

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Rukuvhute** By C. Chirikure. Harare, College Press, 1989, 45 pp., ISBN 0-86925-973-3, Z\$10,95.

**Dama Rekutanga** By S. Chimisoro. Harare, College Press, 1990, 88 pp., ISBN 0-86925-979-2, Z\$12,95.

These two publications are an important literary beacon in so far as they bring to an end the practice of publishing multiple-voiced anthologies which were gradually creating the impression that one volume cannot be devoted to the work of a single poet. Unlike pre-Independence Shona poetry this poetry openly explores historical and political themes. It is part of a necessary communication with fellow citizens during the process of social transformation. In their breadth of perspective and depth of scrutiny these poems are committed to the struggle to establish a humane society in Zimbabwe.

Chirikure Chirikure strikes a balance between private sentiments and public themes rendering individual feelings as public sentiments. He focuses on colonialism, the war and Independence. His poems act as a weapon which is instrumental in shaping history. The title *Rukuvhute* (Umbilical Cord) is a metaphor for the inalienable link of the individual with history, society, his ancestors, fellow citizens and the downtrodden African masses. Chirikure's poetry has a pan-African appeal as well as a parochial flavour which could awaken in many readers recollections of their childhood intimacy with the land. The characteristic theme of suffering is toned down by an optimistic vision of an ideal future society. The struggle for 'flag' Independence is viewed as being succeeded by the struggle for a better life. The magnanimous sacrifices of the heroes who fell during the war are contrasted with the farcical observance of such nationally-significant days as Heroes' Days which are commemorated in shameful acts that are symptomatic of social decay. Problems such as the shortage of essential commodities, class formation and cultural nationalism, and the betrayal of popular causes are depicted satirically.

One section of the anthology is devoted to family affairs and village life; these nostalgic lyrics compare well with Solomon Mutsaers' early poems. At one stage, however, the poet appears to lapse into laboured didactic themes which pre-occupied Joseph Kumbirai and John Haasbroek. Stylistically Chirikure is more sure-footed than many established poets. He adopts popular rhythms and images from traditional and contemporary society to reach out to the majority of the people with whom he has chosen to identify. He uses the 'we' voice in order to present his feelings as those of a collective group and to play down his alienation as a literary poet from his readers. His poetry is a communion with his fellow citizens. Chirikure also bridges the gap between the living poem and its written counterpart by making his poetry part of actual events. Most of these poems were recited to his audience, who are also the critics of art in oral culture, as part of real events. That probably largely accounts for the immediate appeal to the poems of the reader.

Samuel Chimsoro is more concerned with the betrayal of the popular objectives of socialism that were enunciated at Independence. *Dama Rekutanga* (The First Promise) is a metaphor for the undertaking made at Independence to fulfil the wishes and aspirations of the majority of the people of Zimbabwe. The poet sees this promise as having been broken and the resultant bitterness and disillusionment lends the poems a critical tone. The poems clearly show that the post-Independence struggle is a class rather than a racial struggle. The poet indicts the privileged few for reneging on their promises and duties, and he encourages people to take positive action to change their life-style for the better rather than be passive observers of the growing social malaise.

Chimsoro is in a stylistic quandary, vacillating between populist and academic poetry. Most of the poems begin with the easy-flowing rhythm adopted from popular songs and rhymes in the style of Kumbirai. But unlike Kumbirai's poetry the borrowed song-beat does not always fuse into the poet's own composition. The abandonment of the beat results in structural dislocation. The poet also tends to indulge in private images coined either from very rustic or very quaint idioms from folklore. These esoteric idioms tend to be expressed in very long extended metaphors which make the poetry rather obscure and pedantic. The result is an obscurantism that reminds one of the pioneer Shona poems of the 1950s and 1960s by Wilson Chivaura. Such academic poetry is suitable for the privileged intelligentsia with whom Chimsoro does not seem to identify himself. Esoteric metaphors might have been employed to evade literary censorship, but, whether it is employed for that reason or for its own sake, the result is a loss of mellifluousness and hence a loss of popular appeal because of its limited accessibility. Such contemplative poetry is not easy to understand unless it is heavily footnoted. The style appears to undermine rather than facilitate its subversive role. To that extent Chimsoro's anthology stands in contradistinction to Chirikure's.

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**Mothers of the Revolution** Edited by I. Staunton. Harare, Baobab, 1990, xiv, 306 pp., ISBN 0-908311-25-7, Z\$30.80.

This book comprises thirty testimonies from a variety of women from all over Zimbabwe relating their experiences of the war of liberation in Zimbabwe. Their accounts help the reader to appreciate the different ways in which the war was fought and experienced in different parts of the country.

These testimonies are largely from women who lived in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. This perspective helps readers, particularly non-nationals, to understand the liberation war from the point of view of non-military participants in the liberation movements. The fact that peasant women, who are at the bottom of the class hierarchy in Zimbabwe, are well represented in the collection gives the book a strong sense of the view from below. The relationships between the peasants and the soldiers on