Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

POETIVISM, a new art of resistance in Zimbabwe

Mbizo Chirasha · Wednesday, August 21st, 2019

In 2006, the House of Hunger Poetry Slam sparked the flames of a new revolution. The grand poetry slam housed at the Book Café in Five Avenue Street was adjacent to the presidential palace and located few miles from Harare's maddening crowd. Every last Saturday of every month, wordsmiths buzzed into the uptown café to sing their discontent against the Mugabe-led totalitarian regime and other societal sins.

Their revolutionary echoes competed for space and audience with ear-splitting wails of motorcade sirens, yearning pleas of poverty torn vendors and discordant slogans of skokian sloshed touts in the old city now a pale shadow of the sunshine city. Poets did not surrender, their poems reverberated into the ghost city held captive by a goblin-like, sweat sipping and blood sapping autocratic establishment. The rude smell of literary rebelliousness met with the raw scent of black coffee that wafted from hot steaming mugs as poets set the café ablaze with metaphors of defiance. The naughty sun winked through skeletons of the reed and batik dressed café walls and promised freedom. The flame of resistance was broadcast over to other cities, towns, colleges and art centers and a huge blaze of the literary revolution was lit.

Guerrilla Poet

Breeze the Poet

Poets mastered their art of poesy armed with positive zeal and an amazing dexterity, roasting page poetry into sizzling live spoken word and performance. They articulated their state of nation with that vigor of griots. Their pen, smoking guns of truth, and their voices, vuvuzelas of nonviolent protest. Their satire and metaphor rose political crocodiles and zealots from slumber. Behold, the revolution was sacred.

The slam, named after *House of Hunger*, a novella by one of Zimbabwe's literary greats, the late Dambudzo Marechera, is symbolic to protest, resistance and the quest for freedom by budding literary voices in the country groaning under the burden of hunger and untold mass suffering. Poets' verses were pregnant with emotion, eloquence, humor, satire and revolutionary consciousness. Few names of word slingers come to mind: Xapa, Village Poet, Black Poet, Guerrilla Poet. Zozorizozo, Dapi, MutumwaPavi, Godobori, Ticha Muzavazi, Vokal daPoet, Umind?, Flow Child, PoliceStatePoet, So Profound, Godobori and many more comrades.

These names are synonymous with literary guerrilla-ship, rebelliousness and revolutionary

consciousness and they resonate with the 1970s struggle for liberation in Zimbabwe. Now, this is a renewed struggle, struggle against political indecency and economic decadence through word and pen. A literary revolution against tides of dictatorship. A nonviolent war waged by poets armed with pen, satire and voice. A successful struggle that also contributed to the fall of the 37-year-old chauvinistic and tyrant Gushungo-led regime. Zimbabwe remains in murky political waters, but Rome was not built in a day and true revolutions are not an event, they are no presidential banquets. The struggle rages on, Aluta continua!!!

The Book Café closed in 2015 because of economic hardships and other challenges. We were robbed of a refined battleground and revered creative sanctuary. We had learnt the ropes of the revolution though. We have now launched and are waging nonviolent revolutions in different set-ups and several spaces around the economically deprived country, Aluta revolution! Continua poetry of resistance!

The late Dambudzo Marechera (Author of *House of Hunger*)

Towards the end of 2015, LitFest Harare was founded to cultivate new voices in poetry, literature and creative writing, to create good space for Zimbabwean and international literary interactions, cultural cooperation and free speech through all literary forms. It brings a diversity of creative knowledge and a mix of cultural backgrounds. LitFest Harare is a galore of literary consciousness and free expression through literatures. It is founded by a prominent wordsmith and cultural activist Chirikure Chirikure, known for his satire packed and irony laced Shona poems. LitFest Harare invented Kanyanisa Poetry Slam “Mix it” to replace the House of Hunger Poetry Slam and give poetry revolutionaries space to continue with their struggle for liberation. Kanyanisa is a shona/karanga term meaning “Mix it.” The name is derived from Chirikure Chirikure’s Shona/Karanga poem “Kanyanisa” that depicts disorganization, political decadence, economic rot, corruption and lack of rule of law in Zimbabwe. The morality and meaning of Kanyanisa is hidden in shrouds of satire. Chirikure is one among other established poets in Zimbabwe armed with literary sickle to bring sanity through poetry resistance and the art of nonviolence. In Chitungwiza, a young brave voice Tinotenda Waison Wilson, calling himself a Lowlife diarist, is running a poetry blog of mass resilience and the Chitungwiza Poetry Community Intiative, Chitungwiza is a dormitory town located 20km outside Harare and it’s haunted by corruption and societal decadence. In Norton, Takudzwa Chikepe, an academic, poet and singer, organizes musical and poetry interludes at Pakare Paye Arts Centre. The cultural and art centre was founded by the late international musical maestro Oliver Mutukudzi. There is also a hive of activity in Highefeilds where an Arts Collaborative of Edzai Isu Theatre Trust and Action Hub are holding Nhetembo neMbira every Thursday KwaGaza, a densely populated and economically deprived but resilient suburb. Spoken word artists and mbira maestros perform live musical poetry for the audience that is usually excluded from mainstream platforms of the main Harare city because of distance and affordability.

Chirikure Chirikure, Poet and Founder of KanyanisaPoetry Slam

Revered *Imbongi* ‘dubpoet’ and revolutionary poet Albert Nyathi hails from an area called Gwanda, located on the peripheral edges of KoBulawayo. Nyathi, a well decorated poet, rose to stardom through his poem “Senzeni Na.” The poem speaks aloud against whims of colonialism, apatheird and other forms of oppression. The poet is the oasis of inspiration to many poets young and old. Young Imbongis blaze Bulawayo city with flames of Mlomo Wako Poetry Collective.

Mlomo wako literary means your mouth or your voice as poets like PAN, Philani Amadeus Nyoni, sing against dictatorship, tribalism and moral decadence. Another strong voice in this collective is Mgcini Nyoni, master of satire and protest with his poems reflecting on Gukurahundi. Gukurahundi is a shona term that refers to the first rains of the year in Zimbabwe but in its political context Gukurahundi refers to 1980s 5th brigade killings perpetuated by the Mugabe dictatorship regime to wipe out all who supported Joshua Nkomo, most of whom were Zapu Cadres and were labelled dissidents of the state. The poets are disgruntled because they lost their kindred during this so-called moment of madness. They have no guns to avenge, but use their satiric and literary weaponry against/towards oppression, injustice and intolerance. Like those in the Harare, the sister revolution of Mlomo wakho direct their revolutionary guns to big crime fuel, forex and food cartels milking the economic udders of the state until they bleed. Aluta Continua the struggle rages on.

Albert Nyathi, Zimbabwe's top DubPoet

Few months before the November 2019 coup d'etat and the deposing of Robert Mugabe, The Black Poet invented the social media based Zimbabwe We Want Poetry Campaign with the sole objective of taking the revolution to a globalized level and to reach a wider audience. The Black Poet used social media timelines and blog sites to incite the poetic revolution and mobilized more cadres and that set trended *Brave Voices Poetry Journal* published on the MiomboPublishing blog. *Brave Voices Poetry Journal* is an online platform of protest poetry and free speech. The platform since has hosted, archived and published more than 1,000 poets and 10,000 poems to date. The revolution has taken a continental and a regional twist as poets from around the country continue to carry their revolutionary literary combat as they come face to face with terrorism, cartels, warlord-ism, xenophobia, capitalism and super power ego and decadence in Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi, Zimbabwe, South Africa and many other nations.

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