Understanding Shona liberation war fiction: The writers’ perspectives

Abstract:
This book is an in-depth study of Shona fiction about the liberation war in Zimbabwe. It looks at the way Zimbabwe’s liberation war is portrayed in Shona fiction and focuses on the factors that shaped writers’ perspectives on that war. It is argued that Shona war fiction writers romanticised the war and in the process simplified and distorted history. The researcher postulates that writers’ perspectives on this liberation war were shaped by factors that include the mood of celebration and euphoria, the dominant ideology of the time, the situations of independence and freedom, and literary competitions. The book further raises and illustrates the point that writers produced romances of adventure because they were writing on the theme of war, and if one writes on the theme of war one ends up writing an adventure story. However, it is also acknowledged that because authors were writing on a historical event they could not ignore history completely. Some aspects of history are incorporated into the fiction, thereby retaining a semblance of historical realism. The post-independence period is also seen as a time of cultural revival and this is considered as the reason behind the authors’ tendency to celebrate Shona traditional institutions and culture. The celebration of Shona traditional religion and culture introduced into the fiction the element of the supernatural that strengthened the romance aspect of the novels. Shona war fiction writers also perpetuate female stereotyping. Female characters are depicted as everything except guerrilla fighters. It is argued that there are no female characters that play roles of guerrilla fighters because during the actual war women were not visible at the war front, fighting. The book argues that men, who were pioneers of the guerrilla war and writers of the war stories, excluded women from liberation war discourse and ultimately from literary discourse as well. A few writers who comment on the quality of Zimbabwe’s independence and freedom show the disillusionment and despair of the peasants and ex-combatants as they struggled to settle down and recover from the war.

Impact of the book on society
Shona novels contribute to the historical narrative of Zimbabwe’s liberation war but they fail to portray that war realistically. The question of why Shona liberation war novels fail to portray the war realistically has not been answered for a long time and this book tries to provide the answers. Students of literature, media persons, anthropologists, historians
and even polititions and veterans of the liberation war itself will find the book informative and insightful. It contributes significantly to our understanding of the meanings, functions and pleasures of Zimbabwe’s liberation war novel and to literary criticism in general.