

Stories of Struggle: The Intractability of Early African Fiction from Nascent African Nationalism in Rhodesia

by

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of select canonical texts in the first two decades of fictional African literature in Zimbabwe produced between 1956 and 1975 that investigates the critical relationship between these early works and the contemporaneous rise and establishment of African nationalism

“The history of any country is revealed in its art, and the history of any art is revealed in its influences” (Byerly 254).

Literary works play a crucial role in portraying, critiquing and, in cases, determining the state of society is a truism hardly controvertible. In this analysis of select canonical texts of fiction in the first two decades of African literature in Zimbabwe (1956-1975)¹, the critical relationship between these early works and the contemporaneous rise and establishment of African nationalism are examined. First, the advent of the printed African story in Zimbabwe, typically aimed at creating a connection between the contemporary colonized peoples and a triumphant precolonial past-imagined or otherwise played an integral role in the birth and cultivation of a radical nationalism among the African masses. Secondly, colonial era African fictive literature in both English and the native languages was intrinsically political, focusing on the fracturing quality of the colonial experience as it pertained to ethnicity, society’s fragmentation based on varying proximities to Whiteness and the colonial state, and gender. Linguistic agency, whether by way of the mother tongue or by the repurposed use of the colonial language, plays an essential role in the formation and popular articulation of nationalism, as well as national and Pan-African identity.

Through the veneration of African symbols of resistance, a recognition of a dynamic African being in constant flux, and a unity either in sentiment or in practice built around responses to colonialism, the definitive works used as sites of analyses in this essay were instrumental in creating a foundation upon which African nationalism would be built and sustained. Furthermore, while the overwhelming male representation in both the literary content and the content producers echoes, the reputation of nationalism as a largely masculine imagination, the female voices that broke into publication in that era made indelible contributions to anticolonial discourse through Pan-African evocations and didactic lamentations about the colonial environment. This study aligns with the paradigm of literary Pan-Africanism, which is designed to guide the “proper explanation of the content, form, and function of African literary creations... to ensure (these) works are placed in their proper historical context and evaluated based on their practical relevance and problem-solving capacity” (McDougal 41). Therefore, it advocates for a paradigmatic shift in the discourse surrounding these works: instead of fictional texts studied primarily for linguistic, cultural, and artistic purposes, we ought to elevate our analysis thereof to that accorded national histories and critical moments in the political evolution of the space out of which they emerge.

The Politics of African Literature- A Brief Overview

Before we discuss specific texts, authors and their significance in the context of nationalism and Pan-Africanism, let us recognize the inherent political nature of the printed word in general, and of African literature in particular. In his canonical text *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson cites the rise of print-capitalism as the catalyst for modern nationalism, arguing that having a plethora of localized languages in print (as opposed to Latin and a few other before the modern era) fostered a sense of belonging among those that each language spoke to, as well as giving languages and their speakers an impression of antiquity; a critical element in both imperial and anti-colonial nationalisms (44). For Africa, as with other colonized peoples, the printed word in itself was resistance. The absence of a strong literary tradition within many pre-colonial communities, particularly in Southern Africa, was often (and continues to be) cited as proof of African inferiority by the colonialists (Smith 4). Thus, the very notion of African people developing a literary culture in both their native and colonial languages was more than just artistry: it was innately subversive. Mazrui makes this case when he writes “If the general absence of the written word was a part of Africa’s sense of humiliation during the colonial period, the outburst of written creativity among African people since those early days became part of Africa’s vindication of itself” (315). Indeed, it was this recognition that provided the backbone for the cultural Pan-Africanism and renaissance articulated by the founders of Negritude, Ngugi, and others.

I also preface this study by accounting for my use of both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe in reference to the same geographic territory and, at times, in the same moment. Zimbabwe is, of course, the postcolonial name for the former colony that was Rhodesia (and Southern Rhodesia before it). However, I refer to the African anticolonial nationalism that grew out of 1950s Rhodesia as Zimbabwean Nationalism, for it was around this time that “Zimbabwe” emerged as the name for the independent nation that the nationalists envisioned. Thus while, for example, *Umvukela waMandebele* is the first African language book published in Rhodesia, it was a seminal moment in early Zimbabwean Nationalism, and hence, the term is also used interchangeably with African Nationalism in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean Nationalism and African Literature in Rhodesia

To effectively interrogate the role of African literature as the handmaiden of Zimbabwean Nationalism, it is critical to establish the temporal and political context out of which both grew. The end of the Second World War resulted in invigorated nationalistic sentiments for both the Rhodesian colonized and the colonizer, albeit for different reasons. Thousands of African people had been enlisted to fight in the British army overseas, while those who remained at home assisted in the war effort by “building air bases for use by the British Air Force”, among other things (Mlambo 78). Thus, when Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill declared that the 1941 Atlantic Charter, which granted the right to self-determination to “all peoples”, did not include the African colonies, and the African people who had fought tyranny against an unfamiliar enemy were disillusioned at the idea of returning home to face the same from a familiar foe. Ndabaningi Sithole describes the anti-colonial awakening among African people post-World War Two in his seminal 1959 text, *African Nationalism*, saying “during the war the Allied Powers taught their subject people that it was not right for Germany dominate other nations...they taught the subject peoples to fight and die for their freedom” (48). Thus, inadvertently, the World War led to the surge in anti-colonial African nationalism during the late 1940s and 1950s. On the other hand, the colonial powers were doubling down on their hold on the colonies. The onset of the Cold War meant that colonized territories were under the threat of aligning themselves with and coming under the control of Soviet communism. Furthermore, the loss of the Indian colony in 1948 was a huge blow to the British Empire, thus they were determined to maintain control of the rest of their territories, their African colonies in particular. As such, there was an influx of British migrants to Rhodesia in the decade following the war, coupled with increasingly oppressive laws for the African masses (Mlambo 81). In 1953, the Central African Federation (CAF) brought together the British colonies of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi), a confederation aimed at consolidating British control of the central African territory, which further frustrated African people, and only fanned the fires of nascent nationalism in the region.

It was in this environment of disillusionment, heightened frustration, and nationalistic epiphanies that the earliest African works of creative literatures were published. Ndabaningi Sithole, who in 1963 would go on to found the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and is widely regarded as “The Father of Zimbabwe’s Armed Struggle” (V. Sithole 32), published *Umvukela WaMandebele* in 1956. The first Zimbabwean novel in a native African language, *Umvukela* tells the story of two wars that the Ndebele fought against the colonizers in 1893 and 1896, and how their king, Lobengula, evaded capture in defeat. The story operates as a triumph on a number of critical levels. First, it is an instance of ethnic nationalism, as it is written specifically about the Ndebele. As a group that broke away from Shaka’s feared troops south of the Limpopo, the Ndebele’s proficiency in combat and raids fit the colonialists’ narrative of the barbaric African.

Hence, *Umvukela WaMandebele* sets out to portray the humanity, compassion, and unity abundant among the Ndebele that was in stark contrast to the racist and xenophobic rendering provided by the settlers (L Ndlovu 116). Also, because the Ndebele are both a minority group in Zimbabwe and have largely been marginalized in anti-colonial and postcolonial narratives of the country by the hegemonic Shona-majority ruling party that is ZANU PF, their resistance and contribution to the struggle have largely been written out of history. For example, the Umvukela (Ndebele Uprisings) occurred before or, at least, contemporaneously with the 1896 Shona resistance called the *First Chimurenga*; yet it is the Chimurenga that is colloquially synonymous with the struggle for independence such that the armed struggle, calls for which were led by Sithole himself in the mid-1960s, is called the Second Chimurenga (Mazarire). This marginalization withstanding, *Umvukela WaMandebele* serves as a Zimbabwean nationalist text in several ways.

Despite its emphasis on the Ndebele, both they and the Shona (and other smaller ethnic groups) lived under the oppressive thumb of British colonialism: African resistance by any group- ethnic or otherwise would be a dent in Rhodesian Nationalism. It is also important to consider that Sithole himself is Ndaou, a Shona sub-ethnic group, albeit born and raised in Bulawayo. Thus, the first African language book in Rhodesia was in Ndebele, and yet had it been written by an ethnic Shona, represent a pan-ethnic investment in the reimagining of Zimbabwean history and fight against colonialism. Significantly, subsequent early editions of the book were published under the title *Amandebele KaMzilakazi* after the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau (the Bureau) deemed the African nationalist connotations of the original title too subversive (Chiwome & Mguni 42). And the years between the publishing of *Umvukela WaMandebele* and the advent of the African Nationalist parties in Zimbabwe saw a quick influx in native language books. The same year that Sithole’s seminal text was published, Solomon Mutswairo’s *Feso*, the first Shona novel, was also published. The following year another, if not more historically accurate account of the Ndebele nation pre-colonialism was published in the form of P S Mahlangu’s *Umthakwazi*. Although it differs from *Umvukela WaMandebele* in that Sithole took more liberties with the historical facts than Mahlangu, both further the narrative of Ndebele heroism and civilization in the face of their European-imposed barbarian stereotypes.

A more unabashed fictional work than its Ndebele contemporaries, *Feso* is nevertheless an epic tale that serves as a thinly-veiled metaphor for the African Nationalist fight against colonialism. Like *Umvukela* before it, the Bureau took exception to the book's subversive themes and would not allow the book's publication until its original first chapter, describing how African people had been moved from fertile to arid land by the colonial government, had been removed (Chiwome & Mguni 31). The eponymous protagonist finds himself enslaved by a foreign King, Mambo Pfumojena (literally King "White Spear"). Eventually he tricks the king and runs away with the king's daughter as a bride for his own king, before Pfumojena chases after them only to be killed by Feso in the climactic scene. The anti-colonial undertones of the book were ill-concealed, and the Rhodesian regime banned it thereafter. Of particular importance in *Feso* is a lament given by an old man upon seeing Feso and others taken into captivity by Mambo Pfumojena (35). This lament cries out to Nehanda Nyakasikana, the great Shona spirit medium who in 1896 had spearheaded the Shona Rebellions against the White settlers that became known as the First Chimurenga. This lament in particular would become the rallying cry for the nationalist movements and their fighters, and continued to be famously recited by Vice President Simon Muzenda, even after independence (Kalabash).

The venerated medium is also a central metaphor in *Soko Risina Musoro*, would-be veteran nationalist Herbert Chitepo's 1958 epic Shona poem (the first ever to be published). The fictional tale is set in the Manyika kingdom that borders Mozambique, contemporarily. In writing, however, Chitepo takes linguistic poetic license, going back and forth between Chimanyika (the Manyika form of language) and Chizezuru (the form of language most prominent in what is referred to as "MaShonaland", where the capital city Harare is). While such fluidity in form of language form of language peculiar to a specific region or social group would have been very unlikely in a precolonial era of limited regular intermingling, such a retelling in 1958 would have been a strategic choice to further the imagined notion of a unified Shona nation before the advent of colonialism. Although both are deliberately ill-disguised critiques of colonialism, *Feso* is a more triumphant response to an unwarranted attack, while *Soko Risina Musoro* paints a more desolate and listless landscape pleading for some respite. The latter's main protagonist, known simply as "The Traveler" says of the desperate land, "Nehanda no longer suckles her children" (21). Not only does this reiteration cement Nehanda's role as a symbol of Zimbabwean nationalism, it is yet another instance of a unified Shona nationalism: Nehanda lived and died in Harare- an outright Zezuru; thus, the notion that the Manyika would implore her for respite in their moment of need, reaffirms a fluid Shona identity.

The significance of Nehanda Nyakasikana as an enduring symbol of both Shona and pan-ethnic Zimbabwean nationalism cannot be overstated. Since leading the insurrection, cultural and political pundits describe her as Zimbabwe's "anti-imperialist ancestor" (Charumbira 2). Hence, the story goes as she stood on the precipice of the noose at the hands of the White settlers after having been captured at the end of the Chimurenga, she uttered, "my bones shall rise", and this went on to become the prophetic impetus behind the decades of anti-colonial resistance and continues to be evoked as a historical anchor for the contemporary postcolonial state.

Nehanda's importance, as a force behind the anti-colonial effort was not lost on the Rhodesian authorities either: Ken Flower, former head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organization, explained that "(ZANU military wing) ZANLA had moved ahead of us in the spirit by invoking the national spirit...of Nehanda...Rhodesian Forces called it "mumbo jumbo of witchcraft, failing to appreciate the significance of the simple fact that the war had now taken us into the heart of the former Munhumutapa empire, the spiritual home of the Shona peoples and their allies across the border in Mozambique" (Sadomba 12). In this account, then, we see how Nehanda's spirit breaks the boundaries of nationalism and morphs into the embodiment of Pan-African resistance against colonialism. Not only is her spirit invaluable to the literature of a nascent nationalism, but she continues to be the consummate figure thereof in the rest of the anticolonial struggle and in the postcolonial era- her utility often shifting, as we shall see. Author Yvonne Vera, who herself would go on to write a novel centered in the struggle for land titled *Nehanda* post-independence, and explained that "The second phase of the (Chimurenga) struggle was inspired by the first and the image of Nehanda. One grew up with that image in songs" (Chikowero 213). Nehanda represents an African and pan-ethnic womanist subversion of the patriarchal nationalism of European settlers.

The proximity of early African literature to sentiments of Zimbabwean Nationalism is most obviously represented in that several writers of these prominent literary works were or would go on to be influential nationalists. We have already seen how Sithole was a founder of ZANU and dubbed "the father of (Zimbabwe's) armed struggle." Away from the novels, Sithole's Pan-African thrust is the impetus behind *African Nationalism*, published in 1959. Chitepo was also a founding member of ZANU, and was the chairman for ten years thereafter, before his assassination in 1975. *Feso's* Mutswairo went on to write Zimbabwe's current national anthem, *Simudzai Mureza*. The reimagining of the past as exhibited by these writers as a way of establishing a triumphalist past and crafting a sentimental blueprint for contemporary and future nationalism was theoretically summated by Fanon, who wrote that the "colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (187.)

Critical to the contextualization of the nationalist discourse in these early fictive African works in Rhodesia is their distinctly gendered nature. Daniel Magaziner has argued that, "nationalisms have typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (33.) Thus, not only did the themes of these nationalism-inspired works always evoke struggles between competing quintessential symbols of masculinity (with the exception of Nehanda Nyakasikana), the writers thereof were exclusively men. The first published work by a Black woman in Rhodesia was not until 1962², and I return to that seminal point later in this work.

Thus, my call for a reinvigorated focus on texts that bore significant anti-colonial and nationalistic sentiments, essential as it is, is not however meant to gloss over the fact that many early works of African literature in Rhodesia were moderate at best, and advocated for Black acquiescence unto the colonial status quo. For example, the second Shona novel after *Feso* was *Nzvengamutsvairo* by Bernard Chidzero. The title loosely translates “Lazy Bones”,³ the book implored African workers to serve their colonial masters diligently and advocated for racial harmony, untainted by African resistance. Three years later, *Pfungwa DzaSekuru Mafusire* by Paul Chidyausiku leaned on Darwinist interpretations of the colonial condition and coalesced to the argument that European culture was, indeed, superior to African traditions (Chiwome & Mguni, 31- 32). Despite his apparent anti-nationalistic orientation, it is worth noting that Chidzero also became a high-ranking politician in independent Zimbabwe, serving as minister in economic development and planning as well as finance. The existence of these works takes naught away from the importance of studying early texts as national histories: I assert that it only adds to it. The advent of African writers, in both African languages and English, provided a novel platform through which various societal orientations could be brought into conversation. That is to say, whether vehemently, anti-colonial and African nationalist or otherwise, writers took to published fiction to debate their leanings. It is also worth recalling that the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau was the final authority through which books had to pass into the hands of the public. As such, overtly subversive works were often muted or toned down, as was done with *Feso*, thus some writers resorted to publish books void of any potentially problematic themes.

As the anti-colonial struggle matured during the 1960s and 1970s, literary works focused less on triumphalist precolonial recreations and more on the contemporary plight that was colonialism and its devastating impact on African society. Stanlake Samkange followed in the literary nationalist tradition with a succession of texts dedicated to both the precolonial imagining of African nationhood as well as colonial discord and polarity. Aside from being arguably the most prominent writer of his time, Samkange was a high-ranking official in ZAPU and the United African National Council (UANC). His first prominent work, *On Trial for My Country* (1966), recreated two separate trials, one for King Lobengula and another for Cecil John Rhodes- by their respective ancestors. The former was being tasked with having given away the people’s birthright, while the latter was confronted about his brutality and unfairness in the colonial process. First, by creating mirror circumstances for the ghosts of the two chief protagonists of the colonial encounter, Samkange elevates Lobengula, the erstwhile Ndebele king, to a symbol of African nationalism on par with Rhodes for Rhodesian nationalism. That the author is Shona and makes the deliberate choice to exonerate and exhort the Ndebele figurehead also speaks to the active push by early nationalists to overcome the ethnic nationalist divide towards a unified anticolonial nationalism in Zimbabwe. So poignant a threat to the colonial structures was this book deemed, that, like *Feso* and others before it, the Rhodesian government banned it.

Although often imagined and repurposed in African literary tradition, the idea of a flawed precolonial utopia disrupted by colonialism has also formed the basis of scholarly intellectual arguments and postcolonial national projects. Walter Rodney's classic *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* describes at length the communal, technologically advancing civil society that was interrupted by European colonialism (80). In *Ujamaa*, Julius Nyerere foregrounds independent Tanzania's socialist nationalist project in a precolonial reimagining, arguing "we in Africa have no more need of being 'converted' to socialism than we have of being 'taught' democracy. Both are rooted in our past- in the traditional society that produced us" (12). Thus, it can be asserted, such fictional works from *Umvukela* to *The Mourned One* were creative renditions of contemporaneous academic anti-imperial schools of thought.

The theme of polarity between the colonized and colonizer would go on to be central to Samkange's other writings, most expertly captured in his 1975 offering, *The Mourned One*. In this instance, the duality is represented by Zana and Ndatshana, twins separated after birth, with one subsequently raised in a traditional African homestead under predominantly precolonial values while the other grows up under the patronage of a White missionary priest and is thus exposed to the colonial virtues of proximity to Whiteness. The very story of their birth problematizes the early romanticizing of precolonial society as idyllic in comparison to colonial society. Because twins were considered "abnormal and evil" in some African societies, the twins had been condemned to death after birth (17). However, on their way to the river to be killed, they encountered a White missionary who ends up offering to take Ndatshana from "the heathens" and went on to raise him to be a "Christian, educated, and "civilized" native," while Zana remained a "raw native" (27). This life-saving moment and the subsequent polarity of upbringings communicates the apparent superiority of European, colonial culture contrasted with the backward, death-destined, precolonial society. In adulthood, however, Ndatshana fatally falls victim to the same source of his "salvation"- his proximity to Whiteness- when he is sentenced to death after being found in bed with a White woman (2). In the dying stages of *The Mourned One*, as Ndatshana awaits execution, he is reunited with Zana and brings the polarity full circle in their final conversation. Despite his "civilization" and worldly experience under White tutelage, Ndatshana tells Zana that he had always envied him, to which Zana responds in astonishment. In turn he (Zana) says he had envied his twin because he as "educated, clever, and you know how to speak English and live like a White man" (144). All that, Ndatshana responds, has not been able to save him from certain death, although the missionary himself had not hurt him, his insistence that "all men are equal and important in the sight of God" had proved hypocritical as he now stood to die for "as much as lying in a White woman's bed" (145). He explains how Zana had learnt to accord respect to humans, whether they "be dirty and poor... rich and clean... You do not expect any favor in return... This is what African culture taught you" as opposed to "a white man... in similar circumstances... If the woman is rich and known to him, he will greet her with respect. If she is poor, he will ignore her..." (145). Not only does Ndatshana's sentiments mirror such African socialist ideologies as Ujamaa, it is also an indictment of the superficiality of European culture.

In so doing, he is engaging in cultural nationalism, metaphorically debunking the myth of colonialism's apparent "saving" and civilizing benefits upon the continent. Indeed, he contends that African culture may be imperfect, but it creates a more rounded citizen amicable to the African community. This debate, dubbed the "balance sheet of colonialism" has been discussed at length by such scholars as Ali Mazrui, Walter Rodney and Adu Boahen. Furthermore, Ndatshana's referencing of African, and not Shona, Rozwi or Zezuru culture, speaks to a Pan-African conceptualization of the colonial plight and identity before and during colonialism. In most nationalistic ominous tone, one of Ndatshana's final words is "Surely, the white man cannot keep on saying this all the time, for some day or people will hold the necessary experience to run the country" (146).

The polarity between that posits the colonizer and colonized motifs against each other in a literary court of values, captured in *The Mourned One*, was not a novelty in published Black Rhodesian literature. Lassie Ndong's 1962 Ndebele novel, *Qaphela Ingane (Take Care of Your Children)*, was the first published novel by a Black woman in Rhodesia (Daymond 269). Like *The Mourned One* after it, the story is centered on two boys who were raised by two distinct families; one a rigid Christian family and the other one less rigid and holding on to traditional African beliefs. When the two boys eventually meet, the former ends up corrupting the latter; a clear nod towards Christianity. However, Ndong is brilliant in exhorting Christian values while condemning the violence, materialism, and native land robbery that was definitive of the colonial government. In a didactic passage pivotal to the book, she writes:

"The Great wise man named Ntsikana from Macicheni, beyond Nciba among the Xhosa People, prophesied: 'The white man will come with two things; in his right hand he will hold a Bible, and in his left he will hold a metal button without holes. You must take the Bible and leave metal button.'" However, we were an ignorant and unheeding people, we took both, and that is why today our world is in such a quandary" (Draymond 270.)

In this summation, Ndong makes two fundamental contributions to the literary discourse on the African response to the colonial condition. First, by citing Xhosa wisdom regarding the colonizers, and drawing parallel applicability in this Ndebele novel as she shifts the anticolonial conversation from the parochial to a Pan-African arena. Across the continent, where the white man had planted his feet, a similar corruption of the way of life existed. Secondly, even as she acknowledges the decadence of colonial capitalism through the undesirable "metal button" (money), she challenges the African community to eclectically discern aspects of their precolonial and colonial environments essential for both their resistance and survival. Standing peerless as a published Black woman author at the time, Ndong's contributions to making sense of the colonial plight, and the ambiguities that often arose with it, leave her literary significance on par with many of her male contemporaries.

The polarity between the raw and civilized native that Ndongu introduces resurfaces time and again in colonial era works. Brothers Lucifer and Garabha in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* mirror Samkange's Ndatshana and Zana respectively, without the amicable parting and fateful ending of *The Mourned One*. The story revolves around the ominously named Lucifer, a rural boy whose artistic talent had been discovered by a missionary (again) who had subsequently organized for him to further his education overseas. Word gets back to his rural homestead, and in line with the late colonial era romanticizing of Europe and the proximity to whiteness, the excitement from his parents and others at his pending travels is palpable. Conversely, an air of shame surrounds conversations about his erstwhile brother, Garabha- a wandering musician whose distance from urban or White spaces makes him an archetypal "raw native" and his kin treat him as such. When his father is asked about his whereabouts, he responds "As far as I am concerned, whatever they do to him is what he deserves" (12). When Lucifer finally arrives home from the city to bid farewells before he leaves the country, he is bland, quiet, and aloof. His father confronts him about not replying letters written to him by the family, to which he does not respond. Meanwhile, for the father's particular obsession with Lucifer, his own father- Lucifer and Garabha's grandfather- is unapologetically fond of Garabha, as are other people of his generation. The conflicting ideals here come to a head when their father promises to leave his inheritance to Lucifer, the younger son, while tradition holds that Garabha is the rightful heir as the oldest, and the grandfather confronts the father on this (152) While there is precedence for disinheritance if a son falls out of his father's good graces, what plays out in this incident was an essential battle of colonial values: a reticent younger brother whose only claim to the throne is his pending trip overseas and White proximity, contrasted with a rugged older brother who spends his days traveling from village to village drinking with the neighbors and playing music for them. Much like *The Mourned One*, the seeming conflict between a precolonial esteem and identity and that of colonial values as represented by Lucifer (and Ndatshana) culminates in the utter failure to reconcile the two at the end. When the white missionary comes to get Lucifer so they can depart on his trip, Lucifer's father tries to give him protect spiritual charms for his travels abroad and Lucifer, embarrassed in front of the priest, flatly refuses. It is the first time we have seen Lucifer be vocal and assertive, and it is in rejection of the last visage of his connection to Africa before he leaves. Again, the portrayal of Westernization and White proximity not having the African at heart in its essence advocates a cultural nationalism which is an indispensable handmaiden to Black political nationalism. An interesting subplot in the book is that of John, Lucifer and Garabha's guerrilla cousin. In conversation, he invokes memories of the early insurrections against the colonialists, in which the old man had partaken. However, because that wave of fighting had ended in defeat and colonialism had only grown stronger, the old man "tasted humiliation again" at the mention of the wars, remarking that "we were defeated...and have stayed defeated" (31).

In the spirit of the 1970s, however, as the fight for independence had been reinvigorated by the nationalists and their military wings that he represents, John argues that "...things are changing. Sooner than you realize we are going to be the rulers of our own country... We will fight" (31). Thus, this secondary character serves to carry the torch of early nationalism and resistance forward towards independence, as well as placate the hearts of those who came before him in the struggle.

Conclusion

As we set our feet firmly into the 21st century, scholars of both postcolonial and decolonial theory are still wrestling with different approaches to dismantling the devastating and persistent legacies of colonialism. The definitive obstacle in shifting from colonial paradigms has been the imperviousness of society at large, and academia in particular, to considering new and "non-traditional" methods of knowledge production and conceptualization. This intellectual inertia, often accepted for practical and conservative purposes, leaves little room to maneuver away from the perpetuation of colonial narratives and worldview.

Throughout, this paper has sought to establish the inseparability of early African literature in Rhodesia and the rise of anticolonial and Pan-African nationalism in the country, as evidenced by: the coincidence of the earliest published Shona and Ndebele works with the birth of the nationalist movements; the political prominence of the several of the authors; the overt and covert nationalistic and anticolonial themes that ran across the works, and the Southern Rhodesia Literary Bureau's ire and cynicism towards many of the publications among other factors. To continue to tell the story of the anticolonial efforts through the narrow lens that focuses almost exclusively on the political engineering of the African nationalists and the armed struggle of the respective military wings takes away from the complex realities of African resistance and its evolution. An academic re-imagining of the role of early literary fiction not only illuminates their intractability from the rest of the anti-colonial movement: it also contributes to the further disruption of the colonialist narrative that African people were innately moral and intellectual inferiors. Through the written word, creative or otherwise, anti-colonialism developed a nuanced and often defiant intellectual face. Taking the fight to the literary page spurred resistance with the goal of liberation, while carving out space, even within the colonial condition, for the debunking of the African intellect inferiority myth.

Criticism of the near-absence of nuanced discourse surrounding these literary works as socio-political histories by scholars has been gradually increasing in recent years. Ethnomusicologist Mhoze Chikowero writes that "this memory of the cultures that historically resisted imperialism...constituted a powerful usable past for the oppressed, a subaltern consciousness that has often eluded scholars intent on restoring African agency to histories of anti-colonial studies" (214-215).

Postmodernist scholars have been pushing towards a re-conceptualized definition of knowledge production since the 1980s, defined by three particular trends: a growing (or reviving) focus on culture and ideas; a special concern with the production of historical knowledge and the ways in which the past is represented over time; and third, a turn towards the analysis of texts, discourse and language (Maylam 2000; 127). Although this shift has earned the disdain of many a traditionalist scholar, it is therein where a thoroughly nuanced investigation and understanding of often-marginalized voices and knowledge systems, such as those of the colonized, may finally occur. It is thus incumbent upon scholars of African literature and others for whom the continent's holistic decolonization is of the essence to argue for the elevation of these critical works to a status worthy of the attention accorded traditional national and political histories. Through their recreation of a triumphant precolonial past, elevation of often local symbols to national significance, and a rhetorical attack, whether obscure or overt on the colonial state, these early literary works are an indispensable component in the rise of Zimbabwean nationalism.

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Notes

¹ (Rhodesia then)

² *Qaphela Ingane* by Lassie Ndondo

³ Literally, "He/She who dodges the broom"