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**Colonialism and Decolonization: Militia Struggles and Resistance as Catalysts for Independence in Chinodya's Harvest of Thorns.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The wind of Colonialism that swept through the world buried its root in Africa because of the favorable economic realities and riches of the African continent. Colonialism was a yoke on Africa, no doubt. The aim of this paper is to discuss Colonialism as it affects Africa, and the place of Militia Struggles and Resistance as catalysts that sped up the process of independence across African Continent which brought about Decolonization. With focus on Chinodya's Harvest of Thorns and Zimbabwe, It relates the fact that without intense agitation by Guerrilla Fighters – an army of the people, the evils of colonialism would have continued till this day with the white minority dominating the black majority. The paper adopts as its theoretical framework, Resistant Theory, believed to have been first practiced by the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, and concludes that Militia Struggles and Resistance were best responses to Colonialism and imperialism of the West as they aided the actualization of Independence.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Decolonization. Resistance. Militia Struggles. Independence.

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**Introduction:**

Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*[1] falls among the Corpus of Colonial Literature produced in Africa. African writers in the Colonial Era had derived materials for their literary output as a result of the scorched monster called Colonialism; Colonialism in Africa was a pestilence. The Colonial masters were drawn more to Africa – this was not unconnected with her rich, arable soil for agricultural exploration. The effects of colonialism actually necessitated the process of Decolonization in Africa. On this note Jean-Pau; Sartre, writing in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* Succinctly submits:

It is colonialism that creates patriotism of the colonized... When a people's only remaining option is in choosing how to die... what have they got left to lose? Their misery will become their courage. They will turn the rejection that colonialism confronts them with into an absolute rejection of colonialism. [2].

The implication is that the various insurrections experienced in Africa against the Whiteman were products of their actions. All aspects of life of the colonized were affected across the Continents where colonialism was experienced. Emphasizing on the extent to which European culture superimposed that of the native, Edward Said [3], adds, "...European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient...". The people's culture suffered declination just as the people were killed through slavery and slave trade. Consequently, African Writer who had experienced hammers from the imperialists, documented their experiences fictionally.

**The Theory of Resistance**

The theory of resistance is an aspect of political thought especially in relation to religious institutions. It came up in the early modern period of European history around 1500- 1800. Therefore, we speak about Lutheran Resistance Theory, Calvinist Resistance Theory and The Catholic Resistance Theory. The Calvinist Resistance Theory advocates resistance of the people to the tyranny of a ruler. According to Hardeed Kaur [4], Resistance theory is about the resistance to an authority, an individual or group. It is believed to have first been practiced by the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther in the early modern period of European History. Martin Luther resisted the traditional Roman Catholic Church which advocated the hierarchy of chain. By this he strongly rejected the clerical authority in context of religion. This is what informed Kaur's opinion that "The dominant authority which is repressive in nature ought to be resisted as is the natural law, formulated by resistance against the colonial regime in the modern context" [4]. Martin Luther broke away from the Roman Catholic Church to establish the Lutheran Church we have today. It is a truth to assert that resistance in the face of evil perpetuation is a call for transition and social transformation; it is a call on man to stand up against evil. This would further ensure that such evil is put to check and made to instill a sense of a second thought in any one responsible for its perpetuation.

It is obvious from antiquity that the oppressed must certainly rise up to challenge the obnoxious laws and authoritarian regimes of heartless rulers in form of arm Struggle, revolt, guerrilla fighting etc. Resistance or Liberation movements cannot be put aside because we exist in an uncertain world. Most times the aims of resistance just like the ones in *Harvest of thorns* are justifiable. According to Ricigliano "Arm groups and peace processes is concerned...[with] avenge[ing] past injustices and /or to defend or control resources, territory or institutions for the benefit of a particular

ethnic group or social group” [5]. Thus it becomes logical that the decisions by African societies to resist colonialist and imperialist idiosyncrasies were rooted on concrete grounds as it brought about freedom and independence. It is in this vein that Kaur maintains that liberation is the outcome of resistance. Chinodya then emphasizes collective effort in resisting the oppression of the colonizers like Ngugi Wa Thiong in *Weep not Child, Devil on the Cross, Petals of blood* and Sembebe Ousmene in *Gods bit of Wood*.

### **Colonialism in Zimbabwe and Africa: An Overview.**

The encounter of the West with Africa has remained an unforgettable experience. This is due to the fact that it actually led to many challenges some of which have kept Africa the way she is. All over the World, it is evident that colonialism brought with it much anguish amidst the civilization it claimed to have brought. All the societies that experienced this European force have one form of narrative or the other. Discussing the History of Colonialism in Africa, Ehiedu G. Iweriebor states;

...between the 1870s and 1900s , Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressure, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonialization. At the same time African societies put up various forms of resistance against the attempt to colonize their countries and impose foreign domination. By the early twentieth century, however, much of Africa except Ethiopia and Liberia, had been colonized by European power.

The activities of the colonial masters were not peculiar to Africa only. While this ugly incident of conquest and destruction of lives were going on in Africa, other parts of the world were experiencing similar phenomenon but at different times, such as China, India, Vietnam, just to mention few countries. Defining the word “Colonialism”, Osterhammel says, “[it] is based on the will to make peripheral societies subservient to the metropolises” [6]. According to Zig-Zag [7], “Colonialism is the practice of invading other lands and territories for the purpose of settlement and or resource exploitation”. Lain and Alistair [8] assert that colonialism is “The policy and practice of a strong power extending its control territorially over a weaker nation or people” (Pp 91). The word colonialism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, comes from the Roman Word “*Colonia*” which means “farm” or “settlement” and referred to Romans who settled in other lands but still retained their citizenship. Accordingly, the *OED* describes it as:

A settlement in a new country... a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state; the community so formed, consist of the original settlers and their descendants and successors, as long as the connections with the parent state is kept up [9].

From these plethora of definitions, it is crystal clear that colonialism was a practice by Europeans with their aura of strength as superior to other countries of the world to subdue, exploit, oppress, destroy and alienate the rights and privileges of the rightful owners of the territories they scrambled. This was done with gross impunity. The evils of colonialism were indelibly witnessed all over the continents of the world; it was visited either socially, politically, economically, culturally, educationally or otherwise.

The African languages were treated as inferior simply because the colonial masters’ intention was to extirpate Africa and obliterate the thread that bound her. The foremost African novelist, Marxist writer and staunch critic of colonialism, Ngugi Wa Thiong, writing in *Decolonizing the Mind: the politics of Language in African Literature* traces the evil of colonialism on the Kenyan language and its disruption. Ngugi writes;

I was born into a large peasant family. My father had four wives and twenty- eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole. We spoke Gikuyu as we worked in the fields; we spoke Gikuyu outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of story- telling around the fireside... and then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture.... English became the language of my formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language and all the others had to bow before it in reference. Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bar buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as IAM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY...[10].

The insinuation is simply that the language of the colonizer is associated with power, status and prestige but the colonized’s linguistic art is related to inferiority, stupidity, humiliation and low status [11]. This was the beginning of the conquest – the snatching away of one’s culture because language is part of our culture. The above gladly exposes the motivation of the West in Africa. They arrived with preponderance of mischief with a minimal handful of worthy prospects for Africa and her people if at all. Zig-Zag [7] relates how Cecil Rhodes, a British colonial official for which Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was named, addresses the colonial officers, articulates the motives and goals of European colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cecil Rhodes expresses “We must find new lands from which we can easily obtain raw materials and at the same time exploit the cheap slave labor that is available from the natives of the colonies”. This is the

picture which presents itself to us of the colonizer. European colonialism placed Africa and her people at a disadvantage point; a point of servitude, deception, strife, death, humiliation and sexual molestation. A compelling, conspicuous and stinging dramatization of the exploitation and deception of the colonialists in African societies during the era of colonialism is represented in Dele Charley's colonial play *The Blood of a Stranger*[12]. In the dialogue between Maligu and Whitehead the obvious purpose of colonialism is revealed thus:

**MALIGU:** But you are here to plant tobacco.

**WHITEHEAD:** This is what everyone has been made to believe. There are diamonds in the stream and in the place near the tobacco farm. The people have never seen a diamond, so you will tell them before they begin to dig that there are many devil stones in that place. Each one they find must be put into a special jug which we shall take away every day to the shrine, so as to kill the devils before we throw the stone away into the river. You know that diamonds can fetch a lot of money?

There are numerous citations to buttress the point that the colonialism of Africa as well as other parts of the world was a total imprisonment. The colonized were subjugated, dominated and all that they stand for taken away or destroyed. The African people were left naked; they became beggars in their land. No identity, no rights or privileges; they were extremely victimized. These were the ugly pictures that informed Chinua Achebe's Magnum Opus: *Things Fall Apart*. In Zimbabwe, the story was no longer the same with the people when the colonialist came on the scene, Zimbabwe was colonized in the early 1890s by the British South African Company (BSAC). It is on record how the company combined deceit and violence to gain control of Zimbabwe and to take away the best arable land from the Shona and Ndebele people. The Shona and Ndebele are a group of Bantu ethnic group native to Zimbabwe and her neighboring countries. Zimbabwe experienced a serious discrepancy with the colonial masters because of the fertile land they see.

Land was not unimportant in this perspective, but its importance was more symbolic than material. The alienation (forced removal) of land by European Settlers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a powerful symbol of political disenfranchisement, economic exploitation and impoverishment of the African population by the Rhodesian settlers in the region. According to John Metzler[13] "Cecil Rhodes... and other shareholders were primarily interested in making a profit for the Company and themselves as shareholders... the European settlers were desperate to find alternative sources of income... the most reasonable alternative was agricultural production". The stories are the same, as far as colonialism was concerned... the real aim of it was to control the people's wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. Colonialism denied human rights to people it subjugated by violence, which it keeps in poverty and ignorance by force [11]; [14]. The people of Zimbabwe like other Africans did not fold their hands as we shall see their reaction against the colonial and imperial forces of the West.

### **Decolonization: Militia Struggles and Resistance as Catalysts for Zimbabwe's Independence in Chinodya's Harvest of Thorns.**

African people after many years of colonial subjugation decided to take their destiny in their hands. They began the process of decolonization. Decolonization is ending of colonialism and the liberation of the colonized. This requires the dismantling of the colonial government and its entire social system upon which control and exploitation are based. Decolonization... is a revolutionary struggle aimed at transforming the entire social system and re-establishing the sovereignty of tribal people [7]. It is a conscious efforts by the natives targeted at reclaiming their lost glories from the colonizers. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o believes that after physical decolonization, there should be a decolonization of the mind to totally free Africans from the shackles and menace of British colonialism, hence his book *Decolonizing the mind*. A critical study of *Harvest of Thorns* reveals three stages of decolonization processes in Zimbabwe. We are introduced to the formation of political parties; secret revolts and the Chimurenga open resistance. The formation of political parties represents the creation of awareness of the natives of their rights and hunger for self- government. This stage is represented by door to door selling of forms. The narrator relates:

One day a man came to the Tichafa's house selling membership cards for political party. We are church people, Mr. Tichafa told the man. We are interested in the spirit, not the flesh. If it is God's Will to change a government, then He will change it Himself, in His own time (HT. 75).

This implies that there was an intense creation of consciousness of a political upheaval. The people were tired with the exploitative nature of the colonial masters; the likes of Cecil John Rhodes whose agenda includes exploring the resources of the people both human and material for his benefits and that of Britain. The refusal of the Tichafas to purchase the form shows the uncertainty with which some of the people saw the fight for freedom as a result of the manner in which the colonial masters had subjugated the people's spirit, body and soul through various means of intimidations. The colonial masters carried themselves as lords of all who possessed absolute power that could not be denied.

The second stage is the secret revolt and open demonstrations and protests by students carrying placards with bold irritating inscriptions against the colonizers. This stage was demonstrated by the children. In this stage, little school

children were sent as insurgents and witnessed the destruction of public properties. This was where Benjamin first showcased his determination to fight the Rhodesian government to liberate his land as a little child from the strong hold of colonialism. The narrator says; “The police came one morning, banging on our doors. It was still dark, just after five. There had been trouble in the township. A beer hall had been set on fire... your son took part in burning down the beer hall” (HT. 78-79). The narrating voice continues:

There was an uproar in the country. Black students at the University staged demonstration in the capital. Many schools followed suit. Armies of teenage boys in school uniforms marched by night along farm roads and obscure routes, and trooped into the cities and towns with placards that read, among other inscriptions: THE BLACK MAN IS TOO HUNGRY TO HOLD A GUN. GIVE US THE VOTE FIRST. WE HAVE NOTHING TO DEFEND... Benjamin Tichafa marched in the second row propping up one side of the sheet on which he and a dorm mate had painted in bleeding red letters: THE BOYS IN THE BUSH ARE OUR BROTHERS (HT.95).

The scorch of colonial imperialism was telling on the school children. This was the trigger of the total or collective involvement of the children to secure the future of the homestead from the colonizers. Having been pressed to the wall, the children then assumed a revolutionary consciousness to fight the whites to reclaim their lost glories.

The third stage of the decolonizing process is the Chimurenga Resistance. Chimurenga is a word in the Shona language roughly meaning “revolutionary struggle”. It refers to the Shona and Ndebele insurrections against the administration of the British South African Company led by Cecil John Rhodes. Mlimo, the Matabele spiritual/ religious leader is credited with fomenting much of the anger that led to the confrontation. He convinced the Ndebele and Shona people that the white settlers (almost 4,000) were responsible for drought, locust plagues, the cattle disease and pest ravaging the country. This was the first Chimurenga of [13]. The resistance recorded in the novel is the Bush War or Zimbabwe War of Liberation which resulted in the Lancaster House Agreement and further facilitated the independence of 1980.

The above incidents are in consonant with Frantz Fanon’s Comment on the catalysts for organized revolt. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, maintains, “Colonial exploitation, poverty and endemic famine drive the non-existent into being” This was the reason behind Benjamin crossing the border to look for a guerilla camp to fight the Rhodesian government. After the demonstration, Benjamin discovers his name and fingerprint were taken, that he shall be charged to court for taking part in the demonstration, he decides to make to the bush. This was the only reason for living - to fight the government and liberate the land, without consultation he leaves for the bush.

Benjamin finds the guerilla camp. The commander in charge of the camp questions him suspecting him to be in espionage mission and decides his men will accompany him to the border but Benjamin declines to go pleading and insisting he wants to fight. This clearly portrays the doggedness and determination by Africans both young and old to combat the throes and woes of colonialism. Here we can lay in parallel the inner spirit of abhorrence and detestation for colonialism and its evils. Starting from our protagonist and hero Benjamin to Zambia revolutionary politician and first president, who declares in his autobiography:

In Mufulira, for the first time, I found myself suffering the indignities of the colour bar. Africans were not permitted to enter the European shops by the front door. If they want anything, they had to go to a hole in a wall at the side of the shop to ask for it. I am determined to expose this system for what it was, an insult of my race and my people [15].

This is the spirit that enters Benjamin and drives him to join others in the bush of an arm struggle against the colonialists. Having been absorbed into the fold, his name is changed to Pasi Nema Sellout – that is his war name. In the bush he meets boys like Utano, Baas Die, Mabunu Muchapera, Torai zvombo, Shungu Dzangu, Gidi Ishumba, Musango and others including women, girls like Ropa, the teacher who is killed during one of the raids by the Rhodesian Soldiers. All of them guerillas, fighting with arms to liberate the land. The struggle was bloody as several times the Rhodesian army raids the camp. This, some scholars have said that the movement toward decolonization in Zimbabwe was a much more violent and traumatic process. The presence of European Settlers interests greatly influenced the nature of the national struggle. The struggle was a collective one. It was only through the means of collective efforts that the freedom could be attained. This accounts for the reason of door to door selling of political party membership card, the demonstration by the student and a greater part of the populace in the bush as we witnessed in the novel. The many who died in the raids of the colonial master symbolize the price paid for the attainment of independence. The arm struggles of Zimbabwe paid off as in the wake of April 1980 she obtained independence from Britain.

## **Conclusion:**

In this paper, we have examined Colonialism and Decolonization in Africa especially in Zimbabwe and how Militia Struggles and Resistance aided the actualization of Zimbabwe’s independence using Chinodya’s *Harvest of Thorns*. African people experienced the scorch of colonialism and imperialism as the rapid need for liberation was paramount. Thus, dialogue could not be used to gain this because no man may willingly submit that which is so gainful to him. This

was the situation with the colonizers. Therefore, from the discussion so far, it is acknowledged that arm struggles and resistance are catalysts for the attainment of freedom. The tyrant may not come to see reason until the realities of sufferings are shown through coercive means which include all the various processes we see in the novel.

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