REVIEW ESSAY

De-silencing the Past—Challenging "Patriotic History": New Books on Zimbabwean Literature

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BOOKS DISCUSSED:

Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture

ED. ROBERT MUPONDE AND RANKA PRIMORAC
Harare: Weaver P, 2005.
ISBN 1-86888-304-3 [available through African Books Collective, Oxford, UK; for North America: Michigan State U]

The End of Unheard Narratives: Contemporary Perspectives on Southern African Literatures

ED. BETTINA WEISS
Heidelberg: Bettina Weiss Verlag kalliope paperbacks, 2004.
ISBN 3-00-014514-1

Female Identity in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction

BY KATRIN BERNDT
Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger, 2005.
ISBN 3-927510-88-2.

African Oral Story-Telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English

BY MAURICE TAONEZVI VAMBE
Pretoria: U of South Africa P, 2004.
ISBN 1-77922-036-7

What does literary criticism mean in times of crisis? How does literary scholarship engage with developments in a country that was once hailed as a model of political and economic progress in Africa and is now often considered to be on its deathbed? In which ways do assessments of literary works reflect the heated political discourse about the Zimbabwean nation, and in which way does it enter the contested space between nation and narration?

Since 2000 the political arena in Zimbabwe has changed drastically. After the ZANU-PF government of Robert Mugabe lost the referendum for a constitutional change that was intended to enforce the position of the president, it instigated a massive and violent take-over of commercially owned farmland, blaming white farmers and the British government for the drastic economic deterioration in the country. At the same time, a broad oppositional movement spread throughout the country with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at its core, and the cities and Matabeleland at its strongholds. In the parliamentary elections of the same year, ZANU-PF used what internal and international observers described as an equally massive and violent intimidation and ensured a slight majority over the MDC. Since then Zimbabwe has been accused of systematically stifling democratic forces in the country, while the rapid downward path of the economy has led the majority of the people near starvation. After the parliamentary elections of March 2005, Operation "Murambatsvina" ("Drive Out Trash") provoked an international outcry at what appeared to many as an arbitrary onslaught on the poorest of the poor; the destruction of houses in the settlements and townships around the cities left more than 700,000 people in Zimbabwe homeless.

The publication of *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* in May 2005, which coincided with this impetuous act of urban "cleansing," reflects in the most immediate way the involvement of editors and contributors with the political discourse about the narrative of the Zimbabwean nation. A compilation of mostly excellent essays by different hands, *Versions* reads like a monograph by a single author. The various critics' voices are driven forward and held together through a common concern—their anxiety about what is happening to the Zimbabwean nation at the present time in history. The authors take as their point of departure a "writing against blindness"—as the editors entitle their introduction—a blindness resulting from the discursive effects of what the ZANU-PF government under Robert Mugabe has termed the "Third Chimurenga" (war of liberation). Against the monolithic, authoritarian (and male) version of "patriotic" history, by which the government defines Zimbabwe's past and present, the

collection sheds light on the *many* versions and *multiple* voices that challenge this narrative. This critical metanarrative, implicit in all of the essays, unfolds around the core issues of violence, silence, memory, and belonging, as well as the ways writers have represented these themes. An essential part of "debating of violence" is the operation known as "Gukurahundi," the massacres of tens of thousands of people in Matabeleland in the early 1980s, an event omitted in the official historiography of the country. From this "genocide," as a number of the authors call it, a line is drawn back to the silence covering the violence perpetrated against civilians by guerrillas during the Second Chimurenga, and forward to the present with its various forms of state violence.

During the past half century, Zimbabwe has produced some of the most prolific and finest writers from Africa; starting with veterans such as Solomon Mutswairo, Stanlake Samkange, and Lawrence Vambe in the 1950s and 1960s, followed by prominent voices emerging in the 1970s and particularly since the country's independence in 1980, such as Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi, Stanley Nyamfukudza, Chenjerai Hove, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Shimmer Chinodya, and Yvonne Vera. This is not to forget the significant body of literary works in Shona and Ndebele little known outside Zimbabwe as well as the texts of white writers such as Doris Lessing and the recently published Peter Godwin and Alexandra Fuller. Compared to this grand output of literature in three languages, there has been a marked dearth of literary criticism. The multitude of critical works that have accompanied the history of literary development in West Africa, for example, is—for various reasons—in no way equalled by studies devoted to Zimbabwean writers.

Brief preliminary introductions into Zimbabwean literature in English by George Kahari (1980) and Musaemura Zimunya (1982) were followed by my own work, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1992), which was based on a questionnaire study published as *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Education and Literary Careers* (1992). Though limited in its theoretical and analytical scope (see Chennells, "Marxist and Pan-Africanist," as well as Vambe in *Versions*), it set a framework on which the study of Zimbabwean literature relied for a long time. Rino Zhuwarara's *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* and Vambe's small compilation *Orality and Cultural Identities in Zimbabwe* followed in 2001. As regards to Shona literature, Kahari produced a voluminous critical body concentrating on the novel in Shona (four volumes, 1975–90) with categorizations and descriptions of style and plot, whereas Emmanuel Chiwome's *Social History of the Shona Novel* (1996) looked into the factors shaping this literature. A detailed analysis of about fifty white settler novels was undertaken by Anthony Chennells in his PhD thesis of 1982. Apart from these studies of sections of Zimbabwean writers, there exist a few books on individual authors, e. g., on Marechera (Veit-Wild, Chennells and Veit-Wild, and Pattison), Dangarembga (Willey and Treiber), and Vera (Muponde and Maodzwa-Taruvinga).

The new studies of Zimbabwean literature under consideration in this essay not only fill in a glaring gap but also critically engage with the scholarship of their predecessors, as it is highlighted in Maurice Vambe's contribution in *Versions* on "The Poverty of Theory in the Study of Zimbabwean Literature." Vambe challenges the sociological approach in the two influential "social histories" of Zimabwean literature (Veit-Wild and Chiwome), which he reproaches for being too deterministic

and thereby foreclosing pluralistic or ambivalent readings of literary works. Thus the recent publications make abundantly clear that the discursive and theoretical devices and analytical language that many of the critics have at their disposal have developed significantly. The new generation of Zimbabwean literary scholars is headed by graduates of the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), notably Robert Muponde and Maurice Vambe, who both have brought forward a remarkable output of critical works over the last few years. While their superb analytical expertise can certainly be attributed to the general development of literary theory, they also seem to have recuperated the best out of the combination of postnationalist and postcolonial/post-structuralist erudition of teachers at the English Department of UZ such as Rino Zhuwarara and Anthony Chennells.

Versions also reflects the changed political situation and power relations in Zimbabwe on the level of its categorization of literary texts. A crucial limitation of previous scholarship on Zimbabwean literature was the division of writers by race, by language, or by genre; that is, studies dealt with either black or white authors, with either English (of national importance) or vernacular (i.e., ethnic) texts. One of the major achievements of *Versions* is that it overcomes racial or ethnic divisions. Now that whites have become an ethnic minority and Shona and Ndebele works address questions of the Zimbabwean nation as a whole just as much as anglophone texts, the collection undertakes a critique of the various strands of Zimbabwean literature as parts of a collective national discourse. As this discourse is not restricted to specific genres, the book consequently, and in accordance with recent cultural theory, comprises analyses of a variety of genres: prose fiction (including crime fiction), autobiography/memoir, poetry, drama, and film. The discursive level of the deliberations is further enhanced through the inclusion of an essay by the historian Terence Ranger as well as Vambe's already mentioned metacritique.

As the recent developments in Zimbabwe make poignantly clear, the manipulation of language is a central element and instrument in upholding power. "Operation Murambatsvina" ("operation" already being one of the euphemisms used in the context of such actions) was quickly renamed "operation garikai—restore order" by government rhetoric. Reading Hove's collection of essays *Palaver Finish* (2002) in the context of Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity,* Carolyn Rooney argues that "for both Adorno and Hove, a certain manipulation of language is what precedes abuses of power in that language"; "'corruption'—Hove declares—'begins with the corruption of language'" (*Versions* 59 and 58). Analyzing Hove's poetry from the mid-1980s to his latest collection, *Blind Moon* (2003), Rooney observes how an increasing scarceness of words, a minimalism, reflects a withholding and resistance against the sanctification of discourse through the ruling party. The refusal to speak subverts the power of those who try to monopolize all speech(es). The important political function attributed to writers and poets is equally affirmed by Preben Kaarsholm's overview of the development of Zimbabwean writing since independence. Pointing at the way in which many literary texts have worked towards "de-silencing, and thereby helping to remove the fears and mental distortions that continue to make people un-free" (*Versions* 14), Kaarsholm concludes that "in their debating of violence Zimbabwean literary writers have fulfilled a function of social conscience, and have shown a passion of commitment unparalleled in neighbouring national literatures" (*Versions* 22).

Another discursive strand running through *Versions* regards the questions of gender and of age. "Patriotic history" in its present form, it is argued, is history written by men—more specifically, by old men. Hence the "other side" of this history is either told by women or seen through the eyes of children or younger men; this is a perspective developed by a number of writers, notably Vera, Hove, Dangarembga, Marechera, Chinodya, and Lessing, who have thematized rape, incest, or other forms of male violence towards women and children. Speaking out in public about their rape by male comrades in the guerrilla camps, female ex-combatants broke a long-guarded taboo and contributed to "de-silencing" and deconstructing the male history of the Second Chimurenga, a theme taken up in Jane Bryce's analysis of Ingrid Sinclair's controversial film *Flame* (1996). War violence as seen through the eyes of children is the focal point in Annie Gagiano's astute exploration of hitherto hardly noticed texts by Marechera, those published posthumously in the volume *Scrapiron Blues* (1994). In the surrealist play "The Alley" as well as in "The Concentration Camp," a compilation of prose, drama and poetry, Marechera digs deep into the nation's collective trauma and uncovers "those shameful and anguishing memories" (*Versions* 47); he penetrates, says Annie Gagiano, "to the most rotten core of war—its abuse of children." While in Marechera's works children appear as silent victims or witnesses of the horror of war and violence, two war novels analyzed by Muponde project children as models of newly found identities. He explains how *Son of the Soil* (1976) by Wilson Katiyo and *Child of War* (1985) by Ben Chirasha (pseudonym of Chinodya) exemplify the "nexus between childhood, history and resistance as versions of childhoods that are central to the construction of notions of belongingness in a nation-space" (*Versions* 129)

Quite different from such constructions of black childhood within the process of Zimbabwean nation-building is the way white childhood is negotiated. Ashleigh Harris and Anthony Chennells explore how the white Zimbabwean author, who now speaks from a position of "the other," of an ethnic minority, uses autobiographical fiction to question and to define identity. The ambivalent relationship between the claiming and the questioning of belonging is already reflected in the titles of Godwin's *Mukiwa—A White Boy in Africa* (1996) and Fuller's *Don't Go to the Dogs Tonight—An African Childhood* (2002), which have become best-sellers among white Zimbabweans. In both narratives, argues Harris, nostalgic representations of white childhood serve to legitimize the white self and to inscribe it into the national discourse. In *Mukiwa,* however, "personal trauma seems somehow eclipsed by national trauma," when the narrator, who has witnessed the Matabeleland massacres and testified about them to the British press, is declared *persona non grata* by the Zimbabwean government. Hence, ironically, while having found a place at the side of his fellow-Zimbabweans, he is simultaneously expelled from his country. This is where Chennells detects a moment of satire in the postcolonial white Zimbabwean autobiography. While the early colonialist autobiographical narratives contributed to the larger imperial narrative, he argues that in Zimbabwe today "minor and major histories have swapped places and probably will swap places again" (*Versions* 136). The transethnic perspective that *Versions* reflects through the inclusion of white-authored texts is enlarged by Mickias Musiyiwa and Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu's essay dealing with competing ethnicities in Shona and Ndebele literature—remarkable already for the fact that both languages are treated in the same piece of criticism. While early Shona and Ndebele

writings often depicted the relationship between the Shona and the Ndebele as hostile, younger writers turn against their elders—that is, turn against the history of the "old men"—and attack them for corruption, political hypocrisy, tribalism, or regionalism.

Place as well as ethnicity, though at times exposed to ambiguities or transformations, can become the basis for restoring a sense of identity and belonging. In her insightful and informative analysis of the urban setting in Rodwell Musekiwa Machingauta's *Detective Ridgemore Riva* (1994) and Paul Freedom's thriller *Rumours of Ophir* (1998), Ranka Primorac explains how such a sense of identity can be conveyed through a genre that so far has attracted little critical attention, the detective novel. The urban space as a space of and for women is a theme running through Yvonne Vera's works, as is underlined by Sarah Nuttall's analysis of the "material infrastructures of urban subjectivity" in Vera's city writing (*Versions* 192). In contrast, Dan Wylie focuses on questions of space and belonging in rural settings in his "ecological reading" of poetry about Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands.

The metanarrative running through *Versions* comes to a close in its last section, entitled "Writing, History, Nation." Linking Vera's *Stone Virgins* (2002) to Godwin's *Mukiwa*, which share the setting and the stories of the horrors of "Gukurahundi," to texts by a number of other black and white writers, Kizito Muchemwa takes up many of the discursive threads introduced in the preceding essays. "Secrecy guards the skeletons in the nation's cupboard," he says:

> The forces of silence are the taboos that prohibit public exposure of rape, incest, and murder in families. That which is hidden from public scrutiny cannot be spoken and cannot be written. Rape and incest—as Vera's work so powerfully shows—violently destroy language. (*Versions* 197)

Yet, Muchemwa concludes, in line with other authors of the collection, that as writing is a process of "de-silencing," it "becomes a mnemonic device of preserving lives that are 'vulnerable, exposed and hopeless'" (*Versions* 199): writing becomes resistance. Reading Vera's first novel *Nehanda* (1993) as prefiguring her last, *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Lene Bull Christiansen argues that the recreation of the nationalist myth that has cohered around Mbuya Nehanda, sustains the spiritual leadership of Robert Mugabe and the current myth-making of the ruling party. *Stone Virgins,* however, which thematizes the atrocities of the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland, exposes as an illusion the myth of the ceasefire in unison and the Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU of 1987. Christiansen concludes that "in *The Stone Virgins* the spiritual narrative of the nation has become blurred, fragmented and broken and, as such, it does not correspond with any nationalist version of the nation's temporality" (*Versions* 212). Hence Vera's last novel creates a "polyphonic narrative space" (*Versions* 215).

How precarious and endangered this space is, is made abundantly clear in Terence Ranger's concluding essay about "the struggle over the past in contemporary Zimbabwe." "Headmasters and College lecturers, if not yet university professors, have been instructed in patriotic history by war veterans," Ranger recounts. Furthermore, journalism courses "are to be restricted to entrants who have completed militia training. In November 2002 it was declared that all tertiary level students would be obliged to take a compulsory course in patriotism"

(*Versions* 235). While Ranger points at a few, scarce signs of intellectual dissent, particularly located at the State University of the Midlands under Vice-Chancellor Ngwabi Bhebe, a historian, he emphasizes that under the present circumstances "it is virtually impossible for critics to develop a counter-narrative in any systematic way" (*Versions* 242).

Despite this rather pessimistic outlook, *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* uncovers in an astoundingly comprehensive and concise way the many dissenting voices in the ranks of Zimbabwean literature, voices that contribute to alternative readings of national history and, as such, stand side by side with "the opposition, civil society activists and (what remains of) the independent media [who] are courageously challenging the official version of Zimbabwe's past, and of what it is to be Zimbabwean" (from the introduction to *Versions* xiv). Carefully edited like all books by Weaver Press, *Versions of* Zimbabwe ends with a list of all the works cited by the contributors, a compilation that constitutes a very comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography.

Though quite a number of studies have focused on questions of gender in Zimbabwe from a historical, sociological, or political perspective (e.g,. Chitauro et al., Lyons, Nhongo-Simbanegavi, Schmidt, Jeater, Sheldon), the construction of womanhood in literary texts has not yet found much attention. After Rudo Gaidzanwa's important socioliterary analysis *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* (1985), only a few articles have dealt with this topic (e.g., Dodgson, Strong-Leek), apart from two collections and numerous essays on Dangarembga and Vera. Katrin Berndt's *Female Identity in Contemporary Zimbabwean Fiction* and a collection edited by Bettina Weiss are welcome additions to the scholarship on Zimbabwean literature.

The essays in Weiss's anthology, which bears the appealing title *The End of Unheard Narratives*, deal with innovative issues in literary texts from South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe within the discourse on gender, sexuality, and the body—issues such as prostitution, homosexuality, and AIDS. The articles on Zimbabwean writing, which will be reviewed here, can be read as a pertinent addition to *Versions of Zimbabwe,* insofar as they contribute to the process of de-silencing and challenging the patriarchal narrative of the nation. With their focus on gender, some of them have a strong feminist and/or activist perspective towards empowerment. Thus Lizzy Attree's essay on the representation of HIV/AIDS in texts from South Africa and Zimbabwe asks questions such as: "Do they [the texts] incite action and provide catalysts to change? Do they provide culturally subversive narratives in countries where HIV/AIDS does not top the official political or social agenda?" (75). Beverley Dube's analysis of the figure of the prostitute in three little known short stories by Nhamo Mhiripi, Shakespeare Nyereyemhuka, and Musaemura Zimunya develops an interactive critical approach: the female reader/critic challenges the male author/narrator's attitude towards his female prostitute-protagonists. While this makes captivating reading, it would have been profitable to compare the male-authored texts with Virginia Phiri's collection *Desperate* (2002), which tells the stories of women driven into prostitution, from a female perspective. An unusual theme is treated by Robert Muponde, who—as he does in *Versions*—focuses on the perspective of children in fiction. He highlights how children's experience of violence in the sexual relations of adults brings them

to develop extreme forms of sexual violence and sadism. Three articles in the book deal with specific issues in Vera's work: the theme of memory and mourning in *Stone Virgins* (Dorothy Driver and Meg Samuelson), the metaphor of the quilt in relation to the narrative structure of Vera's novels (Jessica Hemmings), and—very interestingly—music (*mbira* and *kwela*) as a metalanguage (Charles Pfukwa).

Weiss can be commended for this first publication of her new Heidelberg-based publishing venture, "kalliope paperbacks." In addition to the good selection of texts and careful editing, the compilation appeals through its pleasing visual and material quality: a beautiful cover illustration, fine paper, and attractive page lay-out.

Katrin Berndt's study, which is derived from her doctoral thesis, presents the reader with a thorough analysis of images of women in selected novels by female and male writers: Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions,* Hove's *Bones*, Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter for my Daughter* (1992), and Vivienne Ndlovu's *For Want of a Totem* (1997). As the conceptual framework of her reading of these texts, Berndt borrows Chantal Zabus's concept of the palimpsest (see Zabus 1991). She discovers this palimpsest in the different layers of cultural inscriptions and subject positions that constitute female identity.

Berndt divides her analysis of female characters in Zimbabwean fiction into three categories: the Bildungsroman (Dangarembga), the "metahistorical narrative" (Hove, Vera), and the "realistic/didactic novel" (Maraire, Ndlovu). While the first two categories might be seen as applicable to the novels under consideration, the analytical value of the classification as a whole does not become clear. In particular the third category appears rather problematic. Not only would a novel such as *Nervous Conditions* also be classified as realist but the characterisation of "the realistic/didactic novel" as "a postcolonial continuation of orature" (chapter heading of the last part) makes a debatable correlation between a simplistic didacticism and oral literature. This is enforced by the use of terms such as "flat" vs. "round" characters in the analysis of the works in question.

The major achievement of Berndt's study can be found in her careful and often insightful readings of the various literary texts and her exploration of the "interstices" in the "negotiation" of female identity formation which appear when uncovering the literary palimpsests. However, her tendency to follow a rather conventional pattern ("plot, setting, structure") in her analysis of each novel combined with a certain inflationary use of "deconstructionist" terminology tends to make her findings somewhat repetitive and predictable.

Maurice Vambe's *African Oral Story-telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English* (2004) was generated from his PhD thesis of 2001 and therefore was conceived prior to *Versions*; nonetheless, both books focus equally on pressing concerns of the most recent years in the development of Zimbabwe. Vambe's monograph is no less astute than *Versions* in engaging critical literary discourse with a politics of resistance. Its great achievement lies in the re-evaluation of the mode of orality in regard to written texts. In doing so Vambe avoids the trap of essentializing orality as genuinely "African"—a position he explicitly challenges—nor does he equate elements of the fantastic with postmodernist writing techniques, a tendency in recent discussions on West African fiction (see Wright, Cooper). Nevertheless, the

reader at times gets the impression that he overestimates or somehow "mythologizes" the elements of volatility, elasticity, fluidity, and instability of oral forms, as he conjures up "cracks and crevices" and "fractures and fissures" in the texts that he discusses. Yet, as Vambe is an extraordinarily ingenious and complex thinker, his book takes the reader on an intellectual adventure trip with astounding turns and twists.

Drawing a line between the *sarungano* (traditional story-teller) and the modern writer, Vambe subsumes fantasy, myth, allegory, and spirit possession as oral forms to be retrieved in the Zimbabwean novel in English. His basic assumption consists in the premise that oral elements in written texts create alternative meanings which contest any monologic readings:

> [W]hether orality is found in performance, or within the novel, orality is a volatile cultural reality. Orality's inherent elasticity, its capacity to be stretched in different directions, to be framed to capture and to represent different meanings, all at the same time, suggests that orality can be used and even manipulated to author alternative narratives of resistance. (15)

The texts Vambe analyzes are wide and diverse in scope, starting with the foundation stone, Mutswairo's *Feso* (1956; a novel in Shona, later translated into English), and continuing with Samkange *On Trial for My Country* (1966), Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), Hove's *Bones* (1988), Marechera's *Black Sunlight* (1980), and Vera's *Stone Virgins* (2002). Also dealt with are Geoffrey Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1979), Wilson Katiyo's *Son of the Soil* (1976), and Mutswairo's *Chaminuka: Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983). The key issue underlying his readings is—as in *Versions*—the relationship between nation and narration: which notions of the Zimbabwean nation are projected within the imaginary space of the novel in a time span of almost fifty years?

The multiple discursive strands in *Feso,* the first novel ever published by a black Zimbabwean author, are a prime arena for Vambe's undertaking. Originally conceived by its author as a story of adventure and romance without any political intention, *Feso* lent itself to an allegorical reading about white oppression and was appropriated during the Second Chimurenga as a means to mobilize the masses, particularly its central piece, the "Ode to Nehanda," which contains a strident indictment of tyranny and oppression. Using his knowledge of Shona language and customs, Vambe points to the paradoxical effect of this Ode, which according to him mixes elements of the Christian idiom with several sub-genres of the Shona oral tradition. Belonging to the category of "clan poetry or *Nhetembo Dzamadzinza*, a form of ancestral veneration,

> the "Ode to Nehanda" works to restore the power of traditional authority as an ideology of the nationalist struggle even as the same ode claims that Africans are fighting to realize modern aspirations such as industrialization, equality, and collective and individual freedom of expression. (29)

While this is an interesting and convincing observation, I cannot follow the author's further argument that the inclusion of the "Ode to Nehanda" implies an absorption of orature into the mode of "realism" and that this blending of two "discursive systems" prevents the novel from being read in a single direction. First of all, the narrative style of *Feso* cannot be subsumed under "realism," as Vambe

himself makes clear; it belongs, rather, to the genre of romantic fantasy. Secondly, the inclusion of oral elements does not automatically imply a multiplicity of meanings and readings—an assumption that Vambe tends to uphold throughout his study.

His conclusion, however, brings in a compelling new turn of argument. He claims that "in *Feso,* the potential for different kinds of African resistance is suppressed by the author," and the national allegory that *Feso* invokes is finally undermined by the male-dominated view of African nationalism that the text promotes. Though Nehanda is a woman, Vambe says, her symbol is used to uphold a hierarchy of superiority and subordination between African men and their women. In the course of time and with the coming of Zimbabwe's independence, Mutswairo established himself as the ethnographer of the Shona-based ZANU-PF government and the author of the lyrics of the national anthem. In accordance with this development, the multiplicity of meanings that Vambe still detects in *Feso* is obliterated and taken over by a narrow and "divisive rhetoric of Shona ethno-nationalism" (43).

In addition to the complex exploration of *Feso,* the reader of Vambe's book will greatly benefit from his stimulating new reading of Hove's *Bones*. Again I am not convinced by the basic tenet that "the use of spirit-possession ensures that the novel remains open-ended," because—as he himself stresses—"spirit-possession can also be used as an ideology of authority and control" (72). However, it makes sense to juxtapose the use of the spiritual voices, which form the backdrop and frame of the narrative, with the story of the farm labourer Marita, who becomes a victim of the postindependent government authorities. While the spiritual voices create a legitimizing myth of the nationalist discourse of resistance, Marita's fate caricatures and undermines this same myth. Vambe infers that the novel puts Hove's own construction of nationalism into question. Contrasting the use of spirit possession in *Bones* with that in Vera's *Nehanda,* he comes to similar conclusions as Christiansen in her reading of that novel (see above). While *Bones*—also through its multivoiced narrative structure—ensures space for multiple meanings, the use of spirit-possession in Vera's *Nehanda* glosses over the "complexity of multiple voices with which pre-colonial Shona women fought back at their exploiters."

The last highlight of Vambe's book is his interpretation of Marechera's "difficult" novel *Black Sunlight* (1980). Using the concept of "metaphoric allegory" (1991), which "describes and registers the dislocations within 'mastering discourses' and also reveals the ambiguities, uncertainties and semantic instability within discourses of resistance," Vambe explains how in *Black Sunlight* Marechera dismantles the homogenizing tendencies of Zimbabwean cultural nationalism and the "new fascism" that has been sanctioned by the "African image." Marechera here refers to African postcolonial African states such Idi Amin's Uganda or Bokassa's Central Africa. (This is an idea he extensively follows up in his other novel, *Black Insider* [1990], a reference that is missing in Vambe's text.) Through the depiction of the urban guerrilla group in *Black Sunlight*, Marechera, who is always fighting on all fronts, is at the same time uncovering authoritarian structures within the revolutionary movement. Unlike Vambe, I do not understand this as directed primarily to the "contradictions within oppositional resistance in post-independence Zimbabwe," which did not yet exist at the time Marechera was writing his novel (i.e., 1979); in addition, in my view, it is directed to movements in Europe like the RAF

(Red Army Faction—Bader-Meinhof Group), which greatly attracted his attention. I completely agree, however, with Vambe's statement that "Marechera's subversion of nationalist politics makes the author at once, a real insider and a patriot" (96). Drawing the line from Marechera to the writers previously discussed, Vambe gives what could be regarded as the conclusion to his study:

> Where some Zimbabwean writers such as Mutswairo, Ndhlala, Samkange, Katiyo and Vera exploit various aspects of orality in their fiction, to invoke and construct a stable narrative of post-colonial resistance based on the "African image", Marechera writes in a way that undermines that image. [. . .] The instability inherent within the metaphoric allegory enables Marechera to reveal and subvert the "stable" narratives of resistance authorized by Zimbabwe's nationalist writers. In the process of doing so, Marechera shows us that there are multiple ways of using orality to construct resistance in the black novel in English in Zimbabwe. (98–99)

After this conclusion, it appears that the last chapter of the book, devoted to Vera's *Stone Virgins,* was added later. Claiming that Vera validates a new official "Ndebele historiography," Vambe develops an apologetic tone on behalf of the ZANU-PF government, a tone that, absent before, is quite irritating. Thus he maintains that

> Vera participates in the reinvention of tribalism and unfortunately, at this point in the narrative, the author's mode of revising the official ZANU war narrative is not to step outside stereotyping the new government as callous, through and through. [. . .] What the novel elides in this counter-narrative is that some Shona people also suffered in the Matabeleland disturbances. (104–05)

Such remarks, which seem to reflect certain ethnic/political sensibilities within the context of the most recent debate about Zimbabwean politics, do not, however, diminish the value of Vambe's study, which represents an extraordinary step forward in the field of criticism of Zimbabwean literature. The book needs some more careful editing, as some bibliographical references are missing or wrong.

Zimbabwe—a state in crisis? The despondency by which many people are overcome who observe developments from a distance would be overcome if they had more access to information about the many cultural activities still taking place in and around that country. Literature and literary criticism holds an important place in this process. *Walking Still* is the title of the Charles Mungoshi's last collection of short stories, published in 1997 by Weaver Press in Harare. It was succeeded by *Writing Still: New Stories of Zimbabwe* (2003), edited by Weaver Press publisher Irene Staunton; the collection brings together voices of around thirty Zimbabwean writers—black and white, well-known and newcomers—who enter new literary terrain. Its follow-up, *Writing Now,* appeared two years later in 2005 during the months of Operation "Murambatsvina." These titles reflect the spirit of defiance of writers, editors, and publishers against the general climate of oppression and moral decay around them.

The reviewed publications work in the same direction. The poignancy with which political and literary discourse intertwine in the discussed publications from Southern Africa is greatly enhanced by a call for papers that I received while concluding this essay. "Zimbabwe: The Hidden Dimensions of Operation

Murambatsvina" is the title of a new book, for which Maurice Vambe, among others, is soliciting papers. Vambe and Muponde, the driving force in the new generation of Zimbabwean literary scholars, do not stand alone. The four publications reviewed here reflect the joint efforts of African and European scholars and editors, many of a younger generation. It is to be hoped that their publications reach readers outside their respective regions of origin. The German publications, although less caught up in the extreme urgencies of the historical moment in Zimbabwe, also have their own contribution to make. This is in particular the case with Bettina Weiss's *The End of Unheard Narratives*, which assembles quite a few critics from Southern Africa, the book addresses pressing questions on the politics of body, gender and sexuality in that region.

Apart from writers, editors, publishers, and literary scholars, there exists a multitude of cultural practitioners in Zimbabwe in the fields of music, theater, film-making, health care, gender issues, journalism, etc. who keep up the spirit of resistance and work towards a democratization of the country. Their efforts are reflected in important events such as the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, the Harare International Festival of Arts, the International Film Festival, and the Women's Film Festival, to name only a few; these activities attract people from the whole region and beyond and show the international community that cultural life in Zimbabwe has not come to a stand-still. Zimbabwe is not just crisis.