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Cultural nationalism in Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness*

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For many years, African countries have struggled to develop an ideological framework that suits the dynamics of the African context. From the writings of literary artists to those of political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, the call has remained consistent: Africa needs to formulate its own path of development and disentangle from the tentacles of colonialism and neocolonialism. While *négritude*, as a cultural movement, was a direct response to the impact of Western civilisation on Africans in the aftermath of colonization, Gomo's *A Fine Madness* may be read as a response to the West's dominance in the neoliberal global order. It interrogates the relationship between Europe and Africa in light of persistent war and instability in Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Like *négritude*, Gomo's work advocates the promotion of African ways of doing things politically, economically and culturally and shuns neocolonial relationships of exploitation. Adopting an anti-imperialist position, *A Fine Madness* holds the West responsible for fuelling conflict in some African countries for commercial gain. The article interrogates the concept of cultural nationalism as it has been appropriated in Gomo's work. Focusing on selected poems, the article argues that *A Fine Madness* is a militant intervention in African politics, and a voice of resistance to the obtaining neoliberal global order.

Keywords: anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, cultural nationalism, neocolonialism, resistance.

Introduction

Every struggle for liberation is a struggle for cultural freedom. Thus, resistance to colonial/neo-colonial domination is, in many ways, resistance to the culture of the coloniser. From the writings of literary artists to those of politicians, there has been a concerted effort in Africa to recover and promote cultures that were annihilated by colonialism or simply to find a cultural framework that is suitable to the African context. Writing about cultural nationalism in the aftermath of colonization, Abiola Irele notes that *négritude* appears as the culmination of the complete range of reactions provoked by the impact of western civilisation on the African, and of the whole complex of social and psychological factors that have gone to form black people's collective experience of western domination. Its roots lie far down in the total historical experience of the black man in contact with the white (Irele 322). The cultural nationalism exhibited by the *négritude* movement had two facets. On one hand, there was a negative gesture of refusal, a denial of an imposed world-order attributed to the white coloniser, and the wish for a cultural 'differentiation' which gave rise to a

nascent political awareness, or a nationalist consciousness. On the other hand, there was a recasting of foreign and indigenous elements into a new cultural structure, which offered new possibilities of self-expression (Irele 323). The ideals of the *négritude* movement are relevant to this article because they provide a background to the cultural nationalism exhibited by Gomo's poetry. As it was during colonialism where Africans were drawn into the cultural world of the European but kept in a secondary position, in the neoliberal global order, Africans continue to occupy a secondary position in an economic system whose balancing scales are tipped in favour of the West.

Cultural nationalism may be defined as the manifestation of the nationalist "sentiment" in cultural indices, which places emphasis on cultural symbols, ideas, beliefs and other artifacts and motifs shared by a group (Adedeji 432). Boyd Shafer (in Adedeji 432) defines nationalism as a sentiment which unifies a group of people who have a real or imagined common historical experience and a common aspiration to live together as a separate and distinct people in the future. Adedeji (432) further argues that in the African context, cultural nationalism arises out of the unique cultural history of the people of Africa, the colonial onslaught on the continent and the conscious attempt by certain individuals or groups to seek ways and means of satisfying their nationalistic aspirations through a programme that resurrects the African past. Gomo may not be advocating a return to an idyllic past, but his work bears out as a vicious attack on neo-imperialism in Africa.

Cultural nationalism tends to have specific objectives. Hutchinson (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 946) is of the view that 'cultural nationalism is a movement of moral regeneration which seeks to re-unite the different aspects of the nation—the traditional and modern, agriculture and industry, science and religion—by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation'. Cultural nationalists therefore perceive of the nation as a product of history and culture and thus they seek to inspire 'love' of community, educating members of community on their common national heritage of splendour and suffering, engaging in naming rituals, celebrating cultural uniqueness, and rejecting foreign practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 947). While *négritude* as a cultural movement sought to resist colonialism and assert African values, Gomo's cultural nationalism resists neo-imperialism which manifests itself through unfair trade relations and the commercialisation of war in Africa.

Mashingaidze Gomo is a Zimbabwean writer who was involved in the DRC war of 1998 following the death of the Congolese dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, and Laurent Kabila coming to power (Ngũgĩ in Gomo 1). Born in Highfield in 1964, Gomo is the fourth in a family of eight. His father was a driver at Lobels Bakeries in Zimbabwe while his mother was a peasant farmer in Chihota village. Gomo spent the first early years of his life in Chihota, his parents' rural home. Although his mother only went to school as far as Standard Three, she believed in education and thus became a source of inspiration to the young Mashingaidze. After completing his Advanced Level in

Harare, Mashingaidze Gomo joined the Air force of Zimbabwe as an apprentice and worked there for almost 23 years. When the Mozambican civil war of the late 1980s broke out, Gomo was part of the Zimbabwe National Army contingent that was deployed to assist the forces of the Mozambican regime. It was during this war that Gomo saw, first hand, the destructive nature of war. The Renamo insurgents “destroyed critical infrastructure from bridges and roads to electricity power lines”.

The DRC war of 1998, in which Gomo also participated, attracted the attention of countries such as Namibia, Angola and Zimbabwe in the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) region. Formerly known as Zaire, the DRC is a vast country in the Great Lakes region which has suffered a series of civil wars since independence in 1960 and the murder of its first premier, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961. Over the years, the civil wars have been centred on the control and distribution of the country’s vast mineral resources.

In line with Ngũgĩ’s call for the recovery and promotion of African culture and languages, Gomo’s work laments the mutilation of African cultural resources in the new global order. Perhaps the question is: what is new? A lot has been done by way of writing back to the empire and countering Western misrepresentations of Africa. According to Hovarth, *A Fine Madness* proves compelling not because its analysis of colonialism is particularly original but because its representation is engrossing and believable. Gomo makes the reader believe in his educated but otherwise ordinary soldier’s earnest struggle to make sense of his circumstances (Hovarth 251). The genre that he chooses to package his ideas is also worth noting. In a review, Whittaker (44) describes *A Fine Madness* as “a kaleidoscope of notes and fragmentary diary entries, poetry and prose, factual descriptions and phantasmagorical flights of fancy”. Most importantly, Gomo succeeds in “painting a visual tapestry of the heinous images that comes with war” (Otas 79). He even manages to wrest beauty from the punishing jungle, to sing songs of hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. Drawing from his experiences of the horrors of war, he passionately “reflects on the wider issues of colonial exploitation and the possibilities of a Pan-Africanist vision of the continent” (Whittaker 44). Far from being an original narrative, *A Fine Madness* resuscitates and rekindles a Pan African vision envisaged by thinkers such as Aimé Césaire in his *Return to my Native Land*.

In his book, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, Ngũgĩ calls on formerly colonised countries to shun Eurocentrism and embrace alternative worldviews. His idea of “moving the centre” resonates with the narrator’s call for Africa to draw from its rich cultural resources and desist from depending on the West. For example, in a poem entitled “Impeccable English and French” (54), Gomo’s narrator harps on the idea of having one language across the African continent. Although the idea may seem far-fetched, it is inspired by the narrator’s realisation that there are more similarities than differences between most African languages. The

notion of “moving the centre” advanced by Ngũgĩ also resonates with “Afrocentrism” which, as defined by Molefi Asante is “a quality of thought, practice, and perspective that perceives Africans as subjects and agents of phenomena acting in their own cultural image and human interest”. The Afrocentric project includes an interest in psychological location, a commitment to finding the African subject place, the defence of African cultural elements, and a commitment to lexical refinement and to correct the history of Africa (Asante 1). Gomo’s work may thus be read as an Afrocentric project that seeks to retell the African story. Afrocentricity, as Asante puts it, is a perspective that puts Africa at the centre. Ngũgĩ affirms that “centredness is the basis of all knowledge and human development. A person must know where they stand in order to know in what direction they must proceed” (Ngũgĩ *Politics*, 32).

The title of Gomo’s book *A Fine Madness* is, in fact, a paradox. Madness is usually perceived as a deviation from the norm, hence to call it “fine” seems to be a contradiction. In this respect, the title is a statement of resistance, and subversion of European ways of conceptualising and representing the world. *A Fine Madness* is probably a celebration of an alternative modernity—a way of life that appears as “madness” to the Western world. In other words, what the West condemns as backward is appropriated and celebrated as an alternative cosmology. Gomo’s narrator is a soldier participating in the war. This is interesting because we rarely think of soldiers as poets, let alone intellectuals. Soldiers are usually seen as machines of power who take orders without asking why. Gomo’s soldier-narrator is different because he seems to understand why he is fighting. His frame of reference is seemingly Afrocentric for he propagates the view that Africans ‘have been moved off terms culturally, psychologically, economically, and historically’ (Asante 1) hence the need for psychological repositioning.

The first poem in the collection, “Tinyarei” (“Give us a break”) celebrates the beauty of Africa which is embodied in Tinyarei, the narrator’s fiancée. *Tinyarei* is a Shona word which is usually used to warn or rebuke someone in confrontational situations. It may also be translated as “give us due respect”. In this poem, Tinyarei is a symbol of Mother Africa endowed with natural beauty and, as the narrator puts it, in colloquial streetwise language, she is ‘the perfect thing’ (4). The narrator’s love for Tinyarei is “a fine madness” because it goes against the popular view that beauty and old age cannot go together. We normally associate beauty with the radiance of youth, but Tinyarei is an older woman “aged in beauty” (4). The juxtaposition of age and beauty may suggest that the narrator’s love is quite deep and goes beyond the superficial erotic level of youth. The resilience of Tinyarei’s beauty is also emphasised when the narrator says her beauty “hangs on even as age takes its toll / Lingering on like a summer sunset” (4). Summer is usually associated with joy and new life. Thus, Tinyarei’s beauty resists the passing of time. She still has a seductive smile capable of “disarming” men.

This poem interrogates two conflicting views about Africa and her relationship with the West. On one hand, there is a view that Tinyarei's beauty should be "scattered around or shared [...] globalised if you like" (4). On the other, there is a view that Africa should take its own path and stop depending on foreign assistance for its own development. The use of the word "scattered" to refer to the manner in which some Westerners want Tinyarei's beauty to be consumed implies a reckless and unsustainable process. Perhaps this is an allusion to the manner in which Africa's resources have been plundered without accountability. The narrator equates this way of distributing Tinyarei's wealth to globalisation. From the narrator's point of view, globalisation is a euphemism for the systematic plunder of Africa's resources, a process of disempowering Tinyarei on the pretext that "there cannot be too much power over the hearts of men in any woman's hands" (4). To globalise is therefore to limit Tinyarei's (Africa's) bargain power. This is probably an allusion to the unfair and exploitative trade relations between developing and developed countries. Biney (130) intimates that "globalization is negative when it allows itself to be handmaiden to ruthless capitalism, increases the danger of warfare by remote control, deepens the divide between the haves and have-nots, and accelerates damage to our environment".

The soldier-narrator stands "at variance with" (5) globalization which he depicts as a smokescreen for perpetuating the exploitation of Africa. In fact, the name "Tinyarei" is also a stubborn rejection of Western interference in African affairs. Western countries are portrayed as deceptive suitors who believe that Tinyarei should not know her value because if she did, she would be difficult to woo. The narrator lampoons those who associate progress with "walking the streets of London and Paris, signing contracts that shackle [them] to European commerce" (5). "Walking the streets of London and Paris" conjures the image of a prostitute selling her body for money. The implication is that globalization and economic liberalization are part of the West's agenda to siphon Africa's resources. In the fourth stanza, the narrator becomes more overt when he points out that Europeans want to abuse Tinyarei, however there are some "surprisingly black too/ who have argued that beauty so superlative is too good for an African" (4). The implication is that some Africans have internalised inferiority complexes and thus cannot appreciate the beauty of their own kind. The black men that the narrator refers to are perhaps those that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls the "comprador bourgeoisie" who collude with international capital to perpetuate the exploitation of Africa. They accuse Tinyarei of "sitting on money" which implies that they want her to commercialise her body without thinking about sustainability. In fact the phrase "sitting on money" is literally an insult on women who fail to commercialise sex and earn a living from it. Some black people also want Tinyarei to "invest herself in European fashion magazines". Here, the notion of "investment" is portrayed as a promiscuous transaction whose only focus is money making. The "streets of London and Paris" symbolise European centres of commerce where Africa's

resources are exchanged for a pittance. By signing such contracts, Tinyarei would “shackle herself to European commerce”, implying that she would lose her freedom or the ability to exercise free will.

In this poem, the narrator uses vernacular to tap into public discourse. The line “*kuti Unomupei?*” (5) is Shona for “What will you offer her”. The expression is commonly used in an attempt to discredit poor men who may be interested in courting a beautiful woman. In this case, the narrator presumably lacks the financial stamina to take care of Tinyarei’s needs. However, in spite of the alleged poverty, the narrator feels that he can still love Tinyarei because African women are not “beautiful invalids” who marry only for economic gain. The contrast between “beautiful” and “invalids” evokes the notion of Africa as a rich poor continent—rich in resources but poor in technical expertise. The narrator seems to advocate self-reliance as the way forward for Africa. Tinyarei does not need men to sustain her beauty, she can be “beautiful as she wants to be and yet not be shared or sustained by men” (5). The narrator refuses to give in to external pressure, and insists that “the madness of falling in love with her should owe no explanation to anyone ... / not even a group of white journalists from a European fashion magazine”. The use of the ellipsis in this quote suggests that the narrator is actually reserving his words; he could have said more to ward off his detractors.

In a Nkrumahist fashion, the narrator thus condemns those Africans who see “partnership” with Western powers as the only way to develop the continent. In a preface to *Moving the Centre*, Ngũgĩ underscores the need for cultures to interact and borrow from each other. However, he cautions that “while there is need for cultures to reach out to one another and borrow from one another, this has to be on the basis of equality and mutual respect”. “Conditions of external domination and control, as much as those of internal domination and oppression, do not create the necessary climate for the cultural health of any society” (xvi). Colonialism displaced Africans through cultural domination. Therefore, there is need for cultural reorientation, of changing our perceptual lenses so that we can see the world from a diversity of centres. This is in fact the “madness” implied in Gomo’s title—the ability to appreciate other worldviews that have been suppressed by colonial epistemology. The narrator’s madness is “very fine and enjoyable” (8) because it is home grown, it “owes no explanation to anyone” (5). The implication is that Africans ought to be psychologically located in Africa and not measure themselves against Western standards. Being a Zimbabwean writer, Gomo was probably influenced by the official discourse of the Mugabe regime, which has over the years been trumpeting the victim trope based on Africa’s colonial history.

For the narrator, the war in the DRC is between Western powers, who finance the rebels, and those defending the sovereignty of the country. On this note, Oliver Nyambi (3), accuses Gomo of representing “the neo-colonial siege” in an essentialist way. The soldier-narrator claims to be resisting neo-colonialism and thus categorises

his opponents as puppets of the West, 'it felt nice to defy the judgment of a world that has styled all life to the whims of barbarians' (8). The use of the word 'barbarians' to refer to Europeans reverses stereotypes and restores (at least discursively) African dignity denigrated by years of colonial barbarism. Europeans are barbarians because they use hi-tech military equipment to kill innocent civilians in Africa.

Towards the end of the poem, it becomes clear that the narrator is not only fighting a political war but also a cultural one. He is proud to declare his African names and defy attempts by colonial schools to destroy African culture, "it felt spitefully nice to be all the names the British priest had refused in Sunday school" (8). The notion of madness is in fact subjective and fluid. It is in fact a construct used to denigrate and discredit the other, yet it can also be celebrated as an alternative worldview. We are told that when the narrator left the Christian church "the priest thought [he] was mad" (8). The narrator embraces the term "madness" as a counter-discourse; the way *négritude* poets affirmed stereotypes as a way of resisting cultural imperialism.

The narrator keeps on alluding to Boende, a village in the DRC, a symbol of African space, and a vantage point from which he reflects on the machinations of the colonial enterprise, 'looking at it all *pa*Boende, it felt so awfully nice I could have enjoyed refusing his suggestion again and again and again" (8). Boende gives the narrator a bird's eye view of the hypocrisy of Western discourses. Looking at the whole situation from Boende, which is also symbolic of a site of struggle, the narrator begins to realise that European traditions are also pagan because Father Dion's name was from Dionysus "the pagan Greek god of wine and fertility" (9). Apparently, this god was a drunkard who "always moved with a good supply of beers" (9).

The narrator celebrates African names because they are social statements. His own name "Muchineripi" is a "slap" because it embodies the spirit of resistance to cultural colonialism. African names reflect events and experiences unique to the African space. A name is therefore a memorial. The narrator's grandfather is called Takawira, which can be translated as "We fell" to capture the brutal experience of defeat and dispossession which came with the colonial experience. The name 'Takawira' also evokes memories of the liberation struggle. Leopold Takawira is the legendary hero of Zimbabwe's liberation history. The narrator is thus a reincarnation of the revolutionary spirit of the anti-colonial struggle. Human beings are constituted by their experiences; therefore what makes the narrator an African is not just the name but the "circumstances [he has] been born into / circumstances that [are] part of [him]" (99). These names situate the narrator within a specific culture and history and act as signposts of particular experiences. The constant reference to Mbuya ne Nehanda and Mukwati (spirit mediums of Zimbabwe's first *Chimurenga*) implies that the current war is inspired by the same spirit mediums that inspired the war of liberation.

In the poem "Kufa Kunesu Machewe" ("Death is with us for real") the narrator celebrates the way Zimbabwean soldiers in the DRC war used music as an antidote to

heal loneliness. Mbira music is portrayed as a medium for transmitting history and culture. The musical melody is “a wistful one [...] a migration of sound from the darkest recesses of the race psych [...] tentatively descending the broken hills of African experience into the valley of neocolonial conflict below” (101). The soldier-narrator prefers to listen to the music because listening “gives one time to savour the music without the distraction of involvement” (100). The use of the word “savour” suggests that music is like food for the soul; it takes the narrator into a tranquil state of relaxation. The two mbira players in the poem (the “man on transit” and the “tall commando”) are metaphorically engaged in a musical battle which dramatizes neocolonial conflict in Africa. The “transit man” takes the lead tune while the “tall commando” follows with a rumbling, domineering bass. The tune of the music is “a wistful one” because it conjures up memories of the past “the broken hills of African experience” and “the valley of neocolonial conflict”. The notion of “broken hills” as an image of the African experience implies that the African past is not perfect. On the other hand, representing the neocolonial dispensation as a “valley” creates the impression that neocolonialism is the Achilles’ heel of Africa’s development. In the musical drama, the tall commando stalks the transit man “with evil intentions” (101), the way European colonizers stalked Africa in order to colonize, “waiting for an opportune moment to pounce” (101). The bass tune rumbles “all over the tentative lead tune like a bully” (101). This is reminiscent of the way former colonial powers continue to make decisions for Africa without consulting her. In the neoliberal order, the battle between the lead tune and the bass tune resembles that between neo-imperial powers and developing countries. The former are bullies who seek to impose their will on the vulnerable lead tune. To make matters worse, when the latter reports the bully to the international world, nothing is done: the international world [is] ruled by the bully and the most it can do for fear of victimization [is] to simply say what [is] being done [is] wrong” (101).

Mbira music does not only provide entertainment and relaxation to the mind, but also functions as a repository of important moments in history. In this poem, Mbira music retraces the African experience and celebrates African heroes and heroines. Neocolonial conflict is the “African Armageddon” (101)—the biblical war of the end of the world—because it is not likely to end any time soon. The bass strand and the tentative lead tune symbolize the imperialist, on one hand, and the anticolonial freedom fighter, on the other. Just as the bass tune wants to silence the lead tune, colonialism aims to obliterate African knowledge systems. However, the lead tune remains resilient like “a lone guerrilla drawing strength from solitude” to keep fighting for freedom. Mbira music connects the narrator to his roots, particularly his ancestors. Mbira also enables the narrator to “revisit the past and appreciate its values from an elevated view” (102), to reflect on and relieve memories from the past “the good music transcended my mind into memory lane / a solitary lane one walks all alone even

when in the company of others" (102). The music speaks to the narrator's soul and guides him to a place of self-introspection.

Playing Mbira music is also a way of communicating and fellowshiping with the dead "a plea to the spirits of the land" (102). The narrator portrays the world of the ancestors as a peaceful world free from the hustle and bustle of modernity. As he is taken down memory lane by the mystic powers of Mbira music, the narrator recalls a woman "possessed by an ancient spirit of the land" (103) "enjoying a moment of respite in the modern world" (103). Thus, the narrator mocks those who have forsaken their traditional ways and calls them, derogatorily *mhuka dzakarasika* ("cursed or lost animals"). While we often think of possession as a traditional practice, the narrator points out that Western culture also has spirits and those who follow it get possessed too "by the rouged deities of Western cultures and the meaninglessness of their so-called sophistication" (103). The woman possessed by the spirit of the land "dance[s] to life" to imply that the true personality of African people is found in their culture. The song that the woman sings, *Kufa kunesu macheve* acknowledges the role of ancestors in the lives of the living. The woman cannot die without the approval of her ancestors *Kunoda vadzimu kufa kwangu* ("my death requires ancestral authority") (103). As the Mbira plays, the narrator travels back into precolonial Africa where Africans had complete sovereignty over their own land "And Chief Nyandoro was being inaugurated / And armed traditional men were dancing around Tinyarei" (103). In traditional Shona culture, knowledge is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, and according to the narrator's grandmother the "armed traditional men dancing around Tinyarei" are mediums of the heroes of the First Chimurenga" (103).

One can thus argue that *A Fine Madness* is a daring attempt to re-affirm African values in a world where Western values have been embraced as the ideal. The poem "The light of Western civilization" debunks the myth of Europe's so-called civilizing mission which destroyed African knowledge systems. Colonial education celebrates Western heroes, "the legendary white explorers who discovered an Africa that was dark and chaotic" and the "light of Western civilization, democracy and Christianity" (39) while denigrating African heroes and cosmologies respectively. Colonial/neo-colonial schools impart knowledge which is "catastrophically irrelevant" (38) to the African context. Although the narrator studied geography at high school, what he learnt did not prepare him for the "punishing heat" of the equatorial region. Ironically, Africans who fail such useless syllabi are classified as illiterate.

We read about famous white men of the cloth
who facilitated dispossession and forced labour of poor African people
And we read about custodians of modern democracy and the rule
of law who formed minority apartheid governments
that denied African people the right to vote and chart
their own destiny (39).

Here, the narrator exposes the contradictions of Western thought. Missionaries were supposed to bring salvation to the lost but they ended up facilitating the dispossession and enslavement of African peoples. Europeans claimed to be custodians of democracy but they also created undemocratic regimes such as apartheid in South Africa. European scholars may not be valuable to Africans because their ideas were used to justify colonialism.

We read of Shakespearean works informed by
an Elizabethan view of a God-created cosmos in which order
was imposed on chaos just as they had done on Africa
and history was not a blind chain of events but providential sequence governed by
Western rule of law
that sanctioned their dominance as destiny and sought to
instil a sense of futility in would-be African revolutionaries (39)

The narrator feels that Western thought is not relevant to Africa because the same was used to support the plunder of African resources through colonialism. Eurocentric education only serves to divide Africans because those who acquire it became alienated from their people. This education system “breeds individualism that advances[s] the capitalist cause” (39). The narrator seems to echo the official discourse of the Mugabe regime when he insists that “no lessons about tolerance can be learnt from invading imperialists who beheaded African people for resisting dispossession and forced labour” (40). He advocates that those who participated in the anti-colonial struggle must take the central role in the writing of African history, especially “the guerrilla who was where it all happened” (41). Although the guerrilla’s narrative may prevent distortion of African history, as the narrator assumes, it may also promote official narratives that are subjective and one-sided. However, the point that the narrator is making is that Africans ought to be agents of their own history: “I thought that African history should actually be designed and not left to providence and chance” (42).

The notion of designing African history speaks about agency, the ability to reject European distortions and promote Afrocentrism. While the narrator rightfully emphasises the need for social justice in the aftermath of colonial dispossession, he is, however, rather extremist to advocate a “Mosaic justice that should not allow invading land grabbers to hold onto even a square millimetre of stolen land” (43).

The poem “The wasp is corrupt” further interrogates the double standards of the West. The latter claim to be custodians of democracy and the rule of law yet they support violence and war in Africa. The relationship between the wasp and the caterpillar metaphorically represents that between Africa and Europe. The wasp (Europe) kills the caterpillar (Africa) to “nourish her own descendants” (59). The “subversive venom” that the wasp injects into the caterpillar is probably colonial education which paralyzes and enslaves African minds. In the wasp’s plans, “violence

would have to be used on the caterpillar's life [...] as violence was used to enslave the African to nourish the children of white people" (60). The narrator asks, "What corruption could be worse than imperialist oppressors subverting and arming African children to commit fratricide and trash their own sovereignty and heritage" (61). The narrator sees war as a conduit through which the West gains access to Africa's vast mineral resources. Africa is the "fat caterpillar" (61) "transformed into the theatre of fights for geostrategic influences or a safe haven for outside opportunists who, in complicity with some greedy African leaders, operate their cynical pursuit of private interests" (Schittecatte 64).

In the preface to Gomo's anthology, Chirere notes that *A Fine Madness* is "a weapon of war and no weapon of war in the hands of a combatant is neutral". Indeed, the narrator has taken a radical stance to expose the West's continued involvement in the destabilisation of the African continent. Some scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o caution that "Gomo's vision might come across as pedantry with the tendency to see history in terms of a monolithic whiteness against an equally monolithic blackness [...] Essentially, "by subsuming class divisions in Africa under the struggle between two colour monoliths, Gomo denies himself a perspective that might better explain the emergence of postcolonial dictatorships and their actual relationship to the Western corporate bourgeoisie" (2). Although Ngũgĩ has a point in highlighting the essentialist dimension of Gomo's narrative, not every struggle in Africa is a class struggle. Achille Mbembe, for example, characterizes Africa's wars as "wars of rapine pitting one set of predators against others" (88).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article has argued that *A Fine Madness* is a political weapon aimed at exposing the hypocrisy and double standards of Euro-American policies on Africa. Along the lines of Nkrumahist Pan-Africanism the narrator debunks Western prescriptions for Africa's development. The West cannot provide a solution to Africa's problems because of its vested interests in Africa's resources. While the narrator seems to have a sound grasp of the relationship of exploitation between Africa and the West, he tends to take an essentialist position that projects the continent as entirely beleaguered by terrorist groups, rebels and opposition parties sponsored by western powers to destabilize African "democracies that threaten to overwhelm white minority influence" (Nyambi 3) He also leans heavily against the anti-imperialist rhetoric, overlooking excesses of some African regimes that purport to be victims of Western interference. However, as Chirere has pointed out, Gomo's narrative "is a weapon of war and no weapon of war in the hands of a combatant is neutral". *A Fine Madness* is not outstanding for its originality, but for its ability to articulate poetically an African perspective and issues that have affected the African continent since the days of

colonialism. The text creates a platform for reflection and introspection, for thinking deeply about the future of the African continent in the context of neo-liberalism and globalization.

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