

Representations of dance in Zimbabwean literature, post-1960

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Abstract

This thesis analyses Zimbabwean literary works that represent dance, specifically those works produced during the period ranging from the 1960s to the present. This study is informed, in its approach, by Afrocentric and postcolonial theories, which foreground the dancing African's subjectivity in postcolonial cultural resistance. The thesis examines the nature and purpose of dance, particularly how dance features in Zimbabwean people's responses to exigencies, such as social demands, foreign encroachments, colonial encounters, and post-independence challenges, as depicted in the selected texts.

By recognising that dance permeates all aspects of Zimbabwean life, the study problematises dance and uses literary representations to discursively examine the multi-purposes of dance, which include socialisation, national unity, mobilisation, political coercion, mockery, gender control, as well as warning listeners against moral decadence. The thesis examines literary works by Zimbabwean writers such as Solomon Mutswairo, Geoffrey Ndhkala, Musaemura Zimunya, Emmanuel Ngara, Shimmer Chinodya, Yvonne Vera, Novuyo Tshuma, Petina Gappah and Noviolet Bulawayo.

Literary depictions of the *jikinya* dance myth, dances performed for and by Mbuya Nehanda during the 1896 Ndebele-Shona Uprising against British colonialism, popularly known as the First *Chimurenga*, depictions of *kongonya* dance during the 1970s Zimbabwe's war of liberation that is also known as the Second *Chimurenga* and those *kongonya* dances characterising the post-2000 Land Reform Programme, are analysed. Furthermore, representations of contemporary social, ritual and entertainment dances performed in an evolving Zimbabwean socio-political milieu characterised with ever-changing socio-economic conditions, unstable racial and ethnic relations, hyperinflation, migrations and HIV-AIDS, are analysed. An emerging trend is that dance representations have been ambivalent, represent a non-neutral symbol and practice that is prone to the whims of politically, racially and gender interested writers, performers and watchers.

Key Terms: Representations of dance; Zimbabwe; Zimbabwean literature; *chimurenga*; socialisation; mobilisation; political coercion; gender performance.