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The nation thing? ‘Enjoyment and well-being’ in the production of cultural spaces in Zimbabwean literature

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2018
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/26489
Mhandu, Edwin (2018) The nation thing? 'enjoyment and wellbeing' in the production of cultural spaces in Zimbabwean literature, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/26489>

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Abstract

My thesis develops a frame of understanding of the aesthetic, cultural well-being and enjoyment spaces in Zimbabwean literature through a close reading of selected texts (both fiction and autobiographical narratives). I argue that Zimbabwean literature demonstrates the expanse of 'enjoyment' beyond the material. Findings from my analysis establish the position that people create and flourish in enjoyable identity conferring spaces of their own choice, and generate an intercultural mosaic in the process. Unlike the standard criticism of Zimbabwean literature which focuses on wars, trauma, memory, interminable gender struggles, binaries of the city and country, dispossessions and repossessions, the "Zimbabwean crisis" and the diaspora, I explore enjoyment and well-being. I establish that the intercultural nature of "enjoyment and well-being" spaces designates a fractured cosmopolitanism in which classificatory variables like gender, race and ethnicity are problematised. I interrogate enjoyment and well-being that is predicated on the pain and suffering of a scripted and choked "Other", whichever name that individual may be called: stranger, alien, refugee, migrant and settler among some "Othering" concepts. The subject that Zimbabwean literature establishes has the capacity to enjoy in multifarious ways that which fosters intersubjectivity. People from diverse backgrounds, sexes, and ethnicities find joy, happiness and pleasure in various spaces of interaction or "contact zones" which are identity conferring.

The research foregrounds cultural sites in four parts: the land, the body, city spaces and diaspora spaces. Part one considers land as the locus of analysis in the explication of Zimbabwean subjectivities, since land is often deployed as the "discursive threshold" after the Post-2000 land invasions/reforms. I establish the paucity and inadequacy of a conceptualisation of land that derives identities from binaries that designate the Self and Other. I proceed to explore rhythms and textures in nature to demonstrate the richness and inter-subjectivity in the way land, animals, the cosmos and human life are intertwined.

Part two demonstrates that the individual body is at the centre of generating its own data and negotiating meanings as physical sensations are expanded to inter-human sensation, contrary to the nation-state's concept of fashioning subjects.

Part three considers city spaces as rendering the atmosphere and environment for subject enjoyment, well-being and authenticity. Beyond and above the sites that are bound by territorial borders, I argue that Zimbabwean subjects enjoy transcendental and diaspora spaces.

Part four explores transcendental spaces of enjoyment and well-being at the level of both the individual human mind and nation-spaces. The rise of cellphones, the Ipad, computers and the semiotics of the big and small screens introduce a mind that is able to transcend the exigencies of place through memorialisation, imagi(ni)ng, pictures, ritual and religion. Texts explored in part four demonstrate that people are able to negotiate spaces and places through remediation and travel, both physically and metaphorically, thus breaching the territorial borders of the nation-state.

The study suggests the creation and sustenance of climates for various orders of joy, enjoyment and pleasure by nation-states which should desist from dictating the way people enjoy for them to maintain legitimacy. The research underscores the importance of enjoyment and well-being in the configuration of nation-spaces at any given time. This research foregrounds an African response to the global scholarship on the constitution of nation-spaces through the tropes of enjoyment and well-being.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, enjoyment, well-being, cultural spaces, nation-state, happiness, subject, *eudemonism*, *eirenéism*, transcendental.