

Solomon Mutsvairo as A Historical Artist: The Interface of History and Fiction

by

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Abstract

The paper analyses Mutsvairo's *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978), *Mweya waNehanda* (1988) and *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983) as recreations of the history of Zimbabwe in fictional terms. It also looks at these novels in relation to the events that preceded the second Chimurenga in this country. The paper argues that though historical novels should not be used solely as a filter through which one endeavours to acquire historical data; Mutsvairo's novels have weaknesses that completely distort Zimbabwean history. Though the historical novelist is at liberty to fictionalise the past to suit his purpose, he has the duty to dramatise and reconstruct moments in history which are important in shaping his people's destiny. Mutsvairo's novels are very partisan to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party and the Zezurus to the extent that they have the potential to nurture ethnic and tribal conflict in the country.

Introduction

Throughout his writings, Solomon Mutsvairo shows an obsession with the Zimbabwean past. His protagonists are Zezuru mythical and legendary figures whom he alleges to be the real makers of Zimbabwean history. Nehanda, Kagubi, Mapondera and Chaminuka are key figures in Mutsvairo's fiction as he endeavours to recreate Zimbabwean history. The ruling ZANU-PF party which has been in power since independence in 1980 is predominantly Zezuru. It has and is still working tirelessly to convince the various ethnic groups in the country to believe that the history of Zimbabwe is synonymous with that of the Zezurus and that the first war of liberation for the country was the prerogative of the Zezurus. As such the whole Zimbabwean nation owes its allegiance to them for liberating them.

In Harare, the capital city of the country, buildings with key government functions have been named after the aforesaid Zezuru mythical and legendary figures as a constant reminder to the nation that the Zezuru ethnic group emblems the history of the country and that the heroes of the first war of liberation were Zezurus. Streets, avenues and schools in the country have also been named after these political figures with the tacit approval of the ruling party to justify its unprecedented lengthy rule in the country.

Mutsvairo's fiction has been written from the Zezuru perspective to further cement the ruling ZANU-PF party's hold onto power in the country. It is therefore the intention of this paper to deconstruct and demystify Zimbabwean history through an analysis of Mutsvairo's fiction. The paper argues that his fiction has a lot of weaknesses and regional political biases which falsify Zimbabwean history. Though historical artists have the liberty to fictionalise the past, they have the obligation to teach their readers the truth about their past.

Who is Solomon Mutsvairo?

Solomon Mutsvairo is a renowned Zimbabwean historical novelist born on the 26th of April, 1924 in Zuwa, Mazowe District in Zimbabwe. He is Zezuru by birth and descent. He went to Canada in the early 1960s with the hope of training as a medical practitioner. However, he could not make it due to fierce competition and racial discrimination, so he opted for a Masters degree in Geography which he completed in 1964 and later a PhD in African Studies in 1978. He taught in various schools while in Canada from 1965 to 1968. He also lectured in American universities from 1976 to 1980 before joining the University of Zimbabwe's African Languages Department in 1981, becoming its writer in residence.

In 1991 his lyrics were chosen among a host of others to be the basis of the new Zimbabwe national anthem. He died in 2005 and was accorded provincial hero status by the ZANU-PF government that is predominantly Zezuru despite the fact that during his whole life he took a very low profile in politics and national events and did not even go to war for the liberation of the country. He was accorded this provincial hero status presumably for endeavouring to promote cultural nationalism and for propping up the image of the ruling ZANU-PF party and the Zezurus in his literary works. Consequently he received a State-assisted funeral against the dissenting voices from the other ethnic groups like the Manyikas, the Ndaus and the Korekores who felt that their own liberation heroes were being sidelined. Ndababingi Sithole, a well known nationalist and founder of the ZANU party from which ZANU-PF was born in 1963, was not accorded national hero status, not to talk of provincial hero status as was the case with Solomon Mutsvairo. Ndababingi's crime was that of being the leader of the ZANLA party that fought the war of liberation, a post that Robert Mugabe also aspired to have. Ndababingi was unfortunately ousted by Robert Mugabe from the leadership of the party under the pretext that he had dinner with the enemy. He was outlawed from the party and declared an enemy of the people.

Upon his death, he was buried on his farm in Chipinge. The Korekores were also not amused by the government's failure to accord another political activist and hero of the liberation struggle, Henry Hamadziripi, also a founder of the ZANU party at its inception in 1963 even provincial hero status. He was pushed into oblivion after the war. He died a pauper more than twenty years after independence and was buried in his rural home. His crime, like that of Sithole, was that he challenged the ascendancy of Robert Mugabe to be the secretary of ZANU when Mugabe joined them in Mozambique in 1975 and orchestrated the ouster of Ndabaningi Sithole. Hamadziripi had to compete with Mugabe for the post but lost due to the shrewdness of Mugabe.

Mutsvairo's Literary Career

He was a member of the African Languages Development Association in Rhodesia from 1953 to 1954. As a member he worked tirelessly for the unification of the various divisions of Shona into one literary language based on his own Zezuru division. He published various papers on his Mbire clan from whom the Zezurus descent. He has five novels to his credit namely *Feso* (1957), *Murambiwa Goredema* (1959), *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978), *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983) and *Mweya waNehanda* (1988). The settings, plots and protagonists of all these historical novels are based on his home area of Mazowe and on the Zezuru mythical and legendary figures whose political contributions he endeavours to nationalise in the very same manner he endeavours to nationalise Seizure. He asserts the superiority of the Zezurus over the speakers of other divisions of Shona in Zimbabwe by alleging that all the Shona people are the progeny of Mambiri, a legendary Zezuru ancestor. Consequently all the Shona to him are Zezuru.

In his first novel, *Feso* (1957), he has a poem dedicated to a Zezuru mythical figure, Nehanda and this poem was recited by politician during the struggle for liberation. As a result this novel was banned by the Rhodesian regime in 1968 and Mutsvairo was sought for prosecution but he had already gone to the United States.

Mutsvairo as a Historical Artist

In *The trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976:vii-ix) Ngugi describes what he and Micere Mugo set out to do:

We agreed that the most important thing was for us to reconstruct imaginatively our history envisioning the world of the Mau Mau and Kimathi in terms of the peasants' and workers' struggle... So the challenge was to truly depict the masses (symbolised by Kimathi) in the only historically correct perspective; positively, heroically and as the true makers of history.

In *Barrel of a Pen* (1983:8) he echoes the same sentiments when he says, “how we look at our yesterday has important bearings on how we look at today and how we see possibilities for tomorrow.” This could have been the sort of vision that Mutsvairo had when he wrote his novels but then their settings, plots and protagonists seem to suggest that the history of Zimbabwe is the history of the Zezurus of which he is one. Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera are all closely related genealogically since they are descendents of Murenga Sororenzou, Tobela and Mambiri(Mumbire) as Mutsvairo alleges.

D. Dabebgwa in N. Bhebhe and T. Ranger (eds.)(1995:24) says, “a complete history of the struggle for national liberation is a long way from being produced and will only be achieved when the chroniclers of the struggle are no longer afraid to confront the truth head-on and openly and have rid themselves of the biases resulting from our recent political past...” This observation is not just true of the Second Chimurenga, but also of the first in which Mutsvairo exalts ‘heroes’ from his home-area of Mazoe. On reading his novels one gets the impression that heroes of the first Chimurenga were all from Mazoe and Zezurus. Mutsvairo does not consider anyone outside the realm of his Mazoe and Zezuru constituency as a hero, despite one’s hundred percent participation in the struggle for national liberation from white colonial rule in 1896-1897. Political leaders or heroes from other regions, Mkwati, Makoni, Chingaira and a few others play second fiddle to those from Mazoe. In his narratives Mutsvairo either mentions them in passing or ignores them completely.

Throughout his narratives, the Ndebele and the White colonialists are placed on equal terms as the worst enemies of the people, the Shona and Mutsvairo appears to be conscientizing the Shona against the ills perpetrated on their ancestors by them. One wonders what this writer is up-to when he puts the Ndebele in the same bracket with the white colonialists yet it was the Ndebele nation that initiated the struggle against colonialism in 1896. Even in the Second Chimurenga, Joshua Nkomo was the first Black Nationalist to mobilise people against white colonial rule in the country.

It is important right at the onset to state that Mutsvairo is a subscriber to the Mbire hypothesis which alleges that “the so-called ‘Shona are Mbire’, and not Shona”(Mutsvairo; 1996:1) and that they migrated from North Africa through the Savannah grasslands(Guruuswa) until they settled in Mbireland, now Zezuruland from where they spread to other parts of the country. The hypothesis further states that all the Shona are the progeny of Mambiri through Tobela (Tovera), Murenga, Runji, Chaminuka, Mushawatu and Nehanda. Mutsvairo therefore uses this hypothesis in his novels in a way that justifies Zezuru hegemony over other ethnic groups in the country.

Mutsvairo’s protagonists are negritudist heroes whose actions are beyond reproach. He removes the human element in them thereby placing them on godly positions in Zimbabwean history. A critical look at the roles played by Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera in Zimbabwean history demythologises the heroism that the writer accords them.

Chaminuka appears to have been a coward-leader who feared the Ndebele so much that he had to walk all the way from Chitungwiza to Bulawayo at Lobengula's bidding though aware of what awaited him there. No man in his sane mind would endure the agony of having to walk hundreds of kilometres to hand himself to his adversaries as he did. But Mutsvairo views him as a Jesus-like figure, the Prince of Peace, the unassailable (p.180) who always advocated for a peaceful co-existence with the Ndebele. Mutsvairo states that although Chaminuka knew very well that he would be killed, he went to Bulawayo "to save the lives of many than to see the day of such suffering..." (p.174)

On reading *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe*, one gets the impression that the Shona were historically militarily inferior to the Ndebeles because their leaders were cowards. They lacked leaders with the military vigour to challenge Ndebele incursions of the time. In *Mweya wa Nehanda* Mutsvairo acknowledges that Nehanda played no significant role in the first struggle besides foretelling the coming of the Second Chimurenga. Her only notable physical involvement in the war was her conviction and subsequent hanging by the settler regime. The actual war was fought by heroes of the struggle like Kagubi, Mkwati, Gutsa, Hwata, Chingaira, Makoni and Zindoga. Nehanda only came to know about the war when it had already spread throughout the country with the exception of Zezuruland (p.103). Mkwati comes to Kagubi to strategize after his involvement in the Ndebele uprisings. Nehanda's involvement is minimal, only as a consultant for the Zezurus on rare occasions in different parts of the country. She knows much about the war through hearsay and later distances herself from the killing of the District Commissioner during her trial by the settlers.

Mapondera on the other hand did not even take part in the 1896/7 rebellions since he had gone to Uzomba (Mozambique) to help his friend Makombe repulse Portuguese infiltration. On his return the war had been over and he engaged in skirmishes with the whites in revenge for the death of his son and brother at the hands of the whites. Mutsvairo views these skirmishes as "the apparently and seemingly one-man resistance of Kadungure Mapondera against white imperialism..."(10) One then wonders how Mutsvairo views the contributions made by those who actually took part in the rebellions, people like Mkwati, Mashayamombe, Makoni, Hwata, Chiweshe, Kagubi and a few others. Mutsvairo ends his account of the life of Mapondera with this statement: "So ended the life of the indomitable and unyielding soldier-the greatest resistor to white colonialism of his time among the sons of the Rozvi-the noblest Jinda-General Kadungure Mapondera."(p.109)

The way the writer praises Mapondera, Nehanda and Chaminuka shows some regional biases. The three are presented as heroes beyond reproach. They are always exonerated of their weaknesses. In *Mapondera: soldier of Zimbabwe* Mapondera signs a treaty with Selous, a white settler and it is this treaty that gives the whites access to mineral rights in Mamboland but the writer says he wanted to protect the sovereignty of the state.

He even accepts gifts from the settlers against Nehanda's entreaty. Mapondera leaves for Uzomba after having killed two white soldiers who had come to buy chickens at his brother's house. The flight could be viewed as cowardice since he feared reprisals from the whites. However, the writer views it differently. He says Mapondera wanted to prepare a good base for an offensive by enlisting support from Uzomba and that he wanted to help Makombe repulse the Portuguese.

One begins to question why a 'hero' of his stature could have left when he knew of the predicament at hand. Chief Chiweshe could have been right in calling him a traitor or renegade who should be killed for dissenting his own people yet Mutsvairo still adores him as a hero despite all these weaknesses. This is the reason why Musa Zimunya views Mapondera as "an anti-hero for having abandoned his people at their point of need to go and fight the Portuguese."(Chiwome: 1998:9).

As if what he had done for the people in dissenting them was not enough, on his return Mapondera mobilises people to fight a war of vengeance against the whites. He makes it clear that his war was not nationalistic in any way but egoistic as he wanted to avenge the deaths of his son Chivharange and brother Chemaringa and the ransacking of his property. He tells Makombe, "I must go, great chief, I must go home to avenge the death of my son and my brother, and rescue my people who are now slaves."(p.83). For him national interests are of secondary importance when compared with his personal interests as shown in the above statement. A true hero should be a person who puts national goals at heart, sacrificing his own interests and life for a national cause. During the war with the whites Mapondera's own soldiers affirm that they were not fighting a national war as they shout; "The whites have killed Mapondera's son and brother and confiscated his inheritance."(p.102). The soldiers' shouts clearly lay bare the major goal of the war. At his own trial by the whites Mapondera pleads for mercy by saying that he fought only the whites who killed his son, destroyed his village and stole his property.(p.106). He distances himself from the war by saying that when the rebellions took place he had been in Uzomba and knew nothing about it.

With all this evidence for the anti-heroism of Mapondera, Chaminuka and Nehanda, it sounds ridiculous for the writer to equate the Zimbabwean struggle for nationhood in the early days of colonialism with the persons of these people. The writer wants to give his readers the impression that resistance to white colonial rule during the colonial days was a prerogative of the Zezurus. The protagonists have been romanticized in a way that makes them unrealistic human figures. The Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera hero-myths are therefore creations by the Zezurus to cow other Zimbabwean ethnic groups into submission. These heroes and heroine have been created and given national status by the Zezurus in the very same way as they are created by the ruling predominantly ZANU-PF party that determines one's hero status in the country. Though a historical novel is not a textbook of history, it should not romanticize important historical figures and events but trivial issues that have no significant bearing on the historical past of a people.

In *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* Mutsvairo attempts to address the question of who really should be the real claimants of the Zimbabwean land. According to him Chaminuka prophesied to the Ndebele that for killing him Bulawayo “shall be accursed and famine-stricken as punishment from the wrath of the ancestors” (p.182). Since the land belongs to the Mbire, and not to Lobengula and his progeny. Chaminuka is said to have assured his desolate followers that he will pray that the ancestors send them a stronger leader among the Mbire who will drive away both the Ndebele and the whites from their land. Mutsvairo’s recreation of the Chaminuka myth in this way encourages racial and ethnic conflicts in the country since he sees no moral justification in the Ndebeles’ participation in the struggle for national liberation. For him Zimbabwe belongs to the Mbire and not the Ndebele and the whites. It is the Mbire clan that is destined to rule this country forever. By cherishing this kind of thinking the writer appears to be justifying the Gukurahundi massacres of the early 1980s in which the Ndebele ethnic group was almost virtually decimated by the ruling ZANU-PF 5th Brigade soldiers for attempting to assert their political right in the country by being the major opposition party and the violent land seizures from the whites by the ZANU-PF government in 2000. One wonders how Mutsvairo views the contributions of such important figures in Zimbabwean history, figures like Dr Joshua Nkomo who initiated the struggle against white rule, his wife Mama Mafuyana, Jason Ziyapapa Moyo, Nikita Mangena, Dumiso Dabengwa and Lukeout Masuku, just to mention a few.

On the land issue still, Mutsvairo seems to be wilfully oblivious of the fact that the Shona, the Ndebele and the white settlers were all migrants who should not in any way claim ownership of the Zimbabwean land. In his Bantu migrationist theories Mutsvairo himself alleges that the Shona arrived in this country between 500 and 700 A.D. and found it under the occupation of the Tonga, the Tavara and the Chikunda in the Zambezi valley, the Khoisan(Bushmen) in the eastern, central and western regions. They drove them away as they were militarily inferior when compared with them.(Mutsvairo:1996:21).The Ndebele, fleeing from the wrath of Shaka also occupied the northern and western parts of the country. The white settlers, also fleeing from the Boers in South Africa went on to occupy the North. Since all these tribal groups were migrants who migrated from a certain point, what justification is there to say the Shona or Mbire are the real claimants to the Zimbabwean land? Therefore the Ndebeles and the Shona fought racial and not nationalistic wars against the whites in the so-called liberation wars. They all fought for that which did not belong to them if at all the issue of the land was a motivating factor here. The real claimants of the land should have been the Bushmen, the Tavara, Barwe, Sena, Tonga and the Chikunda whom the Mbire(Shona), the Ndebele and the Whites found already in occupation of this country.

In Mutsvairo’s works, there is also too much intrusion by the author’s voice in the narratives. There is no longer room for multiple perspectives from the reader as should be the case with the third person narrative style he uses. The author wants the reader to accept his point of view, that is, to accept that Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera were heroes of the struggles against imperialism though it is clear that their wars were not nationalistic in any way.

He says Chaminuka's "ideology is worthy of the admiration and respect of all the people of Zimbabwe and the world. Whether as a hero or a saint, he is a model that Zimbabweans and people everywhere should be proud to honour."(p.2). He also praises his heroes in their struggles against the Ndebeles and the Whites.

In a work of fiction, whether historical or not, it is important for the reader to make his own interpretation of events or situations as the author presents them. When the author makes interpretations for his readers as Mutsvairo does, this creates the impression that he doubts his ability as a writer to present facts as objectively as possible, in a way that convinces his reader to accept his point of view. This makes his work too simplistic and propaganda material for a system he supports.

Narratives are also full of the author's feelings of hatred or anger against the Whites and the Ndebeles to whom he attributes his ancestors' suffering. In *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* Mutsvairo describes the Whites as 'maniacal, terribly ugly, beggars, miscreants, outcasts of their land, weapons of evil, sorcerers, barbarians from the northern hemisphere'.(pp.14,26,105). In *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* the Ndebeles are painted in the same vein. To him they are "the bellicose invaders" (p.101), "great meat-eaters" (p.102) and that Lobengula was "big bellied, stern, and uncompromisingly cruel. He lived in a state of crude pomp and power and was a law and judge unto himself."(p.102). Mutsvairo shows only the negative aspects of the enemies of his people and heaps praises for his 'heroes', Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera. Narratives of this nature have the possibility of distorting the truths about Zimbabwean history thereby placing his art in the category of what S. Robins (1992) calls 'praise texts' which appeared in the early 1980s, whose sole purpose was to celebrate the attainment of independence at the expense of the realistic portrayal of the war. Such descriptions are clear indications of an unfair referee celebrating the exploits of a team he is siding with. As a result, his refereeing becomes biased and not worthy taking note of seriously.

This bias distorts the truth about Zimbabwean history. Though writings are historical works of fiction realism is of paramount importance if at all they are to survive into the future. Since Mutsvairo has been inspired to write by the past historical events of this country and not by his own imagination, the truthful depiction of events as they were before and during the struggles for freedom is expected. Fanon (1990:181) echoes the same sentiments when he says, "the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge." There is no way in which art becomes purposeful to future generations when it distorts the truth about their past as does Mutsvairo's fiction.

Mutsvairo also endeavours to authenticate his accounts of the life and ministry of Chaminuka the prophet by telling the reader his sources of data. In the introduction to the novel he claims to have got part of his material from the writings of Frederick Courtney Selous, a missionary who is said to have visited Chitungwiza in August 1883 and also from those of Stanlake T. Samkange. Because of these sources Mutsvairo says the reader should take what he says to be true. He forgets that Selous and Samkange were mere researchers just like himself and me too. Why is he so fully convinced that their findings were truthful so much that he wants the whole Zimbabwean nation to accept them? In the preface to *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* he explains to the reader that Chaminuka, Nehanda and Mapondera are Zimbabwean heroes in the same way as the Whites have theirs. This is an attempt to have his narratives accepted by the reader again. Mutsvairo forgets that he is writing a historical work of fiction and not a history textbook where the truthful depiction of events in their chronological sequence is of paramount importance. He wants the reader to believe him as a way of trying to silence dissenting voices from the Ndebele, the Ndau, the Shangaan and other ethnic groups in the country. It did not come to some of us as a surprise when on his death he is declared a provincial liberation hero by the ZANU-PF government which is predominantly Zezuru, despite his lack of participation in the actual struggle.

Mutsvairo also parallels the life and ministry of Chaminuka on that of the Biblical Jesus. Like Jesus, Chaminuka had his own disciples, some of whom were Mushaninga, Murambwa and Dzukwa who, like the biblical Didymus later betrayed his master. Like Jesus Chaminuka also experienced some kind of transfiguration just before his death when he went to a secluded brow of a hill to seek the guidance of his Mbire ancestor spirits...As the legend goes, Chaminuka was met in that secluded place by strange apparitions. It is said that these apparitions were the ghosts of his ancestors, Murenga and Mushawatu who had come to calm his troubled spirit...(p.154).

This incident is a replica of Jesus' own transfiguration on Mount Sinai where he met his forerunners, Moses and Elijah who had come to calm his troubled spirit before his crucifixion. Like Jesus, Chaminuka is said to have ministered to his people, performing some miracles and healings. Mutsvairo also presents Chaminuka as a 'Wonderful Counsellor, who like Jesus held some sermons on a mountain (pp.126-127). There are also Biblical quotes in the novel, some almost word for word.

This attempt by Mutsvairo to pattern Chaminuka's life and ministry on that of the Biblical Jesus makes a mockery of his whole narrative for lack of creativity. The authenticity of the Chaminuka legend becomes ludicrous to the reader since one expects oral tradition to be its source and not the Christian Bible. Though his novels could be classified as African protest literature, a western reader for whom they might be meant would laugh his lungs out for the writer's lack of originality since the analogy is quite clear. Even the link between his art and history becomes child-play here. Shona legends cannot be drawn from the Christian Bible.

However, Mutsvairo could be applauded for being the first Shona novelist to attempt to draw from past traditions to teach his people about the Second war of liberation. He endeavours to fit into Achebe's description of the novelist as a teacher 'who should teach his society to regain belief in itself and in its past, who should teach his people that the past with all its imperfections was not a long night of savagery from which the whites, acting on God's behalf delivered them.' (Achebe: 1989). He also attempts to fit into Ngugi's line of thinking that "it is in the collective human values of the African past that the black race must seek the inspiration to build a new society." Ngugi waThiong'o;(1972:41). Mutsvairo's novels could be Afrocentric discourses that seek to deconstruct western hegemonic voices in pre-independence Zimbabwe. He appeals to Shona legends and myths associated with the struggle for independence to show that the Zimbabwean people, (the Ndebele and other ethnic minority groups excluded) had a history to be proud of.

Mutsvairo could have drawn this inspiration from renowned African writers like Ngugi and Achebe whose fiction protests against colonialism and helps assert the dignity of the African people. Rosamund Metcalf in Ngara and Morrison; (1989:15) says "members of the oppressing class however admirable their intentions, cannot produce a true literature of liberation for the oppressed." Mutsvairo's novels are an attempt by a Shona writer to correct the past history of the Shona people that had been written and learned in schools from the colonial perspective. Colonial Rhodesian history celebrated the exploits of Rhodes while at the same time denigrating the contributions made by the Zimbabwean people in resisting imperialism. The resistance to colonialism by the Zimbabwean people was viewed in terms of a repudiation of civilization. Mutsvairo's novels could be part of the decolonising fictions of the late 1970s intended to correct this distorted image of Zimbabwean history. The irony of it all is that Mutsvairo is also a member of a ruling Zezuru ethnic group that views with distaste the bringing into national prominence the heroic deeds of political figures from other minority Zimbabwean ethnic and tribal groups as already noted. This is the reason why ironically his fiction cannot be a true literature of liberation for the oppressed.

S.V. Srinivas in Bernth Lindfors and Bala Kothandaraman (eds.); (2001:110) commenting on Kenya's history of resistance to colonialism that began with legendary figures like Waiyaki and Harry Thuku right up to the Mau Mau struggle and the attainment of independence says, "the defeat of the first set of warriors and the death of Waiyaki contained in it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil." For Mutsvairo, the Kenyan situation is in no way different from the Zimbabwean one that he is attempting to revisit. Like Srinivas, Mutsvairo is of the strong opinion that the history of Zimbabwean resistance to colonial rule dates as far back as the times of Chaminuka, Nehanda and Maondera. The second liberation struggle which colonial hegemonic histories painted as a terrorist war had its roots in the first. The influence of the 'heroes' of the first liberation war permeated through the years to the attainment of independence.

In the preface to *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe*, Mutsvairo shows the reasons for its writing, some of which are in line with what has just been discussed above. Names like Chaminuka, Nehanda, Kaguvi, Dzivaguru and Mapondera have been invoked in the second liberation struggle. Mutsvairo explains who these are in relation to the war. For him these are the Zimbabwean heroes of the struggle in the very same way as the Greeks had theirs. They are not mythical figures or gods but real men and women who lived in a certain period in history and fought vehemently against colonial encroachment for the dignity and freedom of the Zimbabwean nation. They were not witches, sorcerers, murderers, bandits or eccentrics as colonial history had it. The French, with their policy of assimilation and the Portuguese with their policy of *assimilado* tried to accommodate the colonized people into the culture of the metropolis to sustain the supremacy of the colonizer over the colonized. The British and the Germans on the other hand sought to deny them their history. In this way colonialism “destroyed the culture of the natives in Africa deliberately so as to keep them in a state of amnesia about their culture, identity and history itself.”(Lindfors et al, 2001:146). Mutsvairo endeavours to reconstruct Zimbabwean history in a more and favourable way that helps assert the humanity of the colonized people. His novels are a reminder to both the colonized and the colonizer that Zimbabwean people had a history to be proud of. However, his major weakness is that he equates the history of Zimbabwean people with that of the Zezurus. No mention whatsoever is made in his novels about the contributions of the Ndebeles, the Manyikas, the Shangaan and the Ndaus in the first liberation struggle in this country.

In *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe*, Mutsvairo refutes the claims that Pan-Africanism was brought home to Africa through Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana in 1945, but that it was there as far back as the times of Mapondera. Mapondera is said to have spend much of his time in Uzomba, helping his friend Makombe repulse Portuguese invaders. Dzivaguru is said to have joined him as well in a bid to form a formidable alliance against the Portuguese. Mutsvairo could be providing a justification for the help that Zimbabwe got from the Frontline States during the liberation struggle. Accordingly his Pan-African feeling has its roots in the past.

Conclusion

I find it imperative to conclude this paper by saying; Mutsvairo’s fiction is an attempt to reconstruct Zimbabwean history to show that the Zimbabwean people had a past to be proud of. He views the Second Chimurenga as a mere continuation of the first in which political figures like Nehanda, Kaguvi, Mapondera, Dzivaguru, Mkwati and a few others set a precedence for the younger generations to follow. However his fiction has weaknesses that falsify Zimbabwean history to the extent of equating it with the history of the Zezurus. The Ndebeles had been engaged in a war against the British as early as 1893 and both the Ndebele and the Shona in another anti-imperialist war in 1896, but his fiction pays minimal attention to the contributions of the Ndebeles in these struggles as if they had no significant bearing whatsoever on Zimbabwean history.

Mutsvairo's heroes and heroine are romanticized in a way that makes them deities despite the fact that their participation in the Zimbabwean history of struggle was shrouded in controversy as noted in this paper. The falsification of history by the writer has the possibility of nurturing ethnic and tribal conflicts in the country.

It is also important to conclude this paper by quoting Ngugi's advice to writers that "we must not become too fascinated by our gaze at the ruins of yesterday and forget the present..." (Ngugi waThiong'o; 1979:8). This has been the failure of Mutsvairo as a historical novelist. Involved as he has been in reconstructing the Zimbabwean historical past in his fiction, he tends to lose sight of other developments in society. The depiction of his protagonists reduces his novels to mere romances and does not seem to encourage unity beyond ethnic boundaries in this country.

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