

## Beautiful Words are Subversive

By Chenjerai Hove

As a writer, I did not realize that I was banned from entering all government schools of my country until a high school teacher was dismissed for having invited me to his school. High school students nation-wide were studying my novel, **Bones**. My novel was allowed into schools, but the author(me) was banned. The reason: 'You will poison the minds of the students,' an official told me when I protested.

But then, if a writer poisons the minds of the students, what would the novel do since it is allowed into schools? Of course, the authorities feared that my interpretation of the novel would be poisonous. But if I were a frightened bureaucrat or minister of culture or education, I would fear more the book without any authorial interpretation, a free book in the hands of the students, than a book with some interpretation from the author.

Experience has taught me that the root of the conflict between writers and politicians is the space called constituency. Those who said the pen is mightier than the sword might have been materially mistaken, but in the end there are certain fundamental truths in this saying. Maybe the truth is that the pen, words, shoot at the heart, soul and imagination of the reader while the sword, an object of physical harm, only destroys the flesh. A writer's words sooth the reader to change, a gun shoots the reader to death.

Since time immemorial new ideas about perceptions of the world have always been a danger to those whose comfort is viewed as permanent. Books, and all arts, contain 'new' ideas, and new ideas and visions are a danger to those whose constituencies are always measured in quantitative ways. Books change lives through ideas. Politics changes physical and human spaces quantitatively.

Artists never promise their audiences anything except the meaning of a full life. Politicians and others of the power trade promise heaven on earth. The former dwells in the constituency of mind and meaning, while the latter dwells in the constituency of figures and numbers. But when the politician seeks the constituency of mind, he/she finds that the artist has already settled permanently in that constituency.

The two constituencies have their different kinds of power. I cherish to have my words, my language, help shape the dreams and aspirations of those who read my work. My dream is to change the way they perceive the world, the way they feel towards objects and people, the way they feel towards the land they walk on, the way they experience 'the other' who comes from 'other' lands. I want my words to share the beauty and ugliness, the hopes which I still see in human beings.

If my endeavours offend anyone, it is because he/she hates sincerity and the human capacity to doubt, which is also the human capacity to transform. The moment we lose our capacity to doubt everything about our existence, we, as human beings, soon become extinct.

Artists seek the freedom to create, to see and record the joys, sorrows and smiles of their societies in order to celebrate and warn humanity about its flowers and human decay. I hate silence, society hates silence laws because human beings are not silent imbeciles.

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