

**(Re)writing Zimbabwe:  
The Poetics of Postcolonial Impasse**

*The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum a great variety of symptoms appear.*

— Antonio Gramsci

*History itself becomes “hope of history.” Henceforth, each death or defeat leads to a new appearance, is perceived as confirmation, gage, and relaunch of an ongoing promise, a “not yet,” a “what is coming,” which — always — separates hope from utopia.*

— Achille Mbembe

*Black rain  
knocks  
Cracked windowpoems  
— sound of revolt*

*Or?  
From transmitters more certain  
than the stars*

*(More distant)  
I hear Franz Fanon and the muted unborn:  
“WHEN! WHEN! WHEN!”*

— Dambudzo Marechera

**David Buuck**

## I.

Her vision's scrubland  
Of out-of-work heroes  
Who yesterday a country won  
And today poverty tasted

And some to the hills hurried their thirst  
And others to arson and blasphemy  
Waving down tourists and buses  
Unleashing havoc no tongue can tell—  
Her vision's Droughtstricken acres  
Of lean harried squatters  
And fat pompous overlords  
Touching to torch the makeshift shelters  
Heading to magistrate and village court  
The most vulnerable and hungry of citizens—  
Her vision's Drought Relief graintrucks  
Vanished into thin air between departure point  
And expectant destination—  
In despair she is found in beerhalls  
And shebeens, by the roadside  
And in brothels: selling the last  
Bits and pieces of her soured vision.

(“Oracle of the Povo,” Marechera 1984: 107)

When the anti-colonial struggle achieves victory, only to give way to a neocolonial order that is as subservient to global capitalism as under colonialism, how does cultural practice *process* such an impasse? What aesthetic forms are there to coherently capture and rearticulate the simultaneous expectation and disillusionment?

Minds run out of petrol are abandoned  
At the university garage  
Black lassitude in fits and starts  
Lashes out its beautiful fist:  
Workers of the world ignite!  
Under the gumtree and jacaranda  
Beggars and tourists, the povo and the shefs<sup>1</sup>.

(“Throne of Bayonets,” 1984: 87)

How does postcolonial literature reconcile the violent decolonization process with a post-Independence era that exerts its own violence, not least against the past, in the name of the present?

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<sup>1</sup> “povo” is the Portuguese word commonly used for “masses” or “common man.” “Shefs” refers to the elite classes.

In February of 2000, voters in Zimbabwe rejected a referendum on government-sponsored changes to the constitution, changes that would have increased presidential power and allowed the state to seize land without compensation. The defeat of the proposed constitutional amendments was widely viewed as a major setback to President Robert Mugabe, whose increasingly militant and racialized rhetoric around issues of white-owned commercial farms and land reform was seen by many to have been a tactic to provide ideological cover for a rather blatant attempt to further guarantee his continued political power. At the same time, the referendum demonstrated the growing opposition to Mugabe and his ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and the growing presence of a viable oppositional political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). With the national parliamentary elections set for June 2000, and the presidential election on the horizon (set for March 2002), there began a sudden increase in political violence and repression of basic democratic and civil rights. While local and international monitors had expressed concern over the government-sponsored tactics of media censorship, voter intimidation, and suppression of oppositional parties over the last five years, a new wave of public violence brought a level of international scrutiny to the June 2000 elections that had not visited Zimbabwe since its inaugural post-Independence elections in 1980. In addition to increased censorship, intimidation of MDC members and supporters, and the quasi-legal suppression of democratic rights and oppositional political organizations, the tactics that gained the most international attention were the takeover of white-owned farms by groups of (black) ZANU-PF supporters, most of whom identified as ex-combatants of the liberation struggle. Reports of kidnappings and murder—of white farmers, their families, their (mostly black) workers, and numerous MDC leaders—alongside the squatting on such farms by the ex-combatants, were tacitly (and at times overtly) supported by Mugabe, in an attempt to link images of the colonial past with the supporters of the MDC. In an exemplary moment of convergent and contradictory ideologies, Mugabe and the ZANU-PF invoked the anti-colonial struggle (and the importance of the issue of "stolen land" to that struggle) in an attempt to link the MDC with white farmers, international (i.e., European and American) "outsiders," and political "traitors," while presenting himself and his party as champions of land reform and (black) anti-colonial struggle. Given the continued tacit support of the state and its police forces to both the farm takeovers and the thirty-plus reported political assassinations of MDC members and members of the press, Mugabe's public assertions, as well as his policy directives for the state to claim white-owned land without full financial retribution, were widely seen as attempts to retain and consolidate power in the face of a growing political and social oppositional movement. Nonetheless, the participation of ex-war combatants and the fiercely anti-colonial and racialized rhetoric demonstrated the continued cultural and political negotiation of both Zimbabwe's colonial past and its lengthy liberation war.

The June 2000 elections, though critiqued by many local and international observers as deeply flawed, generally had their results upheld and confirmed by international monitoring organizations and foreign nations. While Mugabe's ZANU-PF retained a majority of seats in parliament, the MDC was able to capture fifty-seven of the one hundred contested seats, an enormous increase of oppositional presence in the

government<sup>2</sup>. Though the thirty additional seats in parliament were retained by ZANU-PF (they include ten seats for chiefs, eight provincial governors, and twelve state-appointed non-constituency MPs), thus giving ZANU-PF a working majority, MDC's presence is large enough to both block constitutional amendments as well as function as a viable oppositional party<sup>3</sup>. MDC's leader (and ex-head of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions) Morgan Tsvangirai has survived numerous death threats and continued intimidation by the state to emerge as the likeliest candidate to challenge Mugabe for the presidency in 2002. Still, the post-election declaration of amnesty for all political crimes committed in the first half of 2000, as well as the continued reports of violence and intimidation against the relatively small independent press, has increased concerns over continued political repression in anticipation of the 2002 presidential election<sup>4</sup>. While the policy debates in the new parliament, ongoing struggles over democratic rights and press freedom, and the next election may perhaps give a greater indication of the viability of the MDC, it remains clear that the deeper issues of Zimbabwe's political economy will continue to be contested at many levels, regardless of the results of the election and the conditions of Mugabe's eventual exit from power (whether by vote, age, or death). The ongoing negotiations of the cultural legacies of the anti-colonial struggle continue to inform political and social struggles in Zimbabwe, and its complex histories of nationalist and anti-colonial consciousness mark a crucial terrain of struggle for political hegemony in Zimbabwe. The continued relevance of issues such as land reform, race relations, and democratic rights point to the importance of the liberation war as a central historical moment in Zimbabwean nationalist consciousness.

The struggle for political independence in Zimbabwe was, by some estimations, a century-long affair, with its beginnings in the so-called First *Chimurenga*, the African rebellion against white colonial settlers in 1896-7, shortly after the arrival of Cecil Rhodes and the subsequent colonization process. However, the most intense political and cultural upheavals in the anti-colonial struggle occurred during the liberation war from 1967-79, which, after a period of mostly peaceful nationalist movements in the 1950s and early 60s, politicized the entire nation (and Southern African region), leaving virtually no one (white or black) untouched. Though the histories of the liberation war are just now beginning to be written, analyzed, and contested, initial historical and anthropological evidence suggests an amazing variety of experiences and levels of participation within the various nationalist movements, guerrilla armies, and the urban and peasant supporters of the struggle. In the face of increasingly violent and repressive policies enforced by the Rhodesian colonial regime (particularly after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] in 1965, which established a de facto apartheid state), black colonial subjects began to view themselves as Zimbabweans, not only articulating an African nationalist consciousness but in many cases actively participating in anti-colonial struggle, be it in armed struggle, positions of political leadership, or subversive tactics and underground support within the cities and villages throughout the country. As shall be seen, the

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<sup>2</sup> Since the 1986 unity accord between ZANU and ZAPU (forming ZANU-PF), Mugabe and ZANU-PF had never faced any viable opposition in regional or national elections.

<sup>3</sup> Though not in a position to prevent the subsequent stacking of the Supreme Court and further legislation aimed at restricting media access.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Amnesty International's website for reports of recent attacks on MDC supporters and the independent press, as well as information and testimonials about pre-election violence.

process of articulating nationalist consciousness and practices of anti-colonial struggle were part of a larger hegemonic project, towards the construction of what Cabral termed the “nation-class,”<sup>5</sup> a cultural and political project that still has resonance today.

Indeed, the contemporary and ongoing importance of investigating historical struggles for hegemony within a context such as the Zimbabwean liberation war is highlighted by the present political and cultural situation, where increasing disillusionment with the state and ruling party have in many ways refocused the historical lenses away from a more unified and celebratory nationalist myth of Zimbabwean heroism and independence, towards a more complex and nuanced sense of a history which in many Zimbabweans’ estimation has not lived up to its rhetorical promises.

Contestations over the legacies of the liberation war—in historiography, literature, political rhetoric, popular memory, etc.—are not simply the residual effects of a postcolony in its infancy, nor are such legacies merely raw material, unhinged from any sense of lived history, to be freely yoked to ideologies ranging from radical to reactionary. The struggle to articulate a collective, national(ist) memory is in effect the struggle to narrate the nation’s historical trajectories (both past and present), not only in the sense of constructing an imagined community towards various nation-state-building projects, but also in the sense that the radically anti-imperialist strands within Zimbabwe’s history continue to provoke the possibility of counter-narratives quite at odds with the prevailing global neoliberalism that has become the dominant historical end-point of capitalist developmentalism. This is not to evoke some nostalgia for a romanticized guerilla war in which anti-imperialist nationalism was the sole motor of historical change. Far from it; as we shall see, even the radical nationalist projects of the liberation armies required diverse practices in order to achieve hegemony in the anti-colonial struggle. However, even as a new generation of students and activists who have come of age well after the liberation war enter into the political arena, the complex “social memory” of the postcolony remains a fraught arena of struggle over claims on the past from positions in the present. Given the increased peripheralization of both political and economic sovereignty in the current era of structural adjustment programs, currency devaluation, and international debt, it is precisely the “return” to the liberation struggle as site for “memory-work” that, far from being a retreat from global forces, is in fact the rearticulation of those forces at the level of the local.

Such “memory-work” would thus consist of struggles over and within the official technologies of memory—from state-sponsored memorialization of “war heroes,” official historical accounts of colonialism and the liberation war, hierarchies of tribute and graft in government largesse, down to the renaming of urban streets after nationalist leaders. Against this are pitted subaltern histories and counter-memories, “unfinished narratives ... popular history in which the past is perceived to be unfinished, festering in the present...” (Werbner 1998: 9)

The technologies of postcolonial memory are thus not limited to the temporal, but also materialize themselves within the spatiality of that geographical place constructed as “nation.” Thus one can chart what Werbner terms “a sacralised inscription of hierarchy

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<sup>5</sup> The nation-class is the unifying of classes within the colony against the colonial power. Cabral of course was quick to point out that this was to be a tactical unity, with other class realignments possible in the postcolonial era. (cf. Cabral in Wallerstein 1986: 38-40)

upon the landscape” (1998: 8), the prime example perhaps being Zimbabwe’s Heroes’ Acre, where social realist sculptural aesthetics vie with stark monumental structures, including a “tomb for the unknown soldier” (which is actually empty), all elements within a repertoire of “postcolonial pastiche.” It is from the material site of one memory-genre (that of monumentality) that President Mugabe has articulated another, that of the poetic/rhetorical (if parodical) articulation of nation, subject, and unity:

“We solder with the fast element of unity  
My own freedom to yours and yours to another’s  
So the dappled labyrinth of national freedom  
Can forever fly and forever grow.”

(Heroes Day, August 1993<sup>6</sup>)

From memory-genres to memory-genres: against the backdrop of the materialization of sanctioned memory, a “dappled labyrinth” of mixed metaphors seeks an almost vampiric communion between the “people” and the body of the potentate (cf. Mbembe 1992b). It is clear that the increasingly coercive and repressive tactics of the state to both suppress dissent and police subjects, is part of a broader project within which the state fuses official memory to a biopolitics of power, in an attempt to construct and subjugate docile citizen-bodies. Given that the role of the neocolonial political economy has increasingly become that of managing bodies (as both subjects and labor) on behalf of transnational capital, contestations over social memory become more than merely ideological struggles. Indeed, within the various genealogies of postcolonial Zimbabwe are not only competing versions of the “historical past,” but also battles over the present transitional period from settler colony to anti-colonial liberation to neocolonial periphery within the capitalist world-system. The crisis of hegemony is thus expressed through the strain on sanctioned memory, with increasingly severe reactions from the state: “If we dig up history, then we wreck the nation”(Mugabe, speech at Heroes Acre, May 1997).

Intense historical compression (from precolonial to colonial to postcolonial in less than a century), the synchronic (if uneven) interaction of multiple epistemologies, ideologies, and political economies, the syncretic cultural interplay between so-called traditions and Eurocentric notions of modernity: these fundamental tensions that constitute the postcolony and its memory-bank<sup>7</sup> are too rich to be merely labeled “hybrid,” a term that has become a commonplace of analytic banality, and in the Zimbabwean case perhaps misleading, given that current theoretical invocations of hybridity are often descriptive of a primarily mobile, transnational class<sup>8</sup>. Nor can the colonial period and its aftermath simply be framed as a contestation between articulations of tradition and modernity, as if history only begins for the colony at the onset of

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<sup>6</sup> from transcription in *The Herald* (Harare); Werbner 1998: 89.

<sup>7</sup> i.e., the repertoire of official and unofficial histories, narratives, rumors, etc., that constitute the available content for memory-work.

<sup>8</sup> “Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate and trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery.” (Appiah 1992:149)

colonization. *One* history claims hegemony, to be sure, and if that dominant narrative claims for itself the mantle of “modernity” it is no less just as much a “tradition” as those histories violently displaced in its wake:

“[M]odernity is not an analytical category. Rather it is a continuation of evolutionary discourse that posits European and American post-Enlightenment ethics and economics as the apex of universal development through the rhetorical hijacking of contemporary time...” (Turino 2000: 6)

Similarly, as Cabral argues, the onset of colonialism, itself the formalization of a centuries-old expansion of Eurocentric capitalism, was less the onset of “modern history” than the culmination of a violent struggle of contesting cultures, epistemologies, and histories:

“There is a preconception held by many people, even on the left, that imperialism made us enter history at the moment when it began its adventure in our countries ... We consider that when imperialism arrived and colonialism arrived, it made us leave our history and enter another history.” (quoted in Wallerstein 1986: 38)

Even today, as the globalization of capitalist relations of production and social reproduction further penetrate (post)colonial societies, there still exist vibrant alternative modes of production and exchange—alternative modernities that, while often contradictory in their expression and severely limited in their scope, nonetheless retain traces of alternative historical narratives, subaltern social formations that continue to inform the postcolonial polity even as they become subsumed under global capitalism. Tributary economies, transfer economies, agrarian modes of production, “black market” and informal economies<sup>9</sup>—such social formations are not merely residual pre-colonial logics but repertoires of counter-modernity that remain crucial to navigating everyday life in the postcolony. Thus, while the impact of IMF and World Bank-styled structural adjustment programs have put increased pressure on peasant-based agriculture, and have virtually wiped out the state’s ability to perform the “customary” functions (right, allocations, transfers, even violence) required to ensure both power and legitimacy, they have also contributed to the rise of a complex transnational black market (trafficking in both commodities and cultures) as well as what Mbembe (2001) terms “private direct government”—roving militias, private armies, complex systems of bribes and coercion—all in strategic response to neoliberalist forms of global capitalism. And, as Timothy Burke points out, even the coin of the (capitalist) realm remains up for contestation, as the money form itself, the fetish *par excellence* of commodity capitalism, is often resisted or rejected: “...many Zimbabweans refused until recent times to fully accept money merely as the physical incarnation of a disembodied transactional principle” (Burke 2000: 212)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Amin 1989, Mbembe 2001, Saul & Leys 1999, Diawara 1998.

<sup>10</sup> This leads one to speculate as to the workings of reification within capital, especially given the increasing abstraction (and virtuality) of the money form in transnational finance capitalism, not to mention the now-quotidian practice of (soft) currency devaluation throughout peripheral economies, where the US dollar becomes somehow a more “authentic” expression of the money-

The still-active contestations, compromises, and rearticulations of multiple (and coeval) forms of social and economic relations against the hegemony of global capital also produce still greater fissures in the temporal fabric of the postcolony. African economies, Mbembe argues,

“have been unable to integrate themselves actively and profitably into the new international division of labor ... To this inability to turn international factors to the continent’s advantage must be added the extraordinary constraint of the compression, worldwide, of ‘finance time’ and its reduction to purely computer time ... [T]he gap between this computer time of financial operations worldwide and the historic time of real economic adjustments has grown wider and wider. Helped by the structural inertia of African economies, the bias toward speculative activities (one feature of globalization) has occurred here as elsewhere, at the expense of productive activities. One side-effect of this gap between several regimes of temporality and production is the shift of whole swathes of African economies underground.” (Mbembe 2001: 52-53)

Just as the notion of “finance time” is itself embedded in an historical narrative of modernist and developmentalist teleology, whereby the postcolony can only ever be “behind,” so too do contemporary neoliberal discourses of globalization begin to colonize the spatiality of heretofore peripheral realms:

“...The discourse of globalism operates from similar premises [to the myth of modernity] and, although using space instead of time, similarly argues for the naturalness of the modernist-capitalist formation by equating it with the all-encompassing space of the globe.” (Turino 2000: 5)

Here then we can begin to reconsider issues currently enflaming the political struggles within Zimbabwe, such as land reform and subsistence agriculture, as not only negotiating the hopes and legacies of the anti-colonial struggle, but simultaneously figuring localized rearticulations of postcolonial space and time in the face of global capital’s expanding imperial domain. Likewise, any historiography of the liberation war need also consider the primacy of struggles over not just “territory”—land—but broader temporal and spatial ideological constructions such as history, development, nation, and sovereignty. The battle for hegemony within the postcolony, then as now, was as much an ideological war as a material one. And, of course, a battle for identity, a battle that in Zimbabwe had internationalist (global, anti-imperialist) designs, wherein the articulations between class, nation, and world-system—between “national-popular” and transnational-popular—were still viable sites for struggle, and the concept (and practices) of nationalism had not yet been fully ossified into bourgeois neoliberalism. For example, during the colonial era (especially post-UDI) black Zimbabweans generally identified as “African” before or instead of “Rhodesian.” This is not to suggest that some nascent

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form. Perhaps then, even as debt and currency speculation—a “futures market in African outcomes” (Saul & Leys 1999)—becomes a form of commodity fetishism that masks *global* social relations, one could speak of a process of uneven reification? (cf. Mbembe 2001, Hecht & Simone 1994, and Davies 1998 for discussions of fetishism in the African postcolony).

panafricanist consciousness was foreclosed by the nationalist anti-colonial struggle and the post-independence construction of a new nation-state; rather, the imperial construction of a largely arbitrarily-bounded colonial system determined the geopolitical framework by which anti-colonial struggles would proceed. Thus, contrary to those critics who are inclined to dismiss African nationalist projects as either primarily discursive acts of narration and invention (cf. Bhabha 1990) or the tragic forgoing of panafricanist anti-imperial struggle for the more accessible prize of neocolonial statehood<sup>11</sup>, one might instead recall Fanon's argument for the necessity of anti-colonial nationalism (of a decidedly non-comprador-elite bearing) as an entry point into a broader internationalist anti-imperialist struggle:

“National consciousness, which is not nationalism [in the conventional bourgeois sense], is the only thing that will give us an international dimension ... Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (1963: 247-8)

Given the political trajectories of most postcolonial African states in the last forty years, however, as neocolonial regimes have retroactively hijacked notions of nationalism to particular ideological projects, it becomes all the more necessary to rescue Fanon's call for what Lazarus terms a “nationalist internationalism” (1999: 79) consciousness, whereby “the national liberation struggle is meaningful precisely because it is a form, a modality, of world class struggle” (Wallerstein 1986:162). Against the contemporary geopolitical landscape of globalization, where nationalism and the nation-state are seen to be somehow increasingly anachronistic and powerless against neoliberal economics and ideology, the postcolonial national polity still remains a vital site for resistance against global capitalism.

Of course, claims to the national (or local) in face of hegemonic global forces are not inherently radical, nor even anti-capitalist or anti-globalization. Various local, national, and regional articulations are often invoked as part of a repertoire of tactics to gain competitive advantage within the global capitalist system. Certain forms of protectionism, isolationism, unilateralism, etc., may appear to be counter-globalization articulations, when in fact they may often be evidence of local and domestic political struggles over international geopolitical concerns. Even within postcolonial states peripheral to global capitalism, efforts to claim the nation-state as a bulwark against increasingly predatory transnational capital are not necessarily the same projects of delinking that Amin and others advocate. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that these kinds of contradictory discursive invocations of and claims to nationalism, and the fierce contestations over the actual forms of such nationalist discourses and projects, are in actuality testament to the continuing importance of the nation-state as the mediating political form between global capital and what we might term global citizens. The fact that the nation-state form *appears* to retain an increasingly limited form of sovereignty

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<sup>11</sup>It is of course not difficult to deconstruct postcolonial nationalist discourses, nor to then find the postcolonial nation-state hopelessly “backwards,” especially from the vantage point of a transnational intellectual class that seems more at home within a particular brand of cosmopolitanism that has forgotten that it, too, is a nationalist/culturalist project, (*writ* global.),

over the “forces of globalization” is only to take the effect for the cause. As Peter Marcuse argues,

“The importance of state action in enabling the capitalist system of the industrialized world to function is increased, not reduced, as that system spreads internationally. If states do not control the movement of capital or of goods, it is not because they cannot but because they will not—it is an abdication of state power, not a lack of that power.” (Marcuse 2000)

## II.

Given that the current situation in Zimbabwe is fueled by what I will later argue is an “organic crisis”—a crisis of legitimacy, both locally and globally—the following genealogy of the liberation war will focus primarily on the issue of hegemony: its construction, capture, and contradictions. Rather than remain on a purely meta-discursive plane, reading histories only as genred forms of memory-work, different disciplinary modes and genres of such histories are here put into conversation, to perhaps investigate both the form and content of such contested narratives. This chapter, after all, is also a kind of memory-work, from however great a distance, and as such can also only rely on the available repertoire of various historical and literary narratives of a past that is all-too present in the current struggle for ideological and political hegemony in Zimbabwe today.

Further issues this investigation seeks to address include the problematics of political consciousness and hegemony as applied not only to individual subjects responding to contestatory historical, political, and religious belief systems, but also to classes and class-fractions of Zimbabweans, who during the nationalist struggles were collectively re-articulated (by often complex and contradictory processes) from Rhodesian colonial subjects to Zimbabweans. The range of questions that attach themselves to the central problematic of hegemony proceed through what I would wish to propose are different *levels*, as well as different *kinds*, of struggles for hegemony within the Rhodesian colony and the oppositional nationalist movements.

By “levels” I mean to investigate the struggles for hegemony on the level of “belief,” or self-consciousness—how one identifies oneself, as a subject within a larger socio-political context—and at the level of “action,” or if and how one puts into practice such consciousness within contestatory social and political arenas. In the context of the Zimbabwean liberation war, the distinction between belief (or self-identification) and action is an important one, involving a conscious move from one level to the next (especially given the inherent risks involved in anti-colonial action within the Rhodesian state and its violent security apparatus). Struggles for political and cultural hegemony are never solely ideological; as the overtly racist and *de facto* apartheid regime of Rhodesia had made apparent, use of what Althusser terms “repressive state apparatuses” (Althusser 1971) provide the structural foundation for the continued enforcement of ideological hegemony and political power. As such, the historical development in Zimbabwe of a “national-popular” consciousness (as part of the continent-wide rise of nationalist movements in the 1950s and 60s) would not alone suffice to capture the struggle for

hegemony. At the same time, such consciousness provided the platform for the move to armed struggle and insurrection against the Rhodesian state.

By “kinds” (of struggles for hegemony) I wish to propose that in the Zimbabwean context, the wide variety of experiences of the nationalist movements seems to point to a diversity of tactics used to “convert” individuals (as well as larger groups) to both the nationalist cause in general and, further, to either joining the struggle or actively participating in support of it. The different kinds of conversion here range from outright coercion, to fear tactics (from both the Rhodesian police and the Zimbabwean guerrillas), to invocations of African “tradition” and/or Christian beliefs, education and propaganda, subversive literatures and musics, ancestral spirit mediums, political rallies, unions, familial and/or patriarchal (tribal-based) pressures, etc. Such tactics also had different valences (and produced different tensions and effects) across tribal, generational, gender, religious, and class lines, producing an incredible range and complexity of cultural history in a very brief period. The historical complexity of such a range of cultural and political formations helps illuminate the often contradictory factors within any oppositional struggle for political hegemony.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that, to a large extent, the primary engine of these complex processes of change (to both nationalist consciousness and guerrilla warfare) was the deeply entrenched material conditions and repressive state apparatus of the Rhodesian colonial state, especially during the late 1960s and 1970s, when the arrogance, paranoia, and violent tendencies of the Rhodesian National Front and its police force in many ways created both the conditions and the limitations to the kinds (and levels) of political consciousness outlined above. The specific character of the Rhodesian colonial state and its brutal history demanded specific responses, further complicated by both Cold War-era geopolitics (including the ongoing anti-colonial struggles in neighboring Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa) and the ambivalence of international governments such as the UK and the US. This is not meant to explain away the often problematic methods of hegemonic struggle, repressive tactics, and factionalist in-fighting that occurred within the nationalist movements, but rather to contextualize the broader issue of struggles for hegemony within a specific historical location and moment of lasting political import.

Thus, given the historical, political and cultural specificities of the Zimbabwean anti-colonial struggle, it is necessary to investigate the theoretical frameworks within which an historical account of struggles for hegemony in Zimbabwe can best be articulated. For instance, while Gramsci's theory of hegemony focuses primarily on practices aimed at capturing consent to dominant ideological and political-economic structures, for the purposes of this paper it is necessary to broaden the term to include coercive tactics in struggles for hegemony. It is unclear how notions of consent can be divorced from structures of coercion (whether explicit or tacit), in the same way that Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses is meaningless outside the context of the simultaneous appearance of repressive state apparatuses which enforce and judicate ISAs. In the Zimbabwean context, it is clearly evident that coercion played a major role in the hegemony of the colonial Rhodesian state, especially post-UDI. Likewise, there is evidence of coercive tactics present in the various nationalist movements as well as in the post-Independence politics of the Zimbabwean state. Similarly, one might argue that consent given by the state to IMF and World Bank structural readjustment programs, as

well as the increasing burden of foreign debt in the 1990s, would not be possible without the coercion of multinational capital, international lending organizations, and other geopolitical considerations in an era of multinational capitalist hegemony.

Further, African nationalist leaders and intellectuals have theorized revolutionary practice within the geopolitical context of anti-colonial struggle, bringing a greater degree of particularity to Gramscian theories of hegemony and national-popular consciousness. For instance, Amilcar Cabral, like Gramsci, emphasized the necessity of the cultural component to nationalist consciousness, as the basis for liberation struggles:

"Whatever the conditions of subjection of a people to foreign domination and the influence of economic, political, and social factors in the exercise of this domination, it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement ... We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*." (Cabral 1979, 143, italics in original)

Cabral's notion of the use of culture in the nationalist liberation struggle has strong linkages to Gramsci's notion of hegemony and the national-popular. The project of building hegemony among the various class factions of the African colonial population required articulations of the national, even within an historical and geopolitical context in which colonial notions of "nation" are constructed without reference to language and ethnic groupings. Thus, in the African colonial context (especially in nations with a significant white settler population, as in Zimbabwe) national-popular articulations proved to be a much more complex project, though the horizon of the nation remained the site for contestation:

"For culture to play the important role which falls to it in the framework of development of the liberation movement, the movement must be able to conserve the positive cultural values of every well-defined social group, of every category, and to achieve a *confluence* of these values into the stream of struggle, giving them a new dimension—the *national dimension*." (147)

Given the historical class dimensions of colonial Africa, with a large majority peasantry and much smaller urban proletariat and African bourgeoisie, struggles for hegemony, at the levels of both nationalist consciousness and ideology ("wars of position"), as well as in terms of military tactics ("wars of maneuver"), would necessarily have to focus on the peasantry and the specific cultural formations among them. Unlike Fanon, who granted a spontaneous character to the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, Cabral understood that

"the generally embryonic character of the working classes and the economic, social and cultural situation of the major physical force in a national liberation struggle—the peasants—do not allow these two principal forces of the struggle to distinguish on their own genuine national independence from fictitious political independence. Only a revolutionary vanguard, generally an active minority, can

have consciousness *ab initio* of this distinction and through the struggle bring it to the awareness of the mass of the people. This explains the fundamentally political nature of the national liberation struggle and to some extent provides the significance of the form of struggle in the final outcome of the phenomenon of national liberation." (Cabral 1979, 132)

In the early stages of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle, this insight was confirmed, along with the further understanding that the organizing of the peasantry into a revolutionary nationalist class was more than the task of a vanguard elite, but required a dynamic cultural and political exchange between the nationalist armies and the peasantry. As Herbert Chitepo, then-chairman of ZANU, noted in 1974,

"The first major lesson we drew from our experience during [the] first phase of our armed struggle was that support by the masses cannot be taken for granted. We should not assume that because the people are oppressed they will automatically follow us without our winning them to our side." (quoted in Nyangoni & Nyandoro 1979, 289)

Both Cabral and (as shall be seen) the Zimbabwean nationalist parties and armies understood the importance of the cultural element of the struggle for hegemony. Neither could it be assumed that the urban proletariat or the peasantry would spontaneously align themselves with an anti-colonial nationalist consciousness, nor would a top-down vanguardist program of ideological hegemony necessarily bring such classes into the liberation struggle. As with all struggles for hegemony, there was to be complex and sometimes contradictory negotiations of multiple class, cultural, and ethnic elements. Thus, for the nationalist leaders, who (at least initially) largely came from urban, petty-bourgeois backgrounds, a process of cultural identification with the peasantry, beyond mere lip service to "African tradition," was viewed as an essential characteristic of the project of building anti-colonial hegemony. For the petty bourgeois intellectuals, who made up the bulk of the early nationalist party leadership, Cabral argued that

"a spiritual reconversion—of mentalities—is thus seen to be vital for their true integration in the liberation movement. Such reconversion—*re-Africanization* in our case—may take place before the struggle, but is completed only during the course of the struggle, through daily contact with the mass of the people and the communion of sacrifices which the struggle demands." (145, italics in original)

Indeed, as early as 1960, Robert Mugabe (then head of the National Democratic Party's Youth Wing) called for an initiative of "self-sacrifice," marked by a turn from European commodities and fashion to an emphasis on what was considered African attire, customs, etc. (Plastow 1996, 106)<sup>12</sup>. What is notable here is less the rhetorical invocation of

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, nationalist leaders usually remained in more formal Western attire, and invocations of cultural nationalism became increasingly syncretic, reflecting more accurately the hybrid nature of Zimbabwean culture in the 60s and 70s. Likewise, Cabral made clear that any notion of "re-Africanization" did not imply an uncritical and/or systemic celebration of some essentialist notion of African-ness (Cabral 1979, 150).

African tradition as a counter-colonial identification, as much as the linkage to notions of self-sacrifice among nationalist leaders and participants. Cabral's theorization of the role of petty-bourgeois African nationalist leaders and intellectuals called specifically for what he termed "class suicide" as part of a necessary alliance with the peasant and proletariat classes. Within the context of imperialist and neo-colonial capitalism, Cabral argued, native bourgeois classes were unable to fulfil the "historical function that would fall to this class; it cannot *freely* guide the development of productive forces, in short cannot be a *national bourgeoisie*." (Cabral 1979, 129, italics in original). Thus, in the struggle for political independence, the nascent local bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie can either subject itself to international capital and become a neo-colonial comprador class, or to struggle directly for anti-capitalist revolution as part of the anti-colonial struggle:

"...the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, to repudiate the temptations to become 'bourgeois' and the natural pretensions of its class mentality; to identify with the classes of workers, not to oppose the normal development of the process of revolution. This means that in order to play completely the part that falls to it in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing *suicide* as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he [sic] belongs... This alternative—to betray the revolution or to commit suicide as a class—constitutes the dilemma of the petty bourgeoisie in the general framework of their national liberation struggle. The positive solution, in favour of the revolution, depends on what Fidel Castro recently fittingly called *development of revolutionary consciousness*." (136, italics in original)

Thus, while nationalist consciousness in the liberation struggle was often considered in terms of the challenge of organizing the "masses" into nationalist and revolutionary classes, it is clear that many of the leaders of the Zimbabwean nationalist parties understood both Cabral's concern over the role of the native bourgeoisie as well as Fanon's critique of neocolonial bourgeois nationalism in his essay "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" (Fanon 1968). Chitepo spoke in 1974 (a year before his assassination) on the critical importance of unifying the liberation struggle across class lines, against the specific character of settler colonial capitalism (in which frustrations of the nascent black middle class led to its increasing identification with the liberation struggle):

"While our party is guided by the Marxist-Leninist theory of revolution, we are painfully aware that the road from today's settlerism and colonialism in Zimbabwe to socialism is a big jump, and that half way we will have to pass through the transitional stage of national democratic revolution. By this we mean our revolution embraces in its ranks not only the workers, peasants, and urban petty bourgeoisie, but also the national bourgeoisie and other patriotic and anti-imperialist democratic forces. In our present struggle against imperialism, it is

absolutely necessary to rally all anti-imperialist patriotic forces that can be untied."<sup>13</sup> (quoted in Nyangoni & Nyandoro 1979, 289).

Chitepo and ZANU's leadership were also conscious of the contradictory class struggles within the apartheid settler colonial system, such that class consciousness between workers against international capitalism was clouded by racist ideologies and policies. Thus the national liberation war could be articulated into a larger international struggle against imperialism:

"By cutting off the tentacles of imperialism in the periphery, we will deprive the white working class in capitalist countries of their high standards of living they have enjoyed because of the super profits that multi-national companies reaped in underdeveloped countries. It is only when the exploited working class of both black and white realize that they have a common enemy, a common oppressor, and a common exploiter that they will unite to overthrow the capitalist system." (288)

While many commentators on the history of the Zimbabwean liberation war and the post-Independence era have questioned the degree to which nationalist leaders were actually committed to the kind of class-suicide and identification with the class interests of the African proletariat and peasantry<sup>14</sup>, it is at least clear that many nationalist leaders understood the complexities of racial and class politics within the Rhodesian political economy, such that the kinds of urban, Western-educated, petty bourgeois nationalist parties that had ascended to political power in many other African ex-colonies would not be able to achieve hegemony within the context of a protracted guerilla war necessitating engaged participation from both urban proletariat and peasant elements. Indeed, the specific history of the Rhodesian settler colonial state (and its vexed relationship to international capital) in many ways determined the necessity of broader and more militant forms of nationalist struggle.

The historical context of colonialism in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (and thus the context for anti-colonial struggle) is distinct from most other colonial histories in sub-Saharan Africa, due mostly to the establishment of a British settler colonial state. Whereas most African colonies were mainly administrative regimes, with political and economic power centered in the imperial metropolises (London, Paris, Lisbon), the significant Rhodesian settler population, and its subsequent development of export agriculture and manufacturing infrastructures, led to a specific political-economy within the colony that would eventually break from British control and establish a de facto apartheid system. While South Africa provides a similar historical example, the historical circumstances of that state—having achieved independence much earlier, a much larger settler population,

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that this speech seems prescient of the current alignment of class fractions within the MDC, though in the contemporary case the struggle is more aimed towards what Chitepo is theorizing here as a "transitional stage of national democratic revolution," rather than "anti-imperialist patriot[ism]," i.e., expansion of a neoliberal capitalist, multi-party democracy led by a national bourgeoisie.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Astow (1983), Weiss (1994).

and having developed its own fairly distinct culture, language, and administrative regimes of oppression—do not present comparable trajectories in terms of both internal politics and geopolitical factors.

A few notable developments during the early history of Rhodesia (actually Southern Rhodesia until 1963) are worth mentioning in the context of this paper. Since the Rhodesian settlers and their imperial capitalist backers were unable to find the extensive mineral wealth that they had hoped would extend well north of South Africa, the British state backed an extensive program of settler agriculture, farming mostly cash crops such as tobacco and corn for export back to Europe. With heavy capital and administrative support from Great Britain, Rhodesian settlers began a colonial program that had two major consequences on the African population. First, for most of the first half of this century, by legislative and coercive means, most of the agricultural land in Rhodesia was claimed by the state specifically for white Rhodesians. Secondly, as Africans were resettled onto smaller and poorer tracts of land, there was established a vigorous campaign to introduce a cash economy into the African populations, through hut taxes and the like, such that (mostly male) Africans would be coerced into migrant labor, either in the cities or on the settler agricultural plantations (while instituting, at the same time, a *de facto* gender apartheid, wherein women were not only left to tend to agricultural production—on top of conventional domestic and reproductive labor—but also effectively restricted from entry into the nascent cash economy). This strategy helped provide the settlers with both adequate good land and cheap labor; however, as we shall see, it also set into motion two developments that would help constitute Zimbabwean nationalism. In the urban areas, African labor movements sprung up, beginning in the 1930s and 1940s (Astrow 1983), which would produce the development of an educated, politicized, African nationalist leadership (Ranger 1995). In the rural areas, the forced removal from land and the state destruction (by both open and covert means) of traditional economies would lead to the invocation of “land rights” and the reclamation of lost, stolen, and ancestral lands that would provide the later guerrilla armies with their strongest ideological weapon for conversion of the peasantry to the nationalist cause<sup>15</sup>.

While resistance to the Rhodesian colonial state began as early as the 1896-97 “first *Chimurenga*,” settler military capabilities were sufficient to put down any attempts at a mass oppositional movement<sup>16</sup>. A dual policy of colonial repression alongside colonial education and Christianization worked to create an “ideological state apparatus” (Althusser 1971) that attempted to create passive, reliable colonial subjects for exploitation and servitude. At the same time, migrant laborers and urban industrial workers still kept strong ties to the rural villages, constructing a peasant-proletariat consciousness (Arrighi 1967) rather than a strict urban proletariat that might have organized itself in more European models of resistance. Thus, though there were occasional protests and strikes in the pre-World War II era, the quick and severe repression by the colonial state led one commentator to suggest that during this period (1897-1956), “protest against European domination had indeed been sufficiently weak,

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<sup>15</sup> cf. Ranger (1985), Lan (1985) and Kriger (1991).

<sup>16</sup> cf. Frederikse (1983).

spasmodic, and unsustainable to encourage the Europeans' belief in the Africans' contentment" (Day 1975, 53)<sup>17</sup>.

In the 1950s and early 60s, throughout colonial Africa there was a sea-change in nationalist movements and the struggle toward decolonization. Colonial education and Christian missions slowly created a small class of educated bourgeois Africans (the same class from which many of the neo-colonial comprador classes would evolve in the post-independence period) whose interests, while not in strict opposition to the ideologies of European democratic capitalism, certainly clashed with the colonial system of inequality and non-representation<sup>18</sup>. The history of African nationalist movements in this era is now well established; union leaders and nationalist political leaders forged movements that would lead to the relatively peaceful transfer of political independence throughout most of the British and French colonies (the notable exception being the Portuguese colonies).

However, the Rhodesian case would be different. Cabral's assertion (regarding Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola), that "Portugal cannot decolonize because she cannot recolonize" (Cabral 1979), has similar resonance with the Rhodesian situation. Whereas France and Great Britain were able to effectively transfer political and administrative control in almost all of their African colonies to an educated class of nationalist leaders who, for the most part would not threaten imperial economic relationships, the existence of a sizable (and increasingly nationalist) white settler population in Rhodesia (with its own interests) complicated any smooth transition to an African-administered neo-colony. In the wake of failed diplomatic attempts to bring about a compromised decolonization in (then-) Southern Rhodesia in 1961-64, Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front party signed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, effectively breaking from Great Britain and forestalling attempts at the political enfranchisement of Africans in Rhodesia. The new state of Rhodesia, though somewhat ostracized internationally<sup>19</sup>, developed its own brand of nationalism, a peculiar case of national-popular consciousness that, though outside the scope of this paper, could be usefully summarized as an articulation of a white settler *Rhodesian* consciousness—no longer British—(mostly<sup>20</sup>) unified around the idea of its "historical mandate" (i.e., to rule the blacks and "develop" the land) and the concomitant paranoia of a white working class that saw its interests better served in the racist protectionism of the capitalist settler state than in any class alignments across racial lines<sup>21</sup>. It is also interesting to note that in this particular context, national-popular hegemony was aimed primarily at the white settler minority, whereas the black African majority was hegemonized by more overtly repressive tactics. While there were programmatic attempts to articulate a broader

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<sup>17</sup> However, Yoshikuni (1989) suggests that smaller scale developments such as ethnic and gender-based "mutual aid societies" are evidence of a cultural-nationalist consciousness that can be overlooked by a focus on strikes and public protest. cf. also Ranger (1999) for evidence of early peasant reformist movements within Southern Rhodesia (Matabeleland).

<sup>18</sup> cf. Mungazi (1992) for a detailed history of educational systems and cultural conflict in colonial Rhodesia.

<sup>19</sup> In the wake of UDI, the UN would establish sanctions for the first time over a sovereign state; however, Western nations and economies were less than strident about their enforcement.

<sup>20</sup> Of course there were notable cases of white support for decolonization; cf. Frederiske (1993), personal conversation with Anthony Chennells, Santa Cruz 1999.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Arrighi (1967) for the development of a Rhodesian political economy that, sometimes against the interests of international capital, established policies to ensure "noncompeting" racial segregation along class lines.

Rhodesian ideology among the entire population (via religious, administrative, and educational apparatuses), the rhetoric and tactics of the post-UDI Rhodesian state largely discarded any attempts at a viable multiracial nationalist consciousness, in part as a necessary sacrifice to maintain its own political hegemony among white Rhodesian settlers (thus leading to the paranoid apartheid tactics in response to both internal and international pressure to decolonize).

Thus, in the wake of UDI, the extension of a brutally repressive Rhodesian state (which would ban successive nationalist parties as soon as they could re-form under a new name), and the continued failures of international pressure and diplomacy to work out a solution to the “Rhodesian problem,” nationalist movements in Rhodesia moved increasingly towards the option of armed struggle. As similar liberation wars heated up in neighboring Mozambique and Angola (as well as in Guinea-Bissau, and to a lesser extent, South Africa and Namibia), and the Cold War geopolitics of the region provided the possibility of training and support from the Soviet Union, China, East Germany, and North Korea, both of the major nationalist parties—The Zimbabwean African People’s Union (ZAPU) and The Zimbabwean African Nationalist Union (ZANU)—began organizing armies (as well as exile organizations in Zambia and Mozambique) to commence with military struggle.

The history of the successful liberation war in Zimbabwe, though still being (re)written, is well established in its basic outline<sup>22</sup>: despite numerous setbacks, factionalist in-fighting, assassinations and sabotage by the Rhodesian and South African armies, and limited international support, the two main nationalist armies—the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA)—were able to eventually wear down the Rhodesian state<sup>23</sup>, ally themselves with the newly independent Mozambique, win over international support (thanks to some concessions on behalf of ZANU and ZAPU leadership) and in 1979 sign the Lancaster House Agreement, effectively establishing an independent Zimbabwe (though not without concessions to both white commercial farmers and international capital).

### III.

We now turn to various historical accounts of the liberation war, as seen through the academic and theoretical studies produced in such fields as anthropology, oral history, cultural studies, etc., as well as in various literary accounts. In response to earlier studies by such historians as Astrow (1983), Lan (1985) and Ranger (1985), which are now seen by some commentators as having extrapolated studies of particular regions into theories applied too broadly to national and/or regional generalizations, recent work in the field has tended to further complicate any easy generalizations about how and why Zimbabweans came to participate in the liberation struggle, pointing to diverse experiences across regional, ethnic/tribal, gender, generational, class, and religious lines. While this collective and multi-disciplinary research has added a healthy dose of

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<sup>22</sup> For a more in-depth and nuanced history of the liberation war, cf. Frederiske (1993), Bhebe and Ranger (1995), Lan (1985), Ranger (1985), and Kriger (1991).

<sup>23</sup> The guerilla tactics of the nationalist armies were so effective that the US Army commissioned a study on the “Rhodesian experience” to attempt to apply “counterinsurgency” tactics in Central America in the 80s and 90s (Hoffman, et al, 1991).

particularity to studies of Zimbabwean history, it naturally also frustrates any attempts at broad analytic frameworks or conclusions around the issues of national-popular consciousness discussed in this paper. Indeed, the brief glimpse of the war literature discussed below seems to amply illustrate this point, and, alongside the historical accounts, offers a compelling case for the extremely complex and often contradictory nature of nationalist consciousness.

As for the literary accounts of the liberation war, it is important to note that, beginning with the rise to power of Ian Smith and the Rhodesian Front, and directly following UDI in 1965, the Rhodesian state vigorously enforced a policy of censorship that extended not only to foreign works with potentially political (i.e., anti-colonial and/or Marxist) subject matter, but also writing, theater, and music produced by Zimbabweans, with the exception of white Rhodesian writers whose work generally reinforced the prevailing colonialist ideology<sup>24</sup> and African writers and musicians whose work for the most part evaded contemporary nationalist politics and focused instead on more palatable subjects such as the move from African "tradition"<sup>25</sup> to modernity (e.g. Mungoshi 1974). Thus, most of the literature addressing the period of the second *Chimurenga* has been written either in exile (Marechera 1978, 1991; Nyamfukudza 1980) or after Independence (Kanengoni 1997, Chinodya 1989, Hove 1989, Vera 1992, Samupindi 1992).

Although there is evidence to suggest that many of these literary works are semi-autobiographical<sup>26</sup>, this is not to suggest that these works be taken as direct historical evidence. Instead, they are read here as literary-historical narratives that not only illustrate and dramatize the particular events and characteristics of an era, but also give the reader a greater sense of how Zimbabweans are beginning to negotiate the conflicting terrains of identity, national consciousness, and collective memory. Indeed, though it would reach beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth speculating on the necessity of rethinking postcolonial literatures within the framework of globalization as well, thus challenging readings that either privilege so-called Third World nationalist allegory or simply assess such works against established Euro-American canons and comparative literature disciplinary approaches.<sup>27</sup> Further, anthropological and historical accounts must themselves be read against not only the background of contemporary historical and methodological issues, but also as disciplinary forms of historical narration, which by virtue of their disciplinary status may present different articulations of the historical

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<sup>24</sup> cf. Chennells (1995) for a study of white Rhodesian literature in the 1960s and 70s, which even in its nominally "liberal" variety (at least since Doris Lessing left the country) could not seem to move beyond Conradian stereotypes of the savage, one continuing colonialist trope among many others that in many ways helped to intensify the white Rhodesian paranoia in the post-UDI years.

<sup>25</sup> By "tradition" I do not wish to imply some static form of pre-contact culture, but merely to mark the set of social and cultural practices considered by their practitioners to constitute their own historical heritage. (Similarly, notions of the "modern" and "modernity" need to be challenged for their often inherent Western biases, though such a challenge is outside the purview of this paper.)

<sup>26</sup> Personal conversation with Chenjari Hove, Anthony Chennells, Flora Veit-Wild, 1995. cf also Buuck (1997) and the introduction to Kanengoni (1997).

<sup>27</sup> One such compelling example is Godzich's (1994) reading of Manuel Rui's short story "The Watch" (in Rui 1993), which finds figurations of transnationalism in both the form and content of the story as well as the vicissitudes of postcolonial literary production, publishing, and distribution.

record but should not necessarily be read as more privileged accounts than literary forms<sup>28</sup>.

As mentioned before, with the exception of the exiled writers, it would not be until the late 1980s that Zimbabwean writers would begin to reinvestigate the experiences and legacies of the liberation struggle, challenging the prevailing post-Independence mythologies of nationalist unity and heroism during and after the war. That this nascent movement to problematize and critique the history of Zimbabwean nationalism and the liberation war has begun during a period of increasing disillusionment with the state and its perceived betrayal of nationalist ideals (at the level of both rhetoric and practice) would seem to indicate that any historiographic study of national-popular consciousness (as ideological transformation as well as the construction of nationalist identities and politics) is necessarily also a reflection of contemporary concerns about the strength, efficacy, and/or long-term viability of such consciousness.

As the nationalist parties began in the late 1960s to turn towards armed struggle, first with small insurrectionist tactics of terrorism and destabilization, and later with strategies for a nation-wide liberation war, there was an increasing need to “hegemonize” Zimbabweans to the nationalist cause (specifically the practice of guerrilla warfare)<sup>29</sup>. This need was not only to increase the ranks of the movements and bring soldiers into the ranks of the guerrilla armies, but also increasingly to enlist the support of the peasantry (and, to a lesser extent, urban Africans), who were to provide cover, food, information, as well as the blessing of the ancestors (via spirit mediums; see below).

The nationalist movements thus took it upon themselves to campaign towards what Gramsci called a “collective national will” (in Joll 1977, 127), that could form a new nationalist consensus not only around the idea of Zimbabwean identity but as a new hegemonic formation of intellectuals, soldiers, peasants, and workers, all aligned to (and working on behalf of) the cause of liberation. While the nationalist leadership attempted to achieve this by continuing its more conventional practice of political rallies and speeches, the repression and censorship exerted by the Rhodesian state severely limited any wide-range efficacy the leadership could achieve from exile. Thus, the work of organizing would fall to the guerrillas themselves, who had the most direct contact with the peasantry, and who were in most direct need of their support.

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<sup>28</sup> It should also be noted that the disparate publication and distribution networks of both Zimbabwean literatures and academic/historical works about Zimbabwe suggest that further research is required in regards to the modes of literary and academic production in and about Zimbabwe. While there have been numerous small presses active in Zimbabwe since Independence, many are owned and/or run by liberal whites, and/or supported (at least initially) by the state. Similarly, geopolitical and language factors (as well as the relatively brief period of independence) have no doubt contributed to limitations on the academic and historical production on contemporary Zimbabwe and its history. Needless to say, literary and academic production within and about Zimbabwe is yet another field for the continued contestation of the legacy of anti-colonial struggle and the post-Independence era, a field in which certain gaps and silences must also be taken into consideration. There is also the recent publication of war memoirs and histories being written by ex-Rhodesian whites which, while in some cases useful to consider in regards to issues of race and colonial hegemony, fall outside the scope of this present essay.

<sup>29</sup> cf. J.Z. Moyo's 1970 statement in Nyangoni & Nyandoro (1979) for an early assessment of the needs of the ZANU army.

As outlined briefly below, many of the practices used by the guerrillas to convert the peasantry to their cause relied on invocations of tradition. However, at the same time, within the guerrilla camps in Zambia and Mozambique, a more modernist educational structure became part of the increasing radicalization of the guerrillas (towards both Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideologies), a process that would at times bring them into clashes with both the bourgeois nationalist leadership and the traditional peasantry<sup>30</sup>. As schools were established within the camps (particularly after 1975, when the decolonization of Mozambique allowed the Zimbabwean guerrillas to use Samora Machel's people's committees model, as well as his broad support), entire Rhodesian schools would move *en bloc* across the border and into exile for training and education (Nare 1995, 130). Given circumstances of extremely limited resources and training, there developed what Gramsci would call an "organic intellectual class," as guerrilla educators began to instruct (and construct) a relatively new hybrid form of education (loosely related to the model of Friere's pedagogical theories), that involved both specific material and productivity training (collective agriculture, the use and maintenance of weapons, etc.) as well as ideological training in the history of Zimbabwe and the works of Marx, Lenin, Mao, Fanon, Cabral, et al<sup>31</sup>. Chung (1995), Frederiske (1983), and others point to this process as a form of ideological practice that would equip guerrillas to effectively connect with the peasantry and, in effect, translate their own articulations of nationalist consciousness to other discourses and traditions. This "return to the source" (Cabral 1979), a selective recovery of African tradition that is combined with (and informs) revolutionary ideology and practice, would be a key element in the efforts to build an effective hegemonic bloc among the peasantry.

In practice, of course, individual experiences and articulations of national consciousness and commitment to the armed struggle were much more complex negotiations of often contradictory traditions and ideologies. Shimmer Chinodya's novel Harvest of Thorns narrates the family history of Benjamin Tichafa, from his parents' embrace of Christianity to Benjamin's leaving the country to join the Zimbabwe guerrillas. Benjamin's parents, though casual churchgoers at first, become devout worshippers of "The Overseer," who leads the Church of the Holy Spirit, after being promised by two church proselytizers that their repeated (and failed) attempts to have a child will finally be rewarded if they cease using "witch doctors" and join the church (Chinodya 1989, 67). Here the Christian Church replaces traditional Shona belief (seen as the devil's work by the Overseer) by offering similar promises, i.e., *not* by presenting itself as a modernizing alternative to "backwards" beliefs. When Benjamin grows up an unruly and disobedient child, helping to burn down a beerhall on the insistence of nationalist dissidents, the Overseer prays along with Benjamin's parents for God to "drive out the devil," which in this case Chinodya makes clear is militant nationalism. (90-92)

However, Benjamin will not (re)converted to a good Christian colonial subject. As he continues to fall into trouble, he recalls witnessing his mother being questioned by

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<sup>30</sup> cf. for example Nyathi (1990), Moyana (1988), and Nyamubaya (1986).

<sup>31</sup> This model of combining ideological education with training would be institutionalized in the post-war period (albeit in a very limited form) as the Zimbabwe Federation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP). cf. Nyathi (1990).

nationalist youths, who tell her that she is not the child of God but rather a “child of the soil” (99), i.e., an African not a Christian. Benjamin attempts to reconcile these two views in his mind, but cannot; instead, he begins to hear a running argument in his head: “Do you believe in the Church of the Holy Spirit? *Nobody’s perfect*. Why do you say that? *The Overseer stole church money*.” (105-6) Unable to mold this double consciousness into some kind of syncretic hybridity, Benjamin dissents from the normative: he joins a public protest of inscription of blacks into the Rhodesian army, and is arrested. He flees, crosses the border into Mozambique, and joins up with the first guerrilla unit he encounters, renaming himself (in the self-conscious display of nationalist consciousness, having previously been called a sellout by the Overseer) Pasi NemaSellout. Here Viswanathan’s notion of conversion as dissent (1998) seems valid; indeed, many of the guerrillas were fighting *against* colonialism as much if not more than they were fighting *for* some clear notion of an alternative ideology beyond an independent Zimbabwe.

In *Echoing Silences* (1997), Alexander Kanengoni, an ex-ZANLA guerrilla, frames his war story within a present-day, post-war narrative of Munashe, an ex-combatant struggling to come to terms with his guilt over his participation in the war and his killing of innocent people. Kanengoni illustrates the articulation of nationalist consciousness at two different levels in the novel, for while Munashe becomes a nationalist as a form of dissent from colonialism (yet also as part of a Christian worldview [26-7]), it is only through the coercive methods of the army leadership that he is ultimately led to become the kind of guerrilla who would kill his fellow Africans (for supposed crimes of betrayal and witchcraft) on command.

When he learns as a schoolboy from Father Erasmus that “of all the gifts that God gave us, there is none as great as freedom. Therefore, the worst sin that any man can commit is to deny another this God-given gift” (27), Munashe responds with “But that’s what’s happening to us in this country, Father!” (27), effectively challenging the colonial regime (as represented by the Church and the school) through the Church’s own teachings, a common trope among African nationalist movements in the 1950s and 60s<sup>32</sup>. Shortly after, Munashe leaves school to join the guerrillas in exile. However, within a short time we find him embroiled within the factionalism of the various armed nationalist movements, leading to violent infighting and paranoia in the wake of the car-bombing of then-ZANU chairman Herbert Chitepo, variously blamed on the Rhodesian secret service and ZANLA insurrectionists<sup>33</sup>. Munashe here figures as an example of how coercion becomes an aspect of hegemony, whereby betrayals of one’s beliefs (“the worst sin ... is to deny another’s freedom”) become necessary to demonstrate one’s conversion to a higher cause (that of the revolution).

Near the end of the novel, having return to the present-day frame narrative, Munashe is taken to a *Mhondoro* (lion) spirit medium, to exorcise his guilt over his

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<sup>32</sup> cf. Sithole 1959, Bhebe et al 1995b, and Lazarus 1990, for the invocation of Christian (and Western democratic) ideologies of individuation, political representation, and “liberty” by various African nationalist movements in their appeals to Great Britain and France for decolonization.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Astrow (1983) and Bhebe and Ranger (1995a) for an in-depth history of the factionalism within the Zimbabwean nationalist movements and their armies.

execution of an African woman and her child during the war. This “return to tradition” might be read as Kanengoni’s critique of both the Christian church and the various revolutionary ideologies, calling instead for a mourning of all that was lost during the war, as well as a possible site for rearticulations of nationalist consciousness (to a perhaps romanticized African tradition)<sup>34</sup>. However, though he is forgiven by the woman (through the medium), Munashe is unable to reenter civil society as a “sane” man, remaining stuck in a magic-realist world where Chairman Chitepo and Jason Moyo (another assassinated ZANU leader) are still alive and holding rallies, denouncing the betrayal of the ideals of the revolution. Munashe is found dead the next day, seemingly a symbolic victim of Zimbabwe’s inability to make peace with the compromises and bloody aftermath of the liberation war. Nationalist consciousness in this narrative is thus seen to have potentially dire and violent consequences when a post-revolutionary society cannot live up to its inherent promises.

In both these novels, we see the contradictory pulls of different invocations of tradition: the Christian Church, traditional African religious practice(s), and revolutionary ideology (invoked as tradition as well, in its referencing to the first *Chimurenga*, thus giving the contemporary guerrilla war—the *Second Chimurenga*—a direct connection to the rebellion of the ancestors). While many African religious belief systems and political ideologies have historically been able to construct syncretic or hybrid (Bhabha 1994) cultural practices, fusing both colonial and African systems of thought, here we see the specific context and historical pressures of the Rhodesian colonial society unable to offer its African subjects a viable hybridity, that could accept and fuse Christian and Western democratic notions of liberty and justice, traditional African relationships to the land and ancestral power, nationalist discourses of self-determination and land reclamation, and the gross inequalities of the colonial economic and political system. If the implied hyphen that holds together contestatory systems within the syncretic is the center around which the imaginary “third space” (Bhabha 1994) of hybridity is able to locate itself, it is clear from these novels (as well as from other sources, as we shall see) that “the center could not hold.” Anti-colonial nationalist consciousness could thus be seen as a more viable response to conditions of extreme complexity, whereby identity formations, beliefs, and political practice became so over-determined by the inherent contradictions of the colonial regime that nationalist struggle (and its more extreme sibling, guerrilla warfare) presented itself as a way (if not the only way) to reconcile such contradictions within a new structure of beliefs and actions that seemed to speak to established (if hybrid and contradictory) tradition.

However, African tradition was not necessarily an uncontested set of beliefs and relations which the various Zimbabwean nationalist movements could easily invoke and/or insert themselves into. Indeed, from the beginning of colonial settler contact, British (and later Rhodesian) colonialists attempted to use certain aspects of tradition in order to further entrench a colonialist mentality within the Southern African colonies. This strategy ranged from mapping a British monarchical ideology onto and over the African system of chiefdoms, establishing to some degree what Ranger terms a

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<sup>34</sup> In contrast, see also Bhebe (1995b) for an interesting study of the difficulties facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe in the post-war period to re-establish a viable “tradition” of African Christianity, both as a belief structure (i.e., via notions of “reconversion”) and as an institution.

“‘theology’ of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent monarchy” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 212), to the incorporation of regional chiefs into a colonial scheme of puppet clientism (though not nearly as extensive as the South African bantusan system). At the same time, the missionary work of the Christian churches in Rhodesia worked to insert a colonialist ideology into the syncretic religious beliefs and practices of Africans, where obedience to authority and the Church (here closely tied to the throne and “Mother England”) were part and parcel of a program of “inventing African traditions for Africans” (212)<sup>35</sup>. Such programs of what, following Althusser, one might call an “ideological (colonial) state apparatus,” alongside colonial education, the establishment of English as the official language, and (crucially) the introduction of a cash economy, worked to fuse (though not necessarily effectively) colonial traditions (themselves inventions of the colonial imaginary and British imperialist political objectives) onto various local African traditions, such that a simple recovering of (or return to) tradition for the purposes of Zimbabwean nationalism was impossible without a similarly syncretic and hybrid rearticulation of black Rhodesians to yet another new (re)invention of tradition, towards an identification as Zimbabweans, at once looking back and looking forward, both traditional and modern.

Of course, the contradictions within hybrid constructions of tradition and modernity also extend to gender relations. Freedom T.V. Nyamubaya, an ex-ZANLA guerrilla, is an example of the Zimbabwean woman “modernized” by the liberation war and its ostensible ideology of socialist equality. Having taken on a new name (Freedom) as part of her commitment to the armed struggle, she also took on a relatively new role for women in Zimbabwe, that of intellectual leadership. As women were slowly introduced into the educational and organizing structures of army leadership, conversion to what, following Gramsci, one might call an “organic feminism” developed among many women guerrillas, a feminism whose promise would not necessarily be met in the post-Independence era. Indeed, the radicalization of many guerrilla fighters (both male and female), in comparison to the nationalist party leadership within ZAPU and ZANU, might account for much of the post-Independence disillusionment with the neo-colonial character of much of the Zimbabwean state elites, and the perceived abandonment of the more radical aspirations of the liberation armies<sup>36</sup>. As Nyamubaya writes in her post-war collection of poems, On the Road Again:

Mental decolonisation, an on-going process,  
A difficult task crushing hangovers  
The Native intellectual becomes useful again,

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that, in the interests of brevity, this is a slight oversimplification. Bhebe and Ranger (1995), Maxwell (1995), Nyathi (1990) and others have commented on the roles that some Christian churches and missions played in (often ambivalent) support of the liberation struggle. Likewise, not all chiefs were easily subsumed into a clientist role with the Rhodesian state (cf. Bhebe and Ranger 1995, Ranger 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Nyamubaya’s subsequent career, both as a poet and an activist, seems to bear out her continued commitment to her sense of the ideals compromised by the party leadership and the post-Independence comprador class. Her refusal to work within the state bureaucracy, instead founding an NGO that trains ex-guerrillas on agricultural co-operatives and land resettlement schemes, would be one instance of such a stance. (Personal conversation, Mashonaland East, 1991)

For Africa needed them yesterday.  
(Nyamubaya 1986, 45)

Additionally, Nyamubaya charts the harsh treatment of many women within the guerrilla camps, where modernization—in the form of better education, increased participation, and at least the rhetoric of gender equality—often met head-on with the lingering systems of patriarchy and sexual harassment:

They were all mothers  
With the experience of labour pains  
And bullet wounds on their buttocks  
Fragments all over their bodies.  
They were all fighters.  
They were all Zimbabwean  
Yet they hated their womanhood.

Unknown by the world at large,  
Forgotten by their male comrades  
Who made them pregnant  
Remembered by their distant parents,  
The women still shouldered their burdens.

Fighters to defend their children  
Mothers to provide child care  
Mistresses to entertain the men:  
Their minds sink in despair.

Osibisa, I remember very well  
I know there will be many to come  
For Namibia and Azania today and tomorrow,  
It's sexual, mental and physical harassment  
For women, mothers, in the liberation wars.

(Nyamubaya 1986, 66-67)

In both of these poems, the voice of historical witness—a subgenre of so-called “war poetry”—is implicitly also commenting on post-war conditions of gender relations in independent Zimbabwe. Ingrid Sinclair’s 1996 film “Flame” is another case in point, one which caused a great deal of controversy upon its release for breaking with sanctioned histories of the liberation war<sup>37</sup>. The film tells the story of two childhood friends who leave their rural village to join the guerilla forces. Taking on new names (Flame and Liberty), roles, and identities, their experiences with discrimination and rape are shown

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<sup>37</sup> The film was almost banned due to protests from the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association. Stated Richard Chirongwe, ZWVA deputy secretary general: “We want to portray a *correct picture* of the liberation struggle. The Rhodesian soldiers were the ones who raped people and tortured civilians, that is what should come out.” (*Mail&Telegraph* website archive, emphasis added)

alongside tales of courage and collective struggle. Perhaps as important as the “revelation” of gender inequality and sexual violence within the ranks of the nationalist armies, is the framing narrative, wherein Flame and Liberty meet in 1992, some 12 years after Independence, to reflect upon their experiences and weigh them against their present reality, which the film makes clear has not lived up to their hopes. By framing the war stories within a post-war narrative, the film makes clear how postcolonial memory is always filtered through contemporary contexts

In Stanley Nyamfukudza’s 1980 novel *The Non-Believer’s Journey*, written while the author was exiled in Great Britain in the late 1970s, we follow the “non-believer” Sam, an African teacher living in Salisbury (Harare), a modernized product of colonial education, nominally in support of the nationalist struggle, but unable to overcome his skepticism and commit to active participation in the war. Here we can see the different levels of nationalist consciousness, as Sam, in his principled opposition to the colonial system, is able to articulate a nationalist consciousness (in terms of belief), but is unable to further commit to a position that would take action based upon those beliefs.

Sam’s uneasy relationship to his own identity, as a black Rhodesian both benefiting from and restricted by the colonial state, is an example of what Fanon termed the “pitfalls of national consciousness”<sup>41</sup>. His education and cosmopolitan world-view makes it difficult for him to imagine what for him would be a re-conversion to a more traditionally African identity. When he returns to his village for the funeral of his uncle (killed, notably, for being an “informer”), Sam argues with his father over what he sees as a backwards invocation of tradition by the guerrillas. His father replies:

“What makes a people if not a shared tradition of beliefs about where they come from and who they are? Why do you think this war is called ‘Chimurenga?’ ... It was the spirit mediums, then, who united and inspired the people and actually bade them take up arms against the white man.” (Nyamfukudza 1980, 91)

To which Sam responds:

“You can’t take everything from the past wholesale, you’ve got to be selective and discard beliefs which are no longer useful and obstruct your everyday lives ... Do you know, it would had been an admirable stroke of tactical thinking if all this mumbo-jumbo about spirit mediums were a deliberate, cynical decision to get at people’s hearts through their strongest, most enduring beliefs.” (92)

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<sup>41</sup> Fanon 1963, 148. cf. also Cabral (1979) for his notion of a “return to the source” as a “reconversion” from what both Fanon and Cabral would see as bourgeois consciousness to a (perhaps romanticized) “African” nationalist consciousness.

Though Sam is able to imagine a creative use of tradition as part of a modern, tactical struggle (a use in fact quite effectively practiced by the guerrillas, as we shall see below), his cynicism is such that he cannot move beyond his own stereotypes (“mumbo-jumbo”) about his fellow Zimbabweans. At the end of the novel, when the guerrillas enter his village and attempt to enlist Sam’s support in smuggling medical goods from the city to the bush, Sam refuses to take the risk, and in frustration (mostly, it is implied, at his own cowardice and inability to act) attacks the guerrilla captain, who feels forced to shoot and kill Sam. Sam’s unwillingness and/or inability to commit to the anti-colonial struggle leaves him trapped in a position that the novel seems to imply is untenable in the context of the anti-colonial liberation struggle.

In the same way that tradition becomes a overdetermined and contradictory site within struggles for counter-hegemonic consciousness, so too does the relationship of modernization to a then-nascent anti-colonial (and thus in many ways, anti-Western) consciousness. While one reading of nationalism might find that the move to the “new” would imply a rejection of the “old” (tradition), and thus a progression into modernity (in this case the modernity of armed struggle, “with guns instead of spears”), a more nuanced view would see that often the modern is itself a (re)invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, as discussed above)<sup>42</sup>. As we saw in *Chinodya*, with the renaming of Pasi NemaSellout, the taking on of new names symbolized the rearticulation of colonial subjects to the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. At the same time, there is the invocation of both Afro-Christian tropes (the taking of a Christian name at confirmation, “baptism by fire”) as well as traditional Shona and Ndebele customs (where children are often given names to describe their birthing, as in Tatenda [thank you], Dambudzo [trouble], etc.) In Charles Samupindi’s novel *Pawns*, both the modernizing and religious aspects of self-articulation are demonstrated (if perhaps ironically so):

“They were born again. Daniel became Comrade Fangs and company commander. Joseph, Comrade Blast, was put in charge of logistics and became known as Logistics.

They were new men.” (Samupindi 1992, 102-3)

The use of traditional religious practices—most notably ancestral spirit mediums—would turn out to be perhaps the most effective way for the guerrillas to articulate the peasantry into the struggle, by tying the present-day struggle with the first Chimurenga and the loss of ancestral lands. Spirit mediums were extremely important during the first Chimurenga in 1896-97, “guiding the people” and giving instructions, such that the Rhodesian state made a point of not only capturing the two most prominent mediums (or, more appropriately, the mediums of the two most prominent ancestral spirits<sup>43</sup>) and distributing a widely published photo of their execution. During the second

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<sup>42</sup> Yet cf. also Vera: “Those who were fighting in the bush were fighting to enter the white man’s world, not to preserve their own.” (Vera 1992, 87)

<sup>43</sup> Mediums were rarely identified by name, but known by the name of the spirit they “channeled,” even if such channeling was sporadic. Thus, the killing of mediums would not necessarily kill the ancestor spirit, as with the return of Nehanda during the second *Churmenga*. cf. Lan (1985), Vera (1993).

Chimurenga, the guerrilla armies began using spirit mediums to not only reconnect with the ancestral spirits for guidance but also to demonstrate to the peasantry that the guerrilla struggle had the approval of the ancestors. While some of the more prominent mediums (including that of Nehanda, the spirit whose earlier medium had been killed by the state in 1897 and had become one of the main mythological icons of the second Chimurenga) were taken into exile, to protect them from the Rhodesian secret service as well as instruct the guerrillas, often the guerrillas would come into rural villages and consult the local mediums in order to convert the peasantry to the nationalist cause. As Lan (1985) has outlined in his detailed anthropological study of spirit mediums and guerrillas in Zimbabwe, these meetings between the guerrillas and the villagers would become the focal point of a radically new articulations of nationalist consciousness, where traditional ceremonial elements such as sacrifice, drumming, music, and spirit possession would be fused with ideological education, nationalist history, modern political rallies, military training, and shared communication between the guerrillas and the peasantry. These *pungwes* would often take place over the course of a night, often in some degree of secrecy as the Rhodesian police became increasingly nervous about what they had heretofore presumed to be relatively benign (and “backwards”) traditions<sup>44</sup>.

In addition to the use of spirit mediums, the land itself became a site of national-popular consciousness, whereby guerrillas and nationalist leaders could “reconnect” — personally and symbolically — with the ancestral land for which the war was being fought. Such practices of reconnection would include not only traditional sacrifices and libations to ancestral spirits that represented the land, but also consisted of pilgrimages to significant sites such as the Matopos Hills, where ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo was spoken to by the ancestral “voice of the cave,” granting him the ancestors’ approval for the nationalist cause (Ranger 1999, 216).

As Ranger points out, as guerrillas became trained in Marxist-tinged political ideology, many had difficulty reconciling themselves with the use of spirit mediums and traditional practices, just as heavily Christianized Africans had similar difficulties (Ranger 1999, 203). At the same time, just as the guerrillas eventually found the uses of traditional practices necessary to connect with the peasantry, there is evidence that the Christian Church, in its own way, was able to find a role for itself in the articulation of Africans to the nationalist cause, even in places reconciling itself with traditional practices, though certainly the contradictory and ambivalent loyalties of the various Churches and missions were always in evidence<sup>45</sup>. There is no doubt, however, that the use of spirit mediums by the nationalist parties was one of the most effective ways of organizing the African population around the nationalist cause, reconnecting the armed struggle with ancestral claims to stolen land, and granting the very modern guerrillas the blessing of tradition.

Additionally, the use of popular culture and mass media, though both heavily restricted by state censorship, were effective tools for propaganda as well as a celebratory

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<sup>44</sup> Having witnessed a post-Independence *pungwe*, in the Chikwaka region of Zimbabwe in 1991, I still cannot attest (nor would I claim to be able to) as to the veracity of claims of spirit possession. However, and more importantly, I am more than willing to grant the cultural embeddedness of such communal rituals, as a performative enactment of a belief system that fuses both “traditional” and “modernist” elements.

<sup>45</sup> cf. Sithole (1970), Staunton (1990, 199), Ranger and Bhebe (1995b) for more on the role of Christian churches and missions in the liberation struggle.

fusion of African music and theater to the ideologies of the nationalist movement. As Frederikse (1983) has demonstrated, in her collection of oral histories, song lyrics, Rhodesian state anti-terrorist propaganda, and African newspapers and pamphlets, communication, though heavily restricted (and thus often heavily coded) was essential to the forging of a “collective national will.” Lazarus (1999) focuses on how Shona Chimurenga music was developed in the 1970s as an outwardly sounding traditional form of African music (played with many traditional instrument as well) that in its allegorical and coded Shona lyrics, could get its message past the censors and to the people. As Thomas Mapfumo, the leading musician of the era, put it, such a message “wasn’t being sung directly. I was telling Mr. Smith that there were people in such trouble that all his talking was mere words, talk without substance ... The people understood. They knew what I was talking about.” (quoted in Lazarus 1999, 211)

Finally, coercion and intimidation was another kind of hegemonic tactic, employed nearly as often by the guerrillas as by the Rhodesian police (Bhebe and Ranger 1995a) when non-coercive modes of ideological struggle were not producing the desired effects. The threats, violence, and terror in evidence within not only the guerrilla movements and their infighting factions, but also among the peasantry<sup>46</sup>, are certainly an unfortunate byproduct of the liberation war that no amount of post-war mythology can hide. All told, while many Zimbabweans joined the cause of anti-colonial nationalism, the guerrilla armies and their political party leadership went to incredible lengths, using a variety of tactics (some coercive and violent) to further commit the people of Zimbabwe to the cause of active, involved, ideological and military struggle against the Rhodesian colonial regime. Struggles for hegemony in the context of armed revolutionary struggle necessarily consist of both wars of maneuver as well as wars of position. It should be clear from the historical evidence here that cultural practices and ideological and political work in various and contingent contexts constituted a war of position on several fronts that helped articulate a hegemonic national-popular consciousness to support the more actively militant wars of maneuver. As Gramsci argues, the struggle for hegemony is dynamic, a "continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria" (Gramsci 1988, 423). As such, even successful revolutions are no guarantee that hard-won hegemony will remain consistently cohesive and/or progressive. The current crisis of hegemony in Zimbabwe demonstrates that the historical struggles for hegemony during both the colonial era and the liberation war continue to re-articulate themselves in cultural memory and social and political practice, against the backdrop of contemporary political-economic contexts.

#### IV.

Does knowledge of the Root  
 Expand insight into the future?  
 Everywhere Afro-consciousness  
 Defining itself with pick and shovel. (Marechera 1984, 94)

In 1984, Dambudzo Marechera published what was to be the last book of his to appear in his lifetime. Mindblast, a collection of plays, poetry, prose fiction, and a

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<sup>46</sup> cf. Ranger (1999), Nyamfukudza (1980), Marechera (1978).

stream-of-consciousness diary chronicling his life living in the bars and sleeping on the park benches in Independent Harare, was published by a small Harare-based press, as larger and more established publishing houses had rejected several of Marechera's manuscripts on the grounds that they were not "proper" "African" literature (especially in a post-liberation war context such as Zimbabwe, where cultural nationalism was the norm). From a conventional postcolonial standpoint, Marechera's wide range of aesthetic forms and influences, ranging from absurdist theater to beat poetry and high modernist polylinguism, could not possibly cohere within the normative categories of African literature. At the same time, that very incoherence can be read as indicative of a crisis in representational practices, the fundamental contradictions inherent in any aesthetic project that does not strictly adhere to realist, national-allegory forms.

This uneasy mix of styles, genres, voices, rhetorical modes, and formal devices in Marechera's work is a relatively unique feature within what has come to be institutionally understood as postcolonial African literature. However, I wish to argue that the tensions and contradictions within Marechera's work are *all the more representative of a crisis in postcoloniality itself*, namely the contradictions fundamental to the transition from anti-colonial struggle to neocolonialism. Conventional forms of African literature have tended to rely heavily on the nineteenth-century European bourgeois realist novel as the formal mode best suited to constituting what in many ways can be read as emergent nationalist literatures. However radically anti-colonial the content, however pessimistic the narratives, the realist form remains that which is most easily assimilable to Eurocentric conventions of "world literature." This, of course, is not to take anything away from the important traditions of nationalist literatures in Africa, but to suggest a reading of postcolonial literature that might apprehend *form* as not only a contested space for what Ngugi (1987) has termed "decolonizing the mind," but also as a manifestation of the crises inherent within the decolonization process itself. If the *postcolonial impasse* can be characterized as the structural inability of the postcolonial political economy to achieve both neoliberal democracy and capitalist development within a global capitalist system that simultaneously promises such achievements and forecloses their possibility, then there too are cultural and aesthetic representations that express such impasses, in struggles with and within both form and content. Further, just as the postcolonial impasse does not necessarily produce systemic crises, but often instead forestalls and/or mediates them by repressive means and/or capitulation to World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programs, so too do postcolonial literatures attempt to contain their own fundamental contradictions by sublimating them at the level of form, most often that of European realism.

Then again, just as the postcolony does occasionally fall into organic crisis, where the hegemonic forms of social control and political governance are no longer able to effectively mediate between transnational capital and local forces, postcolonial aesthetic forms also are sometimes unable to sustain themselves within the dominant constraints of form, genre, subject matter, language, etc. Such "aesthetic crises" do not reflect any kind of "failure" on the part of African literatures and/or writers; on the contrary, I wish to suggest rather that they indicate limitations in *reading practices* that interpret such works primarily against the backdrop of the "developing nation" or, perhaps more problematically, the "developing novel" or "developing literatures." Just as postcolonial political economies need be seen as localized articulations of a dominant capitalist world-

system, so too must postcolonial literatures be read within the context of an increasingly global cultural hegemony that has historically placed emphasis on certain forms (especially the realist novel) as being the normative literary modes for postcolonial national culture.

“...of course, it turned out that the African image which we ourselves were constructing in our novels and poems was as limited and as false as in the white novelists’ and poets’ descriptions. Perhaps the limitation and falseness are inbuilt within the novel as a genre which has ... never fully accommodated the multitude and psyche of whole continents.” (Marechera (1990: 80).

“Postcolonial literature” has largely been a chronological term descriptive of a social and political developmentalism, rather than describing a fundamental shift in *literary* practices. Given the political and economic landscape of the roughly forty years since the end of colonialism (for most of Africa), and the increasingly pessimistic and formally constricted terrain of postcolonial African literatures, perhaps it might be useful to reconsider such literatures (especially those thought of as exceptions to the normative, such as Marechera’s) as constituting a potential horizon for new social and cultural forms attempting to break with the legacies of colonialism, a literary equivalent to a post-nationalism that African polities require in order to make the transition from anti-colonial nationalism to something other than a neocolonialism peripheral to global capitalism.

Given the increasing frustrations in Zimbabwe with Robert Mugabe’s rule, economic stagnation, and the pressures of globalization, debt, and structural readjustment programs, the complex and often contradictory trajectories of Zimbabwean nationalist consciousness are now coming into question. While the official histories and mythologies of the liberation struggle continue to have political currency for leaders such as Mugabe, there are clearly tensions within the society among those who became committed to the armed struggle, only to find many of the ideals of that struggle—land reform, socialism, etc.—no longer given more than lip-service by the state leadership. The much celebrated period of reconciliation initiated by ZANU after the 1980 elections, which included the integration of the Rhodesian, ZIPRA, and ZANLA armies and amnesty for all war crimes, is now seen by many commentators as the first stage in a reconciliation between the white agrarian bourgeoisie, the rising black middle class, and transnational capital<sup>47</sup>. The nominal identification as a socialist state did not prevent Zimbabwe from developing the beginnings of a national bourgeoisie, though as an increasing amount of capital remained in the control of multinational corporations and international lending organizations, it is difficult to easily characterize class relations in Zimbabwe within the broader context of multinational capitalism<sup>48</sup>. Despite a relatively promising program of

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<sup>47</sup> cf. Weiss (1994) for post-Independence history of multi-racial class alignments. It is interesting to note that while the white and black middle classes have largely been able to ally themselves under the protection of ZANU-PF, the white petty bourgeoisie and white working class were considered “not welcome” under the tacit agreement at Lancaster House, leading to much white flight (mostly to the UK and South Africa) in the 80s without a corresponding capital flight.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Phimster (1988) and Arrighi (1967) for an historical overview of class relations in Zimbabwe, specifically in the context of the complex relations and often conflicting interests of international

education, agricultural development, and (limited) land reform in the 1980s, the structural readjustment programs and increasing debt of the 90s have largely erased any economic gains made by the Zimbabwean peasantry and urban proletariat. At the same time, the younger generations in Zimbabwe, who have come of age in a post-Independence era without the experience of colonialism or the liberation war, have demonstrated increasing disillusionment with the state party and its policies, and do not seem easily articulated into a stable, patriotic, nationalist consciousness. A more pessimistic view, from the contemporary vantage point, might be that while an articulation of Zimbabwean nationalist consciousness has been achieved throughout the country<sup>49</sup> (even among most whites), the promises of (trans?)national-popular consciousness—of theories and practices of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle, towards the promise of land reform and the construction of a socialist society—may have only been short-term and pragmatic modes of practice in order to organize the guerrillas and peasantry to work together to destabilize the colonial state, effectively forcing a transfer of political (and much economic) power to the Zimbabwean nationalist leadership.

Yet despite the pessimistic outlook in contemporary Zimbabwe, and in contrast to the notion that the more revolutionary rhetoric and beliefs demonstrated during the liberation war were merely pragmatic exercises in ideology, perhaps one might be able to imagine that the hopes and aspirations unleashed in struggles for hegemony that took hold during the liberation struggle may still fuel people's imagination of possibility. Perhaps what was originally more of a pragmatic tactics of a counter-hegemonic bloc engaged in military struggle might still hold promise for a longer-term strategic hegemony of anti-(neo)colonial and anti-capitalist struggle, a reinvigoration of the ideals held within nationalist consciousness that would see the liberation struggle not yet complete with political independence, and not yet foreclosed by the increasing neo-colonial character of the state leadership.

Indeed, given the history of one-party rule, and the repression against oppositional movements, the MDC's success in the 2000 elections suggests the viability of new democratic openings in Zimbabwe's polity. Given that the MDC is largely organized around a shared opposition to Mugabe's rule (as opposed to a common political agenda beyond basic democratic principles), it is perhaps too soon to speculate as to the longer-term impact of the MDC's entrance onto the national stage. While there seems to be little in MDC's public policy statements to indicate any strong anti-capitalist leanings, the broader emphasis on opening up the civil sphere to a multi-party (and multi-ethnic, multi-racial) democracy with basic civil and democratic rights is in keeping with similar movements in recent years in Malawi, Zambia, South Africa, and Mozambique. That the MDC's criticisms of Mugabe and ZANU-PF go beyond the more overt political repression to include critiques of corruption and nepotism, failed HIV/AIDS policies, increased reliance on multinational capital as well as IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs, and the commitment of some 12000 troops in the Democratic

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capital, British colonial control, the white settler agrarian bourgeoisie, white settler working classes, and the black peasantry and migrant laborers.

<sup>49</sup> Cheater (1998) terms such a nationalist consciousness "populist nationhood," wherein there is articulated an identification between "nation" (Zimbabwe) and its people. This is slightly distinct from Gramsci's notion of the national-popular in that the conception of nationhood in Cheater is open to all races and classes.

Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) in exchange for mining rights, indicates the potential for a broader coalition of social and political movements to articulate new alternatives to the largely neocolonial character of many African nations. Similarly, while Mugabe's anti-white rhetoric still has currency among sectors of the peasantry still anxious for land reform, the defeat of the constitutional referendum and the MDC's showing in the 2000 elections holds promise for a multi-generational articulation of democratic opposition, that still in many respects remains linked to the hopes and disappointments of the liberation struggle and its post-Independence legacy. Likewise, MDC's ability to forge coalitions among urban workers and peasants (as well as sectors of the black and white bourgeoisies) speaks to the continued historical legacy of the kinds of urban proletariat/rural peasant alliances<sup>50</sup> that might forge a national-popular consciousness for new, progressive, hegemony.

To the extent that theorizations of hegemony still retain their methodological value in understanding political, economic, and cultural articulations of power, it might be useful to consider the contemporary Zimbabwean moment as what Gramsci termed an "organic crisis" (1971: 210-18). When contradictions in the political economy reach a point of crisis, such that given political alignments can no longer retain hegemony over various classes and class fractions, rapid political and cultural realignments can occur, effectively causing a crisis of hegemony. Such crises are not (solely) caused by external forces, but find their source deep within the contradictions of the historically developed class relations within the society:

"Parties come into existence, and constitute themselves as organizations, in order to influence the situation at moments which are historically vital for their class; but they are not always capable of adapting themselves to new tasks and to new epochs, nor of evolving *pari passu* with the overall relations of force (and hence the relative position of their class) in the country in question, or in the international field." (211)

During the colonial period, and especially after UDI, such a crisis resulted in both the rise of increasingly militant nationalist movements as well as the increased repressive and coercive strategies of the colonial regime<sup>51</sup>. While the Lancaster House Agreement, a

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<sup>50</sup> cf. Arrighi (1967) for a historical overview of the familial and ethnic ties among urban wage-workers, migrant laborers, and peasants during the colonial era, forging a peasant-proletarian consciousness that would provide the nationalist movements in the 70s with a viable strategy of urban-rural alliance. Increased urban migration (in search of employment) in the 90s has not necessarily weakened such connections, since the flow of people, money, and culture between rural villages and urban centers continues.

<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to note that, in the same way the 2000 rejection of the constitutional referendum signaled both the increase in oppositional pressure on the government and the state's increased repression of such opposition, in 1972 the Pearce Commission conducted a referendum among black Rhodesians on the Anglo-Rhodesian Settlement Proposals, a compromise brokered by the British to cede a small degree of political power to blacks in exchange for cessation of military struggles. The overwhelming "no" vote touched off a rapid intensification of nationalist and guerrilla activity, the withdrawal of the British from negotiating a brokered compromise, and the increase in counterinsurgency tactics of the Rhodesian Army (with increased assistance from South Africa, beginning a shift from an Anglo-Rhodesian alliance to a Rhodesian-South African axis). Perhaps the defeats of both referendums could be argued to represent the failure of

compromise between colonial-class and nation-class, nationalist bourgeois elites and transnational capital, was effective in containing the crisis, the symptoms of deeper historical crises began to reveal themselves. In the contemporary post-Independence context, the fact that significant fractions of both the white bourgeoisie and the nascent black bourgeoisie (as well as comprador representatives of multinational capital) have swung their allegiance to the MDC (despite a relatively close historical relationship with ZANU-PF<sup>52</sup>) might signal that such political realignments have begun to reflect the growing sense of crisis in the political economy. Likewise, the strong support of the MDC by students, urban workers, and sectors of the peasantry might be symptomatic of a weakening of ZANU-PF hegemony on the cultural-political level. It is necessary, however, to add to Gramsci's formulation the shifting nature of the hegemonic "class" within the (ZANU-PF) party. For while since 1980 the class interests of the party/state have become increasingly evident, during the liberation war, the necessary anti-colonial (i.e., anti-white settler) formation required articulations of a nation-class (along racial lines, rather than class) as the primary historical agent. Clearly, however, the current crisis of legitimacy facing Mugabe and ZANU-PF is not only due to an incapability to navigate a viable transition from anti-colonial nation-class consciousness to a postcolonial class formation that was adapted to post-Independence requirements, but also evidence of a much more fundamental legitimation crisis at the core of postcolonial polities. Given the inherent constrictions on the development of any viable capitalist class within the periphery, it is difficult to conceive of what Frank (1972) terms the "lumpenbourgeoisie" as being able to maintain hegemony as more than a managerial class mediating between transnational capital and local labor and consumer markets.

Similarly, Amin argues that full expansion of bourgeois capitalism, on the model of Europe, is an impossibility. Comprador classes in peripheral states are not tomorrow's democratic middle classes, for the central contradictions of global capitalism cannot produce value without peripheries. Comprador classes (and their political formations of power) are thus caught in an effective bind:

"At the peripheries, this polarization [the unequal distribution of income on both world scale and within the peripheries] separates the evolution of revenues from labor from the progress of productivity, thereby making democracy impossible ... To accept this is to admit that development within the world capitalist system remains, for the peoples of the periphery, an impasse." (Amin, 1989: 123)

This, then, is the *postcolonial impasse*. Nominal political independence, nor even liberal-democratic reforms, cannot alone alter the peripheral relationship to global capitalism. If there is a way out of this impasse, it is unlikely that it will be via the leadership of a lumpenbourgeois class, even if democratically elected. Perhaps it is conceivable to imagine a post-nationalism, that rearticulates postcolonial nationalist consciousness along more clearly marked internationalist lines, but such a possibility seems unlikely without even further crises and a broad-based social movement with both

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hegemonic forces to negotiate a compromised settlement of the crisis in question, resulting in an "organic crisis" of hegemony.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Weiss (1994) for an account of the relationships between the Zimbabwean state, the white agrarian bourgeoisie, international capital, and the rising black elite.

national-popular and transnational-popular sentiments. The MDC in Zimbabwe has at times been presented as such a movement; how it fares in the current struggle for hegemony will no doubt reveal much about the possibilities for a viable (and peaceful) transformation in the postcolony.

While the potential realignment of national bourgeoisies and multinational capital would not lead one to believe the MDC will be articulating an anti-capitalist politics for Zimbabwe, one must recall that it is in moments of crisis that fissures in the social and political spheres present themselves for progressive and revolutionary possibility. Further, one must view the current crisis of hegemony in Zimbabwe within the context of the crisis-like character of global multinational capital. While neocolonial fiscal and developmental policies are not the sole factor in the current political-economic situation in Zimbabwe, neither is the current political upheaval merely a local phenomenon of an aging ruler and the regional trend towards neo-liberal democratization.

The concern, then, is that the transition to a more viable, stable form of liberal political democracy, however salutary, may in the long run have “achieved little more than to stabilize property-threatening situations by a momentary re-circulation of elites” (Saul & Leys 1999). Thus the growing interventionist attitudes of the UK and the Commonwealth, the US, and the European Union towards stabilizing a situation that could potentially spiral into another Indonesia or Argentina. Needless to add, international lending institutions, already practicing an almost vassalage relationship *viz-a-viz* peripheral economies, put added pressure on postcolonial states such as Zimbabwe to “liberalize”—a progressivist-sounding ideology that has certainly not hurt investor’s returns<sup>53</sup>.

One could argue that the only difference between peaceful transitions to (liberal-bourgeois) democracy in Malawi and Zambia and, say, more violent crises in Indonesia or even the Persian Gulf War, is the degree of coercion and military might required to manage crises and preserve hegemony for transnational capital. At the same time, however, there is a growing sense of interventionism among the US and the EU (behind a liberal humanist face, of course, and in arms with the UN) in the “micromanagement” of such seemingly disconnected crises around the globe. International attention to political crises in states such as Zimbabwe is more than a matter of protecting national (capital) interests, liberal ideology, or geopolitical concerns, for, despite the rhetoric of insulation (as, for instance, against any “domino effect” of the recent collapse of the Argentine economy), it has become increasingly clear that *what may initially appear to be isolated instances of localized crisis are in fact localized instances of global crisis*. While transnational bodies such as the UN and the World Bank may provide a kind of imperial sovereignty to not only isolate, but mediate and manage such crises, the postcolonial nation-state also provides a necessary buffer to global capital from the frustrations and demands of citizens and popular movements, functioning, as Hardt and Negri put it, “to hold in suspension the crisis of modernity” (2000: 134).

To hold such crises in perpetual suspension, however, requires more than merely brute coercive force. Ideological battles within the postcolony, from political rhetoric to

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<sup>53</sup> The rate of return for US investments in Africa is, at roughly 25%, the highest of any region in the world (Saul & Leys 1999). Accumulation and extraction of this degree of course go a long way to explaining the continued “debt-baiting” (Spivak 1999) of a region which the US mainstream media has seemingly written off as economically backwards.

cultural practice, are sites of constant negotiation of the terms of such mediations. That postcolonial Zimbabwean literature has been one such site has become abundantly clear. However, such negotiations within the cultural realm have largely been refracted in two important ways: one, by focusing on the liberation war as a means to address contemporary issues and, two, by rearticulating political and social crises within aesthetic practices that struggle to contain the violent contradictions of postcolonial impasse in coherent and recognizable literary forms.

To return to the work of Dambudzo Marechera, we find his novels of the anti-colonial struggle pressing against the limitations of the form itself, as if the violence of the colonial situation and the liberation war were made manifest in the narrative, syntax, and language of the text. However, within the formal representations of anti-colonial violence there remains a virulent critique of the nascent post-independence political order.

Indeed, in the world of Marechera's fictions, the "sell-out" of the nationalist leaders is presumed to be well under way, well before Independence, and he vigorously deconstructs the often romantic tropes of African nationalism (cf. Marechera 1984, 1991). In The House of Hunger, written in 1977 while still in exile at Oxford, the figure of "Zimbabwe" turns up variously as a T-shirt (19), a piece of toilet paper (35), and as a means to get an English woman into bed (95). Elsewhere, Zimbabwean nationalist leaders are parodied, Zimbabwean sculpture is called "shit" (1991) and shown to be derivative of colonial liberals who "invented the tradition" (52). Marechera finds the sources of anti-colonial struggle to be less "assent" towards liberation as much as an act of aggression and hatred:

"I found a seed, a little seed, the smallest seed in the world. And its name was Hate. I buried it in my mind and watered it with tears. No seed ever had a better gardener. As it swelled and cracked into green life I felt my nation tremble, tremble in the throes of birth—and burst out bloom and branch." (Marechera 1978, 17)

Here hatred is still linked—however tenuously—to nationalism, anti-colonial struggle, the birth of nationhood. Two years later, at the eve of independence, Marechera's Black Sunlight resituates hatred and violence within an anarchistic politics that is not only *in excess* of "proper" nationalist consciousness, but becomes, at the level of form, virtually uncontainable. To give but one example:

"...The blood and bother of bodies and bullets writhed. Erupted upward with one lethal sheer sound. Broke windows. Smashed telephone booths. Set on fire any flammable thing. Sneering the shit into Austerity. Smearing the sordid sunlight across the sky. Truncheons, rifles, sticks, stones, bottles fucked bashed scrunched exploded. Drew in their breath to expel the frightful impact. The yell, a big fist, unclenches. Breaking in reason's doors. Opportunity's window. Pounding away with feet of fright. Hurlled. Shoved. Spit. Shat. Austerity. Shook history's shirtfront. The knuckles bayonet-ripped, oozing vision.

Tearing the arthritis out of the street's fingers.

The heart's placard a void displays.

That primed vacuum of ‘Why not?’” (1980: 98)

Violence here threatens to overcome both narrative and syntax, to the point where form and content find momentary fusion at the very point of their dissolution. Perhaps Marechera is attempting to give voice to what elsewhere he called “the millions of condemned meat / Who let the grim minutes unleash their canned grime” (“Smash, Grab, Run,” 1992: 31); however, whatever the intent, the sheer formal assault of language, broken syntax, and fragmentary collage make a stronger case for a reading of Marechera’s work as *symptomatically manifesting the postcolonial impasse*. This is not to argue that Marechera’s work is somehow inherently radical; there is too much evidence in his work of an almost libertarian individualism to support an internationalist and/or pan-Africanist politics. Rather, throughout his works Marechera’s formal excesses (not to mention the self-reflexive commentaries on formal concerns) support a reading of what might be thought of as a “productive failure.” In other words, where Marechera’s works “failed”—both in terms of the conventions of African literature, which were used as justification by publishers to reject most of his manuscripts, as well as by terms of European modernism—we might, from the contemporary perspective, find a compelling instantiation of postcolonial impasse, that likewise productive failure that, even in crisis, produces bizarre, perverse symptoms that may in fact be more representative of lived reality than those moments of socio-political (or literary) stability that is taken for the normative within postcolonial global capitalism.

I do not wish to suggest that only in the more “extreme” cases such as Marechera can we find evidence of postcolonial crisis manifesting itself in cultural production. On the contrary, I believe that even in the most conventional of “postcolonial literatures” formal concerns are underwritten by such issues. However, in order to upset conventional readings of postcolonial texts (as well as postcolonial polities), it is useful to make distinctions between aesthetic strategies that fall outside the norm, and those that, however politicized, may in fact contribute to the continued practice of reading postcolonial literatures solely in terms of national allegory and/or emergent exemplars of the “world literature” canon.

For instance, the most celebrated novels dealing with the Zimbabwean liberation war and its aftermath—Chenjerai Hove’s Bones and Shadows and Yvonne Vera’s Without a Name—tend to erase historical specificity in favor of a more universal tragic-poetic aesthetics of suffering and loss. In these novels war, famine, sexual abuse, etc., are tragic elements of the “human condition.” That their international reputation may in part be based on a more abstracted, ahistorical rendering of an Africa mired in a seemingly inescapable tragedy of war, famine, and injustice is in no way to take away from whatever literary and poetic merits these works exhibit. However, the transnational literary marketplace for “world literature” (or postcolonial literature, third world literature, Commonwealth literature, whatever the category) has largely favored (both in terms of publishing and distribution as well as canonization) those texts that appeal to presumed categories of non-Western literature while retaining a necessary balance between “local color” and “universal appeal.” Idiomatic use of language, deemed in this case to be recognizably “African”/traditional/oral-literary, is, as long as it remains articulated within European forms such as the realist and/or modernist novel, as much a

passport to circulation within the global traffic of literatures as it is an intervention against hegemonic forms of English or French. Similar to other such interventions, such as Glissant's *creolite*, Ngugi's turn to Kikuyu, even Mark Twain's "Americanized" English, creative rearticulations of colonial languages and forms in writers such as Hove and Vera are certainly necessary elements of cultural nationalism, and Marechera's Caliban-like use of English may well be a similar strategy. Nonetheless, given his consistently strident critiques of nationalism in any form (including the cultural nationalism that in the 1980s was celebrated as central to the anti-colonial struggle), Marechera's cosmopolitan poetics need to be read against the grain of simple recuperative narratives of Third World/African/Zimbabwean literature.

This is not to suggest that Marechera is an early example of that species of postcolonial literature now celebrated under the twin headings of "postmodern" and "hybrid;" despite any surface similarities to writers such as, say, Salman Rushdie, Marechera was no more "at home" in the metropolitan "third space" of (usually middle-class) hybridity than in Zimbabwe (as both place and construct). To the extent that Marechera's poetics can be argued to be straining towards a kind of global cosmopolitanism, it may perhaps be more useful to think of such cosmopolitanism as a kind of "globalization from below." This is not meant to refer solely to Marechera's poor, rural class origins, or his biographical exploits as a squatter in London and Berlin and a self-described homeless tramp upon his return to Harare. Rather, to return to the notion of postcolonial impasse (as a localized expression of the contradictions and crises inherent in global capitalism), Marechera's poetics—at the level of both form and content—reflect the struggle to fuse the incommensurable elements of a postcolonial cultural experience unintelligible within conventional notions of both cultural nationalism and colonial hybridity:

*"Did you ever think of writing in Shona?"*

It never occurred to me. Shona was part of the ghetto daemon I was trying to escape. Shona had been placed within the context of a degraded, mind-wrenching experience from which apparently the only escape was into the English language and education ... I was therefore a keen accomplice and student in my own mental colonisation. That the same time of course there was the unease, the shock of being suddenly struck by stuttering<sup>54</sup>, of being deserted by the very medium I was to use in all my art. This perhaps is in the undergrowth of my experimental use of English, standing it on its head, brutalising it into a more malleable shape for my own purposes. For a black writer the language is very racist; you have to have harrowing fights and hair-raising *panga* duels with the language before you can make it do all that you want it to do." ("Dambudzo Marechera Interviews Himself," 1988: 7)

The complicity involved in the rejection of one's language and the adoption—however fraught—of the colonial language is part of the struggle evident throughout Marechera's work. This struggle becomes dramatized in *The House of Hunger* (1978: 13-17), where the narrator's parents physically punish him, first for speaking English at home, and then

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<sup>54</sup> Marechera began stuttering, according to his telling, upon the murder of his father at age eleven. There is evidence that this was a lifelong malady; cf. Veit-Wild 1992.

for tearing up his English notebooks. Abused both for using English and for abusing it, Marechera's fictional double represents the postcolonial impasse for writers attempting to escape the colonial system without resorting to an essentialist cultural nationalism. To label such an impasse "hybridity" and argue for the inherent "resistance" in that situation is to devalue the psychic turmoil of a condition that continues to manifest itself in the nominally independent postcolony. Again, Marechera's work demonstrates the inherent contradictions of a postcolonial subjectivity that finds no liberatory outlet in the nationalism of the postcolonial nation-state, and yet is at pains to find any other site for habitation. As O'Brien argues,

"The complication of Marechera's path to a literary language, in which opposition to Zimbabwean official nationalism is combined with a rejection of metropolitan hegemony, can be understood dialectically as the impossibility of transcending a historical contradiction between complicity with colonial culture and the ascendancy of African nationalism. Acknowledging the dangers in refusing both ... Marechera painfully lived out the tension between them." (2001: 251)

I wish to argue that this "tension" is indeed the aesthetic equivalent of the postcolonial impasse, wherein the transition from anti-colonial struggle to neocolonialism is an historical situation that cannot hold. Anti-colonial struggle cannot be understood outside of an understanding of that previous form of global capitalism, imperialism. To "win" the battle against imperialism, only to be forced to reconcile oneself with neoliberal global capitalism in the post(neo)colonial era, is as "productive" a "failure" as Marechera's inability to abide by either Eurocentric modernism or African cultural nationalism. And yet, even within such failure, that excess of incommensurability retains both a poetic and political charge:

Splintered bone mangled limb  
Africa's Guernica suffered and won;  
Who and how the Artist in letters of blood  
Describe the terrible truth?  
Silence's steel blade on marble  
Leaves the matter rough unhewn. Crimson  
Memories slumped on green park benches,  
Veterans of black fire, these violets  
Of terrifying beauty. (1992: 56)

Perhaps then, the "unknown soldier" in the cenotaph at Heroes' Acre is that spectral presence of futures past, a figure of alternate histories stalled and/or foreclosed, unfinished narratives and counter-memories, the gaps and silences embedded within the technologies of historical memory, seemingly lost and dead—"unknown"—and yet "not yet"—perhaps such absence is in actuality a figure for both the mourning of lost futures and the belatedness of the past's arrival. Memory-work—the genealogical history of the present—is then that which articulates the present "as experience of a time" (or times), within the

imagined horizons of both the postcolonial nation and the spatial ordering of global capital. It is in historical conjunctures such as the present one in Zimbabwe that the rich legacies of anti-colonial struggle and the complex articulations of cultural memory are still active sites for negotiating new national-popular (or transnational-popular) hegemonies of revolutionary change.

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