

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE POETRY OF STRUGGLE
AND RESISTANCE FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA

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THE POETRY OF STRUGGLE AND RESISTANCE IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA

ABSTRACT:

This thesis attempts a thematic analysis of the poetry of struggle and resistance in Southern Africa. This is the poetry produced by the people in Southern Africa in the period immediately preceeding, and during, the armed struggle for total liberation. Because this poetry (among other works - literary and cultural) reflected the rejection of colonialism, the growth of national sentiment or consciousness, and the African cultural and political awareness, the fascist Portuguese and British settler regimes (in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe) relegated the poetry (and other works) to zonal silence and relative obscurity on the continent. As a result of this imposed silence and obscurity this body of creative writing has had less or little critical attention. The poetic expression of that body of creative writing from Portuguese and British Southern Africa which accompanies and is simultaneously accompanied by the awakening of cultural identity and the spirit of national liberation from

colonialism is the subject of this thesis.

Because of the socio-historically committed nature of this poetry, an understanding of the British and Portuguese presence in Africa, some of the features of their colonial policy and the African response of struggle and resistance to this presence and policies, is necessary for a fuller comprehension of the motivation and the setting of this poetic expression. For this reason, the first part of the introduction is dedicated to a brief historical resume highlighting the colonial presence and policies, and the colonised people's rejection and struggle against colonialism.

Since the aim of this thesis is a thematic analysis of the poetry, we have discerned three themes which we think embody within them the consciousness, aspirations, achievements and short-comings of the armed struggle. Within the analysis of these themes we bring new insight into that body of poetic expression contradicting those who allege that the situation of protest and struggle cannot yield vital comprehensive poetry and that the abject lives of the people in



Southern Africa are not fit subjects for poetry.

For a people who had been denied the right to exist and live in their own motherland by the colonisers; and for the same people who by a systematic cultural uprooting through colonial education and cultural imposition had come to reject and deny their Africanness, rejection of that colonialism and the growth of African and political awareness meant a plunging back to the cultural roots. This plunging back, passionate and otherwise necessitated a reassessment of cultural values and a cultivation of a sense of belonging. The going back to the roots and the reassessment is seen in the poetry as a return of a prodigal and wayward son to the security and sustenance of mother's bosom. Hence we get the motif or theme of Africa as a mother to whom the poets return. This theme of Africa as a mother is the subject of chapter two. The rejection of colonial values is accompanied within this theme by a violation of language so that the mode of poetic expression and perspective breaks from the classical European form.

In the struggle for their motherland, the people are faced with a revaluation and reassessment of life and life-values. Life in the struggle is the immediate subject; life in the pre-colonial era is a point of reference and life in the colonial era is seen as an antithesis to life in the struggle. Life in the struggle is the creation or birth of a new life. This, the life/birth motif within the poetic expression, becomes the subject of chapter three.

The dedication and immortality in death, and the final transformation of death is the subject of chapter four. In dedicating themselves to the total liberation of their motherland, the daughters and sons of Southern Africa had not only to perceive life as positive and thus channel all their energies towards life giving forces, but they also had to dedicate their lives in death. This was to ensure the ultimate destruction of death giving and death-affirming values of the colonial system. The dedication leads to a transformation of death from death as a finality to death as the beginning of life and a guarantee of continuity.

The above analysis leads to a series of final

considerations and conclusions which are treated in the conclusion, concerning the poetry of resistance and struggle or militant poetry from Southern Africa. It is our sincere belief that this study provides or offers some insights and understanding into a people's struggle for cultural and political liberation as synthesised, interpreted and recorded in artistic expression.