

The Nucleation of White Zimbabwean Writing

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Summary

Considering literature as a system in dialogue with non-literary systems, this article discusses the ways in which white writing in Zimbabwe finds itself marginalised from mainstream Zimbabwean literature owing to monological approaches which see the literary system as uniform, static and closed. Feeding from, and into, political, media and literary discourses on belonging, these approaches accomplish the *nucleation* of the system by imposing various forms of nuclei in the form of Rhodesian/colonial sensibilities and allegiances which white writing supposedly has. While it is true that some white narratives exhibit strong affinities towards the colonial past, it should also be noted that such narratives are only part of the system and resultantly the system should not in any way be reducible to this or any other segment. *Enucleation* is proffered as an alternative conceptualisation of the literary and cultural system in that it redeems systems from the demands of sameness and stasis. The place white writing occupies in Zimbabwe's post-2000 cultural landscape, for instance, serves to illustrate how questions of memory and heritage always involve the intertwining of several cultural forces.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel oorweeg literatuur as 'n stelsel in dialoog met nie-literêre stelsels en bespreek die maniere waarop blanke skryfwerk in Zimbabwe dit in 'n gemarginaliseerde posisie van hoofstroom Zimbabwiese literatuur bevind as gevolg van monologiese benaderings wat die literêre stelsel as eenvormig, staties en geslote beskou. Hierdie benaderings put uit en lewer op hul beurt weer bydraes tot politieke, media- en literêre gesprekke oor verbondenheid, en bereik daardeur die *nukleasie* van die stelsel deur verskeie vorme van nukleï in die vorm van Rhodesiese/koloniale gevoelens en verbande waarvoor blanke skryfwerk skynbaar beskik af te dwing. Ofskoon dit waar is dat sommige blanke narratiewe sterk affiniteite jeens die koloniale verlede vertoon, moet 'n mens ook daarop let dat sulke narratiewe slegs 'n deel van die stelsel is en gevolglik moet die stelsel nie op enige manier tot dít of enige ander segment gereduseer word nie. *Enukleasie* word voorgedra as 'n alternatiewe konseptualisering van die literêre en kulturele stelsel in die sin dat dit stelsels van die eise van soortgelykheid en stase verlos. Die plek wat blanke skryfwerk in Zimbabwe se kulturele landskap ná 2000 beklee, illustreer byvoorbeeld hoe kwessies van herinnering en nalatenskap altyd met die onderlinge ineenstrengeling van verskillende kulturele magte gepaardgaan.

JLS/TLW 32(3), Sep./Sept. 2016
ISSN 0256-4718/Online 1753-5387
© *JLS/TLW*
DOI: 10.1080/02564718.2016.

UNISA 


SASAAL
SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR ANTHROPOLOGY
XXXI
SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR GENERAL
LITERARY STUDIES

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

Introduction

This article has a dual purpose. Firstly, by considering literature as part of a cultural polysystem, it draws attention to the place white writing in Zimbabwe is allotted in the mainstream cultural history of Zimbabwe, particularly in the post-2000 era. Secondly, and related to the first, it sets the stage for a critical model which seeks to free cultural systems from the burden of monological approaches that pursue false unities and uniformities – approaches which encourage the system to gel around posited cultural points, what I call *nuclei*, constructed as the life of the system. These approaches participate in *cultural nucleation*: the imposition of a nucleus or nuclei into a cultural system. No literary system operates in isolation. Rather, literature establishes dialogical and contested links with several other systems within (and beyond) the cultural polysystem. Among these systems are political and ideological ensembles that serve as contexts in which literature is located. In these interactions arise literary prototypes which become the loci of encounter and meaning. For instance, it may happen that literature becomes intimately entangled with the political ideology of the day and the former is forced to adopt a political model which becomes the image of the literary system.¹ Such a model becomes a nucleus, that which is upheld as the frozen image of the system. A discussion of Zimbabwean white-authored texts would therefore be incomplete outside a general discussion of the place of white writing among the systems with which it comes into dialogical contact and encounter, and how the relations arising from this encounter impoverish and/or enrich the literary system.

In this article I therefore draw attention to a number of related processes of nucleation in the white Zimbabwean literary system, that is, how a black nationalist criticism, a political discourse on whiteness and a media discourse have contributed to a narrow conceptualisation of white writing in Zimbabwe as irrevocably “Rhodesian” or colonialist, for instance. While there is evidence to validate the accusations of Rhodesian bias in some white narratives, it is also true that nucleation is based on reductionist methods where differences are forced to dissolve and crystallise into prototypes. The tendency is usually to take the most unattractive writers, for instance Ian

1. An extreme case may be found in socialist [Russia](#), in the early 1920s, when a literary model, socialist realism, was adopted in order to limit popular culture to an exact, extremely structured faction of creative expression. What came to be considered Russian literature then was socialist realist literature, that which replicated the political model. I consider this an extreme case because it is too obvious, with high level politicians including Stalin believed to have personally developed the model. Nucleation, mostly, takes subtle forms. Other forces, which appear disinterested and neutral effectively ensure the imposition of nuclei. The discussion of white writing may shed light in this regard.

Smith,² and use them to dismiss the rest. The most attractive also serve a similar purpose under different circumstances. Processes of cultural nucleation obviously operate in all cultural systems, and it would be naïve to imagine that only white Zimbabwean writing is treated in this way. Black Zimbabwean writing has its share of impoverishments owing, for instance, to the aforementioned black nationalist criticism and a political discourse on patriotism and its obverse, treason. Indeed, the positing of white writing as “Rhodesian”, “retrogressive” and therefore “unpatriotic” is enabled by a perception of black writing as its opposite and hence burdened with nuclei deriving from a similarly narrow conception of black Zimbabwean writing. For instance, black Zimbabwean literature can be seen as “nationalist” only if a specific form of nationalism is imposed on it. In the end those writers, texts and styles that are seen to conform to the nationalist grade are celebrated as the image, not of black Zimbabwean literature, but of Zimbabwean literature in total. Anything that does not fit the criteria becomes not-Zimbabwean literature.

Work on enucleation (the movement from nucleation) as a theory of culture is still in progress. Put simply, the term speaks of attitudes and behaviours that underlie our engagement with cultural artefacts – in particular, how the cultural system is regulated, replicated, historicised and mythologised. In biophysics, nucleation refers to a process whereby a change in state within a cell begins to occur around nuclei, enabling temporary exponential growth until, inevitably, the cell stabilises and no further growth is possible. It is not difficult to see how this process works in the literary system, for example. Zimbabwean literature (read “black”), experienced rapid growth in the 1980s and 1990s following independence from colonial rule in 1980 and the attendant need to create a new national ethos through a revised history of the country. Barnes (2007: 633) remarks that the new ZANU PF³-led government’s drive was “nationalist, Africa-centred and Marxist-inspired.” Similar processes were occurring in the literary system, where new heroes and models had to be found in order to replace the Eurocentric colonial literature of Rhodesia. Such a decolonisation move was necessary, until it became imbued with paranoia and a constricted, self-serving, agenda of marginalisation. Works of the pre-1980 era, for example Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and Dambudzo Marechera’s *House of Hunger* (1978), were given a new lease of life and came to symbolise Zimbabwean literature. Beginning with Zimunya’s *Those Years of House and Hunger* published in 1982, the “birth” of Zimbabwean literature was on course and it evolved (and continues to evolve) around the writers of the 1970s and 1980s,

2. I refer in particular to Ian Smith’s *The Great Betrayal*, which is an unapologetic celebration of white minority rule and ideology. It may be accurate to say in the text Smith defends the indefensible.

3. Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front.

among them the aforementioned Mungoshi and Marechera. Imagining Zimbabwean literature outside these pioneering writers, posited as nuclei of the system, has never been easy. Enucleation advocates the removal of nuclei from cultural systems in order to promote multiplicity, difference and movement. Nucleation, which promotes the existence of nuclei in a system, tends to stifle the system, thereby creating conditions for its underdevelopment and premature death.

White Zimbabwean Writing as Part of a Cultural System

I begin by pointing out that in literary evaluation “there is neither a first nor a last word” (Bakhtin 1986: 170). Broadly, the article takes its cue from a renewed acknowledgement, following Bakhtin, of the fundamentally *dialogic* nature of utterances. For Bakhtin (1986: 104), two aspects define the text as an utterance: its intention and the fulfilment of this intention. The intention represents the “centripetal” need to unify a text and stabilise its meaning while the process of fulfilling this need entails a “centrifugal” destabilisation of the text amid heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1986: 269-270, 274, 423). One might argue, extrapolating from Bakhtin and others, including Derrida, that this process involves divergences, slippages, simultaneities and contradictions. This is a struggle, an ongoing process of dialogic tension, which is widely acknowledged in critical theory at large to be a significant feature of all writing, in particular novelistic writing, and it would take a very long stretch of the critical imagination to find that white writing in Zimbabwe should be any different. This article, then, seeks to establish a critical-theoretical basis upon which to contest a surprisingly wide range of authoritative academic positions in the canon of critical writing on Zimbabwe in which white Zimbabwean writing is regarded, broadly, as a retrograde monologue, and as unacceptably monolithic – literally beyond the pale – both in general and in its specific manifestations.

An understanding of white writing as part of a cultural system is premised on polysystem theory, which considers all semiotic categories (literature, language, ideology, politics, culture and economy, for example) as compositions “of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap” (Even-Zohar 1979: 290). “Polysystem”, as opposed to “uni-system”, accounts for the dynamic, diverse and stratified nature of each system with a view to exploring the relations existing among the various strata constituting a system and with those of other systems. Considering literature as part of a polysystem, that is, an encompassing unit comprising various literary sub-systems distributed between the polysystem’s centre and its periphery, calls for an understanding of “stratificational oppositions” (Even-Zohar 1979: 296). In the Bakhtinian sense, these might be styled as the dialectical tensions that characterise such a polysystem. Such tensions, marked by the push-pull

forces of centre and periphery, are inherent in every system. In the case of Zimbabwe's polysystem – comprising literary systems such as black writing, white writing, literature in the vernacular, children's literature and translated literature – these tensions manifest themselves in the tentative positions literary works hold in the polysystem at any given historical moment and the displacements that occur as some literary texts move from the periphery to the centre and vice versa. Even-Zohar calls such interactions “conversions”. During the time of Rhodesia, for example, white writing occupied the centre of the literary polysystem and black writing existed in the margins. However, after 1980 this hierarchical structure was transformed.

Processes of Nucleation

The “oppositions” of centre and periphery that characterise the literary polysystem are understood not as primarily literary, but socio-cultural. In other words, the literary polysystem interacts with other polysystems, such as language, ideology and politics, to the effect that the stratified relations governing it are constrained by other systems (Even-Zohar 1979: 301). In Zimbabwe, the literary polysystem is largely constrained by a socio-cultural polysystem dominated by a black governing elite whose official ideology on belonging has distinct racial undertones. The official ideology has influenced other semiotic systems, such as literature, by affecting and helping to fix (or determine) their respective centres and peripheries. Accordingly, “facts of ‘literary life’ i.e., literary establishments such as popular criticism (not scholarship), publishing houses, periodicals and other mediating factors, are often ‘translation’ functors of the ‘more remote’ constraining socio-cultural system” (Even-Zohar 1979: 297). The question of which literary texts should be celebrated and which derided in Zimbabwe after 1980 is largely extraneous to the literary polysystem. For the most part, it is an element of an ongoing dialogue between the Zimbabwean literary polysystem and a socio-cultural polysystem governed by core principles of black nationalism. The part played by critics across various disciplines, by educators, the media and government in the creation of centre and periphery in a literary polysystem cannot be overstated. As already pointed out, calls for a revision of the education system by the Zimbabwean government in the 1990s, culminated in the publication of history texts deemed appropriately nationalist (Barnes 2007). The call was also met in the literature components of the school's curriculum. In this regard, examinable texts studied at schools, especially after the introduction of the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC), were either texts written by blacks or white narratives considered pro-nationalist, for example Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1973), largely acclaimed for its anti-colonialist sentiments, Patricia Chater's *Crossing the Boundary Fence* (1988), seen as contributing towards a ZANU PF agenda of reconciliation grounded

in silences about the “politically incorrect” aspects about the past (Tagwirei 2013a) and Michael Gascoigne’s *Tunzi the faithful Shadow* (1988), which replicates official discourse on citizenship and belonging (Tagwirei 2013b).

Prevailing discourses on nationalism therefore have the effect of excluding the majority of white voices from any meaningful “narration of the nation” (Bhabha 1990) in Zimbabwe. A strong discourse of black nationalism has dominated political and critical thinking in Zimbabwe since 1980. Prominent critics are seen to endorse a monological approach to Zimbabwean literature, one that overlooks the multiple systems comprising the Zimbabwean literary environment. This monological approach to the subjects white writing deals with is confined to very particular modes of critical observation and refuses to consider the possibilities of alternative or contradictory understandings. Such myopia is not confined to individual critics alone, but also emerge in narratives about whiteness in Zimbabwe authorised by the state. These narratives, largely voiced by the ruling party in Zimbabwe, seek to constrict dialogue on belonging by imposing a monolithic and hegemonic discourse upon critical areas such as the nationalist war, land reform, the Rhodesian past and the question of whiteness itself. Monologic accounts of Zimbabwean nationhood all but deny whites a place in Zimbabwe and, as a result, literature by whites also suffers from either systematic neglect or dismissive criticism.

In the field of literary studies, some narrations of nation are inseparable from the “institutional” uses of fiction, where certain literary works and historical texts are employed and deployed in the service of nationalist ideology (Brennan 1990). These “national narratives” not only result in the creation of “foundational fictions” (Bhabha 1990: 5) which, in current Zimbabwean literary criticism, are likely to refer to black “patriotic” writing; such narratives also create “moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation” (5). They delineate boundaries of national belonging by disowning and excluding specific groups. The texts contain monolithic representations of “white colonisers” and settlers, on the one hand, and “black decolonisers” and indigenes, on the other. This black/white racial binary, accompanied by essentialised notions of indigeneity, is key to how the new Zimbabwean nation has been imagined in recent times (Raftopoulos & Mlambo 2009; Raftopolous 2005; Muzondidya 2010). Incidentally, Rhodesia as a nation was also predicated on essentialist notions about race. In Zimbabwe, in turn, ethnic minorities, such as coloureds, Asians and descendants of immigrants from Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, have been alienated. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 3) typifies these monolithic narratives as “praise-texts” to account for their contribution to a “monologic account of the past” which reinforces ZANU PF’s authoritarian construction of the nation.

In Zimbabwe after 1990 (and especially since 2000), the ethnic and vernacular aspects of the construction of the nation – which emphasise descent, common ancestry, myths, history and presumed family ties – have

prevailed over the civic elements, which emphasise law, institutions and territorial boundaries. Such ethnic and vernacular elements find expression in what has been referred to as “patriotic history” (Ranger 2012). Patriotic history – or in Muzondidya’s terms (2010: 6), “ZANU PF’s populist politics of racial nationalism” – has often been used to alienate minorities and, more significantly, their narratives from what one might describe as *orthodox* national discourses. In most respects, Zimbabwe’s pre-1980 liberation struggle memory is central to these discourses, providing “a classificatory scheme, the wherewithal to think about who belongs, and how, to the Zimbabwean nation” (Fisher 2010: 79). The struggle is reconstituted as “the central legitimizing factor” framing “the boundaries of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ to the nation” (Raftopoulos & Mlambo 2009: xxviii). Notably, orthodox nationalist discourses resemble a “monologue” (Raftopoulos 2005: xiii). They are monologues precisely because they proscribe the space for dialogic contestation or problematisation. In this regard, ethnic/vernacular aspects of identity and the liberation struggle memory both serve as nuclei outside of which Zimbabwe is deemed unthinkable.

Pro-government media has also contributed to literary consecration in Zimbabwe. *The Patriot*, a weekly Zimbabwean newspaper established in 2011, has led a crusade against virtually all white writing. Ironically, it is to this newspaper’s credit that it has given more attention to white writing than most literary critics of Zimbabwean literature combined. In its book review section, one is almost always likely to come across predictably damning reviews of white writers. In “a round-up of 2013 book reviews” published in *The Patriot* of 19 December 2013 under the same title, Melinda Chikukura-Teya and Shingirirai Mutonho rightly point out what has been, and remains, the core objective of their reviews of white writing when they say:

We have been accused of many things one of them which is giving unfair coverage to the white narrative. Some of our readers felt that the white contribution to our Zimbabwean literature was of no consequence as the reading culture was fast diminishing. Our response is simple. If you see a snake in your house playing with your child you first kill the snake and save your child whom you will later admonish.

They further emphasise the need to “expose the serpent-like characteristics in some of the narratives”. The implication is that white writing is important to Zimbabwean literature only for the ideological and political dangers it poses for (black) Zimbabweans. A recurrent theme in *The Patriot* reviews of white narratives is that Zimbabwe is under siege from “Rhodesian” literature, an essentialist descriptor of all white narratives after 1980. Although official censorship against white Zimbabwean writing has never been effected, broader social mechanisms have managed to proscribe white writing with relative success. As a result, studies of the Zimbabwean literary polysystem generally cover black writing and exclude or marginalise white writing. In

consequence, a more critical dialogue between polysystems is key to discussions of both Zimbabwean literature and white writing in Zimbabwe.

Existing criticism on Zimbabwean writing since 1980 pursues a literary historiography symptomatic of the orthodox narratives discussed above – in two ways. Firstly, it commits an error of omission by exclusively focusing on black Zimbabwean writing, thereby ensuring the exclusion of white writing. This can be accounted for by the fact that some critics (Zimunya 1982; Zhuwarara 2001; Chivaura 1998) adopt a black nationalist-cum-socialist ideological approach to Zimbabwean literature in line with prevailing state-centric ideology. Criticism about white writing adheres broadly to what Macherey (1978: 3) calls “criticism-as-condemnation”, which implies “a gesture of refusal, a denunciation, a hostile judgment”. This form of criticism can be noted in *The Patriot* reference above and Irele’s (1990) ambivalence towards white South African writers, such as Paton, Gordimer, Fugard and Coetzee, whose works’ commitments to the experiences of the black community in South Africa he finds distinct from that of metropolitan writers such as Conrad. Despite this difference, Irele insists that the white writers referred to are “bound [...] to the European literary tradition” because “they do not display the sense of a connection to an informing spirit of imaginative expression rooted in an African tradition” (60). This informing spirit ideally expresses itself through oral literature, “the basic intertext of the African imagination” (56). Certainly, insisting on the orality of Zimbabwean literature (Chiwome 1998; Zhuwarara 2001; Vambe 2004) serves to marginalise white Zimbabwean narratives and simultaneously nucleate or impose an image on the former (Zimbabwean literature). Of course white authored texts can deploy oral forms, but the belief is that orality is synonymous with black Zimbabwean literature.

Describing white writing as irrevocably Rhodesian/European, that is, as “bound [...] to the European literary tradition” (Irele 1990: 60) is common to Zimbabwean criticism. Primorac and Muponde (2005: xvi), for instance, allude to Zimunya’s (1982) use of “European” as a “denigrating descriptor” meant to dismiss such writing from what is considered “serious” Zimbabwean literature. Chennells’ “Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel” (1982), described by its author as “the first study that has been undertaken of novels which are wholly or partly set in Southern Rhodesia and which are written by whites” (vii), points to an ambivalence about white writing well before 1980. According to Chennells, critics generally either ignored Rhodesian novels or treated them as South African. In rare cases, commentators focused on “the more substantial names like Haggard, Kipling and Buchan” (viii). Despite such marginalisation, Chennells argues for the Rhodesianness of white writing before 1980 on the basis of its writers’ “sense of community and future” (x). He identifies different “settler myths” and how they informed various novels of this period, from the earliest writings by explorers and missionaries to the time of the liberation war. In other words,

Chennells argues that a white Rhodesian literary tradition existed on the basis of shared perceptions of community by white writers. Pre-1980 white writing is therefore recognised in literary criticism as a specifically *Rhodesian* literary category (Chennells 1982, 1995; Zhuwarara 2001; Pichanick, Chennells & Rix 1977). The term “Rhodesian writing” is at times interchanged with “settler” writing as a way of highlighting its links to empire, racism and prejudice.

Post-2000 criticism has failed to resolve the ambivalence regarding white writing’s place in the Zimbabwean literary polysystem. Javangwe (2011: 64), for instance, categorises work by Ian Smith and Godwin as “white Rhodesian settler life narratives” and later defines Godwin, whose memoirs *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* and *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* appear in 1997 and 2006, respectively, as “a white writer in Rhodesia” (90) despite setting out to examine how the self and the nation are constructed in “*Zimbabwean* political auto/biography” (emphasis added) (7). Lessing is depicted as “a prolific *Rhodesian/Zimbabwean* writer” (emphasis added) (190), something which also reflects the ambivalence of Lessing whose literary affinities were never straightforward nor clear. Malaba and Davis (2008) exhibit a similar ambivalence, declaring its interest in “Rhodesian” and “Zimbabwean” literature of different languages and genres. The text locates white writers within the Rhodesian space. The white writers do not, as part of the “transitions” depicted in the title of Malaba and Davis’ work, evolve into Zimbabwean writers. They remain settler/Rhodesian writers. After a detailed analysis of Smith and Godfrey’s autobiographies, Javangwe concludes that writings by whites in Zimbabwe expose “a reluctance of settler identities to metamorphose into the parameters that define the new Zimbabwean identity” (112). This observation echoes Alexander (2004: 210), who considers whites in Zimbabwe “Orphans of the Empire” because “their self-perceptions and identity construction [...] has prohibited them from ‘emigrating’ to Zimbabwe”. Literature by whites, then, is seldom seen as occupying an integral position in the country’s literary and cultural systems. White Zimbabwean writing is deemed to belong to those narratives that fail to satisfy the demands of “patriotic history”. Consequently, white writing in Zimbabwe exists in the margins, an alternative, sub-cultural literary form. In the work of the nationalist-cum-socialist critics, works written by whites seem to warrant automatic exclusion from the nationalist project since whiteness, for these critics, connotes not just foreignness and a lack of indigenous status, but also a perceived lack of patriotism.

It is not an exaggeration to say nationalist narratives by politicians, literary critics and the media have a profound effect on how we engage with white writing. The networks that exist among the several systems which constitute the Zimbabwean polysystem are quite evident. A clear case of literature’s symbiotic relationship with other cultural systems can be seen through Zhuwarara’s (2001) selection of writers on the somewhat technical basis of

their works being found “either on school syllabi in Zimbabwe or on literature curricula at universities both in Zimbabwe and abroad” (25). However, Zhuwarara neither points out the virtual exclusion of white writing in studies of literature in Zimbabwean schools and universities nor does he try to redress it. In fact, the reality that white Zimbabwean writers are left out of school syllabi and university curricula seems not only to suit him but also to sit well with his ideological preferences. Until 2001, when Zhuwarara’s text was published, only three white-authored texts with a Zimbabwean focus had been studied in Zimbabwean schools. These are the afore-mentioned *Tunzi the Faithful Shadow* (1988) and *Crossing the Boundary Fence*. This list also includes *Rumours of Ophir* (1998), a detective story by Paul Freeman. Currently, the only other notable white Zimbabwean text included in the Advanced Level Literature in English syllabus is Bryony Rheam’s *This September Sun* (2009), albeit included under the “African” literature section despite the presence of a Zimbabwean Literature section. Literature courses at the three universities that teach literature in Zimbabwe (University of Zimbabwe, Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe University) focus overwhelmingly on black writing. Only Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* (initially published by Michael Joseph in 1950 thirty years before independence) attracts the interest of the university curriculum designers. By determining which literature set-books will be examined at various levels in schools, for example, curriculum designers and educators make certain texts visible while simultaneously making others invisible.

Setting the Stage for Enucleation

It should be observed that nucleation naturally evokes its opposite, *enucleation*, whose purpose is to rid the system of nuclei. Enucleation is thus seen in several literary/cultural practices which privilege dialogue, multiplicity and movement as opposed to monologue, sameness and stasis. The stage for a polyphonic reading of Zimbabwean literature is set by Muponde and Primorac (2005), who maintain that literary texts “imagine multiple versions of Zimbabwe, and it is only a multiplicity of approaches and opinions that can do this variety true justice” (xv). Muponde and Primorac place emphasis on “plurality, inclusiveness and the breaking of boundaries” (xviii). It is in the spirit of this greater critical elasticity that Harris, Chennells and Muchemwa, all appearing in Muponde and Primorac’s *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* are to be understood. Whereas Chennells (1982, 1995) addresses what he refers to as “settler myths” and illustrates how these informed the Rhodesian (i.e. white) mentality before and during the war of liberation, his “Self-representation and National Memory: White Autobiographies in Zimbabwe” (2005) examines the autobiographies of Ian Smith, Peter Godwin and Doris Lessing as “white”

subversions of “the self-serving historical memory of Zimbabwe’s ruling party, ZANU (PF)” (133), while remaining guarded in his classification of the texts, which he refers to as “white autobiographies in Zimbabwe” (131). Considering that all three writers exist outside Zimbabwe geographically and at times ideologically (as is the case with Ian Smith), Chennells’ guarded approach seems justified. Nevertheless, such an approach underlines the problem of categorizing white writing in Zimbabwe as essentially extraneous.

Harris (2005) dwells insightfully on the nostalgic and traumatic aspects of white writing in Zimbabwe. The way she handles the two texts demonstrates that white writing in Zimbabwe does not subscribe to a single mode of expression. Trauma and nostalgia are singled out as two of the several modes of white writing that one is bound to encounter in the literary system. Significantly, she points out that whiteness “has a somewhat ambiguous space in the discursive matrix” (117). Likewise, Muchemwa’s “Some Thoughts on History, Memory and Writing in Zimbabwe” represents a refreshing juxtaposition of black and white Zimbabwean writers whose texts are not only “Zimbabwean”, but also “shaped by history [...] and respon[sive] to it” (196). Of the eight texts Muchemwa examines, three are by white writers. Muchemwa demonstrates that Zimbabwean literature by both blacks and whites can share certain thematic and aesthetic aspects. Such a view acknowledges the importance of white writing in Zimbabwe’s literary tradition.

Primorac’s (2006) challenge to Zimbabwean literary criticism to rise above the classifications and subsequent stratifications of literary traditions based on language and race is valuable. Primorac objects to the fact that previous discussions of Zimbabwean literature have been characterised by “the separation of the national literary field into several ‘streams’” (6). She claims that her approach, informed by “the concept of literary function” (16), allows her to go beyond categories linked to race and language. She also acknowledges “the pre-eminence of black writing in English” in Zimbabwean literary criticism (6) and the tendency by critics to judge writers along political lines. *The Place of Tears*, Primorac (2) tells us, comprises “an exploration of the ways in which Zimbabwean fictional texts rehearse, refract and interrogate political themes and events. It starts from the premise that *all literature has the capacity to participate in and comment on social change*” (emphasis added). This steamrolling of literary value, wherein lies the logic of enucleation, should not be taken lightly. It incites literary equity in systems where otherwise some writers and some texts are considered more important than others.

This study of white writing in Zimbabwe represents just one of the ways in which cultural texts are regulated, historicised, replicated and mythologised. I consider these four activities the most evident ways through which cultural systems become *nucleated* or burdened with nuclei. The nucleus is that which is showcased or exhibited as culture. When demands to *see* culture arise (as it

does often), to create a spectacle, the pressure to freeze the movements occurring in the cultural system increases. In those moments Zimbabwean literature is reduced to a few celebrated writers or a stylistic mode or a particular sensibility. That singularity that we uphold for others to see, the essential image arising from the cumulative *practices* that regulate, replicate, historicise, and mythologise the cultural system, —is what defines a [literary cultural](#) nucleus. The nucleus is therefore that which is displayed in a museum, entered in the roll of honour, turned into a nation’s anthem or used to signpost existence. The challenge for enucleation is to identify cultural nuclei in terms of the range of forms that they take in any given system, theorise how and why practices of enucleation are enacted and enable the emergence of a cultural prokaryote, that is, a system with no nucleus.

Nucleation brings with it blind spots. We may fail to see and appreciate various other movements that are occurring in the cultural system, movements that point to the growth of culture and the diversity that it offers. The ability to see movement, not inertia, and the capacity to accept multiplicity, to acknowledge diversity, stands at the heart of a view that is able to achieve enucleation. Nucleated systems are retrogressive, main-taining a fixed backward glance at all times. There is a paranoid search for origins. There is always an emphasis on the point of origin in the literary system, who its pioneers are, and who its literary gurus are. It emphasises that which is customary rather than that which is deviant or surprising. In this regard we find in the nucleated system pitfalls such as one finds in any autocratic political system: it is a setting in which one always idolises the leader, and invariably it creates a relationship between leaders and mythical versions of the past, figures or heroes. Critics and students of culture are drawn towards an illusory stability, finding it easier to work with essentialised and known systems than with migrant ones. Cultural nuclei, it seems, attempt to limit literary life through the imposition of various centres and margins. The moment a text exceeds the limit, it threatens the entire system. This is when certain writers and texts become the subject of expulsion. It is when certain writers, musicians and actors fall in and out of favour, when some subjects are considered taboo and innovative critical methods fail to penetrate the rigid boundaries of the cultural system.

Questions of memory, heritage, “transformation” and textual placement make better sense in the context of these realities. To say “Rhodes must fall”,⁴ for instance, is to simultaneously bring Rhodes into sharp focus as a nucleus regulating, replicating, historicizing and mythologizing the colonial past and to move him into soft focus and render visible hitherto obscured narratives.

4. Rhodes Must Fall (#RhodesMustFall) is a protest movement against institutional racism, which began on 9 March 2015 with a campaign for the removal a statue commemorating Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. The protests gained widespread popularity, spanning other South African universities and inciting debate in and outside South Africa.

The memories people exhibit at any given time reflect the aforementioned practices of nucleation, which result in some memories being frozen in time and space, and becoming the essential images of a system. “#Rhodesmustfall” therefore has the ingredients for breaking the rules, flouting the reproductive cycle, demythologising the text and turning monostory, the dangerous “single story” (Adichie 2009), into polystory. At the same time, to enucleate is not to replace one nucleus ~~with~~ another. The task of enucleation is perpetual vigilance. It is to heed Fanon’s (2008: 181) final prayer: “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!”

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