

Zimbabwe's Fictions and Rebellious Entextualisation: '[A]ll the xenophobia, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia and yugoslavia'

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The article comparatively scrutinizes the world-making potential of two Zimbabwean novels (Chenjerai Hove's 1988 *Bones* and Brian Chikwava's 2009 *Harare North*) against the background of, on the one hand, the official naming codes and practices of the Mugabeist state, and on the other, the emergent critical orthodoxy regarding the about-turn in the worldly orientation of Zimbabwe's fiction since the political turmoil of 2000s. I argue that there is in fact a discernible strand of continuity between the cosmopolitan-nationalist inscriptions each novel performs, and that the textual dialogue between what I call their rebellious entextualisations troubles and interrupts the worlds of necropolitan naming.

cosmopolitanism

Chikwava

Hove

nation

world

Zimbabwe

[W]e must also ask what a given piece of world literature lets us imagine.

Pheng Cheah

Chenjerai Hove now a sellout[.]
Zimbabwe Herald

Kunzi munhu vanhu.
Shona proverb

Introduction: language and the cosmo-nation

In a recent monograph-length contribution to critical debates around world literature, Pheng Cheah refuses to equate the notion of ‘world’ with the spatial extent of the globe. Instead, he locates postcolonial literature’s worldly force in its ability to produce temporalities that open out to new worlds, which he defines as a webs of interconnectedness between co-existing subjects. In the phrase I use as my first epigraph above (Cheah, 43), he locates the worldliness of postcolonial literature in its normative openness to new, emancipatory worlds to still to come. Despite differences in analytical terminology and scope, Cheah’s findings are easily aligned with my own study of Zimbabwean novels’ chronotopic properties, *The Place of Tears*. This book, too, stresses the world-making potential of fiction. It underscores in particular the future-orientedness of a group of postcolonial Zimbabwean novels, by tracing how they problematize and transcend the national master narrative formulated by Zimbabwe’s ruling party around the last turn of the century.

Cheah points to precolonial oral traditions as a resource capable of interrupting the temporalities of capitalist modernity. The link he makes between the notions of temporality and orality also has the potential to inform and refine previous critical engagements with Zimbabwe’s fiction and will, in part, also be relevant here. But it is Cheah’s insistence that, in the global south, ‘the relation of nationalism to cosmopolitanism must be reconsidered beyond one of antagonistic opposition’ (211) that is central to my critical aims on this occasion. The history of Zimbabwean fiction in English has thus far been predominantly regarded as nation-centred. Critical orthodoxy has it that Anglophone Zimbabwean fiction registered a shift in orientation towards world-related concerns only as the twenty-first century brought about an outpouring of diaspora from crisis-ridden Zimbabwe. (Krishnan; Muchemwa 2010b;). This article aims to complicate and add complexity to such views.

It is certainly true that several among the fourth generation of Zimbabwe’s authors of fiction (comprising NoViolet Bulawayo, Brian Chikwava and Petina Gappah and others) are explicitly concerned with issues related to global displacement. Yet Cheah’s book is right to insist that there is nothing inherently liberating about mobility, or about enlarging its spatial extent. The same is, of course, true of representing displacement. My own work on Southern Africa has long stressed the need to recognise the presence of *local*-cosmopolitan literary and cultural texts in the region (Primorac 2011). On this occasion, I set a critical precedent by locating the shared cosmopolitan resonances in texts by Zimbabwean novelists of different generations in their approaches to language. I will argue that first novels by

Chenjerai Hove and Brian Chikwava contest the post-independence nationalisms of Mugabe's Zimbabwe by intimating the possibility of what might be called 'cosmo-nation' via their fictions' narrative styles.

Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009) are both related to the central problem of postcolonial Zimbabwe during Mugabe's rule: the spiritual and nationalist value of agricultural land and the competing cultural and political claims to it. Despite the differences between the two texts' historical context and setting (about which, more shortly), this article contends that both evoke a national sense of belonging that entails a cosmopolitan dimension, by virtue of problematising their characters' ability to 'view[...] [themselves] as part of a world, a circle of political belonging that transcends the limited ties of kinship and country to embrace the whole of deterritorialised humanity.' (Cheah, 3) I further argue that the two novels do so by evoking temporalities and spiritual values that they mark as rural (if not, as Cheah has it, pre-colonial), in contradistinction to Mugabe's party's attempt to monopolise the Zimbabwean social imaginaries related to village locations. The novels deploy stylistic and temporal strategies which are arguably related, and through which they open themselves out to the worldly possibility of a future, more openly cosmopolitan Zimbabwe. In addition to being read as radically new textual departure representing postcolonial Zimbabwe, Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* can thus also be regarded as extending, reconfiguring and amplifying the cosmo-national potential of one of its twentieth-century predecessors.

Necropolitan naming

My second epigraph is the editorial title introducing a reader's letter published in the Sunday edition of Zimbabwe's pro-government daily *The Herald* on 8 April 2004. It was published some three years after Chenjerai Hove, one of his country's most prominent writers, went into exile following incidents of political harassment (Primorac 2008). The author of the letter was Olley Maruma, journalist, movie-maker and well-known supporter of Robert Mugabe's regime. The letter accuses Hove of un-patriotically criticising his country's government in exchange for foreign payouts. It starts with the sentence: 'The tendency of selling out one's people and one's country is not new.'

The letter goes on to give instances of 'selling out' related to trans-Atlantic slavery ('the people who identified the victims to be captured and shipped abroad were fellow black Africans') and colonialism ('black policemen, black soldiers, black clerks and messengers'). The tone and title of this letter, as well as the broad set of generalisations with which it opens, align it neatly with the government pamphlet entitled *Traitors do much Damage to National Goals*, published a year later in 2005. The pamphlet formulates government policy by reducing Zimbabwe's history to a continuous state of conflict involving three groups of agents: nationalist patriots, their imperialist enemies and local traitors (or sellouts) who side with the latter, motivated by material gain (Primorac 2007). The *Herald's* use of the label 'sellout' (which, while widely used, in the context of Zimbabwe has its origins in nationalist vocabularies dating back to Zimbabwe's war of independence) serves to position Chenjerai Hove's name and identity within the narrative grammar that propelled the discursive machinery of Mugabeist nationalism.

Maruma's letter participates in an act of naming that is unitary (in the sense that it seeks to concentrate power in a single social body), public and impersonal. Because such acts of

naming reproduce a state discourse obsessed with death as a definer of life (and also because they are deeply implicated with inflicting pain and death on the state's citizens), they can be described as 'necropolitan' – a term deployed by the Zimbabwean critic Kizito Muchemwa, who writes about how 'the repetition of the state narrative in which bones, blood and death have become the symbolic currency minted by the state to circulate in spaces in which the nation is imagined' (2010, 505).

The term 'necropolitan' subsumes the notion of cosmopolitanism - an ethical position according to which moral obligations are 'owed to all human beings based solely on our humanity alone' (Wallace and Held 1) – to Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, the kind of state sovereignty that exercises control over its citizens' mortality while practising politics as a form of war (Mbembe, 12). In exercising necropolitan state control in twenty-first century Zimbabwe, and extending it indiscriminately to its opponents regardless of their communal identification, Mugabe's party has invoked the images of bones, blood and death as symbols of sovereignty, as Muchemwa describes. Bones, blood and death are also the central symbols of several important works of Zimbabwean literature in English. Chenjerai Hove is one of the writers who have made use of those symbols, most famously in *Bones*. The same national newspaper that branded Hove a sellout in 2004 celebrated him as one of 'our stars' in 2001 (Tawurayi). The adverb 'now' in the title of Maruma's letter reveals the letter to be an act of re-classification: a symbolic expulsion from the national community of a public figure who had already distanced himself from the official understanding of how that community is constituted, and how its symbols are deployed. Hove's status as an officially proclaimed outsider to Zimbabwe was symbolically confirmed after his death when the writer Ignatius Mabasa questioned the cultural and personal integrity inherent in his choice to leave home forever, in a *Herald* obituary.

Necropolitan naming aspires to mark bodies permanently and absolutely. By continuing to denounce the government until the end of his life, Hove chose to disregard the necropolitan labelling enunciated by Maruma. This disregard must have stemmed in part from the knowledge that each necropolitan announcement is always already countered as it occurs. My third epigraph is a Shona proverb whose pithiness easily outshines the brevity of a journalistic caption. Made up of only three words – the infinitive of the verb 'to name', the noun signifying 'person' and the plural of that noun, the proverb (which has an exact Ndebele counterpart) articulates a moral statement that summons another kind of respectability and identity production. In co-relating the concept of naming to a plural noun, the proverb brings into being the notion of consensus from which contestation is not excluded. In stressing the plurality of naming agents, yet leaving out all specification outside the broad notion of humanity, it defies easy unilateral exclusion from the community of naming. Its central noun (hugged, in manner reminiscent of Roman Jakobson's famous description of the poetic function of language, by the verb that regulates it and its own plural echo) articulates what is at stake in stressing the multiplicity of naming: the notion of personhood itself and its connection to other persons.

In a book on Zimbabwe's elders (published in English, in Germany, and in collaboration with a transnational Bulgarian co-author), Hove evokes this proverb with the words: '*Kunzi munhu vanhu*, to be named human is to be named by others, the elders say.' (Hove and Trojanow, 16). He has stated for the record that this is one of the guiding principles of his work (Primorac 2008, 142). *Bones* is a literary embodiment of this principle. The novel revolves around a peasant woman who is spoken about, in a language replete with echoes of rural Shona orality, by a chorus of human voices after her death, but who does not speak herself.

Her humanity and the suffering of her community are textually performed both by the novel's polyphony of voices and by the silence at the heart of it.

Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* has provoked comparisons with Dambudzo Marechera, the 'uncaring, truant son' of Zimbabwean literature, whose work is often placed in opposition to Hove's (Primorac 2010, Rooney 1995, 129). At first sight, Chikwava's gritty, ironic, London-based narrative seems far removed from Hove's rural localism. And yet, I contend, it is possible to trace a current of textual and political affinity between the two novels. A key aspect of this affinity is their approach to language. Karin Barber defines 'entextualisation' as the series of processes through which utterances become separable from their immediate contexts and capable of being transmitted and reproduced over time and space (22). It is through such processes that culture 'moves through the world' (23). In the linguistic sense, *Bones* and *Harare North* constitute themselves as texts through highly stylised variants of written English, particular to themselves. It is chiefly by doing so that both refuse the relationship to language that underlies Mubageist nationalism. Because the two novels' literary forms of inscription relate agonistically to the local tradition of political naming I refer to as 'necropolitan', they may be referred to as instances of 'counter', or 'rebellious', entextualisation. In the rest of this article, I argue that the stylistic codes devised by Hove and Chikwava in their novels resonate subtly but distinctly with each other, in that they locate a form of local cosmopolitanism in the practices, temporalities and values they designate as rural.

Rebellious entextualisation

Bones and *Harare North* emanate from different temporal moments in the history of Zimbabwean nation. Set at the time of Zimbabwe's transition to independence, *Bones* (1988) was published near the end of the period marked by the official policy of racial and ethnic 'reconciliation'. The novel probes the meaning and feasibility of this term, especially at a time when the national unfinished business of re-distributing agricultural land had not yet been comprehensively addressed. *Harare North* (2009), on the other hand, appeared at the height of 'fast-track land redistribution' - a violent process through which Zimbabwe's government claimed finally to have addressed the land issue. The novel is set in the early years of the twenty-first century: chapter 14 mentions the death of Zimbabwe's ruling party founder Edson Zvobgo, which situates the narrative in and around 2004. The two novels' publication dates thus book-end a period of almost exactly three decades, during which Zimbabwe went from celebrating the end of a liberation war, to erupting in local violence that was officialised as its sequel.

In an essay on Hove's relationship to language, Caroline Rooney (2005) underscores the steadfastness with which Hove has protested what she calls the corruption of language in post-independence Zimbabwe. Hove's poetry is particularly effective in satirising the empty performativity practised by ruling elites who would turn language into a vehicle of untruth. In Hove's poems, such language is uttered by both colonial authorities and postcolonial state bureaucrats. In a 2007 interview, with Rooney's work in mind, I asked Hove to comment on the link between the corruption of language and political violence in Zimbabwe. He said:

For me, even the financial, economic corruption begins with the corruption of language. Look at people talking about 'American interests', or Mugabe talking about 'sovereignty' and 'patriotism'. All of a sudden there is a new definition of patriotism.

Suddenly, some of us who are critical of the system are no longer patriots or nationalists. Of course, the person who is in political power – [former information minister] Jonathan Moyo, for example – is in charge of defining who is a patriot, who is a nationalist and what is sovereignty. All of a sudden these words are being given a new meaning. So the corruption of language, for me, psychologically and emotionally, is the beginning of a multiplicity of other corruptions. You can see, for example, how language was manipulated during our liberation war. I was teaching in the countryside and the guerrillas were called the *magandanga* by the Rhodesian military operation. In Shona, a *gandanga* means [...] a most vicious and terrible person. And the guerrillas would come to us and say, hello, we are the *magandanga*. So the word was turned around and became positive! (Primorac 2008, 139-140)

Hove's answer links the postcolonial social mechanism of the 'production of lies and double-speak' (Mbembe, 118,) to the analogous mechanisms deployed during the colonial era. In this way, he links the discourse of Mugabe's state officials (the politician Jonathan Moyo) to colonial officials and discourses. He makes a related link in his first published poetry collection, *Up in Arms*, in which a poem entitled 'Masquerade' provides a mini-glossary of the system of naming endorsed by the colonial state and newspapers ('Nehanda—witch/ Chaka—man-eater/ Native—savage/ Black—evil' – Hove 1982, 24). Another poem, 'Still labels', mourns the persistence of colonial-era labels after independence. In this case, the 'labels' are signs on urban buildings keeping out intruders, often with words in Chilapalapa – a colonial-era pidgin used in Southern African mines and communication between masters and servants: They keep the labels, so they say,/ to show they mean it./ 'Basopo lo inja' if not/ 'Hapana basa' if not/ The 'Trespassers' thing (Hove 1982, 51).

The parallel which Hove draws between pre- and post- independence eras is relevant to my argument here. Although *Bones* does not ascribe necropolitan utterances to state officials or government sympathizers, the novel anticipates latter-day versions of necropolitan naming by representing its heroine, Marita, as violated both within the space of a white-owned farm where she works (whose owner speaks Chilapalapa to the workers) and in the postcolonial city, where she is met with nothing but silence and death. The necropolitan speech uttered by the white farmer Manyepo (whose name means 'liar' in Shona) may thus be read as a condemnation of the political corruption of language yet to come – especially since the novel's temporality submerges the arrival of independence, as I have argued at length elsewhere (Primorac 2006). Furthermore, Hove's interview answer cited above does not stop at condemning a specific system of war-time naming. It also provides a clue as to why all such systems are ultimately self-defeating: in the author's rural community during the liberation war, the repetition of the derogatory label 'gandanga' caused the word to become imbued with traces of the unsaid, and change its manner of signification. In the coming section of this article, I argue that *Harare North* satirically performs an analogous kind of semantic sliding.

In distinct but related ways, both *Bones* and *Harare North* textually perform the ultimate futility of necropolitan naming. *Bones* does so by modelling an alternative system of reciprocal, humanity-making speech through a representation of a peasant speech community. In a changed historical moment, *Harare North* stages a simulacrum of Mugabeist necropolitan naming in the context of twenty-first century London, ascribing it to a different kind of subaltern speaker: a member of Mugabe's youth militia turned UK illegal immigrant.

Mourning 'freedom'

When he was asked about the possibility that his satirical writing would cause him problems by offending the ruling classes in his country of birth, Chikwava (who, like Hove, left his country of birth) surmised that they won't 'get it':

There may be some review in *The Herald* – but I can't imagine that happening because the way that the [social] critique works in my book is not very straightforward. It would be chard to call it colonialist literature or similar. [...] A lot of them [government sympathisers - RP] won't get it.' (Primorac 2010, 257-58).

Harare North's mode of entextualisation is, indeed, designed to evade being easily describable by Zimbabwe's nationalist nomenclature. But the question of readers ever fully 'getting' the meaning-making potential of a literary text is, of course, a complex one. Few 1988 readers of *Bones* could have infused the episode in which the novel's peasant heroine refuses to denounce the cruel white farmer to the freedom fighters with quite the level of prescience it achieved after 2000, when violent evictions of white farmers had become global news. Despite his refusal to grant full humanity to the farm workers, Marita decides to respect Manyepo's humanity, in an act of local cosmo-nationalism whose ethical underpinnings are made legible by the novel's formal and stylistic properties.

Bones is enunciated by several voices or consciousnesses: several Shona farm workers, a nameless city woman, the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda (the Shona royal spirit who led the uprising against white rule in 1896 and one of the central nationalist symbol in Mugabe's Zimbabwe) and the collective voice of ancestral spirits. The voices of all those characters converge on an absent character, the peasant woman Marita, who does not herself assume the role of narrator. Marita's speaking voice is mediated by the voices of the others, who repeat and comment on her words. And although most of those others belong to a small and seemingly homogenous group of Shona villagers, the text of *Bones* nevertheless constructs the idea of its speech community as both heterogeneous and deterritorialised. This is so in part because it comprises both the living and the dead. In the novel, all rely on the same linguistic register. Yet the style of *Bones* – which constructs an intricate approximation of Shona orality rendered in English – subtly suggests an ethical and cultural position that may be understood as cosmo-nationalist, and which is antagonistic to the fixity of necropolitan naming. This position is predicated on the novel's relationship to Shona orality, and the positioning within it of ancestral voices.

Bones is peppered with stylistic devices designed to evoke Shona rural lives. These devices include frequent reliance on relatively short sentences and clauses, repetition of lexical items related to plant and animal life, an absence (for the most part) of references to modern technology and details of city life, and incorporating translations of proverbs, folktales and folk songs into the stylistic texture of the novel. Hove thus creates what Dan Wylie has called an inter-language: an Anglophone form of expression which mimics spoken rural Shona. The language of *Bones* often veers towards gnomic, proverb-like utterances ('Be kind to those who do not know how to skin a goat' (10); 'An eagle can never become a hen' (17)), and a reliance on euphemism in references to bodies and bodily functions (coupled, nevertheless, with a detailed representation of the hardships and discomforts of rural life): 'I remember one day when two women came to share the secrets of their husbands behind the ant-hill where I was helping myself.' (8)

And yet this subtle evocation of Shona rural registers necessarily falls short of complete doubling. The fact that it is written in English makes *Bones* potentially accessible to Anglophone readers across the globe. Moreover, this fact irrevocably *de-hierarchises* Hove's

approximation of Shona modes of address. In a novel in which characters constantly address one another ('Marita, what will you do if you find your son?' – 43), the linguistic features of English prevent them from reproducing the pluralisation (and vice versa) of pronouns, verbs and related structures that unavoidably accompany linguistic enactments of social distance in Shona. When, for example, Janifa tells Marita 'Mother, wait, I will fetch the letter now and read it to you' (10), her respectful attitude is expressed through the appellation 'Mother', but the verb 'wait' and indirect object 'you' retain the same grammatical form they would take if Marita was addressing Janifa. Hove's 'inter-lingual' entextualisation thus works towards disabling a key legitimising mechanism of necropolitical naming: the reification of rural 'tradition' as a fixed mode of practice and address.

Working in tandem with the 'in-betweenness' of Hove's style, *Bones*' scrambling of narrative chronology (widely critically remarked upon) produces the effect of a temporal and cultural stasis. Musanga and Mutekwa read the novel's suspension of the passage of time as an opening out into the spiritual hetero/temporality of the dead, governed by the voice of Nehanda. Because Nehanda is one of the key national symbols appropriated by official Mugabeist discourse, this opening may be read as a proleptic countering of necropolitical attempts to obliterate the kinds of social change unwelcome to Zimbabwe's ruling elites. Such a reading is bolstered by the fact that, when they speak, the ancestral spirits encourage rebellion, compassion and mourning, and are thus in keeping with the novel's dedication to 'the making of a new conscience (...) of bones, blood and footsteps'. The text explicitly links this new consciousness to the notion of deterritorialised humanity. When Marita spares the life of the cruel white farmer during the liberation war, this act is based on the fact that he, too is human: another woman's son. In chapter seven, the notion of humanity is broadened out via the image of rising ancestral bones who 'spoke many languages' (52) - all of which the spirit of Nehanda (who focalises the chapter) understands.

Finally, the notion of a new future consciousness opening out into the world of universal humanity via the mediation of the dead is, from the text's very outset, also linked to non-human forms of life and existence. Early on in the novel, a character re-lives a sequence of interaction and dialogue with a tree, relating it through a series of analogies between human and non-human bodies, both living and not living:

When you climb a tree you must not then tell it that its branches are bad when you are up there. It will let you fall to the ground where you came from like a stone. Then all the bones inside will break like the firewood we break to cook our own food. The tree will smile at your death as they bury you inside the fingers of the tree which take food for the leaves. Then the leaves will be green – even in the dry season – with the fat from a body that is buried there. (38-39)

The 'you' in this extract indicates a mode of addressivity directed towards other human characters in the text, but also its implied readers. The speaking characters' words are often directed at other characters. *Bones* interpellates its readers' own shared humanity by occasionally explicitly allowing them to be aligned with the novel's other textually-constructed addressees as, for example, in Janifa's words: 'Marita, she is like that, a gentle fire which burns all the time. I do not know what I will do without her on this farm. Do you know that she works for me as well?' (45) Since those readers potentially include anyone with competence in English, this particular textual rendition of the Shona notion of *unhu*, or personhood, may be seen to open itself outward into a broad, trans-ethnic and transnational form of entextualised reciprocity.

Some pages later, the war songs of the people are joined by ‘trees, insects, birds [and] animals’ (52). Similarly, in a moment of supreme joy near the novel’s end, the return of Marita’s freedom fighter son is articulated through the fact that ‘all the insects can sing their song and run after the scent of the flowers’ (110). These words point at a wide-ranging form of inclusivity subsumed under the notion of the Zimbabwean nation yet to come. In *Bones*, national liberation promises an end to all kinds of human suffering. In the first decade of independence, Chenjerai Hove rendered key national symbols (to do with bones, blood and the soil) – as always-already inimical to the violences and exclusions of necropolitical naming.

Laughing at ‘war’

Kizito Muchemwa writes: ‘Zimbabwean literature, which has over the years validated [the nationalist symbolic currencies of blood, bones and death], has shifted to newer ground where writers seek to renew old symbols or discover fresh ones in the face of the state’s autocratic hold on the production of meaning [.]’ (2010, 506) Brian Chikwava is one such author. My argument here is that this ‘newer’ textual ground is, however, not new in an absolute sense: the social critique of *Harare North* echoes, amplifies and transforms earlier textual strategies, Chenjerai Hove’s among them. The critique of necropolitical naming executed by *Harare North* is ‘not very straightforward’ (as Chikwava says in the extract quoted in the previous section) because it works with displacement and exaggeration as forms of satirical speech.

The novel places an adherent of necropolitical naming (who is, nevertheless, divested of backing by state power) in contemporary London, where he refuses to diverge from old habits of thinking and speaking. He is a nameless member of the Zimbabwe ruling party’s youth militia known as ‘the Green Bombers’, who has, ironically, entered Britain as an asylum seeker fleeing from state terror. He is also the novel’s sole narrator, who describes himself and his former comrades as ‘boys of the jackal breed’ (8).

Chikwava has explained for the record how the textual/linguistic technique of *Harare North* was inspired in part by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s account of his own parodic subversion of the Communist nomenclature in former Yugoslavia:

Do you remember when you took me to those Žižek lectures [at London’s Birkbeck college in 2006], and he was talking about his student days [in Slovenia] when they were publishing this student magazine in which they were not supposed to criticise the Communist Party. So they praised the Party to such a ridiculous extent that the authorities called them in, and they were told they had to stop this thing. When they asked why they had to stop, the officials couldn’t explain what they were not happy about. They could see it was a satirical kind of exaggeration but they did not want to have to explain it! There are a lot of situations like that. The best way is not to go head to head with [what you are critiquing], but make [your work] a little bit absurd, and suddenly you have a much more interesting thing – a lot more effective. (Primorac 2010, 258)

Chikwava’s textual subversion resembles Žižek’s in the exaggerated, unself-conscious earnestness with which the language of the state is deployed. His ‘jackal boy’ has internalised a version of necropolitical naming and his sense of self is firmly bound up in it, even after it becomes clear that this makes it difficult for him to relate meaningfully to others

in his new surroundings. While *Bones* mourns the human losses incurred in the struggle for independence and Hove's later work retreats to the edge of silence, the satirical speech of *Harare North* resonates with laughter. With this novel, Chikwava parodies the rhetoric of 'war' (the 'Third Chimurenga', as Zimbabwe's 'fast-track land redistribution' is also officially known) that may in itself be described as a dark parody of Zimbabwe's war of liberation.

Harare North narrates a period of about a year in the diaspora life of the jackal boy. After arriving at Gatwick and moving in with relatives, he progresses to a Brixton squat where an old schoolmate, Shingi, lives with a group of stranded young Zimbabweans. As the jackal boy recounts his search for work and money, it becomes clear that he regards himself as a disciplined soldier of Zimbabwe's ruling party. His loyalty to Zimbabwe's president is an article of faith: 'Comrade Mugabe is powerful wind; he can blow snake out of tall grass like it is piece of paper – lift it up into wide blue sky for everyone to see.' (8-9) His London life is governed by the need to service debts from the past: regret over the un-performed *umbuyiso* (a rural bringing-home ceremony) for his departed mother, now an ancestral spirit.

Harare North is rendered in a variant of English that may also be described as an inter-language – albeit one that points in multiple directions. The jackal boy peppers his narrative with Shona and Ndebele lexical items, as well as with elements of Caribbean-inflected British urban speech. He also deploys idiosyncratic lexical usages all his own: 'parapara' and 'kak kak' function as multi-purpose intensifiers, while 'mau mau' and 'propaganda' occasionally become verbs. The irregular plural noun 'teeth' is always rendered as an infantile, linguistically 'hyper-correct' form 'teethies' (which multiplies forms of pluralization). Although the jackal boy uses complex syntax and multi-verb tenses, he usually modifies the grammatical form of auxiliary verbs by omitting suffixes, and habitually drops articles and some prepositions. In chapter nine, for example, he says:

When the past always tower over you like a mother of children of darkness, all you can do is hide under she skirt. There you see them years hanging in great big folds of skin and when you pop your head out of under the skirt you don't tell no one what you have see because that is where you come from.' (75)

Chikwava has explained (Primorac 2010) that he has arrived at this linguistic mix after a hard search: he considered using Nigerian pidgin, as well Chilapalapa - the very colonial-era language whose postcolonial usages Hove deplored in 'Still Labels', and which Simon Gikandi has described as expressing 'imprisoned, incapacitated' selfhoods. Like the language of *Bones*, the style of *Harare North* may be read as suggestive of orality, although it would be difficult to circumscribe the jackal boy's speech ethnically or nationally. A clue for how to understand it comes in chapter 23, when a figure from his past tells the jackal boy: 'Zimbabwe is a state of mind, not a country.' (183) Jackal boy's speech is best read not as a transposition of a single language or dialect, but as a linguistic representation of a necropolitan attitude towards language and culture.

Throughout *Harare North*, the jackal boy adopts—incongruously, because he is living in London--the contemporary Zimbabwean system of war-time naming: he speaks, in the vein of Olley Maruma's letter to the Herald, of 'traitors' (opposition party supporters) and patriotic loyalty to 'Comrade Mugabe'. And yet, as the extracts quoted above show, the idiom of Chikwava's novel also resembles in some respects that of Hove's *Bones*. This is so partly because the spoken style of rural Shona appropriated by Hove has by also been

appropriated by Zimbabwe's rulers. The jackal boy is thus fond of nature-related imagery, repetition, generalisation and gnomic utterances – although his speech combines these features with urban imagery and an explicit, 'indecorous' way of referring to bodies, often to comic effect ('Pubic hair is like your future; you have to find out by yourself what colour it become when time has move on.' – 88)

While the style of *Bones* has the effect of de-hierarchising character relationships, jackal boy's solipsistic monologue strives to recover and maintain the power hierarchies he left behind in Zimbabwe, even as he is surrounded by other subaltern diaspora characters in a London squat. Yet the textual rebelliousness of *Harare North* does not exhaust itself in merely rendering necropolitical speech incongruous. This novel resembles *Bones* in that it performs the ultimate impotence of such speech. Arguably, it does so in the name of a set of ethical values that resonates with those endorsed by *Bones*.

The textual surface of *Harare North* is threaded through with periodic re-deployment of a mobile group of words and concepts. Key nodes in this web of interlinked signifiers are the various grammatical permutations and collocations of: 'wind', 'native', 'possession', 'money', and 'mother'. Among them, 'mother's is clearly also central to *Bones*, while the others are arguably also prominent or implied in the novel's semantic field. Although the jackal boy is determined to pin down the meanings of words, his own monologue in fact performs a gradual re-signification of all of these, so that clusters of widely differing meanings come to inhabit each of them simultaneously by the novel's end. *Harare North* is more radical than *Bones* in its demand that readers detach themselves from the chronological textual progression and plot their own trajectories among the series of verbal repetitions, partial repetitions and re-combinations that configure it. Each act of reading is likely to do so differently. (While Ndlovu maintains that Chikwava writes for those who resemble him in being trilingual, Graham and Krishnan, more complexly, see the novel's mode of address as oscillating among several projected publics, differently spatially positioned.)

The signifier 'native' is, for example, applied to the narrator's friend, 'totemless child' (9) and 'original native' Shingi; a visiting musician--'the original native from Kinshasa (137); the narrator himself (whose email password is 'originalnative' after he has appropriated Shingi's identity, but who also describes himself as a 'new native in town' (43)), and to 'English natives' (10), so that, in the end, it comes to signify an entire spectrum of possible relationships to the notions of 'Africa' and the idea of authenticity of belonging. The signifier 'possession' undergoes a similar process. It comes to govern the relationship between the narrator and Shingi in a carefully textually calibrated manner, from the time when they play a boyish game at school (which the narrator wins by cheating), to the moment when he looks in the mirror and sees Shingi's face looking back at him. The text tasks its readers to take note of, and configure, these resonances. The social critique inscribed in *Harare North* is inseparable from this textual demand—which entails the demand that readers become conversant with the central tenet of Shona-speaking cultures, the notion of spirit possession, also central to *Bones*.

Caroline Rooney has offered a reading of *Bones* according to which Janifa (a young female farm worker) becomes possessed by Marita's rebellious spirit (1995). The textual movement via which jackal boy becomes bound to serving the incapacitated Shingi, whose identity and agency he had tried to steal, may be read as a complexly refracted echo of both the Marita/Janifa relationship, and the shift in meaning of the word 'gandanga' in Chenjerai Hove's wartime village. In *Bones*, the notion of spirit possession both channels and is

channelled by the notion of motherhood. The once-barren Marita becomes the post-independence embodiment of Nehanda not because she eventually bears a child who is to become the land's liberator, but because, in sparing the cruel white farmer Manyepo because he is another woman's child, she refuses to lose sight of cosmopolitan human interconnectedness *here and now*.

In Chikwava's novel's second chapter, the jackal boy has a ghostly vision of his dead mother in her home village, now threatened with obliteration. The suitcase with which he comes to London (and which hides his most carefully guarded secrets) 'still have smell of Mother inside.' (5) Unlike Marita, however, Chikwava's narrator privileges the material location of the village and his memory of it to the 'rural' relationality of human relationships (as also imagined by Hove) that is being performed right in front of him in the tawdry Brixton squat, where the teenage Tsitsi, looking 'like real mother' (33) sings her baby to sleep with a Shona lullaby which the novel cites in full and without translation. Later, Tsitsi is described as engulfed by a feeling of 'big rural happiness' (45) as she greets MaiMusindo, the spirit medium who lives in Brixton and who is heard speaking 'in old and deep [i.e. rural – RP] Shona into her mobile phone (45). The openness and inclusiveness that marks Hove's construction of rural space is re-enacted in London. Imagined as a cosmo-nation, 'Zimbabwe' is capable of being reconstituted in the streets of London, just as (in Hove) rural Shona is approximated by a new literary kind of English. Yet for the jackal boy, as for Zimbabwe's rulers, words are inseparable from their origins in specific things and locations.

Dave Gunning and Isaac Ndlovu each read the jackal boy himself as a version of a malevolent ancestral spirit. Yet the novel's ending, in which the jackal boy adopts Shingi's identity may also be read as rendering *him* possessed by the angry spirit of his victim. Pucherova and Krishnan are right when they stress the radical instability of jackal boy's identity and selfhood: he is both victim and oppressor, an aspiring immigrant and an instrument of the necro-political state. Because *Harare North* narrates the failure of a striving for self-realisation (no matter how misguided), the novel's temporality may be read as thwarted *Bildung*. But the temporality of *Harare North* is not static. In London, jackal boy has plenty of opportunity to reject necropolitical naming: the play of meanings that the novel sets up around the verbal pairs forgiveness/punishment, skill/kill and laughter/slaughter (whose meanings the jackal boy swaps and cross-infects in intricate chains of recurring deployment) attests to the breadth of his ethical and practical choices. In turning away from such opportunities for self-change, and sticking stubbornly to his personal necropolitical idiolect, the jackal boy re-enacts a version of Mugabeist master narrative. The possibility of Zimbabwe as a cosmo-nation (which, here, too, contains an ontological dimension, traceable via the novel's references to animals) is made evident precisely by the opportunities of love and friendship he forcibly keeps at bay.

Perhaps the most poignant and playful condemnation of necropolitical language in *Harare North* occurs in chapter 17, in which jackal boy and Shingi visit a concert at London's Southbank centre. Music played by a shabby-looking Congolese guitarist causes the narrator to come to a sharp realisation to do with humanity and belonging, which he later chooses to ignore. The novel expresses the significance of this moment with the words: 'Then it came one deadly sideways leap of the eyebrow that kill all the xenophobia, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia and yugoslavia [sic] that exist in London.' (138) Here, in and around the long and unwieldy, suggestive but empty quasi-monstrous central signifier flanked by 'xenophobia' and 'yugoslavia' (both easily associated with national dissolution and hatred) in the manner that contrasts sharply with the elegant brevity of *Kunzi*

munhu vanhu, is a concern with conviviality and compassion that echoes the silence at the heart of Hove's *Bones*. Together, the literary figures of Hove's Marita (the absent rural mother who does not narrate, but enables the narration of others) and Chikwava's jackal boy (the displaced 'warrior' son whose voice dominates the novel, impermeable to the voices of others) work across historical layers of Zimbabwe's fictional textuality to wrestle the notion of 'rural tradition' away from being appropriated by necropolitan naming, and realign it with the utopian notion of Zimbabwe as a cosmo-nation yet to come.

Post-script: literary words and the worlds of truth

On 19 November 2017, Robert Mugabe performed his refusal to acknowledge the distance between his nation's official narrative and the truth, for the last time in his role as the president of Zimbabwe. Following a take-over of state power by army generals - who, nevertheless, refused to acknowledge that their actions amounted to a coup, partly for legal reasons and partly because they sought to legitimise their own actions by invoking 'liberation war' values, he gave a widely televised 'resignation' speech in which he clung to the official notion that he was still a free agent, and did not resign. In the early days of Zimbabwe's second republic, *Bones* can be read as a literary embodiment of memory and aspiration. The same is true of *Harare North*, in which the Mugabe-like hero winds up alone and depleted of discursive resources, in a 'mental backstreet' at the novel's end. The power of literature to participate in the re-worlding of worlds is (as Pheng Cheah and Caroline Rooney [2005] separately remind us) fragile but distinct. Together, the words of Hove's and Chikwava's novels have encircled and pre-empted Mugabeist words marked by death. Their cross-hatched textual performance has the capacity signpost national futures, as they have already done in the past.

In 2004, at the funeral of fellow politician Simon Muzenda, Robert Mugabe proclaimed his party's ownership of every living being in Zimbabwe. An answer to that claim had already been inscribed in *Bones* in 1988. In 2009, *Harare North* added its own wry riposte:

Mugabe: '[T]his country and its forests, animals, even snakes and mosquitoes belongs to us.'
(Sunday Mail reporter)

Hove: 'If the birds and insects refused to sing, what would the forest be?' (76)

Chikwava: 'Truth is like termite. You just let it come out in the open and soon it is crawling all over the anthill for everyone to see.' (91)

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