

A Critical Review of Ideological Trends in the Study of Zambian Literature in English

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ABSTRACT:

Two ideologically divergent schools of thought have emerged in the study of Zambian literature in English. The first one rooted in imperialist doctrines emerged in the early 1980s and continues to influence many studies on Zambian literature to this day. The second one with a clear object of the renaissance of world literatures like that of Zambia is recent. It begun towards the end of the second decade of the 2000s and challenges the first one. This paper gives a critical discussion of studies that constitute and mark these two trends. It is a desktop research that employs the documental analysis informed by the historical cultural materialism theory. It concludes that the imperialist school of thought overlook and impoverish our understanding of the wider ideological and political context in which Zambian literature in English has and is evolving and the world literary scene on which we encounter it. Then, the renaissance school of thought does not just remedy this ideological problem but creates an opportunity for us to study Zambian literature in English as a distinct local realist tradition that is organically developing and in transition.

Key words: Ideology, Imperialism, Renaissance, Zambian Literature

Introduction

This paper is an attempt at discussing two major schools of thought in the scholarly exploration of Zambian literature in English. The discussion is informed by the historical cultural materialism theory that seeks to understand literary texts historically. It emphasises the historical and social context of a literary text and holds that the circulation of literary and non-literary texts produces relations of social power within a culture. All acts of creative expression and the appreciation of such creativity are embedded in the material conditions of a culture. They, literary texts and their discussion thereof, reveal the economic and social realities especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion. Thus, it is in light of the interlinkage and interplay between literature and ideology that this paper analyses several studies that have taken interest in Zambian literature in English to show how their analyses of Zambian literary texts have ideologically created two schools of thought. This does not necessarily mean that the studies explored herein are all ideologically conscious. Grant (2003) in his article titled *Imagining the Real: Essays on Politics, Ideology, and Literature* reminds us that whatever stance one takes is ideological and a power struggle including the decision not to be ideological because such a position serves unacknowledged interests. That the difference between the two schools of thought is ideological and founded on power politics of the world literary scene and the historical context of Zambia, this paper begins by discussing the interplay between literature and ideology.

Ideology and Power Politics in Literature

The analysis of ideology and power in literature is not a new phenomenon the world over. Traditionally, the terms “ideology” and “power” in relation to literature was known to be typical of Marxist criticism. But today, as Moriarty (2006) shows, these terms have been used by non-Marxist critics, especially in examining forms of domination apart from those of class (sexual, racial, colonial). He notes that the British

Library alone, for example, “has over 200 works, mostly from 1980 on, whose title contains the word ‘ideology’ and whose subject-matter is literature” (Moriarty, 2006, p.59). Realizing that it is impossible to survey this whole range, Moriarty analysed nine of the most recent works since 2000 in order to give a snapshot of the fact that the terms ideology and power continue to be used in contemporary studies.

From his survey, Moriarty (2006) observed that, first, the term ideology has not outlived its usefulness in literary studies. It has transcended the traditional view of limiting it to social class. He argues, for instance, that “in reaction to the failure of attempts to produce a satisfactory class-based theory of gender ideology, the term ‘ideology’ has been reconceived in more general terms of domination or power, without a necessary basis in social class” (Moriarty, 2006, p.53). Second that the word ideology best describes all formal procedures writers use to “challenge colonialist and Orientalist literary strategies of containment” (Moriarty, 2006, p.53) because such strategies aim at liberation. Third, and similarly, the emergent field of “whiteness studies” of American literature and popular culture of the 1920s and the feminist women writers dealing with separate spheres and functions for women and men are best understood as works rooted in ideology particularly racial ideology and domestic ideology respectively. Fourth, ideology denotes the responses of artists to the political culture or climate in a general sense, where ‘politics’ might have been taken to imply more direct involvement in the political process or merely the philosophical imagination of the same. He concluded his survey by stating that ideology is now so established in a non-Marxist sense that its users often feel no need to relate their own handling of these terms to the Marxist tradition, or indeed to define the sense in which they use them.

The above observations and conclusion by Moriarty while helpful to address critics who think ideology and power are no longer sexy terms in literary studies around the world are misleading on one point. They reduce the understanding of ideology and power in Marxist tradition to refer to economics based social class system. While this is true in traditional Marxism, contemporaries of Marx have since evolved the Marxist use of ideology and power to refer to what Paul Ricoeur (1976) calls the Utopian, that is, the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved classless society. What this means is that ideology and power are in contemporary Marxism encompassing of all efforts that are a functional method for describing cultural texts and analyzing any form of ways in which humans make meaning of their existence to be free from fear and inequalities. This is because, as Althusser (1971, pp.223–227) puts it:

Ideology slides into all human activity, it is identical with the ‘lived’ experience of human existence itself: that is why the form in which we are ‘made to see’ ideology in great novels has as its content the ‘lived’ experience of individuals. What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of ‘seeing’, ‘perceiving’, and ‘feeling’ (which is not the form of knowing), is the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes.

According to Althusser, literature is not to be taken as an analysis of ideology such as Kenneth Kaunda’s humanism but a presentation of the experience of living under humanism. Literature, in this case, both in its writing and analysis or appreciation, is rooted in ideology and power. Ideology here is understood as the foundation of all beliefs and knowledge while power as the capacity of those beliefs and knowledge to dominate and influence. This means that rather than describing a reality or condition, ideology and power are the spheres in which we live to experience our relationship to that reality or conditions, they are our imaginary lived relationship to them that expresses a social or political will whether or not it is conservative or revolutionary (Moriarty, 2006). Thus, when we establish ideology and power struggles in literary texts, we seek to understand the worldview with which the author and characters defined their lived experiences and how that worldview is manifest using various literary devices that make up the text.

Chen and Li (2011) in their discussion of literature and ideology titled *The Entering of Ideology into the Literary Text*, agree with this view just established. They state that in the development of a text, the author has to make choices regarding the topic, the plot, the setting, narrative, syntax, vocabulary and other factors that constitute a literary text. These choices are and involve ideological inclinations founded on the historical background of the author, the social formation at the time of the production of the text and the literary tradition of which the literary text is an integral part. In this way, literature is both a

complex absorbing in the existing ideologies from intertextual literary texts and a complex emitting out its ideological implications onto other literary texts. Further, the ideology of a literary text, which cannot be fully understood in an imposed vacuum of the text, is an organic part of the historical existence of temporality and space (Chen and Li, 2011). In this sense, literature cannot be developed and its nature understood without a deep appreciation of the relationship between the literary text and ideology in a given historical context of power plays of the author and production of the text. Simply put, literature is the site for the dwelling of ideology in the field of aesthetic constitution and practice.

In his essay, *Discourse and the Novel*, Bakhtin shows that when we talk about literature and ideology we should not just think about the author but the very characters and their language we encounter in a given text as “ideologue” and “ideologeme” respectively. He argues that:

The distinctive qualities of a character’s discourse always strive for a certain social significance, a social breadth; such discourses are always potential languages... The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance (Bakhtin, 1981, pp.259–422).

From this point of view we see that literature always presents a power struggle for particular values in society based on a given ideology through spoken or written language. Although the author may distance herself or himself or indeed be distanced from the character in the text, the character takes on or create their own ideologeme with particular objects, meanings and values which in the end has a bearing on our experience of the literary text and society in general. Thus, James Farrell in his article titled *Literature and Ideology* concludes that literature re-creates the consciousness and the conscience of a period in place and time. In short, a literary text should be conceived as ideology and the ways in which it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity is the focus of literary analysis (Farrell, 1942).

It is in light of the appreciation of his interchange between literature and ideology that two viewpoints in the study of Zambian literature emerge. The first school of thought emerged in the 1980s. It studies Zambian literature in English using “paradigm shifting analyses of the formal and semantic implications” of the condescending shadow of “Eurocentrically constructed spectrum of fictional forms and textual genealogies” (Primorac, 2018, p. 86). This approach gives Zambian literature in English a comparative global positioning that servers interlinkages and interplays between literature and ideology as well as ignores the power politics inherent in the literature itself and the global literary scene that forces countries like Zambia to judge what is literature based on European languages and cultural traditions that have accumulated large amounts of symbolic and literary capital (Casanova, 2004). For purposes of this paper, this viewpoint shall be referred to as the Imperialist School of Thought.

Imperialist School of Thought

This worldview in the study of Zambian literature in English was launched by the 1983 doctoral study by John Chileshe. This study titled *Literacy, literature and Ideological formation: The Zambian Case* made a conclusion that remains destructive to Zambian Literature in English. In this study, Chileshe made a historical survey of the progress of Zambian literature in English (and local languages) towards what he termed “authentic indigenous literary expression”. The conclusions of this study suggest that more than anything Chileshe sought to use literatures outside Zambia to dismiss the authenticity of Zambian literature in English. This is evidenced by the fact that Chileshe concluded that Zambian literature is inferior to imported literature because of its characteristic impression of what he called “woodenness”, “imitation” and “cultural externality” that robes it of any form of cultural and aesthetic value. Further, Chileshe recommended that authors of Zambian literature in English should use Ngugi wa Thiong’o as the literary benchmark.

Similarly, the year that followed, John Reed, in his article *Zambian Fiction* which featured in a book edited by Gordon Douglas Killam titled *The Writing of East and Central Africa (Studies in African Literature)*, made a conclusion that:

All Zambian fiction so far has been quite free of literary pretention and selfconsciousness. Its writers have not employed the studied simplicity and offhand quality which Hemingway carried to the point of caricature and which in modified forms has provided a second model for the best West African writing (Reed, 1985, p.83).

Like Chileshe, Reed painted Zambian literature in English as a failed mimesis of society and European literary traditions. In 1987, Likokoto Joseph Mbuyu carried out a study titled *Craftmanship and Partisanship in Zambian Prose Fiction Since Independence: A Critical Evaluation of The Novels Of Mulaisho, Masiye, Saidi and Sibale* that reechoed the claims by Chileshe and Reed that Zambian literature in English is artistically poor, immature and uncritical. Mbuyu examined partisanship and craftsmanship in *Before Dawn* (Masiye), *Between Two Worlds* (Sibale), the *Hanging* (Saidi), *The Tongue of the Dumb* (Mulaisho) and *The Smoke that Thunders* (Mulaisho). In this study, Mbuyu indicates that he studied partisanship to examine the ideological orientation of the writers as presented in their novels. His interest was to establish if what he called “Zambia’s alleged socialist orientation in the economy” (Mbuyu, 1987, p.v) had also affected the literary field in Zambia. Then, he used the concept of craftsmanship to explore the skills of the writers to assess their artistic abilities. This is “because we realise that a writer is primarily an artist and as such if he is to win recognition from the readers, especially students of literature, he must be seen as an accomplished artist or craftsman” (Mbuyu, 1987, p. v).

Mbuyu (1987, p. v) concluded that the commitment of the writers he studied was not socialist. In fact, so he argues:

the writers are not even aware of the existence of classes – a serious handicap since there are classes during the period in which the novel are set. Omission of this fact distorts their texts in that not all factors are being taken into account in the creation of the works.

Further, Mbuyu (1987, p.vi) concluded that the technical skills of the writers he studied were generally clumsy and this is shown in several ways: characters tend to be wooden; there is usually unnecessary inclusion of sociological information for its own sake; and in language and style there is a tendency to overuse the direct style, a practice which tends to reduce the significance of the texts.

By concluding in the manner he did, Mbuyu is in a way seeking to legislate for writing, to tell the writer what to do, what to write, how to write, what ideology to inculcate through his works, what conclusions to come up to in a novel, and what to think. The question is: by whose standards did Mbuyu find the technical skills of the writers to be generally clumsy? Simply because the Kaunda regime manifesto and sloganeering was socialist oriented does it warrant us to assume the literature of the time must have *committed* to socialism? Even more, does it mean socialism was the only ideology that underpinned the existence of the writers at the time and the world economy into which Zambia remains incorporated? Additionally, is there evidence that suggest that the selected writers he studied were State artists sanctioned to champion the State’s “alleged socialist orientation in the economy”?

It is clear that Mbuyu’s conclusion suffered from the same flaw he accused the Zambian writers of. Just like he alleged that they seemed ignorant about the existence of classes in pre-independent Zambia, Mbuyu’s study demonstrates a serious lack of knowledge about the existence of classes on the world literary scene. This is a serious handicap in Mbuyu’s study. There are cross-border literary power struggles where “what is internationally deemed to be worthy of being judged as ‘literature’ is subject to international rivalry, in which the languages and cultural traditions that have accumulated large amounts of symbolic and literary capital have the upper hand” (Primorac, 2014, p.583) and smaller and less powerful literary cultures are always being forced to gravitate towards large and more established ones with writers being reduced to seekers of foreign authentication at the global centres of literary power (Casanova, 2004). This flaw in Mbuyu’s conclusions distorts his study’s interest in the question of ideology and power struggles.

Chileshe, Reed and Mbuyu are not alone in making such conclusions about Zambian literature in English. Michael Chapman (1996) also argues in his book, *Southern African Literature*, that Zambian literature in English is “unpretentious”, “journalistic city-wise” and marred by the “city vs countryside trope”. For Zambian literature in English to recover from this underdeveloped state and take its place on the global literary scene, so Chapman argues, the Zambian writer should learn to have a fascination with the West, or with characters who travel to the British or French University rather than grandmother’s fireside story time and the rural-urban drift.

Several studies on Zambian literature in English have since been influenced by this school of thought. For purposes of this paper, only four studies will be discussed. The first study that buys into the imperialist school of thought is the 2005 study, *Imagining Village Life in Zambian Fiction* by Giacomo Macola. As noted earlier, critics against Zambian literature in English such as Chapman (1996) and Chileshe (1983) have lamented the rustic preoccupation of Zambian literature in English, that is, a focusing on the countryside or rural life and comparing it with city life. Macola’s 2005 study, focused on this particular theme in Zambian literature in English. Macola explored this theme in such an apolitical manner that seemingly gives the ‘rustic fixation’ critique some credence in its conclusion that the presentation of the countryside in Zambian literary texts merely serves sociological and anthropological purposes that are barren of literary aesthetic value and development (Chileshe, 1983; Mbuyu, 1987; Chapman, 1996).

It is important to stress that Macola, in examining the Zambian rustic novelness in Zambian literature, appreciates that “cultural styles cannot be divorced from current economic realities” (Macola, 2005, p.2). This statement by Macola is a typical Marxist ideological statement that would make someone reading Macola’s study to expect an analysis that takes into account issues of ideology and power struggles in the rural-city presentation in Zambian literary texts he chose. One would also expect that since Macola sees a clear linkage between a culture or people’s way of life and economic substructure, he would treat the texts as cultural productions that are highly mediated by that substructure, that is, the sum of productive forces, capital and social forms of intercourse which authors find in existence in their society as something given and become their essence or substance as they write their novels.

To the reader’s surprise, however, Macola chooses to ignore that economic realities are created by an established economic system and that that system is an ideological machinery. Macola treats the economics that birthed the Zambian urbanisation and depopulated rural Zambia including the disruption of the moral campus of communities in both spaces as ideologically neutral and free from power struggles of any kind.

Even more, his comparison of the authors’ presentation of the rural vs urban settings in three epochs of Zambian literature does not, in any way, consider ideological orientations of the authors especially that these authors do not share the same view about rural and urban realities as revealed by his study.

The three epochs in the development of the Zambian rustic novel that Macola’s study shows are (i) *Zambian Fiction Before Independence* where he examines *Namusiya Kumikoti* (Namusiya at the Mines) (Kaavu, 1949), *Tiyeni Kumudzi* (Let’s Go to the Village) (Masiye, 1951), and *Uluse Lwalile Nkwale* (Pity Killed the Nkwale Bird) (Chipungu, 1956); (ii) *Zambian Fiction in the Early Post-Independence Era* where he studies *The Tongue of the Dumb* (Mulaisho, 1971) and (iii) *Contemporary Zambian Fiction* where he explores *A Cowrie of Hope* (Sinyangwe, 2000).

In his analysis of these three epochs, Macola argues that pre-independence era fiction in Zambia is characterised by rustic panegyric which he calls “romantic ruralist imageries” and “idealisations” that are nothing but “anachronistic epigones” (Macola, 2005, p.6). Then, early post-independence fiction condemns rural social relationships and portray urban centres as places of progress and hope for a better life. What Macola (2005, p.6) wants us to see in the fiction of this era is “the kernel of the cosmopolitan discourse: while the village has become a frightening, alien space, the city is, if nothing else, at least the locus of wealth and opportunity”. To Macola, this “depiction of the country provides a much more effective” picture of the reality than the “romantic ruralist imageries” because, so he asks, “if villages were such idyllic places, why would growing numbers of people resolve to abandon them to take up permanent residence in town?” (Macola, 2005, p.7). Suffice to say, Macola seem to be more in favour with the contemporary fiction in Zambian literature that has faith neither in the rural nor urban spaces but the individual person who has the opportunity to escape or overcome the collapse of morality and living standards in both domains.

By asking the question that “if villages were such idyllic places, why would growing numbers of people resolve to abandon them to take up permanent residence in town” Macola demonstrates his lack of not only an appreciation of the economic and political ideology and power struggles of the historical Zambia the literary texts like *The Tongue of the Dumb* try to portray but also a political reading of the literary work(s) in question. This is because the history of rural-urban drift shows that these rural-urban migrations at the time were an ideologically engineered power play by the colonial government at the behest of the capitalist multinational mining companies to supply cheap domestic and industrial labour, provide monetary taxes for the colonial State treasury and wrest control of the local economy from African rulers (Settles, 1996; Watts, 1997).

The second study that is informed by the imperialist worldview is the 2008, MA study titled *Images of Women in Ticklish Sensation, Tongue of the Dumb and Cowerie of Hope with the Perspective of Sex Role Stereotypes* by Limbali Muyendekwa. This study examined the images of women in the three male authored novels focusing on the sex role stereotypes. Rooted in the feminist theory and criticism the study concludes that females are dominated by men both as fictional characters in the text and authors of texts. Such dominance, Muyendekwa concludes, is a product of Zambian African culture underpinned by social constructs. While it is evidently clear that the study appreciates that culture or a social construct is a worldview or perception and perception is rooted in ideology, it does not interrogate the patriarchy as an ideological and power struggle phenomenon either inherent in the text or as an enlivening factor in the minds of the authors of the texts and the society they are writing about especially that such texts are written not in Zambian local languages but the language of the colonizer and the authors of the texts as well as Muyendekwa himself, are products of the education of the colonizer.

The awareness of ideology and power struggle in gender issues by Muyendekwa’s study is evidenced when it argues that “Literature is a reflection of society. It would be appropriate to borrow from the Marxist approach” an understanding that it is within the large framework of social reality (history) that literature can be effectively appreciated (Muyendekwa, 2008, pp.1–2). What makes a literary theory adequate to examine a literary text is when it accounts for the sociology and history as well as the space in place and time within which a text is produced including the fictional characters created by the author (Muyendekwa, 2008). Nonetheless, the only borrowing Muyendekwa’s study seems to have derived from the Marxist approach to literature is this quotation and not the philosophical foundation and ideological implication and application of Marxism in the analysis of literary texts.

It is worth noting that Muyendekwa’s study, apart from failing to apply the Marxist approach it claims to borrow its appreciation of the link between historical social reality and literary works, it neither acknowledges nor cite anywhere the works by Longwe and Clarke (1998) and Chilala (2006) but rather concludes that “The number of studies that concentrated on the images of women among Zambian writers in Zambian literature is almost non-existent” (Muyendekwa, 2008, p.7). These works are important to Muyendekwa’s study because they are the first known studies on gender issues in Zambian literature. Sara Longwe and Roy Clarke conducted a study in 1998 published as a book titled *Woman Know Your Place: The Patriarchal Message in Zambian Popular Song*. This was followed by Cheela Chilala’s *Analysis of Gender Issues in Zambian Literature in English* in 2006. In fact, Chilala (2006, p.20) situates his study as the first complete academic study of gender in Zambian literature but acknowledges that “lessons may be drawn from a comprehensive study done on Zambian music” by Longwe and Clarke.

Of these two works ignored or unknown to Muyendekwa’s study, Longwe and Clarke’s used the term “ideology”. The study is presented to have been conducted “to explore the male supremacist message of many of these songs [popular songs] in order to get a better sense of their full meaning and ideological importance”(Longwe and Clarke, 1998, p.2). Unfortunately, Longwe and Clarke’s exploration of “ideological importance” appears to have ended on being mentioned in this statement. This is because the whole study neither defines what ideology is nor establish what ideology influenced the songs they studied. This shows that although they were aware of the centrality of ideology and power struggles in the phenomenon they were studying, Longwe and Clarke, just like Muyendekwa, had no commitment to using ideology in their analytic framework.

It can also be claimed here that Chilala's 2006 MA study lacked in ideological consciousness. This is because Chilala quoted Chileshe at length but at no point did he indulge Chileshe's imperialist conclusions about the nature and tradition of Zambian literature in English. In fact, the thesis does not even indicate anywhere that Chileshe dismisses Zambian literature in English as underdeveloped and aesthetically deprived.

Similarly, an article by Chilala (2014) titled *Anatomy of the Challenges facing Zambian Writers and Publishers of Literary Works* cites Chapman's book, *Southern African Literature*, and notes that this book "characterizes Zambian literature as lacking in depth". The article points out that the assertion by this book has attracted criticism partly because of the methodology applied by the author and in part because of some factual inaccuracies and casual assertions. However, at no point does the article hold a categorical view about Chapman's assertion. The article merely presents Chapman's conclusion about Zambian literature and what other critiques have noted about it without showing its take on the matter especially that the article is dedicated to the anatomy of the challenges facing Zambian writers and publishers of literary works.

The third study that is subtly influenced by the imperialist worldview is the 2012 study by Purcell titled *Witnessing to the Gospel: Pedro Arrupe's Mission Theology and Dominic Mulaisho's "The Tongue of the Dumb"*. Christianity is now a critical part of the social and cultural fabric of African societies (Gikandi, 2003). This religion is no longer an external force intervening and undermining traditional life (Purcell, 2012). It is natural, therefore, that African writers of the earlier generation in Zambia like Mulaisho, "whose lives bridged the transformation from colonial to postcolonial societies and who were themselves first-and-second-generation Christians," had "interest in the encounter with Christianity not solely at the political level but also as a religious experience" (Purcell, 2012, p.436). According to Purcell's study, Mulaisho's work is a "dramatization at the textual level of a sub-textual contest, not between Gospel and indigenous culture, but rather between the Gospel seeking to contextualize itself into the new culture with which it is coming into contact and the foreign missionaries trying to impose their European interpretations onto the African context" (Purcell, 2012, p.421). While recognizing the political and cultural power struggle in the text, Purcell seems to suggest that *The Tongue of the Dumb* should not be examined in light of the cultural conflict and critiquing the role of the Church and its missionaries in the colonial project. Rather, it should be read more and examined as a religious experience harnessed for spreading the good news (Christian religion) through a dialogue of cultures or enculturation.

Given this standpoint, Purcell dedicates his study to the exploration of different Christian missionary or evangelization models in *The Tongue of the Dumb* to show that literary works like Mulaisho's are a good collection for Christians to read and enrich their strategies for pacifying the unbelievers of the gospel.

The efforts by Purcell to market literary works beyond the academia and situate their relevance in the Christian church, a social institution that has taken over the Zambia society today, should be commended. What is problematic however is the fact that Purcell attempts at establishing a difference between a political experience and a religious one. In this case, he depoliticizes Christianity and obscures its ideological violence both at the time Jesus propounded his Kingdom ideology that challenged the Roman colonization of the Jews and the moment British colonialism used Christianity to create in Africa a poverty industry materially and mentally to pave way for the smooth capitalist exploitation of African populations.

The fourth study influenced by the imperialist viewpoint is the recent 2015 study by Mwaka Siluonde that did a comparative analysis of narrative technique and plot structure in *The Chosen Bud* (Luangala, 1991) and *Bitterness* (Katulwende, 2005). In this study, Siluonde agrees with Mbwayu, Chileshe and Chapman's assertion that Zambian literature in English is anthropologically disinterested in characterization, clumsy in craftsmanship and suffering from folktale hangover. However, Siluonde argues that this does not necessarily mean that Zambian literary works have "no plot structure or narrative technique but the question is what kind of plot structure or narrative technique do they have" (Siluonde, 2015, p.3). In short how does an anthropologically unconscious, clumsy and folktale hangover narrative technique and plot structure of Zambian literary texts look like? This is the question at the crux of Siluonde's study.

In responding to her own question Siluonde concludes that the similarities as well as differences

in the narrative technique and plot structure of the two Zambian novels she studied show that they are influenced by both western literature and African oral literature. While making such a conclusion, the study by Siluonde does not answer the following questions that, in the perspective of this paper, would be key to the making of the kind of conclusion she derives from her analysis: Do the texts in question have their own distinct narrative technique and plot structure which the western and oral African literatures influence? In the absence of an identifiable narrative technique and plot structure unique to these texts the term “influence” would not be suitable but rather “combination”, that is, how do the authors combine the African oral and western literatures for their narrative technique and plot structure? Whatever the case, the next question is: does the influence or combination of the two literatures produce a new narrative technique and plot structure that is neither typical of African oral literature nor western literature but Zambian? What contextual factors explain the influence or combination of African oral literature and western literature to these texts? To what extent has each respective form of literature influenced or been employed in the texts in question and why?

Answering such questions would actually show that literary works are not free from the subjective social, economic, political, historical and cultural imperatives of the context within which they are produced and therefore, it is not enough to just discuss narrative techniques and plot structures of literary works without appreciating their social context and econopolitical value.

Also, Siluonde throughout her study presents the concept of literature in Africa in general and Zambia in particular before the colonization of the continent in terms of orality or unwritten literature. By doing so, she perpetuates the Eurocentric idea that literature and writing in Africa are a colonial artefact. But there is indisputable evidence that writing and civilisation did not just start in Africa but Africans have been writing both in local and foreign languages before slavery and colonialism. All ethnic groups that are in Zambia today migrated from different parts of Africa where such evidence of writing of literature abounds.

Renaissance School of Thought

There is an emerging school of thought challenging the above prescriptive generic pigeonholing of Zambian literature in English in the literary quicksand of European literary standards and culture. Only two articles in this regard have so far seen the light of the academic world namely *Arrow of God at Fifty* by Ranka Primorac and *Zambian Literature in English: Tradition or Transition?* by Cheela Chilala published in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

In the *Arrow of God at Fifty*, Primorac juxtaposes *The Arrow of God* and *The Tongue of the Dumb*, novels by Chinua Achebe and Dominic Mulaisho respectively, within a single analytical frame. She provides a rereading of *The Arrow of God* alongside *The Tongue of the Dumb* as a way of proposing what she calls “new categories for critical engagement with “the African novel” and contributing “to scholarly conversations around the global prestige and appropriation of texts and forms” (Primorac, 2018, p.85). In achieving this objective, Primorac problematises “the center-periphery relations in “the African republic of letters,” and Mulaisho’s ambivalent positioning within it, by outlining certain key literary-historical processes in southeastern Africa before the fall of Apartheid and by interrogating the critical reception of his novel [*The Tongue of the Dumb*], which emerged out of those circumstances” (Primorac, 2018, p.85). In this article, Primorac makes compelling arguments for the need to study African literature in general and Zambian literature in particular in its own right. Rather than a “literariness of crisis identity” she used in her 2014 article as will be shown later, here Primorac contends that Zambian literature in English should “more properly be read” as a “distinct local realist tradition based on Bakhtinian adventure time” (Primorac, 2018, p.85). She argues that the works of African Zambian authors like Ellen Banda-Aaku, Lauren Beukes, Panashe Chigamudzi, and Petina among other authors:

may arguably be related to local forms and publications in ways that are rendered unthinkable if “African literature” is related only to a narrow, Eurocentrically constructed spectrum of fictional forms and textual genealogies. Elsewhere, globally prominent literally practitioners

whose work is consecrated as “African” have repeatedly objected to the prescriptive generic pigeonholing of their work (Primorac, 2018, p.101).

Accordingly, Primorac makes the following three landmark conclusions to govern studies on Zambian literature in English which this paper agrees with. The first one is that in the study of literature in general and African countries in particular any text’s relation to history and social context should never be ignored because once this is critically considered “may help to bring into analytical view the hitherto neglected African social and literary contexts” (p.102). To this regard the spectrum of critical approaches to the reading and circulation of Africa’s fictions should be broadened and literary achievement of African writers like Achebe should be turned into a discursive tool for effacing the continent’s non-globalized literary production rather projected as the standard for all to mimic. The second key conclusion is that in the study of literature in African countries we should question more radically the idea that “globally circulating texts and genres alone can provide an accurate idea of the kinds of literary production that participates in inscribing capitalist modernity on global economic peripheries” (p.102). Only with radical questioning of this idea can the critical manifesto of making world literary studies less Eurocentric and more inclusive make any sense in African countries like Zambia. The third landmark conclusion Primorac makes is that the cultural relevance of texts and forms should never be equated “with their relative prestige in the unevenly structured global literary marketplace, or to blithely assume an absence of valid non-globalized notions of literariness and literary value” (p.102).

In making these conclusions, Primorac is inviting all of us to study Zambian literature as literature without comparing it with literatures from elsewhere especially when such comparison is adulterated by the desire to qualify Zambian literature as literature or not. In studying Zambian literature, we should examine the texts in relation to history and social context with a radical disposition towards existing studies and literary traditions that have since dismissed Zambia as a literary desert.

Primorac had in her earlier article watered down this progressive argumentation. In an article that appeared in the *Journal of Southern African studies* titled *Home in the World? Reframing Zambia’s Literature in English*, Primorac (2014, p.575) quite well countered what she calls “the conventional critical stance on Zambia’s writing in English (which casts it as aesthetically sub-standard and ‘underdeveloped’)” and makes Zambia to be “viewed as a literary desert”. What she openly agrees with in what she calls “the conventional critical stance” about Zambian literature in English is that “the field of Zambia’s written literature in English is not large, and not much of it has been globally marketable” (Primorac, 2014, p.576). Contrary to this conventional critical stance, however, Primorac concludes by arguing that “global invisibility” is not symptomatic of literary underdevelopment, but gives Zambian literature in English an identity she describes as “a literariness of crisis” (Primorac, 2014, p.576). According to Primorac this is “a local literary system that has emerged from conditions of economic, social or political instability and threat, in which producers and consumers of literature allow for the possibility that texts may be directed towards instrumentalist as well as aesthetic ends and purposes” (Primorac, 2014, p.576).

In this article, Primorac (2014, p.584) adds that she hopes her “preliminary analyses will help to pave the way for further systematic studies of Zambia’s writing in English, which might include a discussion of recurring tropes and their significance, an elucidation of local ways of reading, and a critical scrutiny of women’s writing...”

While the attempt in this article to give Zambian literature in English an identity as well as a call for systematic studies of Zambia’s writing in English is laudable, the use of the term “crisis” to define Zambian literature in English repeat what has already been noted, the idea that Zambian literature in English is not “literature” enough and thus should be given a special name that reflects its “substandard” nature and in Primorac’s case, “a literariness of crisis” and ‘literature that is “in multiple senses not at home in the world”’.

By using the term crisis, Primorac implies that there is an *ideal literariness*. The question is what is that ideal literariness and by whose values and standards is it defined or classified as ideal or crisis for that matter?

As has been shown in Primorac's most recent work, the choice of "literariness of crisis" as an identity marker of Zambian literature in English is misleading and lacks appreciation of Pascale Casanova's explanation that countries like Zambia are bullied on the global literary scene and forced to judge what is 'literature' based on European and American languages and cultural traditions that have accumulated large amounts of symbolic and literary capital (Casanova, 2004). It appears that Primorac's view about Zambian literature in English has since evolved away from "a literariness of crisis". The new perspective she holds, which this paper agrees with, found a clearer expression with such prognostic power in the 2018 article than the 2014 one.

In his recent 2019 article, *Zambian Literature in English: Tradition or Transition?*, Cheela Chilala took time to answer the question of whether or not an identifiable tradition has developed with regard to Zambian literature in English which he named in colonial terms as "Anglophone Zambian prose fiction". Chilala further dares to question, by imagining, that if Zambian literature in English has not developed an identifiable writing tradition can we say it is undergoing a transition to some tradition.

In this article, Chilala shows that perspectives about Zambian literature in English remains divided between those like Chileshe (1983) and Mbuyu (1987) who dismiss it as underdeveloped and those like his and Primorac's who now conclude that the so called "popular and journalistic forms", "lack in cultural and literary aesthetic value", "woodenness" and "imitational" attributes of Zambian literature in English should invite us to studying a "distinct local realist tradition" that is organically Zambian.

Chilala's view in this article agrees with the latter viewpoint to which Primorac appear to belong now. In fact, Chilala shows that the former viewpoint that dismisses Zambian literature in English from the world market of literatures is full of contradictions. For instance, he compares Chileshe (1983) who argues that Zambian prose writing in English is characterised by "imitation" to Reeds (1985, p.83) who argues that Zambian fiction has failed to imitate the "studied simplicity and offhand quality which Hemingway carried to the point of caricature".

While both Chileshe and Reeds find Zambian literature to be "substandard" based on their Eurocentrically constructed standards, they differ on the same imitation standard they use. While Chileshe says Zambian literature is characterised by imitation, Reeds claims it has lamentably failed to imitate, and particularly, to mimic Hemingway. To this regard Chilala (2019, p.25) asks:

Does Hemingway have to be the standard? On the other hand, does the mere fact that Zambian writing in English is characterised by imitation mean it lacks a tradition of its own or that it is necessarily aesthetically unsatisfactory?

Chilala (2019, p.25) answers these questions by arguing that:

imitation and revision of other traditions is what leads to creation of a tradition. By its very nature, in fact, postcolonial literature is an imitation and revision of the literary tradition of the imperial centre, which also imitated and revised earlier traditions such as the classical tradition.

In his further analysis, Chilala undoes criticisms that dismiss Zambian literature in English as being rustic in uncritical, anthropological and sociological ways. Chilala argues that this thematic inclination is inescapable for a Zambian writer because it forms part of the character of the Zambian society and in such a society there is a high premium placed on the exploration of cultural conflict between European and African civilisations within the colonial context. Further, this preoccupation is narrated from the colonised vantage point in a reflective and interpretive manner in an attempt to humanize what the colonizer dehumanized. This Zambian context is impelling especially when one considers the socioeconomic and political events around Zambia's borders where Zambia took a central role in the liberation movements of Southern Africa. Chilala (2019, p.27) closes his conclusion by arguing that to claim Zambian literature in English:

exhibits a writing tradition does not in any way mean it is confined to particular aesthetic spaces. What it does mean, however, is that this tradition is – as is the

case with any writing tradition – in transition; that is, a constant state of repetition and revision. In other words, the tradition influences the transition, and vice versa.

This paper subscribes to this demonstrated consciousness by Chilala's article contributing to the emerging literary renaissance of Zambian literature in English. Suffice to say that the consciousness shown in this article by Chilala is apparently absent in the earlier works by the same author on Zambian literature in English. Particularly, in his 2006 MA thesis titled *An Analysis of Gender Issues in Zambian Literature in English*, Chilala quoted Chileshe at length but at no point does this thesis indulge Chileshe's Eurocentric conclusions about the nature and tradition of Zambian literature in English. In fact, the thesis, as noted already, does not even indicate anywhere that Chileshe dismisses Zambian literature in English as underdeveloped and aesthetically deprived.

Another article by Chilala (2014) titled *Anatomy of the Challenges facing Zambian Writers and Publishers of Literary Works* cites Chapman's book, *Southern African Literature*, and notes that this book "characterizes Zambian literature as lacking in depth". The article points out that the assertion by this book has attracted criticism partly because of the methodology applied by the author and in part because of some factual inaccuracies and casual assertions. However, at no point does the article hold a categorical view about Chapman's assertion. The article merely presents Chapman's conclusion about Zambian literature and what other critiques have noted about it without showing its take on the matter especially that the article is dedicated to the anatomy of the challenges facing Zambian writers and publishers of literary works.

A negative attitude towards, and dismissive categorization of, Zambian literature in English certainly is and remains a challenge to both Zambian writers and publishers of literary works by Zambians including academicians, planners and the general public. The recent works by Primorac (2018) and Chilala (2019) in the Renaissance School of Thought brings hope with impelling evidence and have so far influenced an MA Study titled "Ideology and Power Struggles in Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*, Masiye's *Before Dawn*, and Kasoma's *Black Mamba Two*" by Samson Kantini. This study argues that ideologies and power struggles that shaped the political and socioeconomic systems of Zambia during the period covered by the texts significantly reflected in the literary texts it studied. Three key conclusions from this study are worth noting. First, in embodying the different ideologies – imperialism, nationalism and *umunthu* – the writers put their works at crossroads in a way that rather than ultimately contributing to the struggle of the masses, they, in the end, also helped in the perpetuation of the workings of the colonial capitalist and religionism ideologies. Two, the critique that has for long described Zambian literature as "aesthetically substandard and underdeveloped" should be revisited. This is because the very "artistic poverty and immaturity" as well as the "blatant anthropological and sociological compilation of Zambian life that is "uncritical of life", is a reflection of the contextual success of the ideological struggles and power plays particularly the capitalist and colonial battles that aimed at producing a population that is poorly educated and does the bidding of the "master" consciously or unconsciously. Accordingly, the nature of Zambian literary texts as a reality is not a development born out of lack of artistic knowledge but the presence of a particular artistic form of knowledge and skill initiated by ideology and nurtured by the power struggles at different levels. Three, by not reproducing the Eurocentrically constructed aesthetics and structure of fiction, Zambian writers may as well be viewed as protesting against being pigeonholed. This literary protest is also a quest for self-literary identity formation which should be paid attention to, not with the aim to dismiss or compare it with European fictional forms and geneologies but, define what should be considered as Zambian literature in English.

Conclusion

This article has shown the existing two views on Zambian literature in English as well as the lacuna evident in such views and how there is need for more research to be conducted into Zambian literature to bridging such gaps. The imperialist school of thought dismisses Zambian literature in English as underdeveloped. This viewpoint should be understood as a colonial artefact because it is rooted in,

and feed into, the old aged view that missionaries and white colonialists held about African creative expressions especially those that relate to forms of literature like drama. For example, Mary Kelly in her article titled *African Drama* published in 1931 by the *Overseas Education* cited by Kamlongera (1984, p.14) said the following:

Art among the African is in a precarious position; the natural artistic expression of the primitive people is brought suddenly and violently into contact with a highly civilized and mechanized people. African art is very definitely – young – in all its manifestations; there are no memories of older civilisations, but the simplest forms, and childlike expression. We may look to the African to show us, as a thing still alive, the origin of all our own art. ... The art of drama is so very young in the mind of the African that it can hardly be said to exist. And yet the seed of the idea is there, for the African is by nature as full of drama as he is of music.

Even Europeans like Stevens who seemed to hold the opinion that Africa had so much to offer to the world in as far as creative expressions are concerned, they only believed that Africa would do so with Europeans as the midwives of such possibilities. The following quote from his 1934 article, *The Aesthetic Education of the Negro*, cited by Kamlongera (1984, pp.13–14) summarises his position:

The evolution of dramatic art amongst the Africans had all kinds of interesting possibilities. The beginnings of ballet and opera were foreshadowed in some of the more highly organized tribal dances. If the Europeans concerned with dramatic art were only to do a little research on the primitive theatre, their imagination would soon quicken to the possibilities latent in these situations (Stevens, 1934, pp.112–116).

Steven's use of such terms as "tribal" and "primitive" to describe African creative expressions reveals his prejudice like that of Mary Kelly above against drama by Africans. So, when Chileshe, Reed and Mbwanyu make the statements about Zambian literature in English being immature and without quality aesthetics of Hemingway, they are not saying anything new but carrying on this colonial legacy.

The renaissance school of thought shows that this comparative criteria in evaluating Zambian literature in English is patronizing as it promotes the patronage of languages and cultural traditions of Europe and North America in defining what is worthy of being judged as 'literature' and an accomplished writer of fiction. Even more, the imperialist school of thought overlook and impoverish our understanding of the wider ideological and political context in which Zambian literature in English has and is evolving and the world literary scene on which we encounter it.

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