

Moving Beyond Protest Sensibility: Chenjerai Hove's *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) (Conference ID: CFP/476/2017)

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Summary

Chenjerai Hove is one of the most prolific writers in Zimbabwe in the English language. Hove has written novels, poetry and some critical essays. He has also written in the Shona language. Although, Hove's creative oeuvre has received some important critical evaluation, most of these evaluations are on his novels. However, recently, critics have taken an interest in Hove's poetic works. In 2009, Chenjerai Hove completed a collection of poems called *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) which has remained unpublished to date. Sadly, Hove passed away on the 12th of July, 2015 while on self-imposed exile in Norway. This article is a tribute to Hove's poetic ingenuity and an exploration of the poetic shift registered in Hove's poetic creativity from poetry that defines itself as committed to issues of social justice and whose contradictions would be openly resolved through armed, class and gender struggles towards poetry that celebrates life through the trope of love. In *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009), the poet's voice appears less critical of bad governance as is openly registered in his *Blind Moon* (2003). This article argues that the subversive power of *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) is precisely its refusal to conceive of protest politics in terms of slogans against the ruling elites as one can see in *Palaver Finish* (2002). Instead, in *Love and Other Ghosts*, Hove carves out an alternative site where contradictory voices temper with official narratives of Zimbabwe's post-independence dispensation. Hove's *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) creates its own fictional and poetic context that shows that even in the most hostile circumstances, ordinary people can still organise their lives around those values that are life-sustaining. Instead of merely protesting against betrayal of the masses, *Love and Other Ghosts* affirms the inevitability of change through the archetypal image of love.

Opsomming

Chenjerai Hove was een van dié veelskrywers in Engels in Zimbabwe. Hove het romans, poësie en ook kritiese opstelle geskryf. Hy het ook in die Shona-taal geskryf. Hove se kreatiewe oeuvre het egter belangrike kritiese evaluering ontvang – die meeste van hierdie evaluering was oor sy romans. Kritici het egter onlangs belangstelling in Hove se poëtiese werke begin toon. In 2009 het Chenjerai Hove ’n versameling gedigte genaamd *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) voltooi, wat steeds nie gepubliseer is nie. Hove is egter op 12 Julie 2015 oorlede terwyl hy in selfopgelegde ballingskap in Noorweë was. Hierdie artikel is ’n huldeblyk aan Hove se poëtiese vernuf en ’n verkenning van die poëtiese verskuiwing wat in Hove se poëtiese kreatiwiteit waargeneem kan word – van poësie waarvan die selfomskrywing op ’n verbintenis tot kwessies van sosiale geregtigheid dui en waarvan teenstrydighede openlik opgelos sal word deur gewapende, klas- en genderstryde, met die oog op poësie wat die lewe vier deur die troep van liefde. In *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) kom die digter se stem minder krities teenoor swak bestuur oor as wat openlik te kenne gegee word in sy *Blind Moon* (2003). Hierdie artikel huldig die standpunt dat die ondermynende mag van *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) juis sy weiering is om oor protespolitiek te dink as slagspreuke teen die heersende elite, soos gesien kan word in *Palaver Finish* (2002). Pleks daarvan kerf Hove in *Love and Other Ghosts* ’n alternatiewe medium uit waar teenstrydige stemme versag met amptelike vertellings van Zimbabwe se post-onafhanklikheidsbestel. Hove se *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) skep sy eie fiktiewe en poëtiese konteks wat wys dat selfs in die mees vyandige omstandighede, gewone mense steeds hul lewens kan organiseer volgens daardie waardes wat lewens-onderhoudend is. In plaas daarvan om bloot te protesteer teen verraad van die massas, beaam *Love and Other Ghosts* die onafwendbaarheid van verandering deur die argetipiese beeld van liefde.

Introduction: Writing Poetry in the African Post Colony

A permanent feature anterior to any work of art is its political unconscious.¹ This Jamesonian view suggests that there is no creative work whose vision does not protest against social injustice. However, protest fiction has to negotiate the palpably open and the implied meanings in representing elements of what is “political” in symbolical narratives. For Howe, the political in fiction manifests as pointing to “a dominant emphasis, a significant stress in the writer’s subject or in his attitude toward it” (1985: 5). In this view, the function of fiction is conceived as projecting “polarity and tension” (5) of ideologies struggling for supremacy in a single text. The problem with this kind of formulating how poetic art makes meaning is that when “polarity and tension” are constructed around some imagined moral ideal, the result may be the entrapment of the discourse of protest in stereotypes that emphasise the singularity of experience at the expense of the diversity of agency through which humans negotiate their identities.

In African fiction, exclusive focus on the putatively visible ideologies in art can underestimate the patina of politically motivated layers or meanings embedded in private experience. Such narrow poetics encourages a subordination of certain lived realities under

1. Jameson F. 1981. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen.

totalising grand narratives of open modes of political resistance. Creative narratives that essentialise human experiences deny themselves the voice of an independent existence and might fail to establish imagined new contexts outside the gaze of totalizing dominant systems that the poetic fiction seeks to engage and unravel. Thus the desire to move beyond mere protest in fiction is driven by the observation that protest politics emphasises the spectacular representation of complex experiences in ways that ignore “diversity of codes inscribed within a single text” (4). This tends to fall short of satisfying an extended inquiry into social phenomenon, precisely because such works cannot account for our actual experience of the various works that do not fit pre-made literary frames. As Gikandi points out, and this is significant to this article, the turn to the genre of romance in African literature was not driven by “literary lack” (2012: 320). The trope of love or romance contains a yearning desire for self-fulfilment away from the anxieties of colonialism and post colonialism. The “authority of romance appears to be predicated on the transcendence” (326) of exploitative systems in colonial and post-colonial African contexts.

Chenjerai Hove: A Brief Literary History

Chenjerai Hove belongs to the second generation of poets born in the 1950s and who found themselves having to write against colonialism and betrayal of masses in the post-independence period after 1980. In *Bones* (1988), Hove appropriates cultural symbols popularised in Zimbabwe’s official discourses on Chimurenga. Although Hove, in this novel, writes on farm exploitation, nationalism and its aftermaths from the point of view of women, the author uses male voices hidden in female bodies. The ghosts of a relationship of “dependency and antagonism” (Gilroy 1993: 46) to male values are re-inscribed in *Shadows* (1989) in which women are [in]visibilised through the trope of victimhood.

In terms of poetic output, some of Chenjerai Hove’s early poems appear in *And, Now the Poets Speak*.² This collection contains different poetic voices most of whom are embedded in a belated discourse that suggests that politics is always ahead of writing; and that when politicians were creating history out there, poets and writers were dormant; or that it is the conditions produced by politicians that enable writers to engage with imagination. Such a view subordinates the poet’s imagination to the politician’s propaganda. At its worst, the early poetry written by Zimbabwean black cultural nationalists display an innocent view that during decolonisation, the political struggle to establish a national consciousness went hand in hand harmoniously.

While in *Up in Arms*, (1985) Hove weds political nationalism to literary nationalism, in *Red Hills of Home* (1985), the poet bemoans the environmental damage inflicted on the earth by technology in a post independent Zimbabwe. There is, between the two collections, a slight shift not of perspective but on the trenchancy of the poetic voice that has become more open in its attack of the new black rulers. In *Rainbows in the Dust* (1998) and *Blind Moon* (2003) Zimbabwean rulers are railed against because they have become authoritarian, and continue to entrench their elitist politics of entitlements to rule *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam*. In the above described works, Hove writes *against* neocolonialism. His voice is derivative and

2. Zimunya M. & Kadhani, M. 1981. *And Now the Poets Speak*. Gwelo: Mambo Press.

reactive. Besides offering useful moral criticism to the powers that be, the preoccupation with the politics of “against” prevents him from authorising alternative imaginary worlds not necessarily confined to, bound up with, and spoken to, by the very dominant discursive practices his works seek to dismantle.

Hove’s earlier poetic works are informed by a creative impulse to reveal the forceful and ideological projection of circumstances of oppression in the Zimbabwean postcolony. However, like many protest poets, Hove is faced with the challenge of translating “knowing into telling” (White 1996: 274) because real events do not speak themselves or tell their own story. Poetry’s emotive language is a product of ordering and reordering of thoughts and feelings. The imaginative but onerous task of translating signs into images suggests that telling is an artifice; it is a story borne out of the subjectification of an object whether real or imaginary. This is a process that is paradoxical because there is no one to one relationship between signifier and signified. Telling a story through poetry, also depends on intellectual variables such as the linguistic skills that are at one’s command to deploy a diversity of rhetorical registers, and their literary vocabularies. The ability to tell different-ly is, furthermore, dependent on the mastery of the medium of knowing. As such, any act of telling is in fact a form of retelling. Poets construct new facts and new knowledge in this way, so that it does not appear that the act of knowing is separated from the medium through which knowledge is created, represented, accessed, known and sediments as an archaeology of knowledge.

In *Love and Other Ghosts*, Hove genuinely attempts to overcome the problem of using male voices in female bodies, and the deployment of the motif of love as comic relief (Muvindi 2013) to vicariously experience the tragic lives of his gallery of female characters who play victim to patriarchal forces. *Love and Other Ghosts* barely refers openly to organised political struggles constructed around nationalism or its antithesis/extension in class or gender struggles. The collection imagines some people recreating their shattered lives in some context in which the trope of love is the organising principle of the meanings of lives lived beyond overt political persecution, harassment from police, and hunger in post-independence Zimbabwe. By centring love which is absent in the dominant discourses in Zimbabwe, Hove achieves the poetic effect that he had not scaled in the collections that favoured narrating open critique and warfare with the ruling class. As metaphor, love or romance recalls humanity to its basics in the face of inimical forces. The trope of love is imagined as possessing the capacity to “molest inherited literary orders” (Gikandi 2012: 313) in which realism’s national narratives are assumed to exist in a relationship of conviviality with political protest poetic traditions. The abstract nature of metaphors of “love” and “ghosts” in Hove’s collection, in fact suggests fluid meanings from which it cannot be taken for granted that poetry and African nationalism are welded together, walking hand in hand towards a singular vision of post-independence Zimbabwe.

Love and Other Ghosts (2009)

Love and Ghosts is dedicated to “the shadows/Whose vision accompanies me/On all invisible journeys/Of my endless dreams” (Preface). Poetic exploration of personalised experiences is one of the invisible creative travails honed on the idea or motif of life as a continuing journey where every arrival is in fact a form of announcing the possibilities of new departures. The

poems in *Love and Other Ghosts* are redolent with celebration of being in love or bemoaning love's absence in people's lives. Under colonialism and the post-colonial dispensation characterised by Mbembe (1992) as lacking proportion in its ugly dealing with the people, the human bodies of the ordinary citizens were and continue to be targets of humiliation by those who wield enormous power to decide whether someone lives or dies. It is for this reason that the human body in *Love and Other Stories* is also for Hove, a target for sensuous rehabilitation. For example, in the poem, "Love", there is deliberate figurative indulgence into descriptions of the pleasures of sex and love-making that overflows the page. The persona wishes to submerge his emotional self in the ocean of love that a woman can offer:

For once/ In the mourning sun
I want to explore
This universe
Between your breasts
The skies between your thighs.

(19)

"Universe" suggests the expansive nature of the "breasts" while the "skies between your thighs" regard the women's body as an unending space of pleasure. It is acceptable to enjoy sex, and to talk about enjoying sex. The act is subversive in a Zimbabwean context where this subject is viewed as adult talk, and even taboo for adults to talk about it in certain contexts, using the hedonistic language evoked above. Hence, the freedom of expression in the above lines approximates verbal paintings in which a man is depicted as pouring out his longings from his loins to gratuitously celebrate his being. To recognise that sensuous pleasure is possible even in enervating conditions that would otherwise threaten to kill or destroy human feeling, is to undermine the ideologies that confine human agency to single stories plotted around war, land and freedom. Put in other words, if those with power can divest the weak of their dignity at work, one of the few cultural sites for human regeneration that can remain untouched is the sensuous element and it has to be protected and rehabilitated. The human body must be alive to sensate feelings for it to be able to develop appetites for greater human ideals.

In "Supple Lips" (23) what is evoked are images of human organs associated with the seat of emotions such as "heart", "soul", "lips", "supple" and "rainy day". These words transform into images of human warmth that recall the banter in the vocabulary of sexual talk. Although there is a residual negritude sensibility portrayed as unique to black bodies, the poem suggests that ordinary people are not at every hour, minute or second in their lives, fighting tyranny. Ordinary citizens have time to think of the raw sexual experiences that is something that gives meaning to life and renders their lives grievable (Butler 2010) in the face of formidable existential threats represented by the baleful politics of the ruling classes.

In the poem, "Overwhelmed" (25), the absence of human intimacy is projected as a wish to not conquer others but to allow one to wallow in the pleasures of sensual gratification. The bodily pleasures often forgotten, and underplayed in pursuit of what is perceived as higher goals in life are in fact, the source of spiritual regeneration. The poet sees this personal rebirth and enjoyment of the human body as located in the recreations of the pastoral realities of an uncomplicated lifestyle associated with the experience of the "fragrance of your body /By the river sand" (25). The evocation of the rural scape, in the form of the images of the river sand,

connects the previous poem to a romantic narrative that surfaced in the poem, “Years” (26). This poem sounds like a gigantic and nostalgic indulgence that is valued because it imagines a world untrammelled by the sordid existence of being bullied by powerful people. The poem allows the personae to retain the smell of “love” which has kept the poet “writing notes on the fingertips /Of my Heart” (26). Nostalgia is a form of remembrance of a memory that has, now, been brought into crisis by the rapturous nature of forces which define distance in time and space of “all those years gone” (26). The impulse to imagine a coherent but imaginary past is in fact indicative of the turmoil that the present experiences have impacted on the spirit of the poet. The *tremendum* of dismay in the present existence can, according to the persona, be countermanded by creating a make-belief and stable world in which it is possible to think outside the political box informed by the cultural symbols of an authoritarian State.

The metaphor of love in *Love and Other Ghosts* can also be further stretched and its meanings interpreted in unexpected directions. One such possible stretch inclines towards the quest of that which is emotionally deeply felt by individuals and should have been available and yet has been banned from the private lives of the people. The post-independence discourses of rationality foregrounded the need to realise an economic utopia based on land reform in ways that implied that anything outside the purvey of State authorised views on development, and which did not echo this monolithic narrative of war and more war on the previous owners of the land, was deemed to be trite. In *Love and Other Ghosts*, there is an attempt to re-educate feelings towards appreciating the complexities of lived experience. This is why in the poem, “Weather” (29), the seasonalisation of change of emotions captured in the poem plays on the word “mists” to suggest how blurred human emotions can be when they are involved in multiple struggles to stay alive. Sometimes the efforts to individualise emotions against the hard wall of collected aspirations are rudely undercut by a strong sense of pessimism as when the poet registers the alienation of the self from others in the lines, “love/ Only you have vanished/ With the Mists To unknown places” (29). There is a sense in which hope is depicted as nursed by love, and by extension, a way of changed life can still be achieved when an individual or a nation acknowledges its lows and highs, its strengths, and weaknesses.

In the poem “Falling with the sun” (31), the persona reaffirms that, despite the ups and down of life in the private and public spheres, despair can be conquered by love. In the poem, the refusal to bow down to enforced despair is also raised in the phrase the, “rising sun” (31) and the persona reiterates that a solid family and by extension – nation – is founded on tolerance of differences and endurance in protecting that love:

“in matters of love/ We have no sunsets/
In matters of love /We drank the sunset juices/
You and I/ Me, rising with the sun/
You, a rainbow of eternal sunsets.

(31)

The lines above play on colours evoked by azures of absent sunsets while the insistence on “rising sun” subverts discourses that threaten to submerge in despair, the individual’s identities. The longevity of a life lived out of love outruns lives based on empty slogans by which the ruling elites manage and achieve to politically blackmail the ordinary people. In the poetic lines above, the use of pronouns denoting collective identities as in “We have no

sunsets”, or “We drank the sunset juice” is counterbalanced with the use of pronouns insisting on individualised experiences depicted in the address, “You and me”. Individual yearnings, idiosyncrasies, pains and aspirations are often fudged or glossed over in national discourses that emphasise collective myths, These national mythologies are perceived as the basis of imagined collective destinations realised in “eternal sunsets” but narrowly authorised by someone, somewhere. In other words, the act of writing change in post-colonial Zimbabwe through the trope of love is meant to provide checks and balances against the over deterministic narratives of nation-ness that speak in the name of the individual, and yet subsumes the same individual in their totalising discursive practises.

Thus, in narrowing the human experiences to love between two people, the poem suggests that ordinary people can organise their lives outside the restrictive gaze of an authoritarian regime. Hove’s poetic voice makes it clear to the reader that sensuous love cannot be over-indulged for its own sake. As in some domesticated contexts of the carnivalesque, ordinary people can indulge in unrestrained pleasure, live a hedonistic life of sexual orgies, punctuated by quaffing of toxics, drinks and unmitigated swearing. Autocratic governments can encourage the people to waste their lives in occupations and letting out emotions on things that do not matter most. One can discern, in Chenjerai Hove’s love poetry, a change of mood and tone. This tonal shift is from the celebration of human nakedness when people exchange raw emotions during the sex act, to the situations when the poetic voice sounds a cautionary note that insist that indulgence in sex, and love, if overdone, can actually overwhelm the need to address other meanings embedded in the trope of love.

In the poem, “Roses” (32), there is a sense in which the poet begins to revise his earlier deployment of the trope of love as representing everything that is good. The instability of meanings in images of “roses” is acknowledged. We read from the poem that oppressive machineries in society have also the capacity to appropriate the tropes of love, change their meanings to achieve their nefarious political ends. If the poetic imaginary can be infiltrated and the poems’ images can be re-interpreted to suit the agendas that run tangential to what the poet had during the composition then roses can longer be taken as sufficient images that can frame only the preferred meanings intended to capture the beauty of the lives of ordinary lovers. The reader is warned to be aware of the power of cultural implantation and the grafting of alien sensibilities onto popular discursive practises. The reader is then enjoined to burn roses because (32),

Dictators also give roses
To those they burn
Charlatans worship roses
From murderous hands
Let’s burn the roses
So we can name
Our own summers
And Winters.

The lines above effect a dramatic shift from poetic protest traditions that usually appeal to the moral sense of rulers to intercede on behalf of the suffering masses. The consciousness that “dictators also give roses”, that “charlatans worship roses from murderous hands” marks the poetic voice’s departure from a naïve and innocent view of the rulers who are depicted as

capable of manipulating cultural symbols. The radical break is further underlined by the persona's hope that ordinary people can fashion alternative imagery that represents what is acceptable and beautiful in their lives. The desire to name "our own summers and winters" brings out the paradoxical reality in which it is acknowledged that the anticipated change for the better (summers), can only be possible when people have gone through cold or the pain of winter. There is no change that is easy. In order to capture this uneasy relationship between change and stasis, Hove makes extensive use of nature imagery culled from the environment.

Love, Nature and Rhythms of Social Change

In the poem, "Whirlwinds" (8), the harm or the beauty that whirlwinds can bring to the persona are acknowledged as carrying with them the capacity to inaugurate change to the besieged state of the human body (8):

These winds are mine to harness,
With their gentle whisper,
Gentle like soothing things
Of an eternal lover.

As in Shona culture where the *Gukurahundi* rains come in September to bring life out of a cold winter, in the lines above, there is a celebration that change is in the air. The insistence by the persona on wanting to own the "winds [that] are mine to harness" suggests an image of love as an eternal feeling without which even the most despairing people live. The universal deployment of the image of an eternal lover is also apposite; change for the better, and also most successful revolutions, whether political or social, can only survive the test of their time when they are informed by a love that is personal as well as national in outlook. The love in which the protagonists feel for each other is close to what Emmanuel Levinas, in his book, *On Thinking-of-the-Other* (1998), describes as a different way of loving wisdom. In this love, what the dominant discourses in post-independence Zimbabwe have marginalised, and ejected from the vocabulary of the nation is re-centred and celebrated because this love re-inaugurates an alternative history of the basis of new ethics.

In "Moon Sinking" (9), Hove makes use of natural elements to construct symbolical images that are contrasted to each other to achieve maximum effect to the reader: the Moon should sink, with its "blurred light", "yellow sunrays" as if to herald the end of one era in preparation for another one. The poet is part of the change, and his personae "look[s] the other way" (9) suggesting that there could be a version of one's life other than what has been provided as the natural destiny of people in metaphors that emphasise collective identities. Hope is captured in "desires whose depth I cannot fathom" (9) and sunshine presages new beginnings that are characterised by "Love without sunsets" (9). In "Moon Sinking", it is implied that every abject condition, for example, such as is represented by a sinking moon, is a pre-condition or rather, a condition of possibility for alternative values. The translation of desire into what is real underlines the realisation of a goal that begun only as an imaginary thought and now is blossoming into a new possible way of doing things. The theme of change and transitions from one spiritual zone to another engenders transgressions of the old ways of doing things. In Shona mythology, the sinking moon is captured by the expression "Mwedzi

Waora” (The moon has rotten). The rotting of the moon introduces darkness that presages a new cycle of light. Infused within these ritual observations are the contradictions between forces of death and life whose struggles in Shona culture find resolution in the birth of a new moon, new seasons and new social experiences.

In the poem, “Crossing Borders” (10), love is the linchpin on which any attempt to “cross this border” or blockade would result in the realisation of a form of a romanticised and yet ambiguous happiness that in fact embraces “our own slippery rainbows” (10). This poem connects with the paradoxical experiences of humanity rendered in the poem, “Fluffy Clouds Passing” (11). In this poem, the metaphor of love is used as an imaginary template for holding the ideals of an adulterated human condition not defined through the opposites of hate and love that have become normative in the world of the personae. Instead, the voice of the persona in the poem yearns to create a regenerative context outside the dominant values by emphasising the point that everything in life changes; even the powerful fall and when they do, the personae sees it as times to celebrate these “[passing] fluffy clouds” (11). The happiness that accompanies the experiences of “passing fluffy clouds” is underscored by the fact that these clouds do not carry water, they are just fluffy. However, the poetic voice is not naïve to believe that these clouds can just pass without incident: there is intimation of the violence that the sudden downpour from fluffy clouds can bring when it leaves lovers alone. But, it is a situation that the lovers can endure “until birds of love fly back home” (11).

In the poem, “Defiant Love” (12), the persona just like the poet has not been accommodated by his society; he has been “cast away” “like the skin of an old python” (12). The pathos of being a cast away can be changed into an elevated status of self-discovery in which the poetic voice is praising its own alienation because out of it emerges an intense passion that prepossesses the future that had been denied him. Alienation is viewed as a condition of possibility towards knowing one’s multiple selves. When alienation is endowed with intention and positive significance, it implies a “willed move-ment from out of the self and a purposive quest for new horizons of life and of experience” (Irele 2007: 601). Hence, there are “endless departures” (12) that allow one to “arrive in my dreams and the children sing Old songs of love in the valleys” (12).

Hove’s poetry in *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) is measured and tempered with a realistic sense of cautious optimism. The idea of pushing back reckless optimism that would befog the poetic imagination to the potential of being undermined by some negative forces is represented in the poem, “Before” (16). “Before” (16) returns to the theme of change embodied in the image of “whirlwinds/ Still to be named” (16). It is the height of love to imagine change and be part of it. But there is also caution that an unnamed whirlwind can bring in its wake dirt into the lives of the people. The poem, “Body Flowers and Sunsets” (35) pays tribute to the waning old order, reminding it that the clock of time cannot be reversed and that it should accept its fate which is to disappear from the frame of the image of a new horizon. This new horizon is captured through the use of tactile images appealing to the sense of smell:

Sunset
The smell of your sweat.
Sunset,
The flowers of your body
Without perfumes

Interrupting your moist voice

(35)

The address to “sunset” literally personifies a social system that is on the dusk of its existence. The distance or journey that the sun has traversed from dawn to dusk has made the sun to accumulate unsavoury smells associated with sweat. In social terms so much time spent by leaders in power erode their self-esteem in the eyes of those for whom they are supposed to shine. That the sun has no “perfume” to cover its dirty and smelly self, testifies to the inevitability of age that wears and tears the human body. What is also implied in these images is the extent to which social ideologies that once shone with brightness, now “tell stories of dark nights” (35) in which no one can ever completely see or be persuaded to listen to “smells of voices” (35) issuing from “yawning caves” (35). When human love is poisoned by self-seeking political leaders, this takes away the intoxicating pleasure in social acts associated with love making.

Personal love is voided of feeling, and the public love for doing socially good activities die when people feelings are suppressed. The poem, “Rivers” (37), attempts to stretch far back in time in order to salvage humanistic values that now lie trampled by the hard hoofs of political leaders’ insensitive demands bidding ordinary people to follow social ideologies that no longer work in the interests of the majority. Not only does the persona experience the “bitterness of love” (37); authentic personal love as a mirror of national commitment is present no more. Love itself is “so far away/ From the pastures/ Where it once received succour” (37). The sense of a dissociation of sensibility between the two lovers is a metaphor of the ruptures that have torn the society asunder. For the poet, this new situation reflects a “dream I did not dream” (Counting Nights: 80). What there is now left to remember is the violence of the past. In “Rivers” (37), the scars that the past has inflicted on its bearers in the form of ordinary people “Brings painful memories/Of the love Bird/Surging into the dark Sky/ Without me/ Without you” (37).

In the poem, “Declarations of Cages” (39), it is suggested further that, when love for one’s nation is trapped in the effluvia of dominant discourses, life is experienced as a “prison” or a “cage” (39) from which the impulse to escape is pressing. The poetic voice enjoins its fellow suppressed voices to escape, for, not to do so would be to give a new lease of life to a “withered shadow” (39), that naturally is destined to disappear from the political scene. When self-expression is silenced and the “granary of love empties” as suggested in the poem, “Truth to Parting” (41), hate speech takes the place of mutual understanding and then forces the ordinary people, imaged through the life of the poet, to “write funeral songs for lovers and death’s ways” (41).

The change of tone, in which the trajectory of emotions map out the sad life of the populace in *Love and Other Ghosts* is also registered in the poem, “First Love VI (For MT Where ever You are)” (47), in which some powerful people have spent many years wishing to “kill” (47) the people’s desire to “flower again” (47). It is the misuse of energy directed at destructive acts that con-founds the poet’s imagination. Ironically the same illogical logic becomes a necessary prelude to an awakened consciousness determined to divorce one-self forever, from this predatory culture encouraged by those who are figured and fingered in “Divorce” (52), as the “ashes of the old homestead” (52).

The claustrophobic nature of this abandoned homestead that has become Zimbabwe is captured further in the poem, “Windows” (62), in which the persona bemoans this “house

without windows” that threatens to suffocate all those who are in it. The personae wishes to have the “keys” (62) to this house, to open it so that new fresh air can be breathed by the people who dwell in it. The theme of the unaccommodated man, one who is rejected by one’s own country is actually celebrated in the poem, “Rejected, Proud” (68), because the persona believes that his moral principles are far above of those who have the political power to determine his fate. Being proud of having been rejected and ejected of out this house of commotion reflects the extent to which the poet and, by extension, the persona have held on to their values uncompromisingly:

I am proud,
You threw me away,
Like a useless rag
My passion is mine
My love is mine now,
and the air around me
envelopes my many secrets

Not only does the poet/personae feel elevated from being excused from a life of chaos, the rejection itself enables the poet to imagine a plurality of possible versions of self and nation.

Love and Other Ghosts and Political Regeneration in the Post Colony

Hove is aware that whatever efforts by poets, or ordinary people to carve out some spiritual space that they can call theirs, this attempt is unfortunately enacted from the physical space that also is occupied by the dominant classes. As a result, it is not entirely possible for ordinary people to develop an alternative lifestyle not impacted on by the cultures of the powerful. In recognition of this paradox, the poem, “Poet’s Desire” (120), deliberately spells out what the poet expects and wishes his life and that of the people can be. In this poem, that sounds like a personal/national anthem, the poet believes that the gift of imagination and discovering new forms of existence is not given on a silver plate. The quest to originate new pathways of human, social and spiritual development, that break with the past of violence and embraces the present and future, is made the more difficult but not impossible because never, in the history of human development, have been suitable conditions of literary production allowed to the artist by the community, without contestations. The unapologetic artist is almost always located in a space where he or she must contest as well as negotiate with other political competitors for the attention of authorising versions of better lives for those who the poets believe they dream for. In the poem, readerly attention is drawn to the use of verbs such as “meandering”, “Floating” and “blowing” that reveal the desire of the poet to operate in a social context in which free imagination is possible. There is a romantic strain in this expectation from the poet in anticipating “proper” social conditions conducive to imaginative creativity. The irony is created by the absence of the bare minimum conditions that should nourish artistic imagination. Ironically, as in other poems discussed above in which the absence of a “normal” way of life is foregrounded, it is life’s irony that the poems are made possible by the search of what is not given.

In *Love and Other Ghosts* the challenge to a political culture of oppression symbolised in the images of “drying ... desert sands” (120) is made possible by those very conditions of un-

freedom. In “Memories” (121), the transition from Rhodesia to a new Zimbabwe is characterised using mixed metaphors reflecting mixed feelings of the personae. For example, whereas the poet remembers how Africans “all stood up/And celebrated/The fall of the leaves/And the birth/Of a new bloom” (120) this momentous feeling is shattered in the post-colonial context described as possessing “visions without colours?” (121). What started as a promising entry into a democratic culture has ossified, becoming anaemic as politicians gratuitously naturalize violence towards the weak citizens. In “The Moose” (125), the new powers-that-be are dehumanized by their appetite to rule forever and this is characterised as less than the working experience of a “hangman” (125), who can walk home, drink his coffee, read the newspaper as if nothing is amiss, and yet he is the one who has been killing his own people. In the poem, “Ants” (128), small men and women have been cornered to plead for their own lives to be spared: “We are too small/For your big appetite” (128). In “Fotocopies” (129), the culture of intimidation encouraged by the ruling elites creates conditions of sycophancy among some people, who after being degouted of their capacity to think critically and end up acting like zombies, something close to spirit thievery.

Oppressive regimes survive well when they feel they have beaten the poor men and women to submission. The pervasiveness of the culture that zombify is that even people, such as the army that have the power to unseat the tyrant in the state house, have been softened and seduced by the pleasure coming from the creature comforts that they have received from the one leader who personalises history. As a result, it is bemoaned in the poem that powerful women are reduced to images of “monkeys dressed with medals for State occasions”, “men wearing helmets ... [on] annual parades” (129) and Chiefs, the once revered communal institution, has its incumbents reduced to “cabbages ... on leopard skin thrones” (129).

In short, the power that the “declining regime” wields, is fake (Mbembe 2002) but brutal. This callousness that has become the content of the values for governing the populace is demonstrated most chillingly in the poem, “Nights With Ghosts” (75-77), that recounts the pleasure that the regime revels in at the sight of ordinary men, women and children suffering during Operation Murambatsvina. As captured in “Nights With Ghosts”, during the ordeal of Operation Murambatsvina (Vambe 2008), ordinary people were left in the open, during the winter months when their makeshift houses were demolished by the police at the instigation from the powerful leaders. The narrative of violence reveals that people were pushed out of homes and left to the care of the harsh elemental forces of cold, and rain. Teachers, old men and children who did not have “guns/Or spears/Or arrows/Or sticks” (76) were most targeted by police who had “fierce guns and hammers” (76). In that orgy of destruction what was lost was (76),

“Teacher mutawu’s address/My father’s work address/My little sister’s address/ My little dog’s address/My mother’s address” and “Everyone’s address” that were consigned to “Care of spca/Care of Filth department/ Care of order/Care of Caledonia camp/, Care of tribal trust land Care of the river bank!/Care of cockroach camp!/Care of Maggots/Care of crime and grime/Care of State House!”

The last statement suggests that this ruinous operation was orchestrated from the State House. What is implied is that those who wield power do not care for the welfare of the people they claim to represent. Instead, the leaders’ actions do not leave happy people among the communities, but “A broken brick/A broken heart/A broken father/ A broken mother” (77).

The motif of the bulldozer as an instrument of destruction is, in the poem, “Embraces in the Rubble” (79), directly used to cow down a restive population agitating for social change. The postcolonial bulldozer kills children, and those people who are suspected of having different ideas from those of the State; hence, the personae laments that the politics of exclusion in Zimbabwe reveal that the ordinary people “are nobody’s national plan” (79). The power of the ordinary people is only sought when politicians want to be voted into secure offices after which they can unleash their terror on the very same people who voted them into power.

“Tyrant” (81), is one of the most daring poems. In it Hove demonstrates a return to the genre of vituperative poetry where literary metaphor is cast aside in favour of direct confrontation with those in the State House. In the poem, the “King” in the State House uses words that smell of “gunpower” (81), to force people to agree to his vision. He sometimes uses his “volcanic tempers” (81) when he sniffs the “wind for armed insurgency” (81), and as a show of pervasive power inflation, he “wears necklaces of bullets” (81) when he wants to intimidate and cow into submission people who, in his imagination, are the would-be leaders of political opposition. His warlike features displayed even during peace times allows him to desecrate the sacred since, when he uses his whims, “Tomorrow’s funeral/Is banned/The corpse/ Detained/For further Questioning” (81). The absurdity of his power and lack of proportion when dealing with dissent is further revealed in the poem, “Defiled Seed” (87), in which the persona testifies to the fact that Zimbabwe is a *de facto* dictatorship. Ordinary people are under the threat of constant surveillance from the “shadow of the Lion king’s ominous wings” (87), that “cover the seeds” of people’s desire for freedom with “vulture’s claws” (87). The unnaturalness of the power that has consumed the leader like a cancer, is underscored further in the poem through grotesque characterisation in which this particular “king eats with spears for forks” (87).

The poem, “Landscape”, mentions the state as the source of violence that afflicts the ordinary people. The representation of the state as a “vulturescape” (88) prepared to smother people’s dreams is a theme that is concretised and then amplified in the poem, “Prison” (89). Post-colonial Zimbabwe is depicted as a form of jail where the country itself is also jailed by the whims of a few rich but ruthless leaders. Those of the ordinary people who dare complain against the ignominy of the old regime are thrown into prison where “lice long for their bloody dinner” (89). It is not only the people who are incarcerated; any narrative that aspires towards freedom of expression is also manacled and subjected to selective and “filthy cloth of justice” from “invisible hands of scarps of justice” (89). In other words, poets are also targets of the violence from the state.

Since in the Zimbabwean post-colony justice itself is compromised, there is no protection for the ordinary people, hence, in the poem, “Limited Choice” (92), some people have congregated around the Movement for Democratic Change, while others have run out of the country, with many more succumbing to the power that is faked (92):

*Between Fingers
And Toes
And knee.*

Although the political space for self-expression has been narrowed, there is conviction in the poet that this particular form of oppression will come to pass. This positive attitude is manifested in the persona’s reaffirmation of the principle of triumphalism in which social

good prevails over political evil, even though that process of “Freedom’s long journey/ needs tough sandals” (94). The anthology confirms this vision of communal recreation in the poem, “Little Wounds” (115), in which the beginning of the end of tyranny in Zimbabwe is emerging from the horizon (115):

Somewhere behind this little beauty/ Little wounds yearn for their day
Of arrival in spaces not yet known.../These are sharp ends/Of the jaws of history Little
wounds/ With big stories/In their breadths

In these few lines are contained the most political aspects of *Love and Other Ghosts* which is mainly that life changes, and with it new forms of life are inaugurated despite the attempts by powerful blocks in the Zimbabwe society at preventing the fruition of a democratic society that many yearn for.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore and expand the meaning of what is political in Chenjerai Hove’s poetic works. The article demonstrated that all works of art are by nature political, but what determines the nature of these politics is how they are represented in literature. It was shown that Hove’s early poetry resisted colonialism and neo-colonialism but the terms in which that resistance was conducted emphasised the necessity of organized and armed rebellion. While this mode of portraying resistance is historically justified because it was one of the several manifestations of the dimensions of African nationalism, open revolt does not exhaust the multiplicity of other ways through which people register their anti-exploitation sentiments. Open resistance encourages a discourse plotted against a perceived enemy. In the view of Parry, a discourse *against* demonstrates one of the weak forms of oppositional politics. This view is supported in Pecheux who argues that a struggle *against* does not create its own context to contest social injustice. Rather, it is a struggle elaborated on a plain of “ideological evidentness on the terrain of that evidentness, an evidentness with a negative sign, reversed on its own terrain” (Pecheux in Parry 2007: 275).

A critical exploration of the poems in Hove’s unpublished manuscript, *Love and Other Ghosts*, reveals that the poet wished to experiment with other forms of narrating African resistance to post-colonial violence in Zimbabwe. What was emphasised in that analysis was that Hove uses the trope of love to imagine the possibility of the personal and the national identities merging or coalescing into a movement of resistance. This analysis modified Israel Muvindi’s view that “Hove throws in love poetry as comic relief in the otherwise ‘serious’ poetry that aims at societal overhaul” (2013: 203). The trope of love has not been deployed in *Love and Other Ghosts* (2009) to present “lighter moments where he tackles social relationships such as love, probably for the purgation of the readers’ emotions” (208). The article reformulated the idea of love and projected it as a theoretical framework within which to create a poetic context outside the dominant gaze where ordinary people could be seen organising their lives in strictly “non-political” ways that nonetheless had political implications. This view is in keeping with the idea of the comic not merely as relief, but as the essence of contradiction which emphasises, contrast, discrepancy and opposition to the ugly, the base and the horrible in life. The romantic element in Hove’s poems on love is

ahead of social life and it constructs and imagines an aesthetic ideal outside the frame of dominant discourses. The celebration of sensuous and sexual pleasure in the poems is a demonstration of the control that people have of a physical and spiritual sphere that the dominant ideologies of Zimbabwe have not succeeded totally in distorting.

Love and Other Ghosts also uses imagery derived from nature, and seasonal changes to hint at the inevitability of change in the political spheres in Zimbabwe. The significance of such forms of representing resistance reveals the fact that ordinary people can authorise lifestyles that can disturb the grand narratives in which every facet of people's lives should be subordinated to the violence of state authored narratives. It was also argued that for Hove, it is not entirely possible for the ordinary people to conduct their politics completely outside the surveillance from the authorities simply because both the ordinary people and the leaders occupy the same geo-graphical space. This fact alone suggests that organising resistance politics against an intransigent political regime is difficult but not impossible. However, sometimes in poems such as "Love" (19), it is the male lover who initiates action; the woman is objectified and the reader never gets to know how the woman feels about sensuous love. In "Falling with the Sun" (31) the poet uses the collective pronoun, "we" and the voice of the woman is submerged and subsumed in the male authorised feelings. The absence of an awareness to re-educate human feelings is still present in *Love and Other Ghosts* in which Hove tends to insert male voices in female bodies. Despite this valid criticism, Hove's *Love and Other Ghosts* reveals that love can conquer the mantle of oppression in Zimbabwe that shall give in to people's pressure for political reform and subsequently crumble into rubble. If that comes to pass, that would be the beginning of the process of renewal of people's freedoms that have been suppressed for many years.

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