

History and memory as revolutionary tools: An analysis of the significance of Ndabaningi Sithole's historical novel *Umvukela wamaNdebele* (The Ndebele Revolution)

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ABSTRACT

“The colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope.(Fanon 1969: 187)”

*This paper analyses Ndabaningi Sithole's historical novel *Umvukela WamaNdebele* (1956) as a tool for revolution. It argues that although the novel was written under repressive colonial conditions, the author uses the history of the Ndebele in a militant and radical manner to come up with rebellious literature meant to raise the consciousness of the oppressed Africans in the then Rhodesia, to fight against the oppressors. The novel, although written in the 1950s, transcends historical epochs as it interrogates the present post Zimbabwean independence situation, especially the betrayal of the aspirations of the masses by the present leadership and thus gives a direction for the future. History can be a tool for empowerment and liberation. The way a historical artist retrieves and articulates the history of his/her people influences how those people negotiate their present and shape their future.*

Introduction

Zimbabwe is a nation plagued with numerous problems. Zimbabweans are a people who have witnessed gross violation of their human rights. In such a country, there is need to pull together all the resources to map the way forward and historical literature is one such critical resource to be utilised. There is need to revisit our past through literature and retrieve some values that can help us live the present and shape the future. This essay attempts to portray the role of indigenous historical literatures in the struggle against any form of oppression.

The use of history by African writers has been an important element in the development of Zimbabwean literature and African literature in general. Although most Zimbabwean writer's works have been analysed by various critics in an effort to evaluate their significance, Sithole's historical novel has received minimal attention, owing to the fact that the literature has not been translated to English and therefore, it is accessible to few critics. The present research will reveal that Sithole's *Umvukela wamaNdebele* is one of the most committed post colonial zimbabwean revolutionary literatures. The novel is written under repressive conditions of the Sourthen Rhodesia literature beaureu, which refused the publication of subversive literature and encouraged conformist literature. However, Sithole as a writer manages to engage the history, culture and oral literature of the Ndebele people to come up with militant literature. Instead of dwelling on trivial sociological and moral themes like most of the writers of the same period, Sithole chose to address the burning political issues of that time.

Memory and history as a source of inspiration

The history of a society and the way that history is told to the living generation influences how a generation evaluates its present situation and how it hopes to live the future. Historical writers have a critical role to play in the development of their societies. The future of their societies depends on them. Sithole as a historical writer chronicles Ndebele history in a way that restores the dignity of the people at a time when colonial brutality was

at its peak. During this period of the 1950s, the colonialist had already introduced several oppressive laws meant to subjugate and exploit the Africans. Through the colour bar system, the Africans in the Rhodesia had been reduced to the level of the lower animal. The history of the Africans had been destroyed through various colonial myths. They had been portrayed as the most barbaric and primitive people to have occupied the earth.

The colonialists used several myths to justify their occupation of Africa. Chiwome (1996:103) comments that colonialists equated 'colonialism with civilisation and believed that Africans needed to be colonised in order to be humanised'. It is this imperialist myth referred to by Chiwome which led to the emergence of literature that portrayed Africans as objects of history. Other historians like Trevor Trollope; philosophers like Hegel, Hume and Kant denied the existence of African history and despised everything that had to do with Africans. The intention was to humiliate, destroy and tarnish the image of Africans. The colonisers knew the value of the history of a people as a weapon for liberation. It was therefore necessary to distort that history and render it useless so that people would not take pride in it. Fanon (1972: 16) rightly states that colonialism "turns to the past of the oppressed people, distorts, disfigures and destroys it." Ngugi (2009:4) is also in agreement with Fanon's views when he comments that the colonialists:

*"...dismembered the colonized from memory, turning
their heads upside down and burying all the memories
they carried."*

The writer, therefore, is at pains to show that the Ndebele people are not a people of yesterday, to use Amah's words. They have a history to be proud of. Such history includes the history of resistance against colonialism. The writer goes on to narrate two historic wars that the Ndebele fought against the white colonisers in the 1890s. He starts with the 1893 war popularly known as the *Impi yeTshangana* (The battle of Tshangana), a symbolic battle that led to the fall of the Ndebele kingdom and the disappearance of the king Lobengula. In this battle, the Ndebele warriors are portrayed as determined to fight until the last drop of their blood to defend their kingdom. The uprising is brutally suppressed by the colonisers who are using weapons superior than the spears. To the writer, what is significant and memorable about this battle is that the Ndebele king was never captured. This became a victory to the Ndebele as it brought humiliation and embarrassment to the whites. The disappearance of the king becomes an inspiration for the Ndebele to organise another uprising in 1896. The Ndebele believed that their king was alive and wanted them to fight and remove the colonisers so that he would come back and rule his people. The writer then takes us to the 1896 war, popularly referred to as the 1st *chimurenga* by historians, influenced by the ruling politicians. The Ndebele however refer to this war as *Umfazo* or *Impi yehloka elibomvu*. Again, in this revolution the Ndebele are defeated. The question then is, if the Ndebele were defeated in the two wars, why is the writer retrieving such history to the people who are still oppressed by the same enemy. The aim was to show the oppressed Africans in the then Rhodesia that their ancestors never accepted oppression of any kind. It would, therefore, be a betrayal of the entire struggles fought by the ancestors for the generation of the 50s to be docile and passive towards oppression. According to the writer, Africans have always been resilient. The writer is saying resilience is the best gift inherited from our ancestors and every generation facing oppression has to make use of that gift.

It is also important to note that the writer chronicles the two historic wars in a manner that empowers the Africans. In all the wars, the Ndebele people are united as they confront the enemy. They are aware of all the forces that oppress and dehumanise them. The people are not portrayed as helpless or hopeless even as they face defeat. They are presented as active subjects who are ready to shape their own destiny. They are not objects to be acted upon. What is important also, is that Sithole puts the ordinary people at the centre of the revolution. It is a people's revolution and as such the writer fulfils the role of being an African revolutionary writer. Sekou Toure quoted by Fanon (1967: 167) comments that for an artist to take part in African revolution, "it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people." This is what Sithole's book, *Umkhela wamaNdebele* does.

The book also addresses the burning issues of the 1950s. During this period, African leaders in Rhodesia were preparing for the liberation struggle. The writer is therefore saying that if the struggle was to be a success, African leaders were to look for weapons that could match those of the enemy. The Ndebele were defeated in 1896 and 1893 because they were using spears. The writer is also appealing to the African leaders to realize that negotiations were never going to bring independence. According to Sithole, colonialism was a violent system that

needed to be countered with violence. Colonialism was a dehumanising process and Africans needed to be violent in order to restore their humanity.

It is clear therefore that the writer engages the people's past with the aim of retrieving those memories, values and principles necessary to advance the struggle. He is aware of the importance of history in the struggle. Without the understanding and appreciation of the past experiences, people are not able to confront the present and prepare for the future. According to Malcom X (1970:55) "history is a people's memory and without a memory man is demoted to the level of the lower animals." Malcom X also explains how the absence of history strips people of their dignity when he notes that; 'when you have no knowledge of your history, you're just another animal; infect you're ...something that's nothing. History therefore, empowers people to deal with any situation they face. Through the two historic wars the Africans in Rhodesia are able to learn strategies on how to deal with the oppressors. Ngugi (1981: 139) is of the idea that our past is "a great school" which we have to constantly revisit for lessons. He rightly notes that learning from our past means "learning from the strengths and weaknesses of the past experience."

Correcting history: a revolutionary act

The pre-colonial and colonial history of the Ndebele has been subject to misrepresentation and misinterpretation by white historians, missionaries and explorers. The area of Ndebele history that has been deeply subjected to such mystifications is the relations between the different groups that made up the Ndebele state and the relations between the Ndebele and their neighbours. The colonial writings on the Ndebele portray the Ndebele as an uncivilised, cruel race that subjected its neighbours and other ethnic groups to slavery. Such distortions on the Ndebele state are clearly articulated by Gatsheni (2009: 42) who notes that:

"The Ndebele have been depicted as violent and brutal, the Ndebele king as a powerful, despotic and dictatorial leader...the Ndebele soldiers as blood thirsty destroyers of human life and of the area where the Ndebele settled as characterised by destruction, desolation and depopulation."

Such lies and exaggerations were obviously meant to justify the destruction of the Ndebele state and to create tribal conflicts. One of the major tactics used by colonisers to effectively colonise and control Africans was the policy of divide and rule. Sithole is at pains to dispel such myths in order to unite Africans in Rhodesia. He is aware as a writer that in order to fight colonialism and its oppressive policies there was need for unity among Africans. The writer dwells so much on the caste system which is said to have existed among the Ndebele.

The Ndebele nation was a combination of different ethnic groups which were then named according to origin and the time of in-cooperation into the Ndebele state. These included the *abezansi* people, a group which consisted of the Nguni people who migrated with Mzilikazi from Zululand. The second group was that of *abenhla*, a group consisting of the Sotho and Tswana people in-cooperated into the Ndebele on the way from Nguniland. The last group was referred to as the *abakaMambo*. This group consisted of the people whom Mzilikazi found in in now modern day Zimbabwe and these consisted mostly of the Kalanga, the Nyubi and other Shona groups. In their writings, the missionaries and colonialists portrayed a slave and master relationship between the Nguni cluster and the other groups especially the *abakaMambo*. The writer shows that, although the *abezansi* group enjoyed some privileges as they dominated the political arena, there was no way that they could have enslaved the other groups as each group was special and significant to the well being of the state. The writer shows that although the Nguni dominated the political sphere, the *abakaMambo* people dominated the religious sphere. The God of the Ndebele state was infect the God of the Shona. It is the *abakaMambo* people who became spiritual leaders, medicine man and were consulted by the *abezansi* on spiritual issues. These were also traditional healers as they were familiar with the vegetation. The *abenhla* on the other hand had beautiful women, such that most of them got married to chiefs (*izinduna*) and headmen (*abalisa*) who were mainly from the *Abezansi* group. Historians have also argued that *abenhla* and *abakaMambo* people formed the majority in the Ndebele state. There is, therefore, no way that the minority Nguni could have sidelined and ill-treated the majority. It is also impossible that Mzilikazi could have built such a strong organised state if the majority of the people were slaves or were treated as underdogs.

The imperialists have always referred to the Ndebele as a 'cruel damnable race (Beach1986: 13). They talked about the shocking horrors of Ndebele raids and also exaggerated the areas that were raided by the Ndebele. Beach (1986:17), comments that the Ndebele did not raid out of 'sheer blood lust'. He says that there were

sound political, economic as well as social reasons for the raids. He also explains that it was not a one way process as the Shona also raided the Ndebele. Telling the truth and correcting historical myths is an act of revolution. The colonisers misconstrued the Ndebele raiding system because they were alien to that type of culture. The question then is, why is the writer raising such issues in 1956? The writer is awakening the Africans in Rhodesia on the importance of unity in the struggle. He is preaching the gospel of unity. For the struggle to be successful there was need for the leaders to shun tribalism and regionalism. It is unfortunate that our leaders in the liberation struggle did not take the message hence the war somehow, took a tribal approach with negative and serious setbacks on the struggle.

The role of Culture in the struggle

The role of culture in the struggle cannot be over emphasized. Culture is a great weapon against oppression. For colonial conquest to be a success, the colonialists knew that they had to weaken or destroy African culture. Ngugi (1981:93) argues that "economic and political control of a people can never be complete without cultural control". In an attempt to destroy Ndebele culture the white coloniser's denigrated Ndebele customs such as polygamy, celibacy and various religious ceremonies. Colonisers and missionaries came to Africa with absolute ideas about the supremacy of their western culture, traditions, customs, religious beliefs and even mannerisms (Gatsheni 2009:124). The colonialists targeted African culture because they knew that the culture of a people is a crucial weapon in resisting foreign invasion. Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle (Malcom X1970:56). The writer dwells more on cultural aspects of the Ndebele that are relevant in resisting oppression. His aim is to show his generation how their ancestors lived and how that life was stolen away by the colonisers.

He reveals that there are three things that the Ndebele valued; (*utshwala, isifazane lenyama*) beer, women and meat. Women in Ndebele culture are highly valued because their role of child bearing is cherished. The impact of colonialism on Zimbabwean women was that women were relegated to the status of minors. The colonialists were obviously guided by their Victorian ideologies that emphasized on the status of women as being in the kitchen. Throughout the novel, the writer portrays women in a dignified manner. They are part and parcel of the struggle. They are not objects but subjects of history. Ancestors communicate with the living through dreams and such dreams come through women characters like *Mantshangase*. The author realises that a people who are fighting for liberation can never achieve it if their women are treated as second citizens. In traditional Ndebele society women held important socio-political and religious positions. According to (Clarke 2010:31) royal wives like Lozikeyi Dlodlo, King Lobengula's first wife could lead the *Inxwala* ceremony and also acted as king's advisor. Sithole wants Africans to realise that without unity between man and women, the struggle could not be achieved. Beer is an important 'food' in Ndebele culture. Before colonialism, beer was not sold; it was brewed for socialising purposes. At the time when the book was published the Ndebele were finding it very difficult to brew such beer for social purposes as their land had been taken by the whites. Beer was now being sold to them at exorbitant prizes. The crop products from the dry reserves could not sustain this cultural practice yet it was at such beer gatherings where all social, economic as well as political problems were discussed and the way forward mapped. Thus the author is urging people to fight to regain their culture. The Ndebele also loved meat because they had plenty of cattle. The Ndebele of the 50s could not enjoy meat as their cattle had been stolen by the whites and they had been reduced to abject poverty. The various taxes that the whites had imposed on Ndebele people made it impossible for the African people to continue living a normal life as they had to sell their labour to these whites in order to pay the taxes. The writer shows how colonialism had stripped Africans of their dignity as a people and that it was necessary for them to regain their dignity.

The author also brings in the religious system of the Ndebele showing clearly the role of religion in the liberation of the oppressed people. As the people could not understand many problems they were facing, problems such as drought, rinderpest, and various diseases, they consult the *sangomas*(spirit mediums) who refer them to uNgwali (the high priest at Njelele). UNGwali explains to the people that the hardships that people are experiencing are caused by the whites and notes that the solution lies in fighting the white colonisers.

Religion binds people together and for the oppressed people, it is a weapon for liberation. It is in times of crisis that people dig deeper into their religion for solutions. This is evidenced by the role played by religion in Zimbabwe during the liberation struggle. Fanon (1969:168) notes that Culture is not put into cold storage during the conflict. He indicates that culture becomes very active and forms a "special battle field".

Words pierce more than spears and bullets

It is in the presentation of his novel that Sithole's radical stance against oppression is revealed. The writer uses oral art in the form of songs, insults, praise poetry, proverbs and sayings to effectively deliver his message to his readers. Oral art plays a vital role in the liberation of the oppressed. It is a great tool that can be harnessed towards the liberation of a people. This is because of the power of oral art to unite people and raise their spirits. The writer uses praise poetry to remind the Africans of their heroes and therefore restoring their dignity. The praises of Mzilikazi and Lobengula are recited by various characters in social gatherings. The kings are likened to various animals like lions, vultures, and various heroic animals. Through praises the author also revisits the battles that the Ndebele fought against white people since their migration from Zululand. This serves to remind Africans that they have heroes to look up to. Such a reminder was important because during the 1950s the only heroes that were emphasised through colonial education were Europeans. Through praise poetry Sithole shows Africans that they are descendents of heroic legends who were determined to defend their kingdoms at all costs. He uses disempowering images to refer to the whites. The Ndebele are portrayed as heroes and heroines. Throughout the text whites are referred to as white vultures (*amanqe amhlophe*), white dogs (*izinja ezimhlophe*) and also witches and wizards (*abathakathi*). The Ndebele are seen as genuine human beings. Whites are insulted and belittled. They are portrayed as exploiters, murderers and brutalisers. Through these images the author is fighting a battle against colonialism. Such images are sharper and more pointed than the bullets. They wash away all the inferiority labels associated with the Ndebele during that time and restore their confidence and courage. The use of such images is justified because the colonisers themselves did not see Africans as human beings but as 'things' to be exploited and oppressed. To the writer, whites don't deserve to be referred to as human beings because they don't recognize the humanity of others. One wonders how such a radical stance was able to escape the censorship process of the southern Rhodesia literature bureau.

The author also uses radical language to advance his revolutionary message to the people. The third person narrative technique allows him to get into the story and throw in some radical comments. Some comments are directly addressed to leaders of the African movements in Rhodesia. In some of his comments Sithole portrays his ideas of freedom and how it should be achieved. One such message is contained in the following extract:

*Umbuso uqala ngegazi, kumbe ngithi futhi igazi yisigijimi sombuso.
Umbuso awucelwana njengegwayi, uyotshelwa,
uyadutshkelwa. Unkulunkulu kadalanga
Nkosi lapha emhlabeni, inkosi idalwa yizikhali. P2*

(Freedom is a result of blood, or should I say blood is the forerunner to freedom. Freedom cannot be exchanged like snuff, it is fought for. God did not create a king here on earth. Kings are a result of weapons.)

Sithole indicates that an oppressed people cannot get independence on a silver platter. One has to fight for it. He notes that blood has to be spilt; people have to suffer for it. Paulo Freire (1972:25) also concurs with Sithole's ideas on liberation when he states that 'liberation is thus a child birth, and a painful one.' The message that Sithole is trying to put through is that the generation of the 50s was to stop negotiating with the whites. Liberation could only be attained through a violent process. Sithole seems to support Malcom X's ideas that violence begets violence. The colonial system was a violent process that needed to be approached violently. The brutality and hostility of colonialism could not be dealt with peacefully. Sithole takes an uncompromising stance as far as dealing with colonialism is concerned.

The author also borrows heavily from the folklore to enhance his revolutionary stance. His characters are given significant names. The main character Dungilizwe (meaning to cause commotion in the country) behaves in exactly the same manner as he is the one who gives people the courage and spirit to fight against the whites. The author also uses the song as a way of protest. Traditional Ndebele songs are revolutionized and given a new meaning. We are told that as the people change these songs to express the anger they have against the whites, they sing with anger and seem as if they are possessed with a spirit. In another traditional song, the word *umoya* (wind) is replaced by the term *amakhiwa* (whites) and the ordinary song changes its meaning and interrogates the presence of whites in Ndebele territory. The Song goes:

Ay amakhiwa!
Asiwazi laph' avela khona
(Ay! These whites
We don't know where they came from)

The use of songs as a way of motivating the people during the liberation struggle was a continuation of the tradition that was there in Ndebele culture. Traditionally the Ndebele used to sing war songs before or after the battle to motivate the warriors or to celebrate a successful battle. Oral art is therefore remodelled to suit the situation at hand.

The historical novel and post independence

The history of a people is crucial in assessing the present and in preparing for the future. The post independence era has seen the devaluation of the ordinary Zimbabwean people's lives. Corruption, bad governance, tribalism, regionalism, unemployment, extreme poverty, HIV and AIDS and gross violation of human rights among other problems have been the order of the day. Elections are rigged and the voices of ordinary people are silenced through brutal and violent ways. The economic meltdown left most Zimbabweans living the life of destitution. Most Zimbabweans have fled to neighbouring countries where they are sometimes treated like animals. Although there are various reasons for the problems facing Zimbabweans, the root cause of the problem is usually immorality of the leadership.

One needs to go back to such indigenous literatures as Sithole's *Umvukela wamaNdebele* to evaluate the extent to which the post independence leadership has betrayed the history of the people. It has undervalued the dream of our ancestors and has not learnt anything from history. To start with, the present leadership has emerged out of the liberation struggle as heroes to be worshiped and saluted by ordinary Zimbabweans. They claim to have liberated the people. They have even built a heroes acre where they bury themselves while most Zimbabweans cannot afford a cheap coffin. The truth that one gets from oral history points to the fact that the bitter and painful struggle was fought by our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. Ordinary Zimbabweans liberated themselves but their sweat is now being enjoyed by leaders and their families. The way they plunder the nations natural resources like diamond, gold and platinum is shocking. The ruling government wants people to remember the history as told by them. Their intention is to erase all other memories of history, especially memories that put the ordinary peasant at the centre of the struggle like the wars fought by our ancestors.

The land was the major issue that led to the 1893 and 1896 uprising that the writer narrates in his book. To date, the land issue has not been addressed as the land has been distributed to wealthy politicians, their relatives and friends as well as ZANU PF party members. The land redistribution exercise was marred with corruption as most members of the ruling elite own multiple farms in contravention of the one person one farm policy (sachikonye2004:13). The ordinary person on the street, the one who fought a painful war of liberation having been inspired by the history of the ancestors is still landless. The sacrifices of the ancestors have not been recognized and their efforts have been minimized. Ngugi (1981:139) insists that the present generation should never devalue the gift of our ancestors. He also emphasises that we should evaluate ourselves, see what we have done with the gift of our ancestors. He thinks that we have made a 'mockery' of the gift of our ancestors.

The writer shows us that King Mzilikazi and Lobengula were able to unite different ethnic groups and were accountable for the safety and survival of every Ndebele person.. According to Gatsheni (2008:5), pre-colonial leaders were accountable even for natural disasters. The present ruling elite is not even accountable for the disasters that it deliberately creates. Contemporary leaders survive through the politics of tribalism. They divide people along tribal lines, tactics which were used by colonisers. They have chosen not to learn good things from our history, rather they perpetuate colonial evils. The marginalisation of certain tribes in Zimbabwe has no justification in our history. The politicians deliberately misinterpret our history to justify their dictatorship and violation of human rights. The killing of the Ndebele people in 1982-87 was somehow seen as revenge for pre-colonial crimes committed by their king Mzilikazi. The Ndebele are seen as settlers and therefore not genuine Zimbabweans. History is deliberately distorted so as to exclude some ethnic groups from enjoying the benefits of independence. Since the achievement of Independence in 1980, the Ndebele people have constantly been complaining of exclusion and marginalisation (Gatsheni 2009:21). The explanation of what constitutes the Ndebele state as given by the writer makes the Ndebele genuine Zimbabweans and dispels the myth that there

are people who are more Zimbabwean than others. Tribalism and regionalism in Zimbabwe is perpetrated by selfish politicians who want to advance their personal motives.

The politicians also punish every person who questions their leadership styles. Since independence, Zimbabwe's elections have been characterised with violence. Explaining the form of violence that characterised the June 2000 elections, Feltoe (2004:213) notes that "torture centres were set up on farms and in towns and people were forcibly taken there and subjected to the most appalling forms of abuse." The 2008 June elections were the most violent elections that Zimbabweans have ever experienced since independence. Describing the violence perpetrated by (ZANU PF) ruling party against innocent civilians in June 2008 elections, Matyszak (2009:147) notes that:

...ZANU (PF) embarked on a wide spread and systematic campaign of violence aimed at re-establishing blanket control over all rural areas. Incidents varied in nature and extent from individual harassment, intimidation and assault, to murder, attempted murder, rape, severe assault, arson, malicious injury to property and forced evictions.

The government has become the enemy of the people. Instead of protecting its own people; it has chosen to unleash all forms of violence on them. People who oppose the ruling government are said not to be grateful to the leaders who liberated them. These leaders forget that through the literature of the likes of Sithole, memories of the role of our ancestors in the history of the struggle are kept alive. Historical literature therefore becomes important in enlightening the people.

The role of oral art has also been seriously transformed by the ruling elite. While oral art served as a weapon against colonialism, the post independence era has seen the abuse of oral art and the exploitation of the oral artist by the ruling elite. Mlama (1995: 25) argues that although the oral artists in the post independence era are ordinary peasants, "they seldom represent the voice or view point of the common person". She continues to argue that the oral artist has become the mouth piece of the ruling class and sees this as the "disempowerment of the oral artist". In Zimbabwe, women as oral artist are the most abused as they are forced or brainwashed to rally behind the ruling party ZANU PF through music and dance. They are forced to praise and eulogise the leaders so that they appear as heroes who liberated the people. The abuse of women or ordinary peasants as oral artists has no justification in our history as oral artist produced committed literature which served the interests of the people.

However it is not the politicians only who have mocked that gift by betraying the aspirations of the people but the ordinary people as well. The author of the novel points out that the only people who have the power to overturn an oppressive system are the people themselves. The oppressed people are their own liberators. In Zimbabwe, one finds that the victims of an oppressive government lose sight of who the real enemy is and fight each other. The novel challenges any generation of any epoch to learn from the experiences of our ancestors. If the Ndebele fought desperately against the oppressors with the spears and shields, then there is no excuse for the present and future generations to accept oppression or any system that dehumanises and degrades them. Every challenge that people are facing, be it political, economic or social is possible to overcome as long as people are dedicated in solving their challenges. If the generation of the 50s used history to dismantle colonialism, then the present generation should also use our history to fight all forms of oppression as Fanon (1969:167) notes that "each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it." The question we should be asking ourselves is, what have we done to the oppressors instead of concentrating on what has been done to us.

Conclusion

Historical literature and historical writers have an important role to play in the liberation of oppressed societies. By retrieving the history and memories on the past experiences of the people, writers are able to shape the destiny of their people. Gatsheni (2009:5) notes that there is need for African historians, writers and critics "to engage the African past with an aim of retrieving the values that are necessary for development". Historical African literature, especially the literature produced in indigenous languages can be harnessed towards shaping our future as it reflects the experiences, the survival strategies, the strengths and the weaknesses of our

ancestors. There are so many lessons that the present generation learns from our history. Africa's solutions to problems facing Africans lie in the history of Africans. It is the mobilisation of positive values in African history and culture that can rescue Africans from the troubles they face.

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