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Lawrence Hoba's depiction of the post-2000 Zimbabwean land invasions in *The Trek and Other Stories*

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The article examines Lawrence Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories* (2009), which describes experiences from the post-2000 land invasions and fast-track land reform in Zimbabwe. It analyses selected short stories in relation to other Zimbabwean fictional works about land and the definition and restoration of dignified and other identities lost during Rhodesian colonialism. The article also discusses the significance of the narrative style, especially satire, and some of the themes, such as violence, dislocation, the position of women during the land reform and the multiple migration patterns in the land invasions, in an effort to foreground how all these link with Hoba's cynicism and, at times, subversive perceptions on how the land issue has been handled in post-2000 Zimbabwe. The argument here is that Hoba's fictional writings about the post-2000 land invasions and fast track land redistribution programme are reflective of a marked departure from the pro-nationalist, ideological and backward looking fictional mappings of land and national belonging. These writings place the 'now' as critical in unpacking the ironies and contradictory impact of the land redistribution exercise on ordinary Zimbabweans. **Keywords:** dislocation, land question, Lawrence Hoba, Zimbabwean literature.

1

Lawrence Hoba's stories in *The Trek and Other Stories* join the body of black Zimbabwean English fiction that is commonly identified as the third generation narratives and 'new voices', which comment on the post-independence Zimbabwean trajectories (Veit-Wild 7, Adesanmi and Dunton 13–14, Garuba 62). Hoba's narratives address the land question, which is one of the key factors that spurred black nationalists to launch the anti-colonial struggle. According to critics of Zimbabwean fiction such as Musaemura Zimunya, Flora Veit-Wild and Rino Zhuwarara, the land question, especially the indigenous people's anxieties over colonial dispossessions and the yearn to return to ancestral lands, is one of the major themes in Zimbabwean fiction. The bulk of Hoba's short stories are humorous and satirical, which is typical of narratives by some of the urban-born or urban-raised third generation Zimbabwean writers, whose perceptions were not influenced by Christian mission education values (Veit-Wild 307).

Hoba satirically portrays the experiences of some of the ordinary people of his fictional Zimbabwe during the invasion of white-owned farms and the associated

movement, by war veterans and the new settlers, on to the acquired farmlands. These invasions and new settlements on the former white farms were initiated by the former fighters of Zimbabwe's war of liberation and other supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government from the beginning of 2000.¹ The land invasions and occupations of white-owned commercial farms were defined by the ZANU-PF government as the country's third and final war (third *chimurenga*) against residual Rhodesian colonial influence and Euro-American imperial control of the country's land and other natural and economic resources. The publication of his short story collection in 2009, thus, posits a number of interesting issues in the analysis of trends defining the generational continuum and fictional vision of Zimbabwean identities, and the construction of the nation.

This article, therefore, tests Hoba's placing as a third generation writer and analyses some of the stories in an attempt to show how they link with and extend the thematic focuses on land and other concerns that are depicted in the works of earlier writers, such as Charles Mungoshi and Chenjerai Hove. Ultimately, the article determines the way Hoba's narratives address the nation's social memory, land and belonging, which are pertinent in Zimbabwe's twenty-first century social, political and economic reconstruction.

2

A brief consideration of the conceptualisation of generational writing is pertinent as an entry point to this article. Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton edited a special issue of *English in Africa* themed "Nigeria's Third Generation writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Considerations," and Veit-Wild's text, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* are critical here. Key to the journal's special issue and Veit Wild's survey, is the observation that production of literary works is an ongoing process, starting from the decades when the particular writers were born and how they drew on their personal and societal history at the different major historical moments (Adesanmi and Dunton 14; Veit-Wild 6–7). The different historical moments, such as the social histories, colonial and anti-colonial eras, and the post-independence dispensations are significant in mapping writers' and their narratives' generations.

The generational concept is, as noted by Harry Garuba (13), problematic because it is unstable owing to the different interpretations and the way themes and contexts under literary representation overlap.

Heather Hewett (76–78) also acknowledges the instability of the concept of generations in the definition of Nigerian literature and notes that the concept fails to consider women's writings and criticisms. Hewett notes further that the generational concept creates a disjuncture between young Nigerian writers, such as Chimamanda

Ngozi Adichie, who rose to literary prominence in the post-2000 era, and old writers, such as Chinua Achebe.

Nevertheless, Garuba, drawing on the generational model, maps the first and second generation African writers as “mostly born during the first five decades of the twentieth century when the colonial event was in full force” (14). Garuba (15) defines the third generation writers as writers born after 1960 when most African countries, except Zimbabwe and South Africa, attained their independence from colonialism, and whose works have since been noted as “largely a phenomenon of isolated names and works, recognized continentally and sometimes internationally.” Similarly, Veit-Wild maps the generations of black Zimbabwean writers in a linear and clear cut perspective as follows: “Generation 1: 1917 to 1939 (year of birth) / Generation 2: 1940 to 1959 / Generation 3: 1960 and later” (7).

I am, however, interested in the overall instability that is associated with the writers’ generation concept. Garuba’s (51) view that critics must acknowledge the porosity of literary boundaries is critical. Crucial also is Hewett’s assertion (76–78) that literary works are always linked and in dialogue with each other, and the view that, while narratives of younger writers, such as Adichie “set themselves from earlier generations,” there is need for critical sensitivity to the continuities implicit in these texts. Ranka Primorac (14–15) asserts that Zimbabwean fiction can be read “as textual groupings” marked by an “inter-relatedness” that is reflected in the way texts dialogue with each other on complex levels which go beyond categories based on race and language. These assertions complicate the generational analytical framework by drawing on the inter-textual linkages, the way writers’ works engage in dialogue with literary works produced earlier on, and by examining the thematic overlaps in the old and new national literatures.

The above noted ways of reading strengthen the analytical framework drawing on continuities and thematic linkages that I seek to use in my analysis of Hoba’s short stories. This offers an opportunity to recognise those connections and similarities that tie Zimbabwean fiction in one generation and across generations. For instance, a second generation narrative, such as Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) can be classified with some third generation fiction published in independent Zimbabwe from the 1980s onwards. *Waiting for the Rain*, a classical Zimbabwean novel focusing on the impact of colonialism on black Zimbabweans, describes the experiences of the Mandengu family, which was uprooted from its ancestral and fertile lands and taken to an infertile and drought prone village called Manyene. The village is located in the spaces apportioned to black Zimbabweans under the 1930 Land Apportionment Act and referred to as Tribal Trust Lands. Here, the Mandengus, just as other colonised subjects, grapple with the colonially-induced social and cultural displacements. The displacements include their son, Lucifer taking to Western education as a means of uplifting himself from the pervasive poverty. The result is, he cuts links with his

community, and escapes from the ensuing stasis, as they wait for the rain to fall and bring to an end the village's exposure to a continuous drought. *Waiting for the Rain* shares a 'textual grouping' with Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988), a third generation narrative describing the experiences of a female peasant and farm worker protagonist, Marita. Marita, who is displaced from her ancestral home, just as the Mandengus, experiences colonial violence at the hands of the black farm supervisor, Chisaga, the white commercial farmer, traditional patriarchy and Rhodesian soldiers. Thus, Primorac's concept of the 'interrelatedness' of texts allows us to foreground both the continuities and discontinuities in texts belonging to different generational groupings.

Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories*, however, focuses on the post-2000 experiences related to the invasion of white-owned farms by veterans of the liberation war and supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF party. Seven stories out of the ten; "The First Trek—the Pioneers," "Maria's Independence," "The Travelling Preacher," "Specialisation," "Having My Way," "The Second Trek—Going Home," and "The Third Trek—Resettling," are set on the occupied farms or have links with the farm invasions through journeys to and back from the farms. These narratives link Hoba's text with the textual grouping of Mungoshi's and Hove's narratives, discussed above and continue off from where they left. This is because the characters in these narratives, such as the child narrator and his family in "The First Trek—the Pioneers," "The Second Trek—Going Home" and "The Third Trek—Resettling" and other outstanding characters in the collection, such as the female farm settler/occupier, "Maria who came from the city" ("Maria's Independence" 4) and Tonde in "Having My Way" are depicted as still undergoing the multiple effects of social and physical dislocation, some of which can be traced back to the historical legacy of Rhodesian colonial land divisions. The parody on the concept of the 'the trek', a long journey resonating with the Afrikaners' in South African history, satirises the experiences occurring during the post-2000 land invasions. Hoba's characters, nevertheless, move from their rural homes and cities to the acquired commercial farms in an attempt to redress the residual effects of colonial land dispossessions and poverty, themes also treated by both Mungoshi and Hove. A continuity and hence indication of the inter-relations as well as dialogue between texts is indeed depicted here.

There are thematic similarities that link Hoba's work with that of other writers belonging to other generations. For example, the story "The First Trek—the Pioneers" (1–3), shares the same thematic concerns of the colonially induced malaise, land dispossession and yearnings for a better life through the land redistribution evident in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, Hove's *Bones* and Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1995). Another third generation narrative, which belongs to this textual grouping, because it shares similar thematic concerns, is Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1996), in which the female protagonist, Mazvita, journeys from her rural home that is ravaged by the 1970s war, to a white-owned farm and the city. Maria in Hoba's

“Maria’s Independence” also journeys, this time in reverse, to the sugar cane farming region, in search of a new identity and memories that transcend the trauma of rape and attempts by men to control her body. Thus, these thematic continuities place Hoba’s narratives in this generational continuum stretching from the second generation text, *Waiting For The Rain*, to the third generation texts such as Hove’s *Bones* and *Shadows* (1991), as well as contemporary third generation texts such as Petina Gappah’s *An Elegy For Easterly* (2009). In her narrative, “At the Sound of the Last Post,” Gappah ridicules the ZANU-PF elite in her description of a female character, *mainini* (the second wife) who takes advantage of the government’s decision to bury her late husband at the country’s national heroes acre, to force the president of the nation to register the husband’s farm in her name to protect it from seizure by other party politicians.

These texts also use a similar stock of motifs that link them as part of a narrative continuum. I draw on Bakhtin’s discussion on how texts can be categorised on the basis of time and the chronotope, to underscore the role of motifs in establishing a genre, textual similarities and, hence a literary continuum. The use of the drought and hunger motif, in the form of social distress, isolation, hopelessness and violence faced by the protagonists and their societies at the hands of Rhodesian colonialism (Zimunya) as evident in the 1970s Zimbabwean fiction by writers such as Mungoshi and Dambudzo Marechera, highlights this interrelatedness and continuities evident in the texts. The motif, nevertheless, shifts with time. For example, the motif features in the early third generation narratives in the form of traumatic memories of the 1970s war and the presence of pain from the past war in the present. The shift is evident in Marita’s experiences, which are described in a gloomy and surrealistic narrative, as she travels to the city in the early post-independent Zimbabwe to search for her missing son and ends up missing too (*Bones*). The same motif, in the form of violence and displacement, is used by Chinodya in *Harvest of Thorns* to critique the early forms of disillusionment over the post-independence condition where young characters such as the freedom fighter, Benjamin Tichafa, return home from the war only to be rendered helpless owing to huge family expectations and the burden of unemployment.

Hoba draws on the same motifs that are evident in both the early third generation and some of the preceding second generation narratives, as discussed above. The motif of land is chief in this collection of short stories. In some of the stories, the land is tied with the motif of war. The ZANU-PF government and its supporters constructed a grand narrative about land that invoked the rhetoric of the third *chimurenga* (third war of liberation) to propagate and justify the land invasions and occupation of white-owned commercial farms from 2000. Later, the government termed the invasions as part of the so called fast track land reform programme (Hammar, Raftopolous and Jensen). The Magudus’ trek to the sugar cane farming region, in “The Trek—the

Pioneers," is thus supposed to be part of the last war seeking Zimbabwe's economic independence from the residual white colonial and Euro-American control. The author draws on the discourse of war, by referring to the performances and ideological rhetoric associated with the violent seizure of the farms. This is noted in the poetic narrative introduction which states that "THE MASSES / With clenched fists / Swept us onto the farms /" (4). Marxist jargon used in this introduction signals the accompanying confrontational attitude, reminiscent of the ruling party's war discourse from the 1970s. Furthermore, "Maria's Independence," which describes the arrival of a female protagonist, Maria, to settle on the acquired farms, reveals Hoba's incorporation and parody of the old war performances. The narrator in the story describes the experiences where the settlers sang and danced *kongonya* to revolutionary songs² as involving the "rekindl[ing] of old spirits [and the] holding [of] all night pungwes, as in the liberation struggle" (5). This war motif establishes the continuities between this text and the early third generation war novels, such as Charles Samupindi's *Pawns* (1992) and Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*.

Also significant here, is the placing of history in the background of most of the third and other generation narratives. The motif of colonialism, displacement and war, recurring overtly or covertly in the narratives of second generation writings such as *Waiting for the Rain* and *House of Hunger* (Marechera, 1978) and early third generation texts such as *Bones*, *Pawns* and *Harvest of Thorns*, draw on the writers' own social and historical experiences and the nation's history (Veit-Wild). In fact, Kizito Muchemwa (200) in his discussion on Vera's works, comments that history connects the fictional times, places and societies. Hoba's characters react to and are thus linked, socially and historically, with the old anxieties of the Maritas (Hove), the Mazvitas (Vera) and the Benjamins (Chinodya) of the early post-independent Zimbabwe. These anxieties and memories from the past are described by Muchemwa (200) as often "violently intrud[ing] into the present, and shapes it," as noted in their presence in the contemporary narratives about misery and hunger for land which dates back to colonialism.

Thus, Hoba's narratives portray some of the ordinary Zimbabweans' arrivals and experiences on the government acquired farms. These stories employ a narrative tone that mixes humour, cynicism and irony to satirically treat those social and historical concerns that the nationalist government did not address in the 1980s, but which continue to plague postcolonial Zimbabwe's trajectories in the twenty-first century. The implication, therefore, is that we can use the concept of overlaps and porosity (Garuba) of the literary boundaries to blur (Hewett) over the generational paradigm, as well as consider the recurring motifs (Bakhtin) and historical concerns (Veit-Wild; Zhuwarara). This would link the early third generation texts and even those before them and assist us to evaluate how Hoba's contemporary narratives still treat and provide continuities and new ways to imagine land and the construction of identities and nationhood in Zimbabwean fiction.

Hoba's collection starts with the story, "The Trek—the Pioneers" that describes, from a child narrative voice, the movement of the Magudus, a poor peasant family, from the impoverished Zimuto village in Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province to the country's sugar farming belt in the low-veldt region of Chiredzi. The movement occurs "[a]fter he (the narrator's father Mr. J. Magudu) had been away for several weeks and told mhama (mother) that he had got a sugar cane farm, together with the farmhouse, that had been acquired by the government" (2–3). The title inter-textually links the text with the notion of voluntary and forced migrations to seek new beginnings and new freedoms, similar to the nineteenth century Voortrekker farmers in South Africa.

Hoba's work shows historical inter-textual resonances that establish links and continuities in narratives by the old and new writers. The motifs of colonial history, dispossessions and the desire to claim back resources such as the old ancestral lands, and other dignity-restoring social and cultural capital, is invoked here. In fact, Hoba depicts how the Magudus' life had not changed since the attainment of independence. The father possessed the colonial 'Master Farmer' certificate, which was awarded to prospective black farmers during colonialism. The ownership symbolises Magudu's desire to own his own land at some stage, but the irony is that he is still without a farm and living in the barren Zimuto village. Nevertheless, Hoba depicts the Magudus' move, this time voluntarily, to the sugar cane Farm 24, as a reversal of the 1970s and 1980s fictional characters' forced movement evident in the Mandengus displacement in *Waiting for the Rain* and Marita's multiple displacement during the 1970s anticolonial war in *Bones*.

Hoba criticises the ruling elite and the continued existence of the old colonial social and economic disparities in a way typical of the post-independent third generation narratives of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Hove's *Bones*, Samupindi's *Pawns*, Vera's "Independence Day" in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and Chindya's *Harvest of Thorns* (see Veit-Wild 302–11, Zhuwarara 24–25). Hoba criticises the land reform programme in sardonic humour, which results in the trek ceasing to be a hopeful one. This pessimism is evident in the child narrator's vivid description of the family's condition, which is marked by the "tired and bored expressions" (1) of the parents and that of the black and white ox that is pulling their ragged scotch cart. Hoba reveals that the Magudus, just like most new settlers, were poor. The father's lack of adequate clothes is emblematised in dark humour which describes "a pair of *manyatera* (sandals made from the rubber of old tyres) and yellow overalls written 'NRZ' [National Railways of Zimbabwe] at the back" (1) that he is wearing on the trek. Furthermore, the family's poverty is indicated by the hunger that plagues the family, a common motif from second generation writings such as Marechera's *House of Hunger*. The narrator states that even "a sack of maize meal [is] almost empty" (2) as the Magudus travel to the new land along the sugar cane belt. Worse still, their only

ox, a new plough, two hoes and a lack of seeds and fertilisers, indicate the gap between the available resources and the huge new farming task ahead of the new settlers. All this exposes the inadequacy of the post-2000 fast track resettlement project. This return to the land thus ceases to be the dignity-restoring act that one would have thought. Furthermore, Hoba's narrative makes us uneasy as we witness the hopelessness of the Magudus. Thus, our criticism is directed at the government. J. Magudu is a sole pioneer armed with only an old "Master Farmer" certificate and poor equipment, and yet his move has been sanctioned by the ruling ZANU-PF government to participate in this mammoth task without institutional support.

The satire on the Magudus' experiences during the period under focus comes full circle when the story, "The First Trek—the Pioneers," is linked with the other two stories; "The Second Trek—Going Home" and "The Third Trek—Resettling". The experiences depicted in "The Second Trek—Going Home," reflect the child narrator's playful description of how they slept on the previous *murungu* (white farmer's) children's bed and appropriated the farmer's children's photographs. The family also used other household goods belonging to the evicted farmer. The experiences on this farm are, however, bleak and hence reflect the satire on the various post-2000 fast track land reform relocations. Ironically, violence, just as the old cycles of violence emanating from the colonial project and anti-colonial war represented in the above discussed second and third generation Zimbabwean narratives, lurks in the background of the Magudus' experiences. This is emblematised by the ever present sister, Chido's wailing and the mother who would constantly beat Chido to shut her up. Similarly, the mother herself received her beatings—"mhama didn't cry when baba hit her with his hoe handle" (27). This violence is referred to in other stories in this collection, through the trope of rape, as noted in "Having My Way," in which Tonde, a settler, rapes Maria because of his traumas from a past brutal male rape. Further psychological violence is depicted when the mother is reduced to a helpless and crying wreck after "a man with a star on his hat" (29), a senior police officer, arrives to claim the farm from the Magudus and forces them to relocate back to their village in Zimuto.

The Magudus' life experiences on the acquired farm are fragmented and dominated by an element of stasis. The child narrator observes, in a helpless and playful way that, his mother is no longer going to church, for there are no churches in the new settlements, and, as such, "[n]o one tells her to reap only where she sowed. There are piles and piles of sugar-cane" (27). He and the other children cannot attend school as there are no schools, and the father is always away on drinking sprees. This indicates how the trek to Farm 24 became a journey into an anxious and alienating space resonating with the trope of drought and hunger (Zimunya) evident in some of Zimbabwe's second and third generation narratives. In fact, this metaphor is aptly used in "Maria's Independence," where the narrator describes the alienating conditions that they faced as they established the new farms (6):

As time passed, people began to falter. The farms were not the paradise we'd thought them to be. There were no schools or clinics, we had neither the strength of our ancestors nor the machinery of our ancestors' enemies. [...] We blistered our hands cutting down trees and tilling the soil but no rains came to quench our thirst or water the maize.

It is ironic that nothing seems to be working at Farm 24. This sense of stasis is compounded by the presence of "piles and piles of sugar-cane [...] because baba couldn't find a tractor to take it to the mill. He says *murungu* should have left the tractors" (27). These conditions on this farm are laughable and undermine the discourses pedalled under the ZANU-PF grand narrative about the land.³ There is no visible production at the farm and, worse still; the Magudus have been removed from firm ground—the church for the mother, the school for the narrator and a sense of self-initiative for the father.

The text's depiction of the bleakness of the land reform and the image of the post-2000 nation is completed in the story "The Third Trek—Resettling". The 'second trek' ends with the Magudus' forced removal from the farm by the police chief. This forced removal, reminiscent of Franz Fanon's concept of the pitfalls of nationalism, is a common theme in third generation narratives that register the post-independent societal despair at how some of the ruling nationalist elite transform into the oppressors of their own people (Veit-Wild, Zhuwarara, Garuba). Hoba portrays the way some of the ordinary folks are transformed into perpetually violated and displaced identities in their engagement with the post-2000 fast track land reform project. He vividly captures, in a way resonating with Bakhtin's descriptive motif (89) that is evident in romance novels, the Magudus' dehumanising experiences at the hands of the impatient and uncaring policemen who have been tasked with returning them to their village. The police are quarrelsome and argue with the mother over which return-route to take and are abusive on Chido, the ever-crying girl.

Furthermore, the village headman of Zimuto tries to prevent the Magudus from re-occupying their old homestead on the grounds that they had been away for over two years. These vulnerabilities and displaced identities of the ordinary Magudus of Hoba's Zimbabwe are depicted in broad satirical strokes. The expectation in this trek was that the landless peasants would have new access to fertile land; reconnect with the spiritual and physical realm tied with the land in accordance with the indigenous, social and religious culture; restore their humanity; and construct a proud and well-resourced Zimbabwean nation. Ironically, the Magudus become acquisitive in the process. They took over, without compensation, the farm and the most intimate of items belonging to the evicted farmer that include the farmers' clothes and photographs. They harvested where they did not sow, thus transforming themselves into laughable greedy identities.

Violence, a motif running through the generational continuum of Zimbabwean fiction as argued above, is also incorporated in the narratives through the use of war discourses. This is seen in the use of the motif of the third *chimurenga* (war of liberation) and the reintroduction of the night time political orientation meetings and structures such as Revolutionary Command Councils in “Maria’s Independence” and “Having My Way”. These are practices also depicted in earlier third generation war fictions by Hove and Chinodya. In Hoba’s narrative, the victim and perpetrator are blurred in their performances and lives on the new farms. He describes how victims of past colonial violence became perpetrators when they invaded and seized the former white farmers’ moveable and immovable properties. Even the new ethics of justice, established by the Revolutionary Command Councils, are, as depicted in *Harvest of Thorns* and other war fiction, fraught with contradictions and sometimes miscarriages of justice. These are satirised for their inadequacies in handling matters such as male and female rapes as is the case with Tonde in “Having My Way”. Hoba, thus paints a bleak image of this process of the restructuring of personal and national identities during the post-2000 Zimbabwean land invasions and suggests that the project and its trajectories engenders, to a large extent, a continuation of violence, displacements and war discourses stretching from the 1970s.

Hoba also draws on the motif of multiplicities to satirise some of the experiences occurring during these land invasions. While the narratives express the author’s criticism of the presence of violence in the fast track land reform programme, his cynicism also gives way to some positive developments that are evident in the process. Maria in “Maria’s Independence” is an urban woman who joins the new settlers and risks the dangerous movements from one farm to another. The omniscient narrator describes this self-initiated displacement (4):

Sometimes, we would arrive at a farm, only to be told that someone more important had already taken it, and we had to move on. And in the great confusion, we lost many a friend to the vagaries of the bush, or wild animals, whose enclosures we tore apart in our endeavours to secure a farm, even a game farm, for ourselves.

Apart from depicting the bizarre pioneer spirit in the strategies of farm identification and occupation, the risks involved map the space of the new farm as male dominated. The male narrator’s prejudices are clear in the statement that: “This was no place for women, we said; let alone beautiful ones” (4). Male characters, such as the narrator and Martin, doubt Maria’s ability as a new farmer. They are mesmerised by her beauty, dancing skills, and would watch her bathing in the river, thus perpetuating the old gender stereotypes that one believes had been set aside during this new period of nation-building and radical freedoms. As such, the multiple events and characters involved assist in the depiction of the role of female and gender dynamics in the post-2000 land invasions and fast track land reform. Continuities and dialogic links (Hewett)

are made between Hove's Marita from the early third generation narratives and Hoba's Maria, as well as the narrator's mother in "The trek" trilogy, through the theme of female agency. At the end of "The Third Trek," the narrator's mother has transformed into a powerful woman: she scorns and speaks back at the policemen on their backward journey to Zimuto. She dismisses the village headman who tries to deny them their return to the old home and hits back at her husband when he abuses her in a drunken state upon his return to the old homestead.

Similarly, in "Maria's Independence," Maria manipulates the male characters to her advantage. She is the object of a stereotypical male gaze as she dances during the night meetings. In addition, male characters would follow her everywhere she went, but she never gave herself into a lopsided relationship with Martin, her admirer, or any of the men. Instead, she determines the nature of the relationships, as noted in the way she boldly cautions Martin not to grope her during the dances, and only enters into a relationship after he returns as a new and useful man, an agricultural extension officer.

Furthermore, despite the physical risks, the myopic male perceptions and tough start-up conditions at the farm, Maria persevered as noted by the fact that "Everyone else had left but Maria remained employing her own workers" (7). Maria thus tamed the men and the land. At the end of the story, she is in a relationship with a skilled partner in Martin, the agriculture extension officer, and owns acres of a thriving maize crop. Hoba is perhaps criticising the male-centeredness of the fast track land reform programme. By affording Maria this success, he is exposing the gender dynamics that the real land reform seems to have largely ignored. He is also criticising those who painted the fast track land reform project with a blanket apocalyptic image, by valorising hard work and the idea that it is possible for the reform project to succeed.

In addition, Hoba suggests that these new settlers must get the requisite skills, as symbolised by Martin's transformation into an agricultural extension worker in "Maria's Independence". Capital to start the projects is also needed as evidenced by the ironic improvement of the Magudus' condition after they had taken some moveable property from the farmhouse at Farm 24 and acquired two cows after the narrator's mother had sold a cabinet seized from the farm in "The Third Trek—Resettling".

4

Therefore, the linkage between Hoba's fiction and the preceding generation of literary works is multiple. The short stories in the collection, *The Trek and Other Stories*, it can be argued, continue with the thematic focuses, such as personal and national imaginaries about land and identities similar to those of the earlier third generation texts.

Nevertheless, Hoba satirises the post-2000 land reform programme in his Zimbabwe, thus departing from the dominant black nationalist grand narrative about the land propagated by the ZANU-PF government. He is cynical about the success of the project. The cynicism is evident in the depiction of the Magudus' ironic experiences. They leave Zimuto for a new beginning only to face serious hardships owing to a lack of equipment and their own inertia, and are ultimately forced by a powerful police officer to return to Zimuto to start all over again.

However, there is a glimmer of hope in these bleak experiences. At the end of the collection, there is some change in the Magudus conditions. The father is tamed by the mother and becomes a non-abusive husband. The child narrator has grown from an innocent child into an experienced character. Furthermore, the Marias of this fictional world persevered against patriarchal prejudices, unfavourable farming conditions, and acquired creative identities that enabled them to achieve a measure of success in the process.

Thus, in his satire of the Zimbabwean post-2000 land invasions and fast track land reform, Hoba continues with the treatment of the same thematic concerns linking colonialism, land and the desire by the postcolonial subject to restore their socio-political dignity. He is also apt in his depiction of the multiplicities evident in these trajectories as he describes the concerns common to some of the third generation Zimbabwean narratives. It is however, his cynicism and ridicule of some of the perceptions about the land reform that marks his work's departure from the traditional black Zimbabwean writers' image on land and the constitution of various identities.

Notes

- 1 For analyses of white farmers' memoirs about the land invasions, see Manase and Pilosoff.
- 2 This is a traditional *chimurenga* dance appropriated by the ZANU-PF and war veterans which became part of the invasion performances, as portrayed in memoirs about the invasions such as Buckle's. See Gonye's discussion on the nature and significance of *kongonya* dance in Zimbabwe's colonial and contemporary history.
- 3 For a discussion on ZANU-PF's discourses about the post-2000 land invasions see Hammer, Raftopolous and Jensen, and Raftopolous and Savage.

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