or less the drudges of the white men, owing to their inherent inferiority and incapacity . . . It is a thousand pities that we cannot banish all European clothing from native territories and allow the kaffirs to evolve naturally, and form a society of their own . . . Such a plan would be better for both Blacks and Whites (Kidd, 1904, p. 38).

But of course Kidd’s assertions smack of patronizing and condescending attitude to black people as the inferior ‘other’. While the Old Man’s discourse of resistance has the potential to galvanize the Africans into fighting colonialism, it is simultaneously informed by a position of cultural stasis. The Old Man’s advice to Garabha that the colonial values can ‘touch you on the outside, but they can’t touch your heart’ (p. 117) is reminiscent of a tendency that the Danish scholar, Preben Kaarsholm (1991, p. 41) has described as ‘romantic anti-colonialist’. In the Old Man’s mythic narrative of national resistance, this tendency manifests itself as a desire to recover an authentic African culture that also implies a denial of the
fact that colonial values significantly exploited, distorted, manipulated and also suppressed a large part of that African culture.

Mbongeni Malaba (1993) reinforces this view when he argues that the Old Man’s ‘plea for cultural purity is largely at odds with the hybrid nature of contemporary Shona society – as he himself admits: ‘Each time I see my wife Japi take in a handful of sugar, I know how complete and final the white man’s conquest has been’ (Malaba, 1993, p. 115). The ideological dilemma of the Africans living under colonialism as concretized by the Old Man’s quest for a ‘pure’ identity in a cross cultural society, is a significant aspect of the larger problems that inform the continent’s discourse of cultural authenticity. The Old Man’s philosophy of cultural purity reminds one of the limitations in Amilcar Cabral’s assertion that the African masses have a total capacity to defend themselves from all aspects of the colonial cultural onslaught and keep their own identity intact. For Cabral and by extension, the Old Man in Waiting for the Rain, ‘the question of a ‘return to the source’ or of a ‘cultural renaissance’ does not arise and could not arise for the masses of these people for it is they who are the repository of the culture and at the same time the only social sector who can preserve and build it up and make history’ (Cabral, 1973, p. 61).

Antony Chennells’ observation that Cabral gives ‘extraordinary and sentimental authority ‘ to the rural people since in the statement above ‘[t]he peasantry is idealized and accorded a power of resistance which is ahistorical’ (Chennells, 1999, p. 113) also applies to the life of the Old Man.

Within the confines of the mythic narrative of national resistance in Waiting for the Rain, the peasants are not depicted as a homogeneous class that behave in a particular way. Instead, the peasants display a capacity to resist colonialism even as they also desire to be identified with some of the colonial system’s values. This is validated in the paradoxical existence of Uncle Kuruku in the novel. He is the champion of political resistance in the novel who tells Lucifer to go to England and learn so that he would come back to lead the national struggle against colonialism. Uncle Kuruku wears his ‘ngundu’ in defiance of the colonial government’s instruction to ‘arrest anyone seen wearing it’ (p. 93).

During the national struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, the ‘ngundu’ was associated with the authority of tradition that epitomized opposition to colonial rule. As a cultural myth representing a site for the cultural struggle of the African people, the ‘ngundu’ also resembled that cultural and spiritual space which Michael Bakhtin (1984) designated the carnivalesque that is constituted by the ‘degraded’ language of the market place. In this space, a second/alternative world is proclaimed and the colonial values are distorted, ridiculed and trampled upon as insignificant. Despite his shiftiness, Uncle Kuruku partly represents the values embodied in the African mythic narrative of resistance so that he shatters the ‘myth’ of the invincibility of the white colonial system.

The same Uncle Kuruku has embraced Christianity that in the novel is part of colonial modernity. Even where Uncle Kuruku insists on talking about and
projecting the emerging African nation as a single and undifferentiated family, he has abandoned the obligations of taking charge of his extended family. Kuruku purports to work for the collective good of the African people and, he really behaves as an individual. Malaba captures this individualism as he observes that

Kuruku refuses to be saddled with the burdens of the extended family and endeavours to concentrate on uplifting his nuclear family. Ironically, rabid individualism precipitates the disintegration of that branch of the family: Oblique hints that Kuruku and his son John are sellouts abound (WFR, pp. 66, 69, 94): we learn that John fell out with his brother, Paul, and then took the latter’s wife; and five of Kuruku’s children are in self-imposed exile in Zambia (Malaba, 1993, p. 121).

Inevitably, the ambivalence of the discourse of national resistance that is depicted in the mythic narrative of the novel is forced to appropriate some values from colonial modernity with which it hopes to fight the system. Mungoshi’s novel succeeds in showing that the peculiar nature of the mythic narrative of national resistance is its capacity for double articulation. In the words of Paul Gilroy, the black counter-culture that the mythic narrative of national resistance reflects exists and grows ‘inside modernity in a distinctive relationship of antagonistic indebtedness’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 191). This schizophrenic consciousness that is characteristic of millenarian political movements such as nationalism, suggests that the sphere of the dominated social actors appears to be both singularly volatile and relatively unified.

Jean-Francois Bayart (1993) describes the African political terrain especially during the period of the national struggle as:

the production of a political space [that] is on the one hand the work of an ensemble of actors, dominant and dominated, and on the other hand it is in turn subjected to a double logic of totalitarianizing and detotalitarianizing. Too often the creation of the postcolonial state has been portrayed as the titanesque achievement of enlightened Princes, combating the dark forces of tribalism, tradition and imperialism. Despite the interest and comfort in such imagery it does not do justice to the complexity of the facts. The ‘small men’ also work hard at political innovation and their contribution does not necessarily contradict that of ‘big men’ (my emphasis) (Bayart, 1993, p. 249).

The paradox is that ‘big men’ soon forget the political innovations and contributions to the nation made by ‘small men’. This is the root of betrayal in post-independence Africa that the ‘Waiting’ in the title of Mungoshi’s novel ironically hints at.

The complexity of the mythic narrative of national resistance is further dramatized in the character of Garabha who not only resuscitates the mythic-legend of Samambwa, but like his own ancestor, he has the wanderer’s itch. The Old Man associates Garabha with the social forces representing the purity of the cultural identity of ‘nativeness,’ ‘home’, the solidity of ‘roots’ and therefore
the original discourse of national oneness. Unlike Lucifer whom the Old Man thinks no longer possesses the purity of identity that can rejuvenate the spirit of national resistance (p. 152), Garabha is loved by the Old Man because he appears to embody the sense of a stable and unchanging identity. Through Garabha, the Old Man can construct a discourse of national resistance predicated on the rejection of Europe while at the same time conveniently ignoring the internal divisions that the effects of colonialism have passed on to African society. As far as the Old Man is concerned, Garabha ‘will always be here with the family’ (p. 153) and family is here metaphorically meant to symbolise the whole of the African nation in Rhodesia. Garabha has warm relations with the people at home and his art and music soothes the collective psyche:

At ordinary beer parties, when all the people are happy and laughing, Garabha likes to play with someone on the smaller drum. But then, there comes a point where no one can follow him – except the Old Man. This is when he forgets his hands and they go on their own . . . if the beer is good, he stays on to drink a little and listen to the old folks . . . And then they ask Garabha to sing some old tunes, to tell their life on the drum (p. 83)

Unlike Lucifer whose art is used to express individual sentiments against home, Garabha’s art is that of a traditional raconteur, who, through the drum projects the inner yearnings of the community. In short, ‘Garabha the person remains with the group while Garabha the artist (drumming hands) leads the way. This is the ideal role of the artist in a communal society as opposed to the individualism of western society (Zhuwarara, 2001, p. 56).

However, considered as the representative of the political forces of national resistance, the portrayal of Garabha is problematic. His father, Tongoona, has disinherited Garabha. Tongoona’s new sense of individualism leads him to violate tradition in order to install Lucifer as the guardian of the family once the father dies. Tongoona himself is motivated to act against tradition by the desire to benefit materially from Lucifer who is going overseas to learn. The advent of capitalistic forces in Zimbabwe therefore, reconfigures social relations in ways that rupture time-honoured traditions. In *Waiting for the Rain*, Garabha’s life has also been circumscribed by colonial capitalism that has left most of the country’s African youths unemployed and marginalized (p. 40).

It is true that in the novel, Garabha’s drumming is the spiritual entry point into the collective unconscious of the Mandengu history. Although Tongoona has disinherited Garabha, Garabha carries the potential of fashioning an idiom that can lift his home from poverty. As the narrator says, Garabha goes into the future singing a song that is not ‘any of the old war chants’ but one he made up himself . . . with the unerring ear of the old musicians’ (p. 165). Garabha needs the song from the past so he can fashion new songs in order to be relevant in the present. The ambiguity of the portrayal of Garabha is highlighted by the fact that he rejects the very tradition that his drum seeks to uphold by refusing to marry (p. 134). Unlike
Samambwa his great, great ancestor, Garabha refuses to perpetuate the tribe. In an ironical twist, the burden of the title of the novel rests on Garabha: ‘Garabha passes through country that is waiting for rain’ (p. 80). This statement associates Garabha with the discourse of entrapment implied in the images of ‘black ants tearing away at a helpless buck that is still kicking with life, having fallen and broken its legs’ (p. 85).

Furthermore, when Garabha is not drumming, he is having visions of ‘an ant struggling to escape the rising water but constantly falling back lower and lower down the wall of the pond as the water rises higher and higher . . . ’(p. 92). Garabha then represents the degree to which nationalism is ‘immobilized’ or ironically re-charged by the competing factors of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. Through Garabha, the two discourses stage a battle of control even when the novel finally rejects the idea of seeing “tradition as “modernity’s” polar opposite’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 188). In a sense then, Garabha fails to transform his vision of the drum into a positive force that shapes a new idiom of liberation in Rhodesia. Nevertheless his kind provided the human basis for those peasants who were easily conscientised in the actual struggle for independence in the 1970s.

In Waiting for the Rain, the contradictory discourse of national resistance embodied in the Samambwa mythic-legend is related to the fate of the Old Man, Uncle Kuruku and in an ambivalent way to Garabha. The other dynamic presence in the cultural space of the colonialized is described by Fanon as the, ‘look of envy’ that expresses the African’s desire to, ‘sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible’ (Fanon, 1963, p. 30). The Mythic-legend mentioned in Waiting for the Rain is itself embedded in the folktale of the ‘Strange Bird’ (p. 156) which challenges the ‘polemic’ and ‘ideological certainties’ of the Samambwa mythic narrative of national resistance.

Structurally, the folktale of the ‘Strange Bird’ that frames the Magaba legend has tropic affinities with the tale of the same name in the Shona oral tradition. Unlike the Jikinya story, (in which the Strange Bird tale is also mentioned) where the heroine finally comes back to the communal fold, the story of the Strange Bird in Waiting for the Rain is a riddle that problematizes existence as unstable and history as not always organized according to the logic of a linear progression. In the tale Magaba is lured by the Strange Bird into the valley of skulls where he dies a lonely death. The Strange Bird also known as the ‘honey bird’ in the Shona oral tradition is an ambiguous messenger. It can lure the gullible and naïve into danger and yet it can also direct the brave and adventurous into discovering wealth.

In Waiting for the Rain, the colonial economy is regarded as the ‘modern forest’ where Africans are forced to hunt in order to secure a livelihood. White settlers symbolize the Strange Bird, whose voice has the potential to destroy African life. The story of Makiwa bears this out. Makiwa is forced by economic necessity to go and search for work in the white man’s economy. Unfortunately, Makiwa is run over by the white man he worked for and like Magaba, he dies a painful and lonely death. It is easy to conclude that both Magaba and Makiwa were ‘punished’
by the angry ancestors for deserting their homes. It seems as though Mungoshi is also interested in exploring in the novel, the extent to which black people could participate in the colonial order without being implicated in supporting the status quo. It is possible to argue that Magaba and Makiwa demonstrate the desire by Africans to domesticate the new economy and make it work for them in meaningful ways.

In Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe (1985), T. O. Ranger reveals the paradox of the Makoni peasants who struggled against the colonial system by seeking incorporation into the very system that threatened to undermine their economic freedom. In order to ward off the possibility of being absorbed into the colonial capitalist system as wage labourers, the Makoni peasants adopted what Ranger calls the ‘peasant option’ that involved growing sufficient crops to pay off colonial taxes, while maintaining self-sufficiency. Where the military option was not always suitable for Africans to use in dealing with their situation, Africans involved themselves in economic production from within the few opportunities not closed by colonialism. Such activities by Africans amounted to some form of economic nationalism of sorts. As a mode of ‘resistance’ the ‘peasant option’ reconfigures our notion of resistance and underpins the somewhat contradictory ways through which Africans were forced to deal with the colonial system in the absence of military resistance.

In the context of national resistance whose aim is to secure political, economic and cultural freedom for Africans, Leroy Vail and Landeg White complain that the use of the terms ‘resistance’ and ‘collaboration’ to analyse character motivation obscures the complexity of human motivation. They pose these questions:

Is it collaboration to be involved in production of goods for sale on a capitalist market? . . . A frustrated farm labourer in colonial Zimbabwe who misses work because of drunkenness may be viewed as undermining settler capitalism and, hence, as ‘resisting’; a man who works hard, saves his money to educate his children, and finds his satisfaction in ferocious church-going may well be seen as selling out to the system, and, hence as ‘collaborating’. But with reference to which theories of the human mind do these labels become the ‘right’ things to be said about such behaviour? (Vail & White, 1986, p. 195).

Vail and White imply that, in a colonial context, the tendency to define African resistance narrowly only in terms of its military and political aspects, deprives Africans of initiative to participate and control a share of the white settler economy. If the African has only the military and political option at his or her disposal, African history then continues to be centred on the colonial history around the circumscription of colonial time. In fact however, African initiatives during colonialism manifested themselves through the founding of alternative Independent Churches, participating in the capitalist agrarian economy and organizing political movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), all which had the impact of exploding the colonialist myth that posited the African as backward-looking.
In a colonial context, part of the dynamics of the political space inhabited by the colonized is that there was nevertheless no obvious contradiction between the promotion of the personal interests of a class of African entrepreneurs and the desire for progress in the community which they claimed to represent. To found a transport business or a school, buy some land, increase one's maize harvest or send a child to mission school – all had the side effect of undermining the colonial myth of the 'backwardness of the natives.' (Bayart, 1993, p. 73).

Bayart not only modifies Frantz Fanon's insistence that the poor men and women constantly took up arms to fight the colonial system, he also asserts that those 'small' African men and women worked tirelessly to absorb colonial values if only to repudiate the 'colonial myth of the 'backwardness of the natives'. Consequently, national consciousness exists on the cusp of realizing collective interests as well as achieving individual self-actualization.

Kwari and Lucifer Mandengu represent the mythic narrative of 'collaboration' in *Waiting for the Rain*. Kwari sent some of his people to die in the Kaiser's war but the white man accused him of rape and then shot him (p. 117). On another level, Lucifer has been sent to school by his poor parents so that he could look after the extended family. Ironically, Lucifer 'pays' back his family that has sacrificed so much for him by abandoning them. For him, 'home ... is a heap of dust and rubble' (p. 52), the, 'failure's junk' to which he will not return. Lucifer is a more complex character than Garabha although Lucifer is less likeable. At one point in the narrative Lucifer is able to put his finger on the socio-economic problems that have transformed home into a heap of dust.

I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere – of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and I never shall and if ever I leave this place, I am not going to come back ... What is here in this scrub, in this arid flatness, in this sun-bleached dust to love? ... Because I have been born here and here is home where everyone is and the roots of the family are – is that the only reason why I must come back to die in this desert? (p. 162).

There is no reason why Lucifer should love home, especially in its present condition of being a scrubland. As portrayed in *Waiting for the Rain*, Manyene is a colonial creation, a result of discriminatory economic policies that saw Africans being pushed to areas where the soil is sandy and unproductive and where rainfall is erratic. But the problem arises when Lucifer and those educated like him refuse to commit themselves to work to transform the poverty of home and country. By refusing to commit himself to work to transform the poverty of home and country, Lucifer is actually supporting the continued domination of his people by the settler system. And yet, paradoxically, Lucifer also seems to be rebelling against the demands of tradition. Lucifer has not only smashed the 'medicine bottles'
(p. 172) – themselves metonyms of tradition – but as the narrator says, ‘There are so many things Lucifer can’t accept at this time in his life, so many things he can’t believe in. And this lack of belief bothers him too. It is a form of pride. He is proud of being an outsider, standing outside everything, passing judgement’ (p. 72).

Lucifer is trapped by the ideology of modernity that he aspires toward, but at the same time, he fights the ‘fetters’ of tradition that threaten to hold him back. As Tim McLoughlin (1991, p. 132) argues, although Lucifer’s struggle is individualistic, it nevertheless registers a subversion of the traditional established order that the doctor, Matandangoma upholds.

What Mungoshi succeeds in exposing is the paradoxical portrayal of Lucifer. His individualism is, the opposite of the idea of a collective and unified African national consciousness under colonialism. As an educated African and therefore enlightened individual he should have spearheaded the liberation of the country. The story of Lucifer is a subplot in the form of a parable, cautioning young Africans of the dangers of individualism. Musaemura Zimunya’s (1982) verdict that, ‘Mungoshi permits Lucifer into the elite of legend-makers, thus acquitting him’ (Zimunya, 1982, p. 89) is therefore unfounded. For, whatever disagreements the Mandengu family have about what constitutes heroism, Lucifer is not considered heroic. The Old Man pronounces that Lucifer has become something that is not the colour of this soil (p. 152). In his dreams, Lucifer sees himself walking the road that leads nowhere showing that he has become a wanderer, alienated from his people. The examples of Kwari and Lucifer show that the post-colonial political context is also, ‘as much a regime of constraints as a practice of conviviality and a stylistic of connivance’ where some of the colonized people ‘... bridle, trick and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly’ (Mbembe, 1996, p. 2).

Waiting for the Rain initially constructs narratives of resistance that are rooted in a seemingly stable discourse of classical realism. The narratives of the Old Man, Garabha and to some extent Uncle Kuruku who opposes colonialism typifies this cultural discourse. It is, however, to the credit of Mungoshi in Waiting for the Rain to suggest that these narratives of resistance have internal contradictions of their own. Furthermore, through the ‘collaborationist’ stance of Lucifer that comes out clearly in the Magaba folktale in the novel, the writer also demonstrated that the imagined space of national consciousness inhabited by Africans is a potentially volatile space where Africans do not necessarily have similar material and ideological aspirations. Where the cultural nationalist narratives associated with the Old Man, Garabha and the Uncle Kuruku inclined themselves towards producing stable narratives of resistance in the novel, in an ironic twist, the myth of ngozi in Waiting for the Rain simultaneously demands inclusion in the representation of modern life and threatens the ordering of this life. Old Mandisa whose ancestors have killed an innocent person introduces the ngozi into the Mandengu family. The curse of that avenging spirit is said to be causing the disintegration of the Mandengu family because they share the same bloodline with Old Mandisa’s line of descent.
In resurrecting the myth of *ngozi* Mungoshi attempts to understand social change through the cultural prism of an indigenous concept of punishment and retribution. He depicts colonialism itself as a form of *ngozi* that devours the Africans and which in turn demands human sacrifices from the same Africans in order to fight it. It could be argued that the diagnosis of social problems in the context of *ngozi* demonstrates that Matandangoma in particular and the African people in general, are ill-equipped to ‘adjust to and fight for their place in the new hostile world introduced by the West’ (Zhuwarara, 1987, p. 133). Matandangoma’s ‘wrong’ diagnosis diminishes her powerful status and her insistence in clinging to the idiom of the occult justifies colonialism’s claim that African culture is destructive. On one level, it might be easy to dismiss Matandangoma’s diagnosis as demonstrating a, ‘point of retreat [into the occult by some] groups in the society which have been left stranded by some hegemonic development’ (Williams, 1977, p. 116).

Through the ambivalent discourse of *ngozi* and witchcraft, Mungoshi seems to be suggesting that some zones of national consciousness remain tied down to unchanging notions of culture and through them, the colonial power needed and often found African mediation to avert resistance. Taken literally then the discourse of *ngozi* ironically confirms colonialism’s claims that African culture is negative and therefore must be eradicated and replaced by European ‘civilisation’.

If *ngozi* is taken as a myth of retribution and punishment, the *ngozi* becomes in Fanon’s (1963, p. 185) words, a ‘zone of occult instability’ with the capacity to generate new modes of ‘reality’ that simultaneously challenge and transcend the creative potential of the discourse of classical realism that underpins the cultural nationalism in *Waiting for the Rain*. Although the material fortunes of the Old Man, Garabha and Uncle Kuruku have in a fundamental way been shaped by the colonial policies, the novel insists that these lives have been over determined by the reality of *ngozi* so that Lucifer’s going away, Garabha’s refusal to marry and Betty’s failure to get married are all explained by the curse pronounced on them. The difficulty of the *ngozi* is that it insists that a person be killed in order to appease it. This solution is never taken up in the narrative which remains open-ended. Therefore a part of the novel’s veracity in imitating *ngozi* is never tested. Instead, the *ngozi* further multiplies the problems of the Mandengus in the various manifestations of the family’s conditions. The reality of *ngozi* is thus unstable as it generates new levels of conflict in the Mandengu family.

Taken as a metaphor of colonialism and its negative impact on African society the myth suggests that only a far more powerful force can appease the *ngozi* and that has to come from the aggrieved African community. Colonialism is a form of *ngozi* that devours the Africans and as such it demands human sacrifices from the Africans to fight the system. The modernity of *ngozi* and its related idea of witchcraft manifests in the novel through accusations and counter-accusations of witchcraft among Africans. When the ‘doctor’, Matandangoma divines the source of the spiritual disintegration of the Mandengu family, she is forced to resort to
the discourse of witchcraft in order to interpret new inequalities, new forms of power and their drastic consequences for the Mandengu family. The source of the Mandengu family’s problems according to the ‘doctor’ is their neighbour, Kutsvaka. His gripe against the Mandengu’s is that ‘you reap more than I do. You have sent all your children to school while mine sit at home because you have made certain that they shouldn’t go anywhere’ (p. 143). The disruptive economic policies of colonial modernism are here depicted as only one source of contradictions in African society. The competition to control the perceived benefits from the system also creates jealousy and conflict among the Africans themselves.

That the discourses of ngozi and witchcraft originate in colonialism and that the latter system can be taken as ngozi is in the novel modified by Tongoona who tells Lucifer that ngozi and witchcraft are part of the problems which have always been with Africans even ‘before the white men came with their teaching’ (p. 158). With this remark of Tongoona the novel refuses to confront the Shona past in the present as a homogenous culture without its own internal contradictions. Rather, the ngozi recreates a sort of realism of the Shona past that is as unstable as colonialism. Here, one is reminded of Yambo Ouloguem’s Bound to Violence (1971) which implies that Africans were already violent to each other before colonialism’s presence. There is danger here that Tongoona absolves colonialism for underdeveloping Africans.

In Waiting for the Rain, the ngozi myth is not appeased in the traditional sense of handing over a virgin maid to the wronged family. It could be argued that the author represents the nationalist struggle as a collective process of settling the problems beguiling the Mandengu family. But as also argued above, those narratives of national resistance associated with Samambwa, Garabha and Uncle Kuruku do not restore a coherent communal narrative of resistance without their own instabilities. In a certain sense then, the instability of the discourse of ngozi in the novel bestows on the narrative of resistance, authored by the main characters, an equally unstable status. The ‘realism’ implied in ngozi in Waiting for the Rain forces the story to shift from the present to the past and back to the future of the African people in ways that deny the narrative any simple and straightforward resolution. Because of the ambiguous reality of the ngozi in the novel, one is left perpetually asking whether or not Mungoshi is saying that life is akin to ngozi, something that exacts demands on the living. If that is the case, then, to live is to struggle and struggle destroys so as to create anew. In Waiting for the Rain these discourse of resistance and collaboration with the colonial system that have been paradoxically commenting on each other throughout the novel refuse closure. In A Son of the Soil, the conflict between classical realism and the folktale/fable mode on one hand and those of white settlers and of African nationalism on the other hand intensifies.
Fable in *A Son of the Soil*

Wilson Katiyo in *A Son of the Soil* reveals the emerging contradictions between an intransigent white settler government and the equally contradictory forces within African nationalism in Rhodesia. The novel begins with the stability of a seasonal time. This time frame is distorted by colonialism. The novel ends with the challenge of colonial forces by African nationalist forces. This narrative is divided into ‘Book One: In the Beginning’ (p. 2), followed by ‘Book Two: Discovering the Time’ (p. 23) and lastly ‘Book Three: Closing a Circle’ (p. 111) in a manner reminiscent of a romance plot which, according to Hayden White is ‘a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of a world of experience, his victory over it and his final liberation from it’ (White, 1973, p. 8).

Katiyo exploits and actually accepts the ‘reality’ principle of the fable that introduces in the novel the dialogic capacity to destabilize both the colonial and nationalist discourses. According to Julien the fabled construction allows us to see the ‘real’ world from outside its parameters: it allows us thus to challenge that world in a way we cannot from within the perspective of realism which inscribes that world to begin with. It is thus the density of form, its atypicality, that, *because it alienates* the real world it evokes, makes that world all the more visible. Fable removes us from the space in which we are accustomed to exist and through whose atmosphere we are accustomed to look around ourselves. Placing us on a distant shore, it forces us to look at that world from afar. It 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).

In *A Son of the Soil*, the liminal zone that fable generates interrogates colonialism’s assumptions of ‘civilizing’ the African as we realize that Sekuru is the ‘source of family and national history and fountain of cultural consciousness’ (Zimunya, 1982, p. 95). Sekuru combines in himself the roles of a historian, artist and philosopher. As a purveyor of traditional values, Sekuru stands at the door of his culture and through him young Africans are initiated into the values of the community. Sekuru insists on producing and circulating folk stories whose meanings and images ensure the smooth running of his community. In the storytelling session itself, Sekuru forewarns his listeners that the story he is going to tell them ‘will not amuse or entertain you much ... because not everything in life is amusing or entertaining’ (p. 7). Although Sekuru begins his story of the colonization of Zimbabwe with a traditional narrative formula ‘Once upon a time ...’ (p. 7) that distances the story from the life of the teller and audience, he introduces recognizable human white and black characters. What this characterization suggests is that ‘fableness is not a matter of anthropomorphization of animals ... but is rather ... related to an intellectual and moral impulse’ (Julien, 1992, p. 126).

Sekuru’s fable is a sad tale that recounts, for the benefit of the children listening, in gruesome detail, the violent process by which black people were colonized by
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white people. In the actual story, black people lose to the invading white people their land and oxen and are subjected to slave labour (p. 11). On a spiritual level, missionaries desecrated African religious shrines (p. 14). Sekuru, in his narrative of the colonization of Africans in Zimbabwe projects black people as just, good and generous in sharp contrast to the rapacity of the white settlers. What is also significant in *A Son of the Soil* is that Katiyo is conscious of the fact that in Rhodesia where the majority of the Africans did not have access to the printed word, the fable is capable of laying the basis of a national consciousness of resistance to colonial oppression.

Benedict Anderson notes in *Imagined Communities*, that the concrete formation of a national consciousness is not always ‘... isomorphic with the determinate reach of particular print-languages’ (Anderson, 1983, p. 46). Frantz Fanon also recognises the importance of oral stories in forging a ‘structure of feeling’ in creating and projecting outwards, the African people’s national identity during the liberation struggle when he argues that

> [t]he crystallization of the national consciousness will both disrupt literary styles and themes, and also create a completely new public ... The story tellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modification ... There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggles which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and types of weapons ... (Fanon, 1963, p. 193).

The paradox in *A Son of the Soil* is that Katiyo has to appropriate the act of writing and the use of the English language, both attributes which the colonial ‘modern’ claims for itself in order to restructure and elaborate an anti-colonial sensibility. By placing Africans who fight colonialism at the centre of his fable, Sekuru attempts to regain the discourse of resistance that has been suppressed by the colonial system. When Sekuru insists that his fable is a ‘true story’ (p. 21) he implies that there are no other realities in the African community that exist outside the national consciousness that he promotes at the textual and subtextual levels. Thus, while projecting African men as the champions of the nationalist struggle, Sekuru’s fable attempts to suppress the role of African women whom he describes as cowards, running away from the scenes of battle (p. 10). However, any story of the liberation of Zimbabwe remains incomplete without acknowledging the political roles played by such prominent African women like Nehanda Nyakasikana who gained legendary status years after the white settlers hanged her.

The story of the African people’s resistance that Sekuru’s fable articulates is extended further through Alexio’s legend of anti-colonial struggle. The birth of Alexio, his political education in the high density suburb of Highfield and his subsequent participation in the struggle as a freedom fighter are depicted through the classic realist mode. The desire of the author to portray the nationalist struggle in this mode is however contradictory. On the one hand, classic realism is used to depict Africans subverting the colonial project. On the other hand, the same
classic realist mode affirms the telos of modernity and progress that informs the consciousness of the African nationalist leadership. At the end of *A Son of the Soil*, the intended convergence between the consciousness of traditional authority represented by Chief Makosa and the ‘modern’ urban-based nationalist movement represented by Alexio is all too evident. ‘The rest of the warriors will be fighting for our country. But you, Chiko, grandson of Sekuru, a descendant of Shonga, will be fighting not only for our land but for your village as well . . . On the morrow, a fierce gun battle was raging just outside Makosa’s village when the first cries of a baby were heard’ (p. 147).

The ‘cries of a baby’ represent the birth of a new nation thus manifesting the final consummation of the vision of national resistance that is in the novel structured with a beginning, middle and conclusion that excludes any other narrative possibility. It could be argued that the mixing of fable and classic realism introduces a hybrid identity to the novel and is a fact that underpins the Africans’ new way of life. This syncretic mode is only possible in the modernist form of the novel that rejects a purity of form which affirms the narrow politics of authenticity. The inclusion of fable and classic realism in the same novel puts the discourse of national resistance within the purview of dual organizing paradigms, one of which is grounded in orality and the other in the written mode.

Realism in *A Son of the Soil* claims a stability that is used to destabilize colonialism. The latter is unstable because the Africans do not accept colonialism’s mode of naming Africans as inferior. Although the discourse of classical realism of *A Son of the Soil* is made stable in order to destabilize colonialism, the fable mode in the novel comments on realism so that the latter is not allowed to possess truth and this refuses the novel a specific ideological closure. In short, Katiyo may have intended that his realism would create ‘correct’ historical memories of the liberation struggle, but in fact the presence of the fable refuses to give realism the authority of an uncontested symbolic order. Consequently, when both the colonial as well as the nationalist narratives in the novel are refracted through the cultural prism of the mode of the fable, neither of these two opposed narratives possesses total authority which claims an incontestable social order.

In order to reinstate the classical discourse of realism in Alexio’s legend of struggle as the literary status quo, the narrative does not threaten to suppress the fable’s impulse to challenge it. In fact, Maurice Stevens is correct in suggesting that the construction of the image of a unified national consciousness involves, ‘selective forgetting of particular historical memories in order to maintain the fantasy of essential socio-political identities with fixed positions in what are becoming increasingly over-determined historical narratives (Stevens, 1996, p. 204). It seems as though in this novel Katiyo is oddly unaware that the ‘content’ or ideology of fable as form is that it privileges the ‘random . . . heterogeneity of the as yet uncentred subject’ (White, 1987, p. 161) so that the metaphysical imperative of the fabular imagination in the novel directs the reader to interrogate the categories of the ‘real’ and encourages literary open-endedness to a novel whose
internal discourses would otherwise have been sealed with ideological closure. In its mode of imagining the African past, the ideology of cultural nationalism in *A Son of the Soil* constructs an African past that is static, ordered and existing outside its own contradictory historical processes. And yet, the irony is that the mode of the fable is too highly unstable itself and effectively interrogates static conceptions of that very African reality.

**Conclusion**

Stanlake Samkange in *On Trial for my Country* has used fantasy to challenge Cecil John Rhodes' imperial vision of colonizing Africans in Rhodesia. The novel exposes Rhodes' colonial discourse of civilizing and modernizing the lives of Africans and shows that it is a smokescreen to justify his conquest of the indigenous African people.

In contrast, in *Waiting for the Rain*, Charles Mungoshi shows that African mythic narratives of national resistance are unstable cultural spaces. Mungoshi is a more conscious writer than Samkange in depicting the instabilities of African identities in a colonial situation. Through the mythic-legend of Samambwa that is further elaborated by the Old Man, Uncle Kuruku and in a paradoxical way by Garabha, Mungoshi shows the ways in which Africans have created history. But, even this mythic narrative of resistance is also ambiguous in that Africans simultaneously protest against colonial values that they are incongruously also shown as wishing to adapt. Through the Magaba folktale that is elaborated by Makiwa, Kwari and Lucifer, Mungoshi also demonstrates the fluid nature of the categories described by the terms 'resistance' and 'collaboration'. While Kwari and Lucifer actively collaborated with the colonial system in their different ways, Makiwa died struggling to take control of his life that was lived to provide services to the very colonial system responsible for oppressing black people.

*A Son of the Soil* employs fable and classical realism in order to reconfigure the discourse of national resistance to colonialism. The effect is contradictory. On one hand the mixture of fable and classic realism shows that both European and African ‘times’ are present in the imaginations of both the author and his African characters. In this case, the author opted for literary syncretism to show that this is the mode of existence of the novel in the ‘modern’. And yet, on the other hand, classic realism’s propensity towards organizing historical time and space in terms of ‘order’ and ‘stability’ implies that the author is attempting to appropriate a European political reality of the ideology of nationalism in whose name the struggle was fought. Katiyo finds himself constantly interrogating both the discourses of colonialism and African nationalism despite his desire for ideological closure.

Samkange, in *On Trial for my Country* and Katiyo in *A Son of the Soil* could, with modification, be said to belong to the school of ‘conservative nationalists’. The authors display a desire to project a unified national consciousness. Nonetheless the placement of the fantastic and the fabular discourses alongside the classical realist discourses within their novels partly interrogates their construction
of a unified discourse of national resistance. In contrast, in *Waiting for the Rain*, Mungoshi brings out the contradictions within nationalist thought. The effect is to reveal national consciousness as an unstable and liminal space where new African identities are constantly in the making. In its fantastic, legendary and fabular forms, African myth has bestowed on the three novels the dialogic capacity to continuously engage and interrogate the discourse of national resistance and propel the novels into uncharted waters. The quality of cultural instability inherent in fantasy, myth and folktale is carried through into the oral forms used in post-independence Zimbabwean fiction.