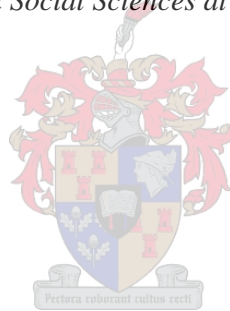


**Discourses of Poverty in Literature: Assessing representations of indigence in
post-colonial texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe**

By

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*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University*



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March 2015

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any other university for a degree.

Signature..... Date: 10th October 2014

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ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a comparative reading of post-colonial literature written in English in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to bring into focus the similarities and differences between fictional representations of poverty in these three countries. The thesis explores the unique way in which literature may contribute to the better understanding of poverty, a field that has hitherto been largely dominated by scholarship that relies on quantitative analysis as opposed to qualitative approaches. The thesis seeks to use examples from selected texts to illustrate that (as many social scientists have argued before) literature provides insights into the ‘lived realities’ of the poor and that with its vividly imagined specificities it illuminates the broad generalisations about poverty established in other (data-gathering) disciplines. Selected texts from the three countries destabilise the usual categories of gender, race and class which are often utilised in quantitative studies of poverty and by so doing show that experiences of poverty cut across and intersect all of these spheres and the experiences differ from one person to another regardless of which category they may fall within. The three main chapters focus primarily on local indigence as depicted by texts from the three countries. The selection of texts in the chapters follows a thematic approach and texts are discussed by means of selective focus on the ways in which they address the theme of poverty. Using three main theorists – Maria Pia Lara, Njabulo Ndebele and Amartya Sen – the thesis focuses centrally on how writers use varying literary devices and techniques to provide moving depictions of poverty that show rather than tell the reader of the unique experiences that different characters and different communities have of deprivation and shortage of basic needs.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis onderneem 'n vergelykende studie van post-koloniale letterkunde in Engels uit Botswana, Namibië en Zimbabwe, om sodoende die ooreenstemmings en verskille tussen letterkundige uitbeeldings van armoede in hierdie drie lande aan die lig te bring. Die tesis ondersoek die unieke manier waarop letterkunde kan bydra tot 'n beter begrip van armoede, 'n studieveld wat tot huidiglik grotendeels op kwantitatiewe analises berus, in teenstelling met kwalitatiewe benaderings. Die tesis se werkswyse gebruik voorbeelde uit gelekteerde tekste met die doel om te illustreer (soos verskeie sosiaal-wetenskaplikes reeds aangevoer het) dat letterkunde insig voorsien in die lewenservarings van armoediges en dat dit die breë veralgemenings aangaande armoede in ander (data-gebaseerde) wetenskappe kan illumineer. Geselekteerde tekste uit die drie lande destabiliseer die gewone kategorieë van gender, ras en klas wat normaalweg gebruik word in kwantitatiewe studies van armoede, om sodoende aan te toon dat die ervaring van armoede dwarsdeur hierdie klassifikasies sny en dat hierdie tipe lewenservaring verskil van persoon tot persoon ongeag in watter kategorie hulle geplaas word.

Die drie sentrale hoofstukke fokus primêr op lokale armoede soos uitgebeeld in tekste vanuit die drie lande. Die seleksie van tekste in die hoofstukke volg 'n tematiese patroon en tekste word geanaliseer na aanleiding van 'n selektiewe fokus op die maniere waarop hulle armoede uitbeeld. Deur gebruik te maak van ' die teorieë van Maria Pia Lara, Njabulo Ndebele en Amartya Sen, fokus hierdie tesis sentraal op hoe skrywers verskeie literêre metodes en tegnieke aanwend ten einde ontroerende uitbeeldings van armoede te skep wat die leser wys liever as om hom/haar slegs te vertel aangaande die unieke ervarings wat verskillende karakters en gemeenskappe het van ontbering en die tekort aan basiese behoefte-voorsiening.

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION:		i
Abstracts:		ii
Acknowledgement:		iv
Introduction:	Literary Depictions of Poverty - A Source of Authoritative Knowledge on Indigence	1
	Defining Poverty	3
	Theoretical Perspectives on Poverty and Theories Adapted to the Study	14
	Maria Pia Lara	18
	Amartya Sen's Capability Approach	20
	Njabulo Ndebele's Rediscovery of the Ordinary	23
	Writing Poverty in Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe	30
Chapter One:	Poverty Articulated in Literary Voices from Namibia	37
	Representations of poverty in the wake of colonial disruption and dispossessions in <i>Born of the Sun</i> (1988)	44
	"A life of poverty has its good moments too" Examples from <i>Born of the Sun</i>	53
	Rethinking the role of Christianity in Colonial Dispossession: Representations of Poverty in the Church	57
	Poverty in the midst of Political Transition in Diescho's <i>Troubled Waters</i> (1992)	60
	<i>Meekulu's Children</i> - The 'Ordinary' in the 'Spectacular'	65
	Gendered Gradations of Poverty - The Namibian Story	68
	<i>The Purple Violet of Oshaantu</i> (2001)	72
	Concluding Remarks	79
Chapter Two:	Unconscious Dignity in Poverty - Stories from Botswana	82
	Bessie Head and Poverty: The story of migration, adaptation and discrimination	88
	The Triumphant Rise of the Poor	103
	<i>Maru</i> (1971)	110
	<i>A Question of Power</i> (1974)	115
	<i>The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales</i> (1977)	119
	Unity Dow, the Law, Poverty and Economic Disparities in Rural Botswana	124
	<i>The Screaming of the Innocent</i> (2002)	130
	<i>Juggling Truths</i> (2004)	135
	Melamu; Dedication to Survival	137
	Conclusion	150
Chapter Three:	Urban Poverty in Selected Zimbabwean Texts	152
	The Second Generation Writers: Disillusionment on the Eve of Independence	159
	Charles Mungoshi's <i>Waiting for the Rain</i> (1975)	160

Chenjerai Hove’s <i>Bones</i> (1988)	166
Dambudzo Marechera’s <i>House of Hunger: A metaphor for Zimbabwe’s poverty</i>	171
Tsitsi Dangarembga’s <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (1988)	178
Third Generation Writers in Zimbabwe- writing poverty amidst the crisis	
Yvonne Vera’s <i>Butterfly Burning</i> (1998)	190
Gendered poverty in <i>Butterfly Burning</i>	202
Writing Crisis – Post-Independence Writing in Zimbabwe	205
Stories of life in the post-Independence economic meltdown	
<i>An Elegy for Easterly</i> (2009)	207
“The Mupandawana Dancing Champion”	212
“Queues” – Shimmer Chinodya	216
“Pay Day Hell”- Christopher Mlalazi	221
“In Memory of the Nossi Brigade” by Zvisinei Sandi	225
The HIV/AIDS Scourge in a Hungry Nation	227
Valerie Tagwira’s <i>The Uncertainty of Hope</i> (2008)	228
“These are the Days of our Lives”- Edward Chinhanhu	233
“A land of Starving Millionaires” by Erasmus R. Chinyani	235
Conclusion	237
Conclusion: Literary Depictions of Poverty as a Significant Resource	239
Works Cited	246

Introduction: Literary Depictions of Poverty – A Source of Complementary Knowledge on Indigence?

The scope of current interest in the status of poverty in Africa is indicated by the three questions: who are the poor? Why are they poor? And what can be done about it? At each of these levels of enquiry – the profile of poverty, its causes and the implications for policy and practice – there is growing recognition of the value of a multidisciplinary approach...and the need to integrate this with more 'qualitative' evidence reflecting poor people's own experience. (World Bank Development Report 1999-2000)

This is a study of literary depictions of poverty and their possible contribution to the understanding of the broad subject of indigence that, as the epigraph above shows, has preoccupied researchers from many fields of study. The thesis undertakes a comparative reading of post-colonial literature written in English in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to bring into view the similarities and differences between fictional representations of poverty in these three countries. The central focus is on local indigence in literary depictions of poverty and the way in which writers attempt in their representations to give the poor a voice through narrative devices that allow the characters to speak and claim agency over the narrative of poverty. Such devices are, for example, point of view, dialogues and interior reflections, multi-layered scenes that trouble simplistic readings of the impact of poverty on the lives of characters, irony and humour and the utilization of different narrators. Maria Pia Lara in *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* (1998), while focusing mainly on feminist struggles to make real life voices of women heard in the public sphere, invites us to explore how these features of novelistic discourse give the poor a voice by enacting, imagining and representing them in fictional accounts of poverty. Through an examination of a wide range of women's narratives, Lara argues that the novel form is a "frame for struggles of recognition and transformation" (7) because when demanding recognition in the public sphere, dominated groups such as women, frame their demands in evocative and compelling narratives. Drawing on these perspectives that Lara presents I ask questions about how voices

that speak from positions of imaginatively realised situations of poverty enter the public sphere through fictional representations of poverty. I argue that with a voice to speak about their conditions, characters that are depicted as poor become active subjects in their own stories and are therefore enabled to transform their individual identities as perceived and understood by the reading public.

The main aim of this study is to make a case for the appreciation of subjective and experiential knowledge provided by delineations of poverty in the chosen African literary texts in which writers represent insiders' perspectives on the experience of poverty in contrast to state and/or sociological discourses describing poverty from the 'outside'. While paying particular attention to the specificities of each country, this study endeavours to explore the similarities and differences between techniques that writers use to acknowledge poverty both aesthetically and culturally while at the same time highlighting that indigence is socially and materially real. This study intends to foreground the theme of poverty in literature to chart the way towards a focused but comparative analysis of literary depictions of poverty. In this study the term post-colonialism delineates the post 1966 period in Botswana, the post liberation war period in Namibia starting from 1990, as well as the post 1980 period in Zimbabwe.

My study acknowledges that poverty is a world-wide and age-old problem that is even featured in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, with Jesus Christ acknowledging the existence of the poor and affirming God's concern for them. Bearing in mind the complexities of poverty as a subject of study, this thesis explores whether and in which ways selected fictional narratives can complement and counter commonplace sociological and statistical representations of poverty arguing that the different approaches and techniques

used by various writers to portray indigence (such as characterization and irony), if studied flexibly, can lead to a nuanced understanding of poverty.

Defining Poverty

This thesis views poverty as a complex, multidimensional and relative phenomenon experienced, understood and depicted by selected authors as it affects societal, political and economic facets of the everyday lives of their fictional characters. Cognisant of the fact that poverty is multifaceted, I do not want to confine my thinking to customary definitional demarcations of absolute (measured by the absence of economic well-being and absolute deprivation) and relative poverty. Instead, this dissertation acknowledges that poverty is a loosely defined term, which is best viewed broadly as “[a] lack of power to command resources” (World Bank 1999-2000). Both cultural and socio-economic aspects of poverty that feature prominently and consistently in the selected texts have a place in such a definition because it is suitably expansive. What is crucial here is to recognise that such lack of power over the command of various resources obviously speaks to a range of social positioning and in this regard it is useful to consider Albert Camus’s caveat not to see poverty “as a single, uniformly lived condition that could be comprehended easily by any external observer, but as a condition that span[s] a scale from tolerable discomfort to utter deprivation of necessities of life” (cited in Letemendia 442). In a detailed analysis of “Poverty in the Writings of Albert Camus”, V.C. Letemendia writes that, for Camus, “each degree of poverty gives birth to a separate and specific experience of destitution” (442). My focus is on fictional representations of ordinary and localised lived realities of poverty and it is this focus on specific indigence that I seek to explore in texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The three neighbouring countries are at comparable levels of development and are therefore facing similar economic challenges providing for a rich body of fictional accounts of

experiences of poverty at the different epochs in the histories of the three Southern African countries.

This thesis adopts definitions of poverty that highlight the notion of “experienced poverty” which is my focus in exploring literary depictions of indigence as it influences various characters under different circumstances. D.H. Lawrence in his poem “Poverty”, declares “[that] poverty is a hard old hag/ and a monster, when you’re pinched for actual necessities” (lines 5-6). Lawrence illuminatingly demonstrates that poverty is a relative phenomenon that can mean lack of basic needs or absolute lack of necessities such food and clothing. Alongside harrowing portraits of absolute poverty which often lead to problems such as malnutrition and starvation as depicted in some texts, this thesis also probes and investigates fictional accounts of relative poverty which encompass a wide range of conditions that are identifiable as indigence when individual characters that are depicted as poor are juxtaposed to those who are portrayed as rich in fictional communities.

The definitional challenges and the quest for a broad understanding of indigence is indicative of the reality that poverty in developing countries has attracted the attention of researchers from various fields and has made its way into major political campaigns around the world. Ethnographers from the field of Anthropology as well as sociologists such as, Oscar Lewis in *Culture of Poverty* (1968), Carol Stack in *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (1974) and Elliot Liebow in *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women* (1993), have conducted studies of people living in poverty, but the topic has historically been discussed in fields that rely more on quantitative analysis. As examples of sociological and anthropological studies on poverty, these seminal texts provide useful insights into various topics that are addressed in fictional depictions of poverty in the texts I discuss in this thesis.

Lewis's text popularised the concept of 'culture of poverty' arguing that poverty makes the poor adopt a negative poverty-perpetuating value system. While helping one to grasp the bleakness of real people who succumb to poverty from one generation to another, Lewis's text also offers my thesis the opportunity to investigate how characters who are depicted as poor are given narrative power to challenge and question negative views about the poor such as the ones espoused by proponents of the culture of poverty theory¹. Stack gestures towards the general focus of my thesis which is to explore the nuanced picture of poverty in fictional representations, by challenging stereotypical notions of poor families (mostly black) as "deviant, matriarchal and broken" (Stack 22). In contrast to stereotypes against the poor, fictional depictions of poverty in the texts I discuss imaginatively and illuminatingly depict "the adaptive strategies, resourcefulness and resilience of...families under conditions of perpetual poverty" (Stack 22). The central argument in my study is that poverty is experienced differently by individuals and this nuance is adequately captured in selected fictional works. I argue that the "capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalization, exclusion and prejudice" (Lara 8) in most texts offer a revival and empowerment of previously disempowered subjects. Drawing from Stark's insights on real people, I discuss alternative representational possibilities offered by literary texts considering how such depictions challenge common perceptions of the poor and of poverty. Bringing in the gender aspect of poverty (that features in the fictional texts I discuss), Liebow's text seeks to challenge stereotypes and myths against homeless and poor people by exploring and documenting the lives of homeless women. Liebow's call for a deeper understanding of poverty resonates with my thesis's attempt to explore the possible contributions of fictional representations of poverty to the broader understanding of problems such as homelessness, deprivation, destitution, living in need, pauperisation, squalor, anomie and related concepts of

¹ Oscar Lewis coined the term 'culture of poverty' in his 1961 book *The Children of Sanchez* controversially arguing that the poor share similar beliefs, values, and behaviours that perpetuate poverty in their lives from one generation to another.

indigence. The diverse concepts (above) that are all related to or are components of poverty, point to how complex, poverty as a topic is and I argue that a literary study such as mine accommodates an imaginatively diverse and complex range of responses to fictional representations of poverty.

On the research front, attempts have also more recently been made across the social sciences to explore ways in which qualitative approaches can complement the existing data obtained largely through quantitative studies. Social scientists Uma Kothari and David Hulme in their essay “Narratives, Stories and Tales: Understanding poverty dynamics through life histories” come to the following conclusion on quantitative analysis of poverty as contrasted with what they call “more qualitative approaches”:

[R]esearch based on such [quantitative] data and analysis while they can, arguably, describe patterns and correlates of economic and social mobility have proved less effective at explaining why these occur (Shahin 2003). These analyses tend to be ‘lifeless’ and contrast with more qualitative approaches that in deepening the understanding of why some people are poor and cannot ‘escape’ poverty while others can, are more ‘life full’. That is, they provide a wealth of data about people and their experiences rather than aggregated classifications, categories and characteristics of poverty. (4)

As part of the on-going debate on expanding sources of knowledge on poverty, the above authors highlight the usefulness of life histories (an ethnographic technique of data collection) and are therefore making a case for more qualitative studies on indigence.

Reiterating the complexities of poverty as a developmental challenge, leading African writer and intellectual Chinua Achebe in his essay “Africa Is People” (2009) underscores the value that experiential data can provide in complementing mathematical calculations and

estimations of poverty. He told experts at the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1989:

Here you are, spinning your fine theories, to be tried out in your imaginary laboratories. You are developing new drugs and feeding them to a bunch of laboratory guinea pigs and hoping for the best. I have news for you. Africa is not fiction. Africa is people, real people. Have you thought of that? You are brilliant people, world experts. You may even have the very best intentions. But have you thought, really thought, of Africa as people? (157)

In the quotation above, Achebe reminds scholars that Africans have stories to tell about economic interventions such as structural adjustment programs that were introduced in Africa by multinational bodies like the OECD and the International Monetary Fund – the IMF. To illustrate his point, Achebe relates the Nigerian experience of structural adjustments, which resulted in the country's minimum wage plummeting “in value from the equivalent of fifteen British pounds a month to five pounds” (157). He argues that this plummet is “not a lab report; it is not a mathematical exercise... [it is] someone's income” (157). In this way, Achebe reminds us that if we want to understand poverty in relation to African people we need to listen to their narratives and similarly if governments want to understand poverty fully, they have to listen to the voices of the poor themselves. In this thesis I investigate whether literature can validly and adequately represent poverty by reimagining experiences of poverty and voices of the poor as fiction and therefore open to multiple interpretations and meanings. My argument in this thesis is not that the voices of fictional characters that are depicted as poor can replace the voices of real poor people recorded in sociological research but that fictional representations of poverty can contribute to a broader understanding of indigence through rich, captivating and moving depictions which influence a reader's perspective on poverty.

Responding to calls for a change in approach to development, the World Bank introduced the ‘Voices of the Poor’ initiative through which the bank endeavours to engage storytelling methodology in the production of development knowledge. ‘Voices of the Poor’ is made up of three books; *Can Anyone Hear Us* (2000), *Crying out for Change* (2000) and *From Many Lands* (2002). For example, Deepa Narayan et al. in the first book *Can Anyone Hear Us* conducted extensive interviews with poor people in 47 countries on their experiences of poverty with the hope that the stories about different people’s experiences with poverty, could then inform policy positions adopted and promoted by the world body. In the report, Narayan challenges researchers and policy makers to conceptually “look at the world through the eyes and spirit of the poor, to start with poor people’s realities” (274). Despite this progressive change in approach, it is crucial for this thesis to note that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the Bretton Woods Institutions) have been heavily criticised for promoting policies and programs that created poverty in developing countries such as the structural adjustment programs of the 1990s. Anup Shah in “Structural Adjustment – a Major Cause of Poverty” more explicitly argues that:

Many developing nations are in debt and poverty partly due to the policies of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Their programs have been heavily criticized for many years for resulting in poverty. In addition, for developing or third world countries, there has been an increased dependency on the richer nations. This is despite the IMF and World Bank’s claim that they will reduce poverty. (Shah n.pag.)

The historic role of the two world bodies (as aptly articulated by Shah), makes the bank’s shift towards a humanitarian approach to the study of poverty ironic and some critics have even questioned whether the move is a genuine effort to find solutions to poverty.

Sandra Jeppesen's "From the 'War on Poverty' to the 'War on the Poor': Knowledge, Power and Subject Positions in Anti-Poverty Discourses" broadens the debate on the unimpressive historical role of the world bank in fighting poverty in developing nations by problematizing the exercise of writing about the poor in sociological studies, which she argues often excludes the voices of the poor themselves. Jeppesen's essay accords my inquiry unique insights on the 'illocutionary force' of literary texts by providing examples that suggest that "although there are clearly ways in which the 'war on poverty' constructs the regime of truth while failing to account fully for the experiences of people living in poverty, self-representations by people living in poverty [through their own narratives] challenge this, leading to social transformation" (Jeppesen 489). I argue here that fictional representations of poverty offer reimagined voices of the poor, through fictional characters who are given the narrative urgency to present every facet of their lives to the reader to challenge narratives that are written about the poor that often ignore their voices. Jeppesen's focus on lived experiences of poverty in Canada and her exploration of "ways in which poverty is experienced differently by a broad range of people" (490), speaks to my discussion of literary depictions of poverty in Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. My thesis investigates the peculiar quality of literature that I argue has the ability to lead readers into the dense and complex lived realities of poverty as depicted in selected texts.

This thesis also seeks to examine how the process of re-envisaging and reimagining poverty as fiction opens it to multiple interpretations and perspectives. In the process of fictionalizing human experiences such as poverty, I argue, writers, their texts and the readers create new meaning and nuanced understandings of indigence. Writing more broadly about art (literary texts included) Rita Felski, in a seminal lecture titled "Context Stinks!" argues that "[a]rtworks can only survive and thrive by making friends, creating allies, attracting

disciples, inciting attachments, latching on to receptive hosts” (585). Felski makes the point that a successful work of art is one that movingly engages with the reader or viewer’s intellect and emotions, making them empathetic in their interactions with the minds and lives of other real humans. To elucidate this point on the emotive abilities of art, Felski writes:

The significance of a text is not exhausted by what it reveals or conceals about the social conditions that surround it. Rather, it is also a matter of what it makes possible in the viewer or reader—what kind of emotions it elicits, what perceptual changes it triggers, what affective bonds it calls into being ... their own. We fumble to account for the often unforeseen impact of texts: the song on the radio that unexpectedly reduces you to tears; the horror movie gorefest that continues to haunt your dreams; the novel that finally persuaded you to take up Buddhism or to get divorced. (585-6)

Felski here illustrates how works of art and literary texts in particular, are able to capture the attention of readers while also having the ability to shock them into full acknowledgement of the subject matter addressed by fictional works. Literature as Felski eloquently argues, moves the reader into thick descriptions of experiences of poverty as experienced differently and uniquely by individual characters, thereby broadening the perspective of the reading public on indigence. This also allows them to reimagine themselves in other identities such as those of the poor.

Further to the effect that literary texts may have on individual readers, the text I discuss also aim their message at different audiences who all have diverse experiences of poverty. As David Lewis et al. in “The Fiction of Development: Literary Representations as a Source of Authoritative Knowledge” argue, targeting different audiences allows these texts to “transcend [their] difficult, even unattractive subject matter [poverty] and [to] edge towards a universal appeal based on a kind of humanism” (207). By putting a human face to the

problem of poverty through fictional representation, literary texts that I discuss in this thesis “constitute a key form of evidence and testimony” (202). Lewis et al. fruitfully explore possible “significant advantages to fictional writing over non-fiction” (198). The intention here is not to create what would be a false dichotomy between literary texts on poverty and social science studies on the subject but to draw attention to how the two may complement each other in contributing to a nuanced understanding of poverty. To set the two alongside one another, I seek to use examples from selected texts to demonstrate how fictional representations of poverty provide “readers with an immense variety of richly textured commentaries on man’s life in society, on his [or her] involvement with his fellow men... [which allow for] an intensity of perception” (Lewis et al. 198). Attentive to how the paper compares and contrasts fiction in selected literary texts and facts in policy-related representations of the developmental process, I seek to explore how some writers base their literary works on academic or factual research and by so doing, creatively and fruitfully blur the line between fiction and fact. The social scientists argue that “relevant fictional forms of representation can be valuably set alongside other forms of knowledge about development such as policy reports or scholarly writing, as valid contributions to [the] understanding of development” (Lewis et al. 208). My study seeks to contribute to this debate by analysing examples of representations of experienced poverty as shaped and presented in selected literary narratives. I examine how the “nuanced understanding and detailed depiction of poverty” (Lewis et al.198) in selected texts benefits from “a freedom of fabrication that allows [texts] to present ... unbearable hardships [such as poverty in manner that] manages to entertain” (Lewis et al. 198) while at the same time conscientising the reader about the plight of the poor. In reading selected fictional texts, I interrogate how fictional creativity gives writers the opportunity to reimagine lived realities of poverty and as a result manage to

produce moving, unique and meaningful contributions to the complex, multifaceted and elusive concept of poverty through their fictional representations.

This thesis explores the diverse ways in which literature provides a broad scope of fictional depictions of local indigence as well as the interconnectedness between the experiences of individual characters and the understanding of wider social contexts within which they are placed. An essay by Martina Kopf titled “‘If You Think You Are Educated...’: A reading of Dambudzo Marechera’s *House of Hunger*” emphasises the way in which the writing of Zimbabwean author Dambudzo Marechera can function as an example of how literature can be a source of useful knowledge on poverty: “literature as source and literature studies should be integrated into poverty research in order to achieve ‘thick descriptions’ of poverty” (2). Considering Kopf’s views I examine ‘thick descriptions of poverty’ in fictional narratives and how they explain not just the concept of poverty, but its context and diversity as well, such that it also becomes meaningful to readers. Kopf posits further that “if poverty research is not to stay merely a reflection of the concept but also deal with the phenomenon, literature constitutes an important source of knowledge by telling stories of those concerned” (2). This thesis places emphasis on Kopf’s careful choice of words here to make it clear that she is not arguing that literature should replace quantitative research on poverty but rather that literature should be considered as a possible valuable source of knowledge on poverty.

I contend in this study that literature provides insights into the multi-layered realities of the poor and allows interior perspectives that can shed light on some of the broad generalisations about poverty established in other (data-gathering) disciplines. Gavin Jones in *The American Hungers: the problem of poverty in US literature, 1860-1945* echoes this sentiment, writing that “[l]iterature can shed light too on a topic that has tended to resist rigorous philosophical

analysis, and has remained far less parsed, in literary theory and criticism, than companion categories” (228). He argues, however, that despite the potential of literature to provide insight, poverty as an analytic category remains in the shadow of most forms of literary criticism, which only tackle it as an aspect of other categories: of race, gender and class. Jones argues that too much focus on these categories by some literary critics is to blame for failure “to take poverty seriously as a complex category” (63). The issues of gender, class and race are also discussed in “Little Sister: The Place of Poverty in Orwell's Fiction” (1986) by T.D. Miller; “Home Economics: Representations of Poverty in Eighteenth-Century Fiction” by Ruth Perry (2005) and “‘Why Do They Have To...To...Say Things...?': Poverty, Class, and Gender in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*” by Kathleen Therrien (1999), all of which demonstrate that the categories identified by Jones, relate in various ways and intersect with poverty, but a focus on them as central themes often takes away the opportunity to adequately address local indigence, which I argue is explicitly and clearly addressed in chosen examples of literary depictions of indigence.

In another study, Allen Koretsky in the essay “Poverty, Wealth and Virtue: Richardson's Social Outlook in *Pamela*” (1983) discusses the effects of “misused power in human relationships” (55) as depicted in Richardson's fiction. Koretsky's analysis of class struggles in Richardson's novel will inform my discussion of similar struggles in Dow and Head's texts, where class and power struggles are particularly prominently depicted. Influential socialist thinker, Karl Marx provides a powerful explanation of class as a struggle for ownership of property and the literary texts I discuss in this thesis, provide a stage upon which this contestation for power by the rich to exclude other members of society from owning the means of production (pushing some people into poverty) is re-enacted, reimagined and movingly depicted in its complexities across the different fictional settings.

Literature therefore accords readers the opportunity to experience the class social conflict at all levels of society through the lives of fictional characters which then “triggers a playful to and fro between identification and differentiation on the part of the reader, which effectively works towards a genuine expansion of subjective boundaries” (Albrecht Wellmer qtd in Maria Pia Lara 56). This thesis investigates this possible contribution of literature to the broad and nuanced understanding of poverty.

For the writers whose texts I discuss in this thesis, “poverty presents a fusion of cultural and sociological perspectives, wherein class aspects of material deprivation and the cultural aspects of gender and race—as well as the politics of sexism and racism—naturally emerge” (Jones 149–50). Jones persuasively argues that literary works are able to capture all the different facets and contradictions of poverty “by revealing its discursive (psychocultural) and material (socioeconomic) interactions on their fictional and documentary subjects” (4). Seeking to demonstrate how literary texts successfully render the full complexity of poverty, Jones argues that fictional texts “inaugurate a simultaneously material and discursive interest in poverty—an interest in a national polemic of poverty that would reverberate throughout the literature of subsequent generations” (52). The freedom of writers to reimagine experiences of poverty allows them to show that all the various aspects of indigence “social, religious, psychological, sexual, class, and literary” (Jones 130) need to be taken into consideration for one to have a full understanding and appreciation of the concept of poverty.

Theoretical Perspectives on Poverty and Theories Adapted to the Study

Poverty as a category is rarely explicitly mentioned in literary criticism but some studies have been conducted on literary depictions of poverty. Existing works that discuss European and American literature and poverty include Diana Maltz’s “Sympathy, Humour and the Abject

Poor in the work of May Kendall” (2007), which provides an analysis of Victorian writer Kendall’s exploration of literary genres with the view to identifying the one that best captured the plight of the poor. Maltz makes an interesting argument on how genres like satire while effective in exposing the hypocrisies that perpetuate poverty may end mocking the poor themselves. In this thesis I argue however that different genres and different authors use varying creative tools to rethink the concept of poverty and all of them could contribute meaningfully to a nuanced understanding of indigence. Maltz’s essay therefore assists my dissertation’s argument concerning the possible contribution of literary works to the study of poverty by assessing the contribution of fictional depictions of poverty in attracting readers’ empathy towards the poor and understanding of the condition of indigence. The literature that I study in this thesis presents the creative and varying manner in which different texts may contribute to the broad understanding of poverty as experienced and lived by fictional characters.

Paula Backsheider in “Give Me Not Poverty, Lest I Steal” (2007) explores the interface between a legal subject and everyday struggles for survival. She provides insight into how the law sometimes struggles to address certain cases of behaviour and crimes committed by what Backsheider calls “pitiable human beings” (81). The essay provides discerning examples of the confrontation between the law and human beings comparable to how Moteane Melamu’s character, Bashi in his short story “The Waif” in *Living and Partly Living: Short Stories* (1996) relates to the police. V.C. Letemendia’s “Poverty in the Writings of Albert Camus” (1997) discusses Camus’s approach to understanding poverty, arguing that poverty “assault[s] its victims on an individual level, psychologically and morally, at its very worst curtailing human expression and communication” (442). As already stated, Letemendia’s essay provides my study with a useful definition of poverty which emphasises unique and

localised experiences of poverty and suggests that each narrative needs to be examined in its own right.

The above mentioned studies provide insight into perceptions of poverty in American, English and Latin American literature. The idea of the poor being to blame for their condition (as they are accused of being lazy or according to proponents of culture of poverty, they adopt lifestyles that perpetuate poverty) is addressed extensively in these works, which are hence useful to my study's exploration of how discourses of poverty in African fictional narratives differ from official poverty discourses that often seek to absolve authorities from failure to cater for the poor and instead blame people for their laziness and unwillingness to earn a living. Moreover, the above studies focus on individual countries and/or individual writers, while my study offers a comparative inquiry addressing literature from Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Literary criticism on poverty and literature in Africa include Sam Raditlhalo's essay "Beggars' Description: 'Xala,' the Prophetic Voice and the Post-Independent African State" (2005), which addresses "literary representation of the destitute of African societies as reflected in the novels of Sembène Ousmane, Thomas Akare, Ben Okri, and Zanemvula 'Zakes' Mda" (84). Raditlhalo's essay is important to my inquiry because it grapples with how African writers have depicted beggars in their writing. He argues that "African writers are caught within two paradigms: one that sees beggars in a mystical, romantic way and another that perceives the destitute as an index of the betrayal of the ideals propounded by nationalism" (84). In my thesis I argue that even though there are similarities between literary depictions of poverty in selected texts, in the main the depictions are as diverse as the subject of indigence that they seek to represent. The depictions seek to present a comprehensive

picture of poverty instead of zooming in on certain components such as destitution. Michiel Heyns's "Houseless Poverty in the House of Fiction: Vagrancy and Genre in Two Novels by J. M. Coetzee" (1999) and "The Politics of Poverty: Two Novels of Political Independence in West Africa" by Ogunba Oyi (1974) are also pertinent. The focus of these essays is on the growing indignation that literary narratives espouse about the prevalence of poverty in post-colonial African states. My thesis will extend such insights concerning discourses of poverty in literature to selected literary texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, engaging with the lingering effects of the colonial past and failures of the post-colonial present.

In light of the above literature review, the main theoretical underpinnings of this study will be drawn from Maria Pia Lara's theory on the 'illocutionary force' of narratives, Amartya Sen's 'capabilities approach' and Njabulo Ndebele's notion of 'the ordinary'. By placing the three theorists in conversation I seek to locate my discussion of the complex topic of literary depictions of poverty within an equally complex theoretical formation that does not involve:

a singular theoretical formation, but rather an interrelated set of critical and counterintuitive perspectives, a complex network of paronymous concepts and heterogeneous practices that have been developed out of traditions of resistance to a global historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism.
(Young 20)

As Robert Young rightly observes, the complex trajectory of lived realities in Africa has to be understood within the context of the continent's history of colonialism. In this study I seek to explore literary depictions of power dynamics that have roots in the colonial era, but are shown to continue into the post-colonial period. This thesis explores how literature gives the poor and often powerless a voice not only to challenge the status quo but also to provide their own perspectives on poverty through compelling narratives of poverty. My study seeks to

avoid dichotomies of poor/rich as well as powerful and powerless, which I argue flatten the nuance of complex and diverse lived experiences of poverty.

Maria Pia Lara's *'Illocutionary Force'*

Lara offers deep insights into the 'illocutionary force' of narratives, a term initially used by Jürgen Habermas to refer to "aspects that makes the speech act a performance" (Habermas 256). Lara uses the term 'illocutionary force' more widely and gives it a cultural twist to explain the impact narratives have on the reader. Evoking Lara's version of 'illocutionary force' my thesis seeks to explore how fictional narratives that depict poverty can "create new forms of power, configuring new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making institutional transformations possible" (Lara 5). Lara echoes my study's argument that literary depictions of poverty broaden the reader's perspective of indigence through moving portraits of lived realities of poverty that grab the attention of the reading public while at the same time challenging unfair narratives that blame the poor for their plight.

Theorising the interfaces between the social and the literary, Lara argues that narratives, especially those written by women, have "illocutionary force" (*Moral Textures 2*) which she argues leads "to an understanding of how, with the subjects of the speech acts focusing on newly problematic social issues, it is possible to transform them by creating new narratives in the public sphere" (*Moral Textures 2*). Employing Lara's argument I seek to demonstrate how literary texts highlight issues that were not problematic in past patriarchal societies, such as traditions and customs that give boys preference over girls in education, as well as those that dispossess women of their assets when their husbands die. I will use Lara's argumentation on the ability of fictional narratives to effect change, to indicate that various stories I discuss, are not only meant to change the dominant and often oppressive attitude

towards poverty but also to possibly transform the way the poor perceive themselves after interacting with fictional representations' of poverty. Drawing from Lara's discussion of how women narratives can transform the plight of women, this thesis reads selected texts both as evidence of the conditions they describe as well as responses to these conditions that are aimed at transforming and changing the situation for the better.

My thesis seeks to explore how selected authors in some cases tell new stories about lived experiences of poverty while others re-tell common narratives from the perspective of the poor. Using the example of feminist narratives, Lara makes a compelling case in explaining how "the appropriation of [women narratives] has been an empowering technique aimed at the recovery of 'women' and their intentional capacities" (*Moral Textures* 17). She demonstrates how women move from being victims "who can only offer resistance - to being owners of their lives" (*Moral Textures* 8) by utilising fiction to retell their stories and demand recognition and space in the public sphere. Lara describes 'public sphere' as "a cultural arena where public meanings of justice and the good permeate democratic institutions" (*Moral Textures* 4). She further defines a 'cultural arena' as "an arena where societies can change their self-understandings precisely because moral, aesthetic and political issues are intertwined" (*Moral Textures* 170). It is my argument here that literature can function as a method by means of which to draw attention to the plight of the poor and influence the readerships' understanding of their situation.

Lara's text is critical to my effort to produce a consolidated inquiry into fictional representations of poverty that explore the relationship between poverty and gender as well as in analysing the effects of poverty on women and men as portrayed by my chosen authors who explore the struggle by both genders to assert their identity and rights within a poverty

stricken environment in their fiction. I use Lara in this thesis to help me to delineate the public function of texts from the three countries (written by women and men) in their efforts to use fictional narratives concerning the lives of the poor to create an understanding in their readers of the multiple challenges poverty poses to their characters. Lara refers to this multiplicity of challenges in her response to Eduardo Mendieta's criticism of the notion of "illocutionary force", arguing that "literature is all about the expansion of subjectivities and the creation of new places wherein to create oneself" ("A Reply" 184).

Lara's validation of literature as having the capacity to change social realities, albeit in ways that might not be easily provable, speaks to my discussion of selected texts in this thesis. While some of the authors focus on the incredibly brave efforts of characters to show fortitude and kindness in the most difficult circumstances, they are not blind to the power of those who rule. They interrogate how sovereign power impacts upon the everyday lives of people. Closely linked to notions of power are the concepts of opportunity and capability in the study of poverty which have been studied and expressed more extensively by Nobel Laureate and Indian economist Amartya Sen.

Amartya Sen's 'Capability Approach'

Among the notable contributions that Sen has made to development studies and to poverty studies in particular is the shift towards qualitative research on poverty by the World Bank (noted above). Through his extensive work on poverty and development, Sen, the winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics, has developed a more humane theory of Economics that seeks to move beyond mathematical estimations in order to take into account all the dimensions of poverty. As such, he is one of the three key theorists for this study. Sen has shaped a new way of thinking of 'development as freedom' and views poverty as "capability

deprivation” (*Development as Freedom* 87) which is a term that he uses to refer to lack of opportunities to live the kind of life a person desires. Sen’s focus on individual struggles with poverty affords my study the opportunity to examine fictional accounts of poverty as experienced by individual characters. In line with the quest of my thesis for a nuanced approach to indigence, Sen argues that “poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty” (*Development as Freedom* 87). The sudden and forceful introduction of the money economy in Diescho’s fictional pre-colonial Namibia deprived the natives of the life they were used to, not necessarily because they did not have money but because their economy was rendered obsolete. They were now poor despite having cattle and other goods with which they managed to live a normal life before the changes. Sen’s approach is therefore an important tool that I can use to investigate the nuance in the fictional depictions of poverty in selected texts. Poverty is viewed as deprivation of the capability to live a good life, and ‘development’ is understood as capability expansion. The capability approach is distinguishable from other established approaches by its focus on the capability of individuals to achieve the kind of lives they want and value. The focus on localised individual experience with poverty will assist my examination into ways in which selected writers use fictional characters to achieve the nuanced picture of indigence that Sen is advocating for. Sen’s argument that poverty is experienced differently by people allows my study the opportunity to probe similarities and differences in the lived experiences of poverty as enacted by fictional characters who are depicted in selected texts as poor.

Over the years Sen developed and refined the ‘capability approach’ to poverty (e.g. Sen, 1980; 1984; 1985; 1987; 1992; 1999) which is now a leading alternative to income based economic approaches to indigence. He critiques the tendency to conflate well-being with

opulence, arguing that in order to understand poverty, there is a need to consider what different people are able to achieve with the opportunities and resources that are at their disposal. Sen maintains that different people and societies have different capacities to convert income into valuable achievements. He insists on the uniqueness of individual experiences of poverty and Quesada quotes Sen arguing that “human beings are thoroughly diverse; you cannot draw a poverty line and then apply it across the board to everyone the same way without taking into account personal characteristics and circumstances” (qtd in Quesada n.pag.). Sen observes that “a person’s capacity to achieve does indeed stand for opportunity to pursue his or her objectives” (*Inequality Re-examined* 31). He also refers to capacitation as the “real opportunity [to] accomplish what we value” (*Development as Freedom* 40).

Capacitation theory’s emphasis on individual experience resonates with the argument of this thesis that literary depictions of poverty which emphasise localised lived realities of poverty are valuable to the overall understanding of poverty. The theory’s emphasis on a comprehensive and holistic approach that focuses on the set of capabilities that are open to individuals is in line with my objective to capture the complexities of lived experiences of poverty as depicted in literary texts. This thesis employs Sen’s theory to discern literary depiction of unique individual as well as group objectives of escaping poverty.

Using examples from selected texts, this thesis will explore and probe how selected authors reimagine and re-enact Sen’s idea that people need to live in conditions in which they can pursue the kind of lives that they want to live. Sen rightly argues that

what the capability perspective does in poverty analysis is to enhance the understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and deprivation by shifting primary attention away from means (and one particular means that is usually given exclusive attention, viz, income) to ends that people have reason

to pursue, and, correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends. (*Development as Freedom* 90)

This approach allows my thesis room to discuss how some characters in various texts choose to transform general capabilities into specific ends and some do not, while some characters in the same fictional family or community may require more resources than others to achieve the same capability. For example, previously disadvantaged communities are depicted in the texts I discuss, as needing more resources to survive in the new money economy (in Diescho's text), while women and girls are depicted as requiring more effort in some communities to succeed. Tambudzai in Dangarembga's text for example, is initially denied the chance to go to school because preference is given to the boy-child and she initially has to work hard on the farm to try and raise tuition money while her brother has free passage to school. In some narratives, women are dispossessed of assets such as houses when their husbands die. These examples show the strength of the capability approach as a tool that authors can utilize in their portrayal of unique experiences of poverty. This thesis examines how various authors take into consideration personal, social and environmental factors that influence a person's ability to convert resources into a better life, in their fictional depictions of poverty. The comprehensive approach to the subject of poverty as articulated here resonates with Njabulo Ndebele's call for a return to the complex every day struggle for a normal life that is often overshadowed by a focus on major historical events.

Njabulo Ndebele's *'Rediscovery of the Ordinary'*

In line with my thesis's focus on localised experiences of poverty South African writer and literary critic Ndebele calls for fiction that accommodates the complexities of ordinary everyday life. Ndebele, critiquing South Africa's 'protest' or 'resistance literature' in his

book *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1994) calls for a writer's "deep creative understanding of his subjects" (24). He contends that in the kind of writing that seeks to represent the 'ordinary',

[t]he peasants are never seen as debased human ghosts inviting only condescending sympathy or pity. They are too disturbingly human for that. The realistic setting moreover, enables us to understand that the peasant condition is not attributable to some mysterious forces constituting the 'human condition'. They are what they are largely as a result of particular kind of conditions. Some triumph over the conditions; others are destroyed by them. The result of all this, for the reader, is a kind of understanding that is much deeper than any direct 'message' or 'instruction'. Deeper, because the stories are an occasion not for easy messages, but for asking further questions. (24)

In this quote Ndebele echoes my argument that imaginative features of literary texts allow for rich literary depictions of poverty which provide room for a wide array of views and perspectives on poverty. The text I discuss in this thesis do not seek to provide any particular direct message or didactic lesson on poverty but to open up more critical issues for consideration as reimagined and depicted by the authors. The ability of literary texts to provoke different emotions in the readers contributes to their nuanced understanding and appreciation of poverty. Literary representations of poverty are therefore able to meaningfully and uniquely contribute new ways of understanding the complex concept of poverty through the emotive power of fiction. Ndebele's notion of a return to the ordinary as enabling the reader to comprehend particular conditions that are social and historical (in which the lives of peasants have meaning) informs my analysis of the literary texts in the main part of this thesis. It is my reading of the text that the 'ordinary' is the fictional space where all facets of the lives of characters that are depicted as poor, encounter each other as realities. The focus on lived experiences portrayed by selected writers, allows them illuminatingly to tell the story

of ordinary people's everyday struggles with poverty as opposed to generalised estimates that, according to Ndebele, only lead to didactic or moralistic conclusions. Ndebele in this work encourages writers to investigate their subject matter fully in order to discern the 'ordinary' instead of the 'spectacle'; so that their writing may move beyond simplistic messages to more questioning. Ndebele argues that fiction that focuses on the 'spectacle' "tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil, instead of leading to us towards important necessary insights into the social process leading to those finished forms" (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 15). This argument is crucial to my reading of selected texts, as it echoes the argument of my thesis that binaries (such as good or evil) do not allow for in-depth understanding of unique experiences of indigence as depicted in various texts.

During the course of his writing, Ndebele writes that a new kind of literature is emerging in South Africa which is breaking the tradition of the spectacle. This shift away from the tradition echoes Lara's notion of the 'illocutionary force' of narratives and I argue in this thesis that by focusing on localised lived experiences of poverty, selected texts retell stories of indigence from the perspective of the poor themselves. For Ndebele, the 'ordinary' constitutes a new artistic practice:

It would seem to follow then, that African fiction in South Africa would stand to benefit qualitatively if and when radical intellectual tradition was to be effectively placed in and developed from the ranks of the mass struggle. It is there that the writers will also inevitably be found. (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 21)

Ndebele seems to be arguing for a move away from the earlier literary trend in South Africa which was closely related to the history of Apartheid: "The brutality of the Boer, the terrible farm conditions, the phenomenal hypocrisy of the English Speaking Liberal, the

disillusionment of educated Africans, the poverty of African life and a host of other things” (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 40). Even though Ndebele groups poverty among the spectacles, he argues against the predictability of a kind of writing that flattens the nuance and fails to show unique experiences of poverty where some people live dignified lives within poverty. Discussing Yashar Kemal’s *Anatolian Tales*, Ndebele bemoans the lack of representation of poverty or peasant life in South African literature:

It seemed to me that there existed a disturbing silence in South African literature as far as peasants as subjects of artistic attention, were concerned... What seems to be lacking, then is an attempt at a sincere imaginative perception that sees South African peasant life as having a certain human validity, albeit a problematic one. (“Rediscovery of the Ordinary” 19)

While accepting and appreciating Ndebele’s reaction to Kemal’s stories and how the stories impacted on him, this thesis seeks to explore the nuance presented by different texts and to demonstrate how important it is to observe the specificities of each text in its presentation of fictional representations of poverty. For this point, Ndebele comes under heavy criticism from among others, Rob Gaylard (in “Rediscovery Revisited”), who contends that it is “simplistic and reductive to view all (or almost all) black writing as a species of protest writing or as caught up in the convention of the ‘spectacular’” (45). Even though Gaylard’s criticism is valid, Ndebele’s insights on the nuance that is possible in literary depictions of human experience remains pertinent to this study. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie makes a similar critique of certain types of African fiction and thus she concurs with Ndebele:

There is the “neo-colonial literary narrative” consisting of a paradigm and details which are now de rigueur for the African novel: some “tribal” people involved with kolanuts and “weird” rites of passage in some “rural” place, away from modern variety in “the cities” who are poor (as constantly reiterated), speak some pidgin, ride around in mammy wagons with quaint and fetching sayings splashed across, in

a country where the political leaders are “incomprehensibly” and “uniquely” corrupt (as only Africans can be corrupt) and the intellectual writer is in lonely and alienated angst. When shall we get a break from these novelistic clichés? Who sees this Africa? Who speaks of it? When shall we get to see the real Africans as they actually live their lives in the complexity of continuity and change, tragedy and joy, not only in the gleefully, patronizingly reiterated poverty? Are there some Africans who are, in fact, happy to be alive and prefer to live in Africa, even in hardship which they, of course, want to change on their own terms? Are there Africans who prefer to live in Africa but wish that their political leaders did not negotiate away their lives with such foreign institutions as the World Bank and IMF whose sharp practices and arm-twisting interactions with African governments are not protested by the owners of those same eyes that weep over the poverty of Africa? (8-9)

I share the concerns that criticism such as this raises and therefore I want to attend to the specificities of individual texts and the unique writing techniques used by each author to show that the authors concur with Ogundipe-Leslie in depicting characters that are poor yet demonstrate creative ways of living with their poverty. And in this thesis I agree with Ogundipe-Leslie and Ndebele’s insistence on the need for literary texts to focus on localised lived experiences and the value of such representation to the understanding of poverty. I seek to utilize Ndebele’s work to demonstrate how selected writers use their literature to “de-romanticise the spectacular notion of struggle by adopting an analytical approach to the reality of [poverty]” (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 45). While acknowledging the reality of indigence, the writers seek to offer “an analytical story; a story designed to deliberately break down the barriers of the obvious in order to reveal new possibilities of understanding and action” (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary* 46). Literary depictions of poverty trouble sociological conclusions on poverty and suggest nuances of lived experiences through evocative and compelling fictional accounts of indigence.

In order to situate this discussion firmly within literary studies, this thesis also draws inspiration from Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "Heteroglot Novel" (in "Discourse in the Novel" 1981). Bakhtin's discussion of the novel form in general, helps in articulating the ability of literature to present a complex picture of poverty in all the spheres of everyday life by allowing the reader an opportunity to witness as individual voices of characters are heard by each individual character thereby shaping and influencing one another. In my discussion of fictional depictions of poverty, I argue that as the many voices of characters that are depicted as poor interact in the texts, the diversity of lived experiences of poverty come to fore. The novelistic form, for Bakhtin, is "many voiced or, more precisely, [it is] the artistic orchestration of a diversity of social discourses" ("Discourse in the Novel" 259). In this study I argue that this feature of the novel is applicable to other literary forms and the multiplicity of voices and views accommodated in various forms of literature offer a unique picture of poverty. In Bakhtinian terms, "all languages whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" ("Discourse in the Novel" 115). Bakhtin's approach allows this thesis to analyse the complexities surrounding depictions of lived experiences of poverty in selected fictional example as highlighted by the definitions of poverty that I propose for this study. In the course of one chapter for the texts of each of the three countries whose literature is discussed here, this thesis seeks to explore how (in the chosen texts) specific cases of representations of local indigence are (in Bakhtinian terms) "juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and [can] be interrelated dialogically" ("Discourse in the Novel" 115). The various evocations of lived experiences of poverty at all levels of expression articulated by different characters create a mosaic of perceptions highlighting the complexity of this phenomenon.

In order to understand the machinations of those who yield power, the thesis will draw on Achille Mbembe's concept of "sovereign power" to discuss power dynamics as they relate to poverty depicted in the chosen texts. I seek to illustrate how various 'sovereigns' have power over the wealth of communities and can decree ownership of land and other valuables. In a public lecture on "Necropolitics", Mbembe states that "sovereignty [in African states] means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not" (27). Mbembe further argues that sovereignty is a "twofold process of self-institution and self-limitation (fixing one's own limits for oneself)" (13). I argue here that despite the limited resources at their disposal, the poor in the texts demonstrate the potential to rise up to break the bounds of self-limitation.

Drawing on notions of sovereignty, I argue here that the texts provide a complex picture of a struggle for survival. In addition to the portrayal of the "unconscious dignity" (a phrase coined by Bessie Head in *Tales of Tenderness*, 41) with which some people deal with poverty, the writers I discuss in this thesis also depict poverty as being a product of selfish, greedy, mean 'pseudo nationalists' who actively seek ways of perpetuating poverty in order to keep their grip on power and their hold over the poor. In suggesting a move beyond traditional accounts of sovereignty that ties the concept to nation states, I utilize a broad definition, to explain the powers that chiefs and other authorities have over the poor and which they use to deny the poor the opportunity to actively seek ways of improving their lives. As Mbembe argues, even though the sovereign's right over the poor is not subject to any rules, the texts show that despite the onslaught of various oppressive factors, ordinary local people have the potential to confront their challenges even though such potential is not always implemented or ultimately successful.

Situating my thesis within these theoretical frameworks, I pose the following research questions: What constitutes poverty for individuals and/or communities? What are its characteristics and implications? What are the complexities of writing fictional narratives about poverty as a crucial political problem of socio-economic suffering? What are the similarities and differences in the way writers in the three countries approach and depict poverty? What are the historic approaches to the question of poverty in the African context? What is the role of culture and religion in the understanding of poverty and efforts to fight it, or in contributing to, causing, or justifying poverty? Is there a relationship between migration and poverty in the narratives from these nations? How do poverty narratives from these countries address issues of land ownership and land distribution? In addressing these questions, the thesis will investigate a range of detailed and nuanced depictions of poverty in literary texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, in order to study the kinds of knowledge of indigence created in fictional writing and to analyse how such depictions vividly and enlighteningly portray local indigence.

Writing Poverty in Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe

The countries of Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe have had varying colonial experiences that shaped their developmental trajectories in the post-colonial era. The arrival of European settlers led to indigenous populations being displaced from fertile lands, on which they depended for subsistence farming and cattle rearing. The settlers also introduced money as part of the new capitalist economy and thus rendered barter economy obsolete. The disruptions that came with colonialism significantly disempowered indigenous populations and impoverished them. As I will show throughout the thesis, the colonial legacy tends to

haunt the three countries even after independence, as economic disparities and inequalities persist to varying degrees and often confound the nationalist dream of independence.

Botswana was the first of the three to gain independence in 1966 after having been a British Protectorate since 1885. Botswana's economic rise from one of the poorest countries in the African continent at Independence to an upper middle income country is well documented. Research has, however, indicated that the country's economic success, which is largely attributed to the discovery of mineral wealth, has not translated into better unemployment and poverty figures. The African Economic Outlook observes that:

While Botswana has made remarkable progress in social and human development, as reflected by impressive education and health indicators, the level of poverty remains a major concern for an upper-middle-income country, with 20.7% of the population classified as extremely poor. (AfricanEconomicOutlook.org)

The African Economic Outlook², a research website that monitors and publishes economic data concerning trends on the continent, further notes that the country continues to struggle with an “unemployment rate of 17.5% ... combined with high income inequality” (africaneconomicoutlook.org). The World Bank echoes the same observation in stating that “Botswana's impressive track record of good governance and economic growth ... stands in contrast to the country's high levels of poverty and inequality” (worldbank.org). Poverty statistics from Zimbabwe show a similar trend, where poverty levels dropped considerably following independence and then rose up again: “from independence in 1980 poverty levels declined in the 1980s, gradually rose in the 1990s and dramatically increased in the

² AfricanEconomicOutlook.org is “an evolution of the annual African Economic Outlook report that combines the expertise of the African Development Bank, the OECD Development Centre, the United Nations Commission for Africa and the United Nations Development Program”.

nineties”³. The World Bank reveals that as of 2011-2012, “72.3% of Zimbabweans [were] poor, with poverty being most prevalent in rural arrears, where 84.3% of people are deemed poor” (worldbank.org). Poverty, unemployment and economic inequality also continue to be the three most serious developmental challenges facing the Namibian post-colonial government. Herbert Jauch⁴ in a paper titled “Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality in Namibia” reveals that in 2004:

about 82% of Namibians were living below the poverty line of N\$ 399,80 per person, per month. Applying the crude international poverty line of US\$1 per person, per day would have resulted in 62% of Namibians being regarded as poor (LaRRI 2006). (vivaworkers.org)

The sociological and economic researches on poverty in the three countries differ in approach owing to the challenge of defining poverty. Jauch, for example, presents poverty in Namibia according to different research methodologies concluding that the varying approaches to indigence show the difficulties in defining poverty.

The above sociological findings point to the need for a broad multidisciplinary approach to poverty in order to find a solution and I argue that literary depictions of indigence in selected texts offer additional ways of seeing poverty which can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Literary texts problematize the tendency by sociological and economic studies (such as the World Bank and the African Economic Outlook) to present poverty in established patterns and tropes by providing vivid depictions of daily experiences of poverty, which differ from one person to another and from one society to another. In this thesis I argue that literary depictions of poverty present the problem of indigence as an individual life

³ See http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/assets/files/ten_years_ppts/Chimhowu-poverty-Zimbabwe.pdf

⁴ Herbert Jauch is a former director of the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) in Namibia

experience rather than a statistic. Selected authors use literary tools such as stark realism and irony to offer a complex picture of poverty and its consequences for individuals, while at the same time avoiding the suggestions of what often appears in sociological studies as an obvious link between material deprivation and victimisation of the poor. Literary texts destabilise views that establish this link, showing that this pattern is in some cases broken.

Among the three countries discussed in this study, Botswana and Namibia currently enjoy stable political and economic conditions and they have experienced steady economic growth (though to varying degrees) since the inception of democratic rule. The economic success in both countries has come with new challenges of what Henry George calls “poverty in wealth” (cited in de Mille 543), which is a situation where some sections of the population grow richer (as the countries prosper) while the poor get poorer. The stable and democratic atmosphere in both countries has allowed writers to grapple with a wide range of socio-economic issues affecting the citizenry. However, the growing body of literature from the two countries has not received adequate attention. Compared to other national literatures, little work has been done on the writings from Botswana and Namibia (with the exception of Bessie Head from Botswana, who has strong South African ties and whose work has caught the attention of many critics) and to the best of my knowledge, no sustained and broad critical inquiry into the literary depictions of poverty in all the three countries under review has been previously undertaken. In contrast to the socio-political environment of Botswana and Namibia, Zimbabwe is experiencing an economic meltdown, with the result that many new and established writers turn the attention in their narratives more than before to daily struggles for food and basic necessities. Many new voices have emerged out of Zimbabwe as a result of crises such as the infamous 2000 shack-clearing campaign *Murambatsvina* that left many shack dwellers homeless.

Authors such as Bessie Head (mentioned above) and Zimbabwean authors like Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi, Yvonne Vera, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Chenjerai Hove and Valerie Tagwira have received considerable attention from literary critics. Most of these studies, however, do not focus on poverty as a central theme. An exception is Huma Ibrahim's book *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile* (1996), which provides a feminist reading of poverty in Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1972), with the particular focus on exile identity. As already indicated, Martina Kopf's study "'If You Think Because You Are Educated...': A reading of Dambudzo Marechera's 'House of Hunger'" (2007) provides useful observations concerning this writer's depiction of poverty, but the main focus of the article is on education as a means of poverty alleviation. Another study that will inform my analysis is Molly Yankovitz's "Food in Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*" (1997) a study that captures the author's use of food references to delineate privilege, class and social position and describes how food also functions as a symbol of resistance against oppression and colonial control.

This study relies on close textual analysis of the selected literary texts from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe that will be discussed in so far as they address the topic of poverty. The study employs a thematic approach in so far as only those aspects, passages and features of texts where poverty features are discussed allowing space to explore the fairly large number of listed texts. In Chapter One, the study discusses texts from Namibia which cover the effects of the liberation war on families, exploring how displacements that occurred during the war, as well as other acts such as the imposition of taxes and forced labour contributed to, create or exacerbate poverty. The chapter also discusses the effect of migrant labour on families when husbands left to work in the South African mines and on the white owned farms both in Namibia and South Africa.

Chapter Two focuses on local indigence in rural Botswana as depicted by earlier texts that also explore colonialism as well as cultural practices which made some people more susceptible to poverty than others. In this chapter, the power dynamics between poor rural communities and the ruling elites will be explored through a discussion of various voices articulating comments on and assessments of struggles for survival in selected texts by Bessie Head and Unity Dow. The last segment of the chapter will discuss Moteane Melamu's depiction of poverty in the rapidly urbanizing society Botswana, therefore contrasting experiences of poverty within an individualistic scenario to those of indigence within a closely knit communal existence which were represented in earlier writings. Melamu's texts will link the Botswana chapter to Chapter Three on Zimbabwe, which will discuss literary depictions of poverty in a predominantly urban setting.

The chapter on Zimbabwe will highlight the history of urbanization and modernization in the former British colony as the search for gainful employment gave rise to slums and shanty towns due to the mass exodus from the rural areas to cities and towns of people needing and seeking paid employment. With a focus on local indigence, the chapter will discuss the authors' portrayal of the collapse of family structures in the wake of migrant labour practices as well as analysing depictions of related, gendered gradations of poverty in a violent and volatile urban milieu. The chapter furthermore explores literary depictions of the economic collapse of the 2000s in Zimbabwe, which was precipitated by President Robert Mugabe's controversial land redistribution programme which saw many white owned farms repossessed and allocated to blacks. In this chapter I will also explore the double tragedy of poverty and HIV/AIDS, arguing that for women poverty is often a triple tragedy of an oppressive patriarchal context, poverty and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Building on existing studies, this thesis seeks to deepen awareness of significant literary depictions of poverty in order to analyse how the authors manage to persuasively and vividly depict that a complex present in part creates new kinds and in part exacerbates (or fails to alleviate) earlier forms of poverty. It will also discuss narratives that have received little scholarly attention and thus it is hoped that this thesis will bring this literature to the attention of a wider readership. The relative scarcity of critical material means that I will explore continuities and discontinuities between my own inquiry and existing studies with the primary focus on local Southern African viewpoints. The valuable existing body of knowledge will be extended to offer a comparative reading of the literatures of the three countries by analysing evocations of individual instances of poverty and individual experiences of poverty on the one hand, and depictions of general societal contexts on the other, comparing the details and techniques of poverty portrayal employed by authors in different texts.

Chapter One: Poverty Articulated in Literary Voices from Namibia

[The Peasant] had land
[H]e owned cattle
He possessed labour
[And] [a]ll was under his control
(Mbako 17-20)

This section examines Namibian literature; Joseph Diescho's *Born of the Sun* (1988), *Meekulu's Children* (2000) by Kaleni Hiyalwa, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: Writings by Namibian Women* (2005) edited by Elizabeth Ikhaxas and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) by Neshani Andreas, with a view to discerning the complexities and ambiguities presented by the texts in their depiction of lived realities of poverty. I seek to demonstrate here that poverty is represented in its complexity in the selected texts, showing a constant tension between efforts by the writers to capture the various strategies characters employ towards maintaining a dignified communal and individual life in the face of poverty, while at the same time portraying the severity of their deprivation. The chapter traces efforts by selected writers to answer Achille Mbembe's call for a new kind of writing that theorizes lived African experience and its attendant power forms beyond Western theories that view African rural life as invariably indigent. Mbembe denounces some of the tenets of political science discourse:

Mired in the demands of what is immediately useful, enclosed in the narrow horizon of “good governance” and the neo-liberal catechism about the market economy, torn by the current fads for “civil society,” “conflict resolution,” and alleged “transitions to democracy,” the discussion, as habitually engaged, is primarily concerned, not with comprehending the political in Africa or with producing knowledge in general, but with social engineering. As a general rule, what is stated is dogmatically programmatic; interpretations are almost cavalier, and what passes for argument is almost reductionist. (7)

Even though Mbembe is often accused of falling for the same negative theorisation⁵ about African lived experience that he seeks to discourage, his focus on localised experiences of indigence is central to this chapter. I argue that the texts provide examples of how different people deal with poverty in varying and often ingenious ways.

The chapter presents examples from the texts that show that with the introduction of the new money economy it became even harder to maintain dignity, but some people still sought creative ways of living with dignity under the harsh conditions while others yielded to temptation and greed. Tongkeh Joseph Fowale in “The Origins and Evolution of Money in Africa” concludes that:

The introduction of a western-style monetary economy struck hard on the very backbone of African society, putting an end to communalism, the force which held Africa together. It established new centres of wage labor – the mines, plantations, roads, railways and harbors. These centres completely distorted the social and demographic landscape of Africa. (suite.io/tongkeh-joseph-fowale n.pag.)

⁵ See Jeremy Weate, “Achille Mbembe and the postcolony: Going beyond the Text”, 2003.

The abrupt changes impoverished native Africans because they needed money to buy basic necessities and for them to earn the money they had to leave their families in search of jobs. Colonised communities were at a disadvantage compared to their colonisers who were used to the money economy and had the experience and skills to compete in the market. Amartya Sen in his capabilities approach argues that the quality of life that one lives is dependent on what a person can achieve and that people and societies differ in their capacity to convert income and commodities into something that is valuable to them. To illustrate this point Sen observes that:

For example, a disabled person may require extra resources (wheel chairs, ramps, lifts, etc) to achieve the same things (moving around) as an able bodied person. Moreover, a child typically has very different nutritional requirements from a manual labourer, pregnant woman or someone with a parasitic disease. (*Commodities and Capabilities* 25-26)

Sen's insights suggest that the colonised needed more than just money in order to survive under the new money economy because it was a completely new concept for them. This conceptual foundation of the capability approach is based on Sen's critique of traditional welfare approaches that equate income with well-being. The introduction of the money economy under colonialism disadvantaged locals who had to start afresh and hence needed extra resources (not only monetary but also knowledge and understanding of the new economic environment) to achieve the same successes as colonisers who were already established in the new system. The texts further show that even among the disadvantaged groups, different people are subjected to different levels of poverty as some people adapted better to the new economy than others. In the group of natives who were disadvantaged those who could speak the language of the colonizers had an advantage over others in the new economy while women and children were the worst affected since they remained behind in

the rural areas while men joined migrant labour circuits. In keeping with Sen's argument that societies and people deal with and are affected differently by poverty, the situation in Namibia varies from one region to the other with the northern part historically being the worst affected by poverty:

Poverty is particularly concentrated in the northern regions of Namibia, home to the majority of the indigenous population. A veterinary cordon fence extends from east to west across the country about 70 to 100 km south of the Angola border to block the southerly movement of livestock diseases. This fence effectively separates the poorer north, where subsistence farming is the main source of income, from the south and its rich commercial ranchers. The highest rates of nutritional deficiencies can be found in the north-east, in the Kavango and Caprivi regions. The poorest households are those headed by women, which amount to about 43 per cent of all households in rural areas and are more likely to be dependent on subsistence agriculture. (International Fund for Agricultural Development n.pag.)

Interestingly, all the authors discussed in this chapter come from the same region, which has been shown to be prone to poverty and drought. The fact that the authors all come from this northern region attests to my argument that writers seek to represent the problem of poverty from the vantage point of direct encounters and close observation and in some cases from their very own experience, for example, we know that Bessie Head and Dambudzo Marechera both encountered periods of extreme poverty, respectively in Botswana and Zimbabwe. As shown in the quote above, the northern region of Namibia is home to indigenous groups who have been left out of the society's mainstream economic activity and have found it difficult to compete with other tribes in the country.

The texts discussed in this chapter represent a fairly new development in Namibian literature, which was for a long time dominated by literature written in Afrikaans and German (both these languages represent the country's colonial past of having been a German colony before

being ruled by apartheid South Africa). Earlier writings from Namibia did not focus explicitly on the everyday lives of ordinary people and often excluded narratives of indigenous groups like the ones in the North of Namibia. As Dorian Haarhoff observes in *The Wild South West: Frontier Myths and Metaphors in Literature set in Namibia, 1790-1988* (1991), these earlier writings discuss at length the tradition of Namibia as a transfrontier, first to Germany and later to an expanding Cape Metropole. Haarhoff's work illustrates that literary voices from Namibia consisted mainly of colonial settlers and their South African counterparts.

In contrast to such earlier writing, I seek to engage emerging post-colonial narratives depicting indigence. The texts I discuss in this section deviate from the trend that focuses on the frontier metaphor, to explore challenges facing indigenous Namibian communities. The section epigraph by Zhu Mbako, taken from the poem "The Namibian Peasant", provides an example of this break, as the poet engages creatively with the history of his people. In the cited extract from the poem the good old days when the peasant had a good life are delineated, then (in the following lines) the setting quickly moves to the time "when chiefs were extorted into treaties/ [a]nd [the peasant] dispossessed of the land" (29-30). My contention is that this departure from the earlier popular trend of focusing on Namibia as a transfrontier runs across most post-colonial writings discussed in this section.

Joseph Diescho is one of the most celebrated Namibian writers and his novel *Born of the Sun* (1988) is considered the first novel written in English by a Namibian born author⁶. This text therefore also marks a shift in focus in Namibian literature by highlighting colonial dispossession and disruption of native communities. However, rather than concentrating on the debate of the evils of colonialism, the text presents everyday struggles for basic

⁶ See Anene Ejikeme's "Culture and Customs of Namibia". Carlifornia: Greenwood, 2011.

necessities during the colonial era. Set during Namibia's struggle for independence, Kalinin Hiyalwa's *Meekulu's Children* (2000) focuses on the dramatic change in a child's life following the brutal killing of both her parents. Without ignoring the major events of the time, Hiyalwa writes about how the lives of ordinary people were affected by the circumstances of war and how this exacerbated hunger and poverty. In my reading of Hiyalwa's text, the theme of people's lived realities of poverty and how they survived through the difficulties are central to the story. The anthology of stories written by a group of Namibian women (*Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: Writings by Namibian Women* (2005)) and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) explore gendered gradations of poverty, highlighting both cultural and new forms of patriarchy (imposed by colonialism), which made women and children more susceptible to poverty. The anthology focuses more on the experiences of poverty under oppressive cultural practices, while Andreas's text covers a much later era of the fight for liberation and democracy, highlighting experiences of poverty within a modern patriarchal context. Reading the Namibian texts through Head's notion of "unconscious dignity", I seek to illustrate that the texts I discuss here indicate that contrary to generalisations about African poverty, the experience varied and was thus not always catastrophic and hopeless. Head's theorization is used for the relevance of her insights to the Namibian context and also because of the scarcity of similar literary-theoretical texts in relation to Namibian narratives.

Even though Head recognises the negative effect of poverty on people, she seeks to depict poverty in its complexity, showing that some people have an "unconscious dignity" while others have a "terrible mindlessness" about the condition (stemming from fear and anxiety) (Head, *Tales of Tenderness*, 41). In explaining how poor rural communities in her adopted home of Botswana survived rampant poverty, Head termed their agility and creativity as well

as their adaptation to the situation “unconscious dignity”. Head’s perceptions of poverty, though not derived from Namibian conditions, are pertinent and useful here. To illustrate her point, Head in a 1989 posthumously published collection of short stories entitled *Tales of Tenderness and Power* argues that:

Poverty has a home in Africa – like a quiet second skin. It may be the only place on earth where it is worn with unconscious dignity. People do not look down at your shoes which are caked with years of mud and split so that the toes stick out. They look straight and deeply into your eyes to see if you are a friend or a foe. That is all that matters. (41)

The above quotation from Head’s story called “Village People” shows how an African community devises means of living with deprivation and a constant threat of drought and poor rains. In this community, genuine friendship and companionship matter more than material possessions and people are not judged based on what they are worth financially, but by the above attributes. Commenting on the story, Richard H. Bell in “Rethinking Justice: Restoring our Humanity”, observes that Head “writes of the dignity found in poverty and humility – African virtues born of circumstances and virtues that free a human being for forgiveness and hope” (77). As Bell rightly points out, Head’s representation of poverty shows that despite the difficult living conditions, some of her characters carry the burden of deprivation with no sense of victimhood, while others crumble under the weight of the difficulties and hardships that come with poverty.

To show the complexity of the topic of poverty, Head refers to the “terrible mindlessness” brought about in some people by poverty which (she argues) has a negative effect on those concerned. While some examples from the texts echo Head’s conclusion that “poverty also creates strong currents of fear and anxiety” (41), others show that some poor people do have

the “capacity to take in their stride the width and reach of new horizons” (Head, *Tales of Tenderness*, 41-42). In this section, I argue that selected texts present a complex and nuanced picture of experiences of poverty ranging from what Bessie Head calls “unconscious dignity” to a recognition (by some characters) of poverty as a shameful thing that society shuns and of which the poor are constantly reminded by the presence in their midst of those who are better resourced. To a large extent, the texts articulate specific, daily, human experiences of poverty while at the same time giving voice to lived realities of many indigent people in Namibia. I argue that, while the authors employ varying literary tools and approaches, their texts provide descriptions of how different people deal with poverty under varying conditions.

It is clear that Namibian texts such as Diescho’s *Born of the Sun* and Kaleni Hiyalwa’s *Meekulu’s Children* present the argument that the poverty they depict is largely caused by colonial incursions; yet their main focus is on the ordinary; on every day, individual struggles for survival. I begin the discussion in this section with an assessment of Joseph Diescho’s depiction of impoverishment of a colonized community through colonial disruptions and dispossession of indigenous Namibian communities.

Representations of poverty in the wake of colonial disruption and dispossessions in *Born of the Sun* (1988)

Joseph Diescho was born in 1955 to uneducated peasant parents in Namibia’s northern Andara Kavango region during the era of South African rule in Namibia. Set during this period, Diescho’s novel chronicles a dramatic change in the peaceful life of a rural community when South African rulers send a ‘Commissioner for Native Affairs’ to the village. The text tells the story of a young man and his friend, living in a community under transformation. The protagonist Muronga and his friend Kaye live initially a traditional and

communal way of life that is sustained by an exchange economy, based on cattle rearing and crop ploughing, then they move into mine labour and through that, become politically conscientized.

In an effort to represent what Ndebele calls “the ordinary”, Diescho in a note at the beginning of the text declares that he is “fully cognizant of the debate surrounding the usage of such anthropological words as, ‘hut’ and ‘kraal’, and the derogatory meanings they have acquired” (viii), but explains that “these words are here employed deliberately, in part due to a paucity of better words in the English language, and for the purpose of re-establishing their positive character. The intention has been to convey a vivid picture of African rural life” (viii). Diescho’s bold decision to validate terms that have acquired a negative connotation suggests that he sees his writing as a way to contribute to positive representations of rural Africa. Ndebele’s argument that “even under the most oppressive of conditions, people are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order” (“The Rediscovery of the Ordinary”, 154) comes to mind in this regard. The characters in the text hold onto their traditional and communal way of life, despite the transformation around them, showing that the impoverishing experience of colonialism has a human dimension to it that is often overshadowed by political debates on the colonial encounter. I submit that Diescho’s statement is a critique of western anthropological researchers who misconstrue African rural life as primitive and indigent because people who live in such communities do not possess the relative material wealth of their counterparts in Western communities. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie argues that “such analytical simplicities must change particularly because they are predicated on Eurocentric assumptions” (9). A similar criticism is expressed by David Booth et al. in “Experiencing Poverty in Africa: Perspectives from Anthropology” who argue that:

The focused anthropological literature on poverty in Africa turns out to be minimal, and what there is does not easily deliver up the visions of poor people about their condition. This is partly a matter of intellectual focus. The treatment of issues to do with poverty and well-being is diffused across a range of specialist literatures: in early works on kinship, political and marriage systems, religion and economy; in more recent research into rural production systems, food security, gender, health, urban housing, identity and ethnicity, and so on. To some extent the entire corpus of African ethnography is relevant. However, to assemble fragments of insight from across these scattered sources is not only a monumental task but also a rather questionable one, requiring as it does extracting them from their theoretical and substantive contexts and forcing them into engagement with an external discourse on another subject. (www.trentu.ca)

This critique is in line with my use of Head's assessments to question the validity of Western stereotypes of poverty as abject and as a condition from which Africans are always seeking to escape. African communities in the text appear to have adapted to poverty and are seeking to change their situation in their own way. In Diescho's text, the characters are proud of their 'kraals' and 'huts' and do not consider themselves to be in any precarious situation. In his quest to positively portray rural life while at the same time capturing the difficulties associated with it, the author starts his novel with a vivid description of a traditional rural community:

"Kirikiki, kirikiki", the village cocks sing as they begin the second round of their morning choir, signalling that the work-loaded day is around the corner. The commotion of the creatures around the hut and in the neighbourhood alerts the young man, Muronga that the night is changing into day. Still lying on his back on his bed, he feels the day breaking as he stares up at the grass roof of his mud and stick hut. Hearing the cattle stirring as the fowl greet the first rays of the sun, he sighs contentedly. His work in the fields has become a routine to him, as to Haushiku, his father, and his Uncle Ndara, who taught him that Monday, the first day of the week, is also the first day to mount work for the week. (3)

The above passage, with its overtly positive representation, highlights the tenacity and strength of people in rural communities who survive under difficult conditions, with a constant threat not only from dispossessing powers of colonialism but also from natural forces such as drought, famine and poor rainfall. Despite these very real challenges, Muronga and his people continue to till the soil in the fields and go about their everyday routine with the same cheerfulness and vigour as if they are unaware of the hardships they face. Diescho's text provides a picture of Muronga, who is full of energy and ready to launch himself into the week. The positive energy and the vibrancy shown above are buttressed by a successful and safe traditional birth of Muronga's son, who is named after his courageous Uncle Ndara. Following the joyful event, the two new parents join other members of the community for a celebration at the headman's kraal. At the ceremony, Muronga is reminded of the new opportunities that come with the migrant labour system. In answering a question from Muronga as to from where he got his new shirt, Old man Ganiku answers: "Oh, the shirt was given to me by my sister's son who just returned from Thivanda. He brought us clothes and, as you can see; this shirt and this hat are new" (22). The old man's exaggerated and almost childish excitement about his new clothes is shown by the price tags that still hang on the shirt and on the hat. This image represents the constant leitmotif of 'keeping up appearances' which marks the turning point in the way the community perceives poverty. The distinction between those wearing new clothes and the rest represents the arrival of a subtle shift in their perception of poverty. People now look at each other's shoes to determine their worth, leading to a desire among many to make an impression on onlookers. By highlighting the change in perceptions of poverty and the introduction of the culture of consumerism, Diescho confirms Pia Lara's notion that narratives of the past are "vehicles of human aspirations and desires for a possible future" (43). It is my reading of the text that the rich imagery is not intended to perpetuate common dichotomies of "rich and poor" but it is rather a recreation of

the histories of the people in Diescho's fictional community to show that contrary to some Eurocentric assumptions, these histories are "often sagas of proud resistance and intelligent negotiations of and adaptation of imponderables" (Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, "Re-creating Ourselves", 9). The community in Diescho's text resists the changes that are imposed on them while wisely and selectively embracing positive aspects of western culture.

As the story unfolds, the protagonist, his wife and members of their community interact with more outside forces such as the church (whose role in the impoverishment of the community, I discuss in more detail later) and the commissioner, Master Kruger, whose arrival marks a dramatic change in the life of the community. The commissioner addresses a meeting through an interpreter, Franz, who most of the time distorts his meaning. In his message Master Kruger chooses to announce the bad news first:

Tell them that the bad news is that all men are required to pay taxes, and those who do not have their tax papers yet must stay for a short while to be fingerprinted in order to get their papers...Things are changing now, and all of us must pay money to the government...it is the law and we must obey the law. I am sent by the law to tell you the news. I also pay taxes, more than what you all will have to pay, but I don't squeal, because it is the law. (72)

Kruger's imaginative speech creatively reflects one of the causes of poverty and concurs with Marxian perspectives on the causes of poverty by highlighting the exploitation of poor people through cheap labour. The omniscient narrator highlights the murmurs of disapproval at the announcement thereby showcasing how the poor are able to express their concerns in multiple voices in a literary text. The emphasis on everyone having "to pay money" to government reveals the dilemma facing the community that has not yet transitioned to the money economy, but rather lives within a barter economy. The community never had the

need for money because they harvested their own food and exchanged commodities to get what they needed from one another. The commissioner then announces what is ironically called the good news: “Now the g-o-o-d news! Next month, the government will buy lots of cattle from people like you across the country. Those of you who have cows, oxen, and bulls can sell them to the government and get money to pay your taxes. That’s good, isn’t it?” (72-73). The rhetorical question at the end of the commissioner’s words marks the cutting irony the author employs to show the doubly impoverishing effect the introduction of taxes had on the colonised. The overarching narrative voice expresses the unfair practice of imposing the money economy on the community while simultaneously depleting their source of livelihood. The verbal and situational irony in this case is unmistakable and it is used to emphasise the cunning strategies of colonialism that reduced the colonised community into captive sellers who have no active role in the determination of the price or the terms of sale. The colonised community is impoverished because the coloniser determines the rules of engagement as well as the extent to which the colonized benefit from the new economy. The community also does not have a choice on whether to sell their cattle or not, because they need the money to pay tax.

The author uses dramatic irony to expose the commissioner’s manipulation and hypocrisy as he cunningly announces an act of dispossession as “g-o-o-d news” while the readers are made aware of the effect of the news on the audience. The reader notices that the men who are listening to the commissioner are not as gullible as he thinks and that they are aware of the looming loss of their major source of livelihood. He further announces that “young men can go on contract to the mines in Johannesburg. There is lots of work for you there. You can bring home a lot of money, clothes, and everything” (73). Uncle Ndara’s question as to “what people who have neither cattle nor physical strength to work in the mines are to do” (74) is

elided by the interpreter, but the reader is aware of it and of the fact that it goes unanswered. To explain the multiplicity of voices in literature, Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1993), borrows the concept of 'polyphony' from music which literally means multiple voices. I evoke the concept of 'polyphony' here to show how the reader encounters multiple voices and thoughts of the people who attended the meeting as they ask themselves what the future holds for them. Each of the voices has their own valid perspective within the narrative and none of them is subordinated to the other or to the voice of the author. Consequently, the truth value of what the commissioner is saying is in Bakhtinian terms not dependent only on him but on the many other voices that come together at the meeting because "the novel should be a comprehensive reflection of the time its era: the novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim to being significant; the novel must be a macrocosm of heteroglossia" (*Dialogic Imagination* 411). Different positions both in the native community and among colonisers are represented in the novel and their contesting views are on display at this particular meeting.

The Commissioner's meeting compels the two young protagonists Muronga and Kaye into answering the inevitable call to join the migrant labour system. Muronga and Kaye look at men who are returning from work with shock, wondering how it feels to have so much while some of your people have nothing. This revelation prompts the duo to conclude that they will keep reminding themselves that "[they] are going not only for [them]selves, but for all of [their] uncles, brothers, wives, and fathers – for everyone [they] have left behind. What [they] earn belongs to the rest of them" (113). The two are clearly aware of their indigence as compared to the affluence of the returning workers. The men who are returning from the mines and those who are on their way there, look at each other with a degree of hostility. The

manyowani (new ones) believe those who are returning (the *magayisa*), shun their torn clothes and are exhibitionists who are eager to display their fancy clothes and blankets. However, the reader also recognises that the wealth of the returnees is rather modest and that their working conditions stand in no relation to their reward.

During the journey to Rundu, the protagonist and his friend make discoveries about the changes brought about by money wealth (new clothes and other material possessions) and the two are alerted to the corrupting effect of this new wealth. In a chapter titled “Going the Distance”, Diescho depicts Muronga’s journey after being separated from his friend Kaye as he now sees more examples of poverty and affluence living side by side. Muronga witnesses how those who are poor are made to feel ashamed of their condition. As he excitedly looks forward to a trip on one of the “huge, magical birds that fly”, the authorial voice sums up the motives as well as the nature of the ‘civilisation project’:

[O]ne powerful and all-possessing white man whose Christian name is The, and whose heathen name is Government. He is almost as powerful as the God of Muronga’s forefathers...The Government possess the power to make laws, to seize people’s land, demand their dues, and chastise those who do not obey commandments. When Mr The Government arrived in the land, he claimed the wealth of the soil for himself. Then he created something called ‘money’, which is now exchanged among people, and whereby he controls their lives. (134)

The use of irony and humour yet again makes the argument that the process which impoverished colonised communities was disguised as modernization and civilization and that it led to those communities ceding all powers to colonial rulers. The above postulate sums up the author’s argument in the text and points to the continuation of the unjust practises of colonialism into the post-colony. The irony also gestures towards the emergence

of a powerful government who “seems to control everything, including this flock of mysterious birds that swoop down out of the sky like hungry hawks searching for prey” (134). This imagery illustrates how communities are now dependent on the new rulers and their machinery (as opposed to a situation where one’s survival depended on hard work and dedication in the fields), showing that the powerful rulers are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to further consolidate their positions and further impoverish native communities.

Muronga ends up in a South African mine where he meets leading figures in the struggle for the Independence of Namibia such as Nakare, Ndango and Nyangana. These men hold night meetings and encourage other miners to join their organisation called the United People’s Organisation. It is at these meetings that the exploitation at the mines and the deplorable working conditions are put in the spotlight. Issues of land dispossessions and the introduction of taxes become campaign topics for leaders of the organization at the secret meetings held at the mine compound. Closely related to the larger goal of emancipating their country, the miners also have an organization called the Black Promotion Movement which fights for better working conditions for the black miners. The struggle takes a turn for the worse when the leader of the Black Promotion Movement, Archie Bokwe, is killed in detention. The miners hold a mass rally in honour of their leader, resulting in mass arrests. The protagonist Muronga is among those arrested and following a long period of detention, the men are released because the mines need their labour. Muronga, Ndango and Nakare are shortly afterwards declared “troublemakers” and are fired from their jobs. The formation of the organizations is a step taken by the miners to restore their dignity and it also shows their resolve to fight against colonialism and impoverishment. The formations of the Black Promotion Movement indicates knowledge of the bargaining power that lies in (what is

modern day) unionization. The organization works as a union for the miners and fights for better working conditions for them in order to rescue them from poverty. This bold step to demand their rights is met by a violent response from mine authorities who target leaders of the revolution with the aim to isolate them and eliminate them.⁷

After a series of beatings at the hands of guards, the trio are offered a chance to escape from prison in Francistown, Botswana. A warden tells the men that he can help them escape from prison and “get a safe place in Botswana where [they] can work for [their] country’s liberation” (298), but he warns them that if they “decide to follow [his] plan to escape, [they] must realise that [they] may never see [their] families again” (298). Muronga and his friends are now faced with a difficult decision to make but in the end, the trio chooses to forgo the chance to return home and instead joins the struggle for independence. This choice is presented as the climax of the story in that it dramatizes the extreme sacrifice that the characters have to make in order to fight for the preservation of their dignity. Muronga and his peers put their lives at risk in order to save their people from what Hove (in a text that I discuss in Chapter Three) calls an “ant-hill of poverty” (73). The escape marks the beginning of a journey towards emancipation and freedom, not only political freedom but also economic freedom.

“A life of poverty has its good moments too”: Examples from *Born of the Sun*

As already illustrated in the introductory part of this chapter, Head’s nuanced view of poverty in Africa shows that even though harsh conditions and poverty impact negatively on those

⁷ Note how this is a persistent response to striking miners. Even in 2012 South African police under an ANC government shot and killed 34 miners and injured 78 more during a strike at the Lonmin Platinum mine in what has come to be known as the ‘Marikana Massacre’.

living under them, some African communities and individuals in the texts use various coping mechanisms to survive. Raditlhalo in his essay argues that “[i]nstead of assuming a unity within the African world, writers have paid close attention to the discursive systems through which ‘African worlds have been established as realities of knowledge’” (171). Diescho, like Head, illustrates that some characters within African communities where poverty is rampant have learnt to “swim through life” (59) like the protagonist promises to teach his son, while some are defeated by the situation. The concept of swimming through life suggests an ability to survive difficulties that life throws at you and this ability is developed through experiential knowledge. Thus, the image of swimming illustrates not only the adoption of survival tactics in the face of death, but a capacity to live with grace. This suggests that poverty is viewed by these characters as a part of their life and as being just one of life’s many challenges. Writing about adapting to a life of deprivation, Head in the *Tales of Tenderness and Power* points out that:

Poverty here has majority backing. Our lives are completely adapted to it. Each day we eat porridge of millet in the morning; thicker millet porridge with a piece of boiled meat at midday; at evening we repeat breakfast. We use our heads to transport almost everything; water from miles and miles, bags of corn and maize, and fire wood. (41)

Diescho takes the critique further through Uncle Ndara who declares that: “[t]hese white people! They don’t know how to greet one another; they don’t know how to eat. Nothing! ... [they] can’t even swim” (53-54). Diescho contrasts the perseverance and hard work of native Namibians with the attitude of white people who (according to uncle Ndara) “want [...] everything to be easy [and] are afraid to do hard work” (54). The views expressed by Uncle Ndara are part of the multiple voices that Diescho is able to accommodate in his texts to

counter western views on well-being which often conclude that African rural life equals poverty – a view to which Ogundipe-Leslie strongly objects in an earlier quote.

Diescho's text provides a positive portrayal of rural life. In the image painted by the author, the characters talk proudly about their everyday life with few complaints. The protagonist in Diescho's text, Muronga, reveals at the beginning of the text that "for about three weeks, [his wife Makena] has been sleeping alone *on the dirt floor on another mat near the fire that separates them*" (3, emphasis added). Even as he describes an image that would otherwise qualify as a state of deprivation and lack of comfort, Muronga does not seem to find anything wrong or inappropriate in this situation. Muronga's attitude towards his situation echoes Sandra Jeppessen's declaration (from which the title to this segment is derived) that "a life of poverty has its good moments too, like any life" (488). Muronga explains why he cannot at this particular time share his "small bed" with his wife, (something he normally enjoys doing): "It is not only Makena's protruding belly that makes it hard for them to share their small bed, but the elders teach that a husband and wife should not sleep together when the wife is with the moon and when she is due to give birth" (3-4). By referring to culture and custom, the narrator makes the size of the bed and the condition on the floor where Makena sleeps seem acceptable and tolerable and a demonstration of a local civilisation and culture. The same creativity is shown in the way Makena improvises to make a "baby pouch":

She returns with a large dark piece of cloth to where Muronga is waiting. With two of the straps from the fabric she carefully ties the cloth around her waist and spreads the pad of leaves against her left hip. Muronga gently places Mandaha against her back as she leans forward. Pulling one of the remaining straps over her shoulder and the other under her left arm, she makes a baby pouch in which Mandaha will ride comfortably during the short walk. (19)

The dignity with which Makena and Muronga deal with their indigence is consistent with the general spirit of communal existence that prevails in their society, where members of the society assist one another and share the little they have amongst themselves. Discussing what she terms “effective ties and relationships” Lara notes that “the best relations are the product of lasting friendships (97) and that “one of the main attributes of moral subjects is that they are not divorced from their effective ties and relationships defined in terms of emotional support for other human beings” (101). Makena and Muronga rely on the social networks and support systems to survive the onslaught of colonialism, dispossession and displacement. The spirit of sharing is evident throughout the text with characters preferring to share their food rather than eating alone. Kaye declares that he does not enjoy eating alone, adding that “eating with others, sharing food from one plate – that makes eating make much better sense. Otherwise, I feel like an animal that just eats, and eats wantonly” (63). The emphasis on eating as necessary for continuation of life as opposed to one living in order to eat, points to the sanctity of life. To Kaye, eating only finds meaning in the act of sharing and as Anna Trapido (in *A Hunger for Freedom: The Story of Food in the Life of Nelson Mandela* (2008)) puts it, “meals are a shared event” (xiv). Writing about the tastes of South African and world icon, Nelson Mandela, Trapido adds that “food is an important social tool used to communicate emotional messages” (xiv). For Kaye and his community, eating from one plate is a sign of togetherness and inviting someone to share your food is a sign of love and appreciation.

Muronga promises to teach his son Mandaha that “although life is sometimes not like honey, there is a way to find some honey” (59). The lessons Muronga wants to pass to his son are at the centre of his people’s response to the harsh conditions they live in. Diescho in the above passages continues to show the resilience of the community he writes about and how they

survive through difficult conditions of perpetual poverty. The passages show that the poor do not fold their arms and pity themselves, but they explore ways of surviving their life of deprivation and need.

To paint a more complete picture as well as capture the complexities around the community's collective response to their condition, the author shows that even after the introduction of the new economy, there are those who still continue in the spirit of sharing and communal care, as exemplified by old man Ganiku's nephew who takes on the responsibility of taking care of his extended family by buying them new clothes. In a similar vein, Muronga reflects on the life of his community before the colonial incursion. Making reference to the communal existence, the text employs a metaphor of two playful lizards which the narrator likens to his people before the encounter with colonialism: "we were as free and fearless as these lizards before the white people came. We don't need to be ashamed because we take care of one another" (28). Calling for a return to the communal way of life, Diescho counters criticism against that way of life, showing that such criticism is often based on capitalist views, which see sharing and collective ownership as unsustainable.

Rethinking the role of Christianity in Colonial Dispossession: Representations of Poverty in the Church

I begin this segment with a quote from Fanon who writes that "the church in the colonies is the white people's church, the foreigner's church. She does not call the native to God's way but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few are chosen" (32). Fanon here points to the role that the church played in imposing the capitalist system on colonized natives thereby introducing vast economic inequalities. Fanon's evocation of the biblical terminology of "many are called but

few are chosen” emphasizes the difficulties that come with making a living under the new system. By invoking the victim trope in Africa’s colonial history, Diescho shows that as a result of the difficulties brought about by dispossessions and impositions of the money economy and the high competition for scarce resources, many people end up living in poverty. And the role of the church was often central in this.

Contrary to Christian norms of equality and justice for all, the church in Diescho’s text is shown to be the haven of inequality. I argue that the humility and dignity with which the community formerly reacted to and endured poverty, are replaced by a class conscious response which values appearances and encourages ‘keeping up appearances’. An example of this phenomenon is the renaming exercise that comes after baptism. Even though Muronga and his wife Makena forget their names shortly after being named Franziskus and Maria-Magdalena, they acknowledge the differing appearances of the people inside the church. The narrator reveals about Makena that “she is shy to be seen by all these well-dressed people. It looks as if they come to church to show us poor people how rich they are. We poor people feel left out here. They have newer clothes. They even have shoes and we do not” (42). This phrase shows that as Sen articulates in his writings, poverty is experienced differently by different characters and that even among the colonised, the educated fare much better than the likes of Makena. The choice of the church to illustrate growing inequalities further points to the attitude towards Christianity and its role in colonialism articulated by the overarching narrative voice. The church, which is supposed to be the epitome of justice for all, is depicted here as the leader in the promotion of an economic system that oppresses the poor. The church in Diescho’s text is shown to be the conduit through which ‘civilisation’ is launched and justified. The church also becomes the stage on which perceptions of poverty and of the poor are played out. The stage provides for the manifestation of a new view of poverty as a

shameful condition as it is now juxtaposed to the glamour that the new money economy affords the few lucky characters.

Makena is reminded of her poor status by the well-dressed teachers and nurses. She feels ashamed of her condition (in the church), despite having been comfortable with her condition amongst her own people. Makena's feeling is similar to the way the *manyowane* feel when they compare themselves to the *magayisa* who are better dressed and have acquired other valuable goods. The depiction of poverty within the church shows religion's role in impoverishing the colonized community. At a lunch held to celebrate the couple's baptism, Muronga pronounces the difficulty he has with abandoning the way of life of his community:

I have a difficulty with not being a heathen myself. Even though I am now baptized, I am and will remain what I was – true to my family, true to my forefathers, and true to my land – not to the saints, I am afraid. I would not want to evict another man from his land by baptizing him. *If this makes me more of a heathen than a Christian, then I would prefer to be a baptized heathen.* (55, emphasis added)

Diescho here highlights the role of Christianity in promoting unfair colonial practices which left the colonised landless and poor. Muronga's thoughts on the issue while he sits on the bench in church attests to the above point: "he thinks when the white people came, we had land, and they had their red books. Then they started preaching to us and teaching us to hear the words from their Bibles. When we looked around, they had the land and we had the Bible" (31).

Even though Diescho here points out that the poverty he writes about was partly imposed by colonial land grabbing and displacement, his focus remains on the struggle by ordinary people. He discusses at length how ordinary people struggle to live normal lives and how

they fight for survival in the wake of their many challenges. As we have seen, Diescho's text depicts the detrimental colonial intervention that changes a local barter economy into a capitalist economy that impoverishes a whole community, as its ways of living are rendered obsolete by the introduction of taxes which have to be paid in money. His characters employ different strategies to continue living meaningful lives. The text however does not downplay the severity of poverty, as it also shows how some people fail to cope with the hardships and instead turn to crime and greed. In this novel (which is also his first), Diescho tells the story of ordinary people struggling with poverty from childhood to later stages of migrant labour and political organization that leads to imprisonment and exile. These themes are further addressed in Diescho's second novel *Troubled Waters* (1992), which tells the story of the transition from British oppression of the Afrikaners to the oppression of blacks by Afrikaners and the subsequent liberation struggle.

Poverty in the midst of Political Transition in Diescho's *Troubled Waters* (1992)

Diescho in this, his second text focuses on the stories of two young people, Andries Malan and Lucia, who are removed from the comfort of their families and are introduced to the changes that come with liberation and political change. Set in 1974, the book tells the story of a young white South African whose perspective on black people changes as he interacts with them. Andries has fond memories of his family's domestic worker:

Andries thinks of Mavis Ngwenya, the maid in his parents' home. He loves her. She washed the dishes, she changed the sheets. When he was a baby, she changed him. She tucked him in when he took his naps. Andries begins to feel calm as he thinks about this substantial woman who raised him, who understood him even when his own mother did not. (10)

By entering the troubled mind of Andries, the author is able to introduce a new form of migrant labour which was not depicted in his first novel in which only the men embarked on migrant labour while the women remained in the rural areas. Andries fondly remembers Mavis's care, but "it never occurred to him that she might have missed being with her own children in her own world" (10). The domestic worker provides Andries with his first contact with a black person, but he is later to meet other black boys at a religious camp for boys from various schools. At this camp, Andries stays in the same room with the black boys from Orlando High and Diescho uses the opportunity to provide a contrast between the pyjamas worn by the two sets of boys: "[t]he blacks change into new pyjama suits they bought to show the whites they have them. When the whites come back, they change into their pyjamas. Some old and wrinkled" (18). The vivid depiction shows the nuance in the author's representation of poverty, indicating that there are some blacks who can afford new clothes while other whites cannot. This view provides a balancing act to the depiction of white domination and their power to dispossess blacks in the previous text. A discussion that ensues between one of the black boys, Siphon, and Andries and Frederick shows that the two sides each believe the other is better off. Explaining why he cannot join the army, Siphon charges that "things are bad for us. You have it so good, and we don't even have enough places to sleep. You are called up to go and fight those who want to improve the living conditions for all the people of this land" (19). Frederick is not convinced and responds: "[b]ut how can you say that you don't have it so good? ... Look at your sleeping clothes, they are tons better than mine" (19). Even though Siphon is adamant that the pyjama is the only thing that he has that is good, the text shows that he is more privileged than some of the white characters in the text.

The use of appearance and clothing to show either poverty or affluence is further found in Andries's recollection of how his parents dress on special occasions such as birthdays and

Christmas Eve: “His father had been impeccably dressed in his old colonial suit and over polished shoes [while Naomi his sister] wore the Indian satin dress given to her by their parents on her birthday” (36). The old suit that the protagonist’s father is wearing resonates with the old pyjamas that the white boys are wearing in the above quotation. Even in this instance the author juxtaposes this modest appearance with the appearance of “many smart couples, families, nice-smelling ladies in dark clothes and men in expensive suits” (36) who also attend the same church as the protagonist’s family. Poverty is therefore depicted as a relative term that cuts across race, gender and class categories. Different people in these various categories are affected by poverty in varying ways and to different degrees.

Like in Diescho’s first novel, the church here is also depicted as a symbol of inequality as the differences in wealth play out in the institution as people show off their clothes. Institutionalised religion is used to impoverish and oppress the poor and ordinary blacks in the text. When he is recruited to be a soldier and ultimately assigned to teach religious studies to black students, Andries is told that “[t]he classroom is a continuation of the battlefield” (40). Andries is thus mandated to use education to promote white minority rule while at the same time using religion to justify the hierarchy that places blacks as servants and whites as their masters. In one of his classes “a young man named Petrus raises his hand to ask a question, not to answer one: “Mister, does it mean that the poor people have to be poor because God wants them to be poor and the rich will only get richer?” (68). Even though he did not know the answer, Andries responds: “The book says that it is God’s intention that there be those who have and those who do not” (69). Andries uses scripture to pacify the poor and to stop them from demanding change, but the authorial voice intervenes here and exposes Andries’s genuine observation which is the opposite of what he has to teach:

He [Andries] is troubled as he goes through the motions of teaching. In spite of what he has to teach in class, God never seems to be on the side of the wealthy in what he reads in the Bible. The verses say: “...not many wise and not many mighty are called ...” “The meek will inherit the earth”, “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble”, “Sell what you have and give to the poor”. (70)

The intervention reveals that the Bible is deliberately misinterpreted to justify injustices against the poor. By revealing that in reality Andries is aware of the true meaning of the verses he reads from the Bible, the author manages to show that the problem is not the word of God, but those who preach it and the institutions that they have put in place to spread the Gospel. When Andries confides in another teacher, Frank van Zyl, about his experience with Petrus, the older man puts the whole thing into perspective:

The students here read the Bible the way we Afrikaners read it when we were underdogs. When I was young, the Bible was everything. We believed that God was on the side of the oppressed and the poor. Not with the English!... Now that we have political power, we believe that God who gave us power will make sure we keep it!... “Now, what we whites do not understand or want to accept is that the blacks look to the bible for a message of liberation. We did it too. And the Bible is clear, especially in the Old Testament, that God sides with the poor and oppressed. (71)

Frank illustrates the relationship between power and meaning, showing that those with the power to rule often want to influence the interpretation as well as the meaning of the Bible. In this text, just like in Diescho’s first novel, the church plays a significant role in perpetuating inequality and poverty. Andries sees these inequalities every day as he travels to work. The white township is described as having “[b]eautiful houses, fat dogs and clean streets” (47), which are juxtaposed to the “brick houses” (47) in the black township as well as the “mud houses” in the village. The disparities in the three areas of residence also point to the inequalities that are prevalent in Diescho’s society.

In the process of teaching, Andries interacts with more blacks and gets to understand them better. As he gets to understand the other more, Andries begins to question some of the things that he was taught by his father. In a discussion with Siphon, Andries is encouraged to imagine “life differently, from the position of those who have no power, no money, no education, no nothing, nothing!” (28). Siphon adds that “[f]rom there you learn to love” (28). Andries learns of influential people like Martin Luther King who preached love as being crucial for humanity and his perspectives are changed. In this way, Diescho shows that the encounter and the conversation between the characters are crucial in enabling them to cross racial boundaries imposed by their society.

Andries falls in love with Lucia, a black woman who is said to be alienated from her community because of her University training. The family sees her as too soft to carry out household chores. The notion of those who travel to the city being soft is also expressed when Lucia’s father returns from the mines. In Lucia’s recollection the people thought her father “looked lazy because his hands were not rough enough” (82-3). This conclusion is drawn despite the assertion by the migrant workers themselves in Diescho’s first novel who believe that they are subjected to hard labour by their white masters. The novel ends with Andries’s return to South Africa and his abandonment of pregnant Lucia. Lucia feels it is best he does not know of the pregnancy, but the question remains: “[w]hat world would this child be born into?” (187). Despite showing the possibility of interracial relationships, Diescho’s novel powerfully demonstrates the limitations as well. Andries is shown to lack the courage and the imagination to see a future for him and Lucia. The next text I discuss is Kaleni Hiyalwa’s *Meekulu’s Children* (2000) which tells of how family bankruptcy affects children.

***Meekulu's Children* – The 'Ordinary' in the 'Spectacular'**

Like Diescho, Kaleni Hiyalwa, the author of *Meekulu's Children's* (2000), comes from the North of Namibia. She was born in Onhamunhama, in the Ohangwena region. The text tells a story of a young girl, Katja (who is the narrator), whose life is thrown into disarray when both her mother and father are killed in a raid by the South African occupation forces. Katja's siblings Kamati and Estela disappear during the attack, leaving Katja with her Meekulu (her grandmother), who is ageing and who can no longer provide food for the two of them. The author dramatizes the death of the parents in an unforgettable image of the narrator's hand dismembered from the rest of the body. The narrator says "I was staring at the hand I knew so well, the hand which generously fed me every day of my life" (1). By focusing on the extreme violence of the struggle for liberation, the text largely depicts the dark history of the Namibian liberation war against the South African forces but it nonetheless presents a story of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Lara posits that in situations of adversity such as the poverty facing Katja, "the circumstances of women are considerably more chancy and often more threatening than those of men" (99). In this study I explore how Katja's gender adds to her challenges for survival in Hiyalwa's fictional patriarchal society.

The author seeks to balance the fact that external forces can plunge individuals into socio-economic abjection with the argument that in some cases the individuals contribute to their own demise. In addition to the theme of the liberation war, atrocities and the disintegration of families, the text addresses the creative ways through which the people survive poverty under conditions of war. To foreground the theme of poverty, Hiyalwa writes a story of a family that remains closely knit despite many nights of hunger. The narrator describes the situation in her family:

We did not have much to eat and we only ate when there was something. When there was nothing, mother told us to tighten our belts. We had no money because my father could not go to the cities to work in the mines like many other countrymen. He was disqualified because it had been discovered that he was suffering from TB. (7)

The family experiences poverty because its head cannot take part in the migrant labour system due to a medical condition which is common among miners. Even though the text does not reveal whether the narrator's father was ever part of the migrant labour system, evidence from other texts show that once diagnosed with TB a migrant labourer is sent home empty handed. Ndango's brother in Diescho's *Born of the Sun* is a case in point. Speaking of his brother, Ndango gets agitated:

But what makes me angrier...is the story of my elder brother. He worked here many years ago. He dug every hole in this mine! Then he and his white boss got T.B. The law says that anyone who gets this lung disease must be sent home immediately, with lots of money as compensation. But the white man is clever. He is sneaky, *skelm!* The white supervisor got lots and lots of money. So much, in fact, that they had to give him checks, because the money was too much for him to carry in his hands. But my brother got almost nothing. First they made my brother sick, then they sent him home with almost nothing. (129)

In this quotation Diescho captures the unfair labour practices of the migrant labour system showing that those who got sick while working were discarded from the system and condemned to a life of poverty. Hiyalwa's text indicates that incapacitating the breadwinner affects many other family members who depend on him for survival. The comparison between this indigent family and the others, whose fathers work in the mines, indicates that poverty is perceived here as extreme deprivation. The narrator argues that despite the hard work put into ploughing by her mother, "there were very poor harvests during the prolonged drought seasons" (7). She adds:

But harvests brought to our stomachs only a little oshifima-millet pap. This took us only halfway over the dry season. So it meant that we had equal days to fasten our belts around our empty stomachs in a year. That was the way we kept ourselves alive. When we fell sick, there was no money for hospital bills or for herbalists. (7)

Hiyalwa's characters complain about their living conditions and they clearly bemoan their situation. The death of the parents, however, worsens the situation as Meekulu no longer has the energy and strength to till the soil to produce food. The text represents an attempt to highlight the 'ordinary' within the 'spectacle'. Poverty in this text is extremely severe and in the words of D. H. Lawrence "pinches [the characters] for actual necessities" (line 6).

Hiyalwa's novel reveals the intersection between the struggle for independence and the struggle for basic necessities such as food. For the narrator's family, to get a meal on the table is a constant struggle and challenge and sometimes they are forced to go without food altogether. It is my contention here that by juxtaposing the struggle for basic necessities and the struggle for independence, Hiyalwa manages to place the ordinary within the spectacle. The juxtaposition is more evident in the author's note at the beginning of the text: "[p]eople on planet earth need to live in peace, love and freedom; free from hunger, ignorance and diseases. May every human being live to love and be loved and be let live a full healthy life with dignity" (i). Set at the height of the liberation war, the text laments the living conditions of the people, echoing Diescho's message of the need for change, articulated through the actions of Muronga and his fellow fighters, who took up arms to free their people. Experiences of poverty in the text are therefore closely linked to experiences of the war. The narrator's situation is exacerbated by the death of her parents, plunging her into a childhood

of ‘belt tightening’ and perseverance. Even though independence is ultimately achieved, the struggle for better living conditions continues to pre-occupy the next set of texts.

Gendered Gradations of Poverty – The Namibian Story

I was not born with a hunger to be free. I was born free. Free in every way that I could know. Free to run in the fields near my mother’s hut, free to swim in the clear stream that runs through my village, free to roast mealies under the stars [...] It was only when I learnt that my boyhood freedom was an illusion [...] that I began to hunger for it. (Mandela 750)

In this part of the section I explore how women writers from Namibia depict their struggle with poverty. Following the end of decades of struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid, Namibia attained independence in 1990, giving birth to a democratic state that guaranteed all its citizens equality and justice. Critics have however argued that the guarantee remains elusive to previously marginalised groups such as the majority of women. To address the challenges faced by most women, the Women’s Leadership Centre (WLC) was formed in 2004 by Elizabeth Ikhaxas with “the primary purpose of fostering women’s writings as a means of consciousness raising, empowerment, creative expression, and resistance to male-dominated culture” (25). In this segment I employ Lara’s consideration of the illocutionary force of narratives as helping to lead women to better futures. Linking this perspective to Hannah Arendt’s discussion of the role of narrative, Lara concludes that Arendt “connected her conception of the public sphere as the human creation of plurality with a conception of narratives as the sources of a reflexive judgement capable of envisioning utopian futures” (11). Following Lara’s claims, I argue here that the texts present a nuanced picture of conflict and competition as well as cooperation and partnership among poor women who live under difficult conditions. Poverty is also viewed as an unjust predicament which the narratives seek to expose in the public sphere. The female characters in the two texts I discuss in this segment, tell their stories to demand a better life. As per Lara’s theorization of the

illocutionary power of narratives, the women in the texts do not succumb to a state of hopelessness; instead they recognise the power of telling their stories and through them demanding better living conditions. The stories reveal a wide array of factors which contribute to poverty among women, but of interest to this section is that through the performance of their stories, the poor hope to get the reader's attention. The epigraph above, taken from Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, echoes the hunger (both literal and metaphorical) for economic freedom articulated by women in the stories that I discuss here.

In the first part of this segment, I discuss relevant sections of the centre's first book, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (2005), which is an anthology of poems, stories and essays about gender inequality in post-independence Namibia. I seek to explore how female writers in this collection depict poverty while at the same time capturing the hunger in women to free themselves from oppression and deprivation. I begin with Martha Iyambo's story titled "The Oppression that Women Lived With" (2005) which chronicles women's response and reaction to harsh conditions of impoverishment and indigence. The story begins with an assertion that "In the beginning, God created two different people, a man and a woman. Men were regarded as the head of the family and Women were regarded as inferior to them" (5). The satire that invokes the biblical story of creation mocks the use of the scripture to justify poverty among disadvantaged groups such as some women's groups. The irony gestures towards the discrimination that sought to close women out of economic activity:

The cultivating field was divided in the middle. The woman had half and the man his. The husband chose the part with the more fertile soil and the wife was given the dry, hard part... However, the wife had to work both her own field and in her husband's. Come harvesting time, the husband's harvest was

always better than the wife's because it got the best manpower while the wife had to be content with the left-over manure mixed with ash and rubbish from the homestead. (5)

The division of the land under patriarchy into two unequal parts resonates with what Fanon calls "compartmentalization of the colony" by colonial masters, where the most fertile land was reserved for the whites, thus impoverishing the colonised. Patriarchy, like colonialism, had a double effect on the woman who was "expected to feed the whole household with her harvest while the husband's harvest was stored away" (5). Despite having to devote more of their energy and time on the man's piece of land, the women do not have access to the yield and when their food is finished, their husbands would say that they "didn't care, [and] that [they] didn't give birth to a lot of kids" (5). This tradition, which enslaved women, led to the poverty among children, because during the tough times children were "regarded as their mother's family and not their father's" (5), yet when the father passed away, "all his property went to his relatives, and the widow and the children were left with nothing. They were left out in the cold." (6). This story, like the other 99 stories in the anthology, showcases the daily realities of women in Namibia. Marlene Mungunda, Namibian minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, commenting on the stories and introducing the book, submits: "[the stories] portray patriarchal dominance, and women's and children's submission, deprivation, poverty, ignorance, disease and susceptibility to violence and abuse" (ix). The above mentioned themes run across the texts that I discuss in this segment as well as in the rest of the chapter, as the writers use the illocutionary power of telling their stories to demand a change in their living conditions.

Oneka Msiska in a piece called "Evil In The Name of Culture" punctuates her story (which is about the cultural practices which dispossess women of their property upon the death of their husbands) with vivid descriptions of the indigence in the lives of the women. The room

where she is lying to mourn her husband only has “a thin mattress in the corner” (8). The description of the mattress and the empty room highlights the already dire situation the protagonist is in before the impending impoverishing cultural practice under which relatives of a deceased man grab all possessions from a grieving widow.⁸ In another exploration of the power of telling stories to highlight injustices like poverty, Ndinomukulili Hashiyana, in a story called “Women,” laments: “[o]ur human rights are violated every day. We are not counted as human beings. We cannot even earn a living wage, and cannot afford the basic necessities of life” (17). The story further posits that “[w]hen it comes to surviving, women are struggling to help their children” and the “government must see [the] problem with open eyes and change everything that causes women to be in danger” (17). The above quotation is perhaps the most explicit example of the motivation behind this set of women’s narratives as it summons the attention of the reader to the struggle for survival by women and demands action. Poverty as a difficult situation facing women is depicted as a challenge that women can address through the illocutionary power of their narratives. The story communicates the struggles of poor women from their point of view and seeks to reconstruct a new public where women have the opportunity to live better lives. A text like this recalls Lara’s insistence (concerning women’s emancipatory narratives) that “new historical accounts can be drawn that reveal the bias and distortion of earlier narrations and where ... representations of ... excluded and oppressed groups can be challenged and set right” (171).

The idea of encouraging women to face their challenges and talk about them is cleverly chronicled in Martha Iyambo’s “The Revenge of Manyami’s Wives,” where the wives of a rich man called Manyami Nduutepe take matters into their hands to save their children from

⁸ Most of the stories in the collection discuss how cultural practices impoverish women by empowering the families of their husbands to claim the couple’s property upon the man’s death. See Edna Lizazi’s “Men do not Die a Natural Death”; (“on Tuesday afternoon two men came demanding the deceased clothes and money” 18).

hunger. The women worked hard in the fields, but were starving while their husband treated his mistresses to the fruits of their labour:

One day, when the wives' food and grain were finished, the husband refused to give them from what he had stored. They became angry and fed up. They spent their time working the fields, but when there was no food in their kitchens, he wouldn't offer them, not even once. What they didn't know was that the husband brought his mistresses home during the night and gave them food to take to their homes.
(39)

The collective action taken by the wives to deal with this unjust and unfair treatment from their husband echoes a theme of unity of purpose among women which is central to Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*. Faced with an acute shortage of food, the wives defy their husband and steal the grain to feed their children. In my reading of the text, the defiance and courage displayed by the women show that if united, the women can overcome challenges brought by poverty and oppression. I argue that here that the action taken by the women indicates that they have moved beyond resisting oppression to (as Lara argues) "being owners of their lives" (8). In the last segment of this section, I discuss *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001).

The Purple Violet of Oshaantu

The author Neshani Andreas was born in Namibia in 1964 when the country was still a colony of South Africa. Andreas trained as a teacher and taught English, history and business economics from 1988 to 1992 in a rural school in northern Namibia. In an interview with Erika von Wietersheim ("A Passion for Writing"), following the publication of her text, the author indicates that it is within these settings of rural northern Namibia that she places her characters. She submits that the unfolding storyline in the novel is "inspired by true events

[and] it is a combination of many stories fitting together like a puzzle” (cited in von Wietersheim n.pag.). The novel is therefore inspired by the author’s involvement with the rural communities in the north of Namibia where women were often left on their own to work on small farms as their husbands migrated to seek employment on commercial farms and in mines. A thematic reading of Andreas’s text echoes Lara’s notion that literary narratives can shape the public sphere: “story telling becomes the articulate social weaving of memories, the recovery of the fragments of the past, the exercise of collective judgement, the duty to go against the grain and promote with this retelling, a performative frame for a ‘new beginning’” (40). To usher in the ‘new beginning’ Andreas chooses to focus her writing on something different from the grand narratives of the ten years following Namibia’s independence:

Namibia was a new country. People were still talking about the struggle, about exile and returning home. Writers were expected to write about great events, to glorify the past and the present, to glorify people. My struggle was different; I was not involved in high profile political activities. I had to write about other things: travelling in overcrowded minibuses, selling and buying at markets, about sickness, witchcraft and church, about ordinary things. (cited in von Wietersheim n.pag.)

The above remarks by the author sum up her approach to a wide array of issues affecting ordinary people in their everyday life in the fictitious village of Oshaantu. She wanted to capture the many voices of the ordinary women instead of joining the bandwagon of praising liberation heroes. Poverty is ubiquitous in the text as the majority of the female characters struggle with indigence. To buttress this point, Andreas opens the text with a description of a rare year of plenty: “It was that time of the year again. The season when our village, Oshaantu, camouflages itself in a rich green carpet and provides a breathtaking sight ... We had good rains this year and are promised plenty to eat” (1). The image of the camouflage which suggests something taking on an appearance that disguises its true identity and also

points to the usual struggle for basic needs such as food, which in most cases (other than, in the special year of good rains) is an everyday struggle, or the normally prevalent state of affairs in this village.

To show the complexities of these struggles, Andreas employs a diverse set of characters. The narrator and her friend (whose story she is telling) do not only differ because one is trapped in an abusive marriage, while the other enjoys a happy relationship, but they come from different backgrounds. Lara argues that the public sphere is a place of conflicting narratives and experiences culminating in “contested meanings” (8). The conflicting narratives in this story are told by the two friends and their experiences are contrasted to affect the readership in a transformative way. Kauna, who is the daughter of a priest, was able to attend school, while the narrator’s indigence denies her an opportunity to further her studies. Speaking to Kauna, the narrator says: “at least you got married out of high school. I did not even get that far. Mother could not afford to send me to secondary school. My father simply refused to pay my school fees despite the fact that he could have done so if he had wanted to” (47). The refusal by the narrator’s father to pay for her school fees, is an indication of the power dynamics at play which work to create gendered forms of poverty and perpetuate them.

The way Andreas describes poverty allows her to address crucial social issues that affect women, while at the same time allowing her female characters to explore creative ways of living with indigence. A vivid description of the scenery in the church provides further illustration on this point:

On Sundays, the normal appearance of many church goers changes. It is hard to imagine that these are the same people we see during the week. Their dirty, sometimes torn, clothes are replaced with

beautiful outfits. The hard cracks in our heels are well hidden by shoes. The familiar sight of half-naked children is transformed by their clothes, though they cannot wait to get home to abandon them. Church attire contrasts the haves and have-nots. Teachers usually stand out. They wear hats and shoes that match their expensive outfits. (36)

Here, the author provides depictions of contrasted characters to point at the emergence of a class system of haves and have-nots even in rural Namibia. This allows the writer to create rich, problematic and nuanced situations which represent the struggles of the communities in which her text is set. The distinction between those who are well dressed and the rest echoes Diescho's description of the excited old man, who wore new clothes without removing the price tags. The vivid images of the strong contrasts between the rich and the poor shows the emphasis that society now places on appearances. The illuminating picture in the church indicates that contrary to Head's evocation of rural Botswana, people in the church look at each other's 'shoes' to determine their worth.

The story is about a woman, affectionately and admiringly referred to as 'the purple violet of Oshaantu,' and is told from the point of view of her friend, Mee Ali. The author, however, often resorts to an omniscient narrator who is able to reveal to readers experiences of the protagonist, the narrator's own, and those of other women. These narratives overlap with or interrupt the main story, and in some cases support its argument while in other instances such stories are woven into the main narrative to show another point of view and as such provide a complex and nuanced perspective of issues. As the main narrative of Shange's death is still unfolding in the text, the story of an old and poor woman, Kuku Namene, interrupts it:

Kuku Namene and her husband lived with their grandchildren...The old couple depended on the charity and goodwill of their neighbours and young people from the village, who often went to their homestead to pound for them or assisted them by fetching water and wood or with other household chores. (14-15)

The text depicts continued contrasts of the emerging trend and the introduction of new social formations which co-exist with traditional forms of communal existence. The narrator uses the occasion of the death of Shange and the preparations for his funeral to employ flashbacks; here for instance, placing the focus on old Namene's death.

To paint a vivid picture of growing economic disparities, the author juxtaposes the Shanges – who are described as “wealthy people” who “own many cattle and large pieces of land” (15) – and old Namene, whose “homestead was poorly built [and as such] mourners had nowhere to sit or sleep [and] there was not enough food to eat or mugs to drink from” (15). The picture painted of Namene and his situation is made even more touching by the narrator's revelation of how the children of the poor man neglected him and how the grim picture of his suffering occupied people's minds for a long time. The mourners at his funeral disapprove of the behaviour of his children who not only neglected him but also dumped their children and left them in his care – another alarm raised about a growing trend that the author wishes to discourage. The juxtaposition also arouses mixed feelings from readers on poor Namene's death, as some would have seen his death as freeing him from his difficult life as compared to the death of Shange which was punctuated by cries of “poverty, poverty, wuu, wuu, wuu poverty has befallen us. My pillar, my pillar is gone” from his relatives (32). The reference to poverty is ironic, because as the reader is to find out later in the text, Shange's death becomes a business venture for the relatives. Mee Katilina, Shange's neighbour, witnesses the deceased's relatives arguing for the livestock at night and this greed is clearly portrayed to be prevalent in both women and men, as both genders are represented in family gatherings which dispossess widows of their properties as well as displacing them. The relatives are quoted as shouting: “that is my bull, that is my bull, yeyeyeye, yeyeyeye...No, that is not your

bull” (40) and they disregard calls by Mr Johnson, who asks them to “bring all the animals together so that they can be divided equally among the relatives and the children” (41).

Shange’s relatives accuse Kauna of killing their son and they demand knowledge of “his money, bank accounts, insurance policies, his cattle and all sorts of other things” (100). The reader is made to dismiss the conclusion of the relatives that “wives are the people closest to their husbands [and that] it is only the wife who knows where husband keeps his wealth” (100) through Kauna’s response to the demand. In her response Kauna reminds her husband’s relatives of her abusive marriage: “most if not all, of you were aware of our marriage situation. You knew how he treated me. Do you honestly think he would entrust me with his money and the papers you are talking about?” (100). When reminiscing on this occurrence, the narrator reveals that she “did not know who was worse, the men or the women. Greed demonstrated itself equally among them” (102). The author uses greed to show how the money economy and the scramble for material possessions contribute to poverty. The relatives, who are themselves poor, see the death of their more affluent relative as an opportunity to improve their own situation and do not care that they are depriving the widow and fatherless children.

The interrogation of Kauna by her husband’s relatives reminds Mee Ali of what transpired when she went to attend the funeral of her husband’s cousin, Victor. Victor’s widow Mee Sara was also accused of killing him, even though he died of AIDS, yet the relatives ranted: “if you think you killed our brother to inherit his wealth, you are greatly mistaken” (104). The narrator provides a picture of what happened:

They stripped her of everything. They dragged her to the bank to withdraw their relative’s money. They took everything from the house, even the electronic appliances...one of Victor’s sisters, a teacher,

mind you - you would think she would know better - 'inherited' the television set for her children. It was a mess. (104)

The narrator's commentary on the behaviour of Victor's sister who is not only a 'fellow' woman but also an educated person makes clear how ruthlessly widows can be impoverished in this society. As the time for Shange's funeral approaches, Kauna refuses to shed tears for her husband and she ultimately refuses to speak at the funeral as is customary. Kauna's defiant behaviour does not save her from the inevitable:

A month after Shange's death, Kauna received a visit from the headman. He explained the whole process of compensation for the homestead. He told her that since the owner who had paid for it had died, she should now pay for it, if she intended to stay on and become the new owner. Kauna discussed the matter with her in-laws. They agreed with the headman; it was the custom and she would honour the headman's request. However, she needed time to raise all the money that was needed...A week later, Kauna received a message from the headman. He informed her that her in-laws had paid for the homestead and were now the new owners. Her destiny was in their hands. (166)

With Kauna's destiny in their hands, Shange's relatives do not waste time before kicking her out of the compound. Kauna is, however, calm in her regained sense of self-respect despite the loss and exclusion, as the author shows in Kauna's metaphor of mahangu millet:

You know what happens to the mahangu millet? After it has been knocked down, stepped on and mercilessly destroyed by cattle, it finds the strength to repair itself and grow better. It is often bigger and more vibrant than the millet that has not been threatened by any danger and cut to the ground. (174)

The text represents a recovery of human dignity as Kauna loses all her abusive husband's belongings and is rendered homeless, but she finds freedom in the loss. The protagonist here

becomes aware of the existence of her dignity, despite her poverty, and she is as a result able to see the possibility of recovery. The protagonist does not lose hope because of being poor following the raid by her late husband's relatives, but instead becomes more resolute; determined to bounce back to her feet and be as resilient as the mahangu millet. As Lara writes, "women have developed a pattern in which the present is the source of future possibilities" (93) – a point confirmed here by Kauna's courageous and resolute attitude to deprivation.

Concluding Remarks

My analysis in this chapter has shown that it would be counterproductive to come up with a single meaning of poverty. The texts present a complex picture of poverty as experienced by different characters that react and deal with it in various ways, even if there are discernible patterns of similar experiences depicted across the various texts. As seen from various examples cited, the texts implicitly provide a strong critique of generalizations about human experiences, dissecting both positive and negative aspects of rural African life. The poor are in some instances depicted as having adapted to the condition, not seeing themselves as indigent, while in other situations the poor (especially women characters) seek to change their situation by telling their stories of hunger and deprivation. I argue in this chapter that the narratives seek to change the readers' perceptions concerning traditions that oppress women and on the role played by the church in colonising and impoverishing the natives.

As we saw in Diescho's text, some characters defy all odds as it becomes more difficult to maintain dignity amidst economic transformation which impoverished their community. Muronga, Makena and Kaye, continue to seek ways of living with dignity even as they are losing their land and cattle to the colonizers. Following the introduction of taxes and the

money economy, Muronga and Kaye turn to the migrant labour system, not to enrich themselves, but for the survival of their community. The will to fight for the restoration of dignity is also evident in the formation of mine organizations to advocate for better conditions of service for the workers. To capture these complexities, Diescho also shows that some characters succumb to the challenges and adopt behaviour patterns that do not only shock Muronga and Kaye but also make them more resolute to maintain their dignity despite deprivation and other challenges. The exhibitionist mentality portrayed by the men returning from the mines, the *magayisa* (75), makes the new men, *manyowani* (140) like Muronga, realise their relative poverty which is in relation to the material comfort such as blankets and other valuables carried in “heavy boxes” (75). The question of religion is explored in detail in Diescho’s second text, which shows how Christianity is abused to justify oppression and dispossession. This text also provides a nuanced picture of poverty among blacks and whites, indicating that different characters in these two categories are affected by poverty and they respond to it in varying ways.

In *Meekulu’s Children*, the characters endure poverty and deprivation in the midst of war and violence. The lack of security and other natural conditions such as drought, make the life of the protagonist’s family a struggle for basic necessities as they have to endure many nights and days of hunger. The text like the others I discuss in this section is corrective as it provides an implicit protest against the impoverishing forces of colonialism and capitalism. The narratives written by Namibian women (*Between Yesterday and Tomorrow: Writings by Namibian Women*) and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* by Neshani Andreas, display the illocutionary force of women’s narratives in seeking corrective measures to their situation. The texts highlight the severity of deprivation while at the same time capturing how different characters manage to continue living their normal lives despite suffering under cultural and

modern practices. The characters seek ways of maintaining dignity despite being deprived of the right to earn a living, while exposing cruelly unjust, sexist cultural practices used to dispossess widows of their husbands' property after the latter's death. The women seek creative ways of maintaining lives with meaning and some of the coping mechanisms include friendships between women (Kauna and Mee Ali in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* being a good example) and ways of cooperating and assisting one another in their work at the fields. The two arrange for an *okakungunu* where women gather and converge at Kauna's field to assist her in finishing the cultivation of her field.

The cooperation and unity of purpose portrayed by the women, the miners and the community of Oshaantu, are similar to the communities who are at the centre of Head's discussion of poverty in the following section. Head foregrounds this idea as she shows a community joining hands to save themselves from hunger and drought. Texts discussed in the present chapter are set in northern Namibia, which is home to the Namib Desert, bringing into focus the effect of harsh weather conditions on people's livelihoods. The next chapter explores Namibia's neighbour to the east, Botswana.

Chapter Two: 'A gritty resourceful people' - Stories from Botswana

Batswana are a gritty resourceful people whose struggles making a living in the dry desert often meant no rain for months if not years on end. Due to the seemingly endless droughts the people are prone to saving, and having to make do with what they have, and that's often little indeed. The prevailing climatic and environment conditions also mean my people, the Batswana, are normally not dreamers, but pragmatist, determined to somehow soldier on and survive, while passing something to their children for the future. (Mogae)

The views expressed above by Botswana's former president Festus Gontebanye Mogae are instructive and act as a cue for this section on Botswana to explore how literature from this country captures the lived realities of the poor. The writers that I discuss here illuminate everyday struggles under harsh climatic conditions, juxtaposing ordinary people's determination to survive to the selfish efforts by some in power to suppress their ambitions and perpetuate poverty. The texts capture the resilience of the ordinary people in a poverty stricken country, showing that despite the almost impossible living conditions characters are resourceful in the face of scarcity. This resourcefulness is captured by the epigraph above where Mogae describes the Batswana and how they deal with the harsh terrain in which they live. Like Bessie Head's fiction, Mogae highlights the dignity and the humility with which ordinary people react to poverty and how they at the same time try by all means to continue with their lives. Mogae refers to climatic conditions which are similar to those of Namibia and in this section I show that these similarities of geographical and climatic features influence literary depictions of poverty profoundly.

As shown in the previous chapter, in one of the key texts in the Namibian section (*Born of the Sun*), Diescho introduces the metaphor of "swimming" through life, suggesting that native communities which were colonized are often better equipped to swim through the challenges of life than their colonizers. The concept of swimming is also utilized by Head in her third novel *A Question of Power* (1974), where during one of Elizabeth's hallucinations Medusa

tells her that “Africa is troubled waters. I’m a powerful swimmer in troubled waters, you will drown here. You’re not linked up to the people you don’t know any African language” (44). Medusa suggests (like Uncle Ndara in Diescho’s text) that she is better equipped to survive under the difficult conditions than strangers are, because they have not been exposed to such conditions. Another factor that Medusa sees as crucial to survival is connection among people both through communal belonging and through a shared language. In this chapter, I explore this concept in depth to establish how the characters in the selected texts survive harsh weather conditions contending that the focus on the environment illustrates Head’s early understanding of the importance of the sustainable use of the environment. In her texts, Head emphasises that the environment can play a crucial role in the fight against poverty if used efficiently and effectively. This understanding of the importance of a person’s environment, I argue, stems from Head’s own experience, starting from her peculiar birth-place – the mental hospital – to her eventual adopted home of Serowe.⁹

In the current discussion I explore Head’s writing in more detail to tease out the development of her notions of “unconscious dignity” of the poor and that of the “terrible mindlessness” induced in some by poverty across some of her narratives. Having explored how these notions are applicable to Namibian literature, I also seek to discern Head’s possible influence on fellow writers from Botswana and to establish how their representations of poverty accords with or differs from that of Head, who is considered one of Southern Africa’s most important writers. I discuss Head’s first published novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), as the central text in this chapter, while some of her other texts – *Maru* (1971); *The Collector of Treasures* (1974) and the posthumously published *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989) – also form part of the discussion. To carry out this comparative analysis, I discuss Unity

⁹ For a pictorial illustration of the various environments that Head lived in see <http://www.bessiehead.org/biography/housephotos.html>.

Dow's *Far and Beyond* (2000) as a key text which deals explicitly with poverty and AIDS while also drawing from her other texts – *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2003) and *Juggling Truths* (2004). The third author I discuss in this chapter is Moteane Melamu. I discuss his second text, *Living and Partly Living: Short Stories* (1996) as a central text because of its focus on the topic of poverty. In my discussion Melamu's other texts; *Children of the Twilight* (1987), and *The Unweeded Garden and Other Stories* (2006) are also referred to in more general terms.

Even though she was born in South Africa, Head is widely accepted as Botswana's most celebrated author, as is evident from the attention her work has been getting in Botswana. A Bessie Head Heritage Trust has been formed to preserve the writer's works, both published and unpublished. Most of Head's archive is housed at the Khama III Memorial Museum in Serowe which has been collecting her works and assisting researchers who are studying her work. One of the authors I discuss in this section, Unity Dow, was the guest speaker at an occasion to mark what would have been Head's 70th birthday, in 2007.¹⁰ In her speech at the event (called the BessieFest 2007), Dow concluded that "Bessie's Botswana in the mid-sixties was little more than a poor patch of dust."¹¹ Dow's observation does not only explain Head's focus on poverty in her writing, but it also shows Head's pioneering role in the development of Botswana literature in English. To further honour the writer, the Bessie Head Literature Awards have been introduced and are administered by the Bessie Head Heritage Trust.¹² Head's writings illuminate the developmental path of Botswana from the years of colonial rule (e.g., *When Rain Clouds Gather* starts when the country is preparing for independence and ends after the attainment of self-rule) until well into independence, where

¹⁰ For full coverage of Bessie Head's 70th anniversary see: http://www.bessiehead.org/bessiefest/festnews_serowe.html.

¹¹ See http://www.bessiehead.org/bessiefest/festnews_serowe.html.

¹² The trust was established to promote the life and work of Bessie Head both in both Botswana and abroad. See <http://www.bessiehead.org/owners/owners.html>.

her texts show the way in which traditional beliefs and a strong ruling class selfishly stand in the way of economic progress and poverty eradication.

Unity Dow – as the invitation to her to speak at Head’s 70th anniversary confirms – is an important figure in contemporary Botswana, where she is well known as a judge, human rights activist and writer. Born on 23 April 1959 (20 years after Head’s troubled birth and six years before Botswana attained independence), Dow was raised in a village called Mochudi, in a rural setting which had a lot in common with Head’s adopted home of Serowe. Even though the circumstances surrounding her birth may not have been as eventful as those of Head, Dow would lead a life that changed the lives of many ordinary citizens of her country. She won a landmark case in which she challenged the citizenship act of Botswana for denying children the right to inherit their mother’s Botswana citizenship in cases where the fathers were not Batswana. Her victory led to the repeal of the act, benefiting all women and children in similar situations; to this day children enjoy the fruits of this landmark case.

As a lawyer, she was the first Motswana woman to be appointed a high court judge (where she served for 11 years) and she now runs her own private law firm (formed after retiring as a judge in 2010, (poptech.org/unitydow)). Even though she lost in her bid to become a Member of Parliament for Kgatleng West (a constituency that includes Mochudi where most of her texts are set) in the 2014 general elections, she was subsequently nominated as a specially elected Member of Parliament and then appointed assistant minister of Education. It is her work as a writer that I wish to focus on in this chapter. Like Head, Dow shows herself to be concerned about her country’s poverty in her texts and she addresses the issue of how those in power use the law to oppress the less fortunate – hence her relevance to this study. I suggest here that Dow’s legal background and social activism become apparent in her writings, where her heroes and heroines take on those with power to fight for their rights

despite being poor and without resources to match their oppressors. Dow's passion for justice resonates with Head's commitment to fighting exploitation and oppression through representations of social conditions in her literary texts.

The third writer I discuss in this chapter is Moteane Melamu, who is a Professor of English at the University of Botswana. Like Head, Melamu was born in South Africa and as such some of his books are set in the South African townships, portraying the poverty and the squalid conditions in the shanty towns. Melamu is a founding member of the English Department at the University of Botswana, having joined the then University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland in 1964 as a lecturer. The institution, which was formed in 1964 as a tripartite university, was divided into separate institutions when Botswana and Lesotho gained independence in 1966 and Professor Melamu was among a team that went to Botswana to start a campus (*Living and Partly Living*). Melamu's background (being from Sophiatown, South Africa) has influenced his writing about poverty because, unlike his two counterparts, he does not focus on rural poverty, but rather on what we may term 'urban poverty'. This provides interesting contrasts with his counterparts, who present rural communities that struggle for survival on a daily basis while their leaders enjoy the fruits of the labour of the poor. In the township or urban areas the mentality changes, as we saw with the migrant labourers who left their homes to go and work in the major towns and cities and at the mines in Diescho's text. As Belinda Bozzoli argues, in the township space "severe oppression and poverty were experienced on a racial and class basis" (Bozzoli 79). Melamu's focus on the townships will provide insight into how the inhabitants of the African town deal with poverty, as well as how lack of certain values such as community solidarity influences these experiences of urban poverty.

Many characters in the texts I discuss do manage to rise above the potential trauma of drought, lack of rain, shortage of food and terror from rulers to keep a positive outlook on life. In this way the texts present a case for what Annie Gagiano in her book *Achebe, Head, Marechera: on Power and Change in Africa* (2000) calls “progressive energy in the social situation [or] regenerative growth” (136). The potentiality to revolt in these texts therefore also represents growth in awareness and a realisation among the poor that there is strength in their numbers. Various characters show very impressive abilities to adapt to their conditions and even tackle new opportunities to overcome their challenges. The sovereigns are shown up as colluding to curtail the potential of the masses. Achille Mbembe argues that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11), and the ‘sovereigns’ in some instances in the texts I discuss here literally kill young girls and boys for muti, because they believe that human parts will make them both powerful and rich. The texts indicate that despite the power of the sovereign, the poor are not always helpless against them and similarly the poor do not always manage to defeat the power of the sovereign, as some are pressurised to take part in the killings in order not to become victims themselves. The texts thus illustrate how ordinary, poor masses of people suffer at the hands of selfish ruling elites led by chiefs and later by politicians. As a result of the behaviour of the ruling elites, the ordinary people are left with no option but to seek their own solutions. The idea of the masses finding their own solutions to problems and not relying on their leaders for answers (as was the norm in Head’s societies) is a common thread in her writing. I argue in this chapter that characteristics of strength and the ability to adapt to severe conditions are illuminatingly portrayed across texts from Botswana.

Bessie Head and Poverty: Stories of migration, discrimination and adaptation

Bessie Head was born in South Africa to a white mother and a black father, a union which was outlawed during the apartheid era. She was born in a psychiatric hospital where her mother was confined for psychological instability. Head's troubled existence led her away from South Africa to Serowe village in the then Bechuanaland. Upon arrival in Serowe in 1964, she obtained a teaching post at the Tshekedi Memorial School and in a letter to Vigne, Head describes her troubles with school authorities:

There is a man here, the principal of our school he sort of thought he could get started to sleep with me - just like a frenzied itch but as a woman I mean nothing - when he couldn't get rid of the itch he just turned on me - right to the point of manhandling me in front of kids and twisting my arm. I had to bite his hand to let him let go. (10)

In this letter Head addresses the theme of women abuse which is one of her recurring themes throughout her literature as she writes about the plight of women in a patriarchal society that unfairly discriminates against women. Sen in his capability approach to poverty articulates the notion of conversion factors which he argues influences the ability of an individual to convert resources at their disposal into a 'functioning' or into something useful to them. Discussing Sen's theory, Ingrid Robeyns in "The Capability Approach: a theoretical survey" explains that:

The relationship between a good and the functionings to achieve certain beings and doings is influenced by three groups of conversion factors. First, *personal conversion factors* (e.g metabolism, physical condition, sex, reading skills, intelligence) influence how a person can convert the characteristics of the commodity into a functioning. If a person is disabled or in a bad physical condition, or has never learned to cycle, then the bicycle will be of limited help to enable the functioning of mobility. Second, *social conversion factors* (e.g public policies, social norms,

discriminating practices, gender roles, societal hierarchies, power relations) and, third, *environmental conversion factors* (e.g. climate, geographical location) play a role in the conversion from characteristics of the good to the individual functioning. (99)

Giving an example, Robeyns observes that a bicycle “enables the functioning of mobility, to be able to move oneself freely and more rapidly than walking” (99) for those who know how to cycle but it is of no use to those who do not know how to ride as well as those with a physical challenge. Similarly, due to the oppressive patriarchal set up (social conversion factor), Head is unable to use her education to live a better life. Following her altercation with the principal, Head is fired from her job as a teacher, and that becomes the cause of her poverty as she articulates in the same letter that “[d]ebts have piled and piled...Haven’t been able to eat porridge and meat which is the teacher’s diet” (11). Head’s reference to the type of food that is associated with a class under which teachers fall further buttresses the point that she is unable to live the kind of life she desires. This experience explains Head’s focus on poverty as a subject in her texts, which to a large extent, reflect her life experiences both in South Africa and in her adopted country.

As Gagiano points out in her piece *Writing a Life in Epistolic Form: Bessie Head’s Letters*, Head’s letters indicate her poverty and desperation: “It is in reading Head’s letters from Botswana that one becomes aware of the nearly constant pressure of poverty to which she was subjected – while she had to provide not only for herself but for her son” (6). Her tumultuous experience also includes her direct encounters with ‘sovereigns’ like the principal and the chiefs. In another letter to Vigne, dated 27 November 1965, Head concludes that

There are a lot of pullers-down in Southern Africa and in a crappy tribal society there are a hell of a lot – mostly half -crazy black people who do not know where they are going - half crazy through constant fear and dog-eat-dog policy which is all they have known from the chiefs and colonial authorities. (15)

As indicated in the above quotation, this chapter seeks to show that poverty is presented in Head's texts as well as those of the other authors from Botswana as a tool used by those in power to maintain their grip on the masses. The sovereign controls everything, including the production of food. In a short story titled "The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration" (from *The Collector of Treasures* 1977), Head writes: "[l]ong ago, when the land was only cattle tracks and footpaths, the people lived together like a deep river. In this deep river which was unruffled by conflict or a movement forward, the people lived without faces, except for their chief, whose face was the face of all the people" (1). It is under this communal arrangement that the characters carry their condition of poverty with an "unconscious dignity" as they wait for their leader to authorise their every move in crop production. The chiefs, like the men in the Namibian stories written by women, get a lion's share of the yield because they are expected to feed the less fortunate and also to feed the community during times of drought and poor rainfall. This becomes a control tool, however, used by chiefs, the rich and the powerful to manipulate the poor in Head's fiction. The struggles that Head went through in her own life are mirrored in her texts as the struggle of the poor against those seeking to curtail their successes. This struggle also delineates the positive outlook on life by the Batswana despite difficult conditions. Old man Dinorego in Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) articulates such an attitude:

Batswana people often go without food and water and so do their cattle. Cattle are grazed where a bit of grass grows, but water may only be found ten miles away. Life is like this...A Motswana man thinks like this: "If there is a way to improve my life, I shall do it". He digs and digs, slowly moving the earth

with a pole on top and a handle. To this he attaches a rope and a bucket. Then he sends his son down into the well. The son digs and digs, each time sending up the earth in the bucket. At last water is found. (22)

The vivid illustration of the tenacity and survivalist attitude of the Batswana further delineates their readiness to fight on until they achieve what they want. As Dow mentioned in the earlier quote, Botswana in the sixties was one of the poorest countries in the world. Head's first novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* captures the mood under those circumstances as they prevailed in the fictional village of Golema Mmidi on the eve of independence, when people embraced new technologies brought by foreigners like Makhaya and Gilbert. The efforts inspired by ideas brought by the two men meet with strong opposition from the chieftains, who had before then controlled the wealth and had the power to dispossess as well as banish people from their land.

In her first novel Head writes about a journey undertaken by a South African man trying to escape the evils of apartheid in his country. In his escape Makhaya is accommodated by various strangers and he is earlier in the text introduced to the poverty that is rampant in Bechuanaland. Makhaya's first host (on the border, just before entering Bechuanaland) treats him to a "steaming bowl of thick porridge" (2), which, we later learn is about the only food that the Batswana eat. Following this encounter with the old man, Makhaya is given shelter by an old woman who stays with a girl of about ten years. The vivid description of the old woman's hand as "a shrivelled old hand, cold and hard with years and years of labour" (8) introduces Makhaya to the difficult conditions under which the people he is joining live. The migrant is then shocked by the abuse of the underage girl by the woman who sends her to his room to offer sex in exchange for money: "'What do you want?' he asked. The hands darted back and there was a brief silence; then she said, 'You know'. 'I don't,' he said" (10).

In an explicit offer of sex, the girl tells Makhaya that her “ grandmother won’t mind as long as [he] pay[s]” (10), but the man is disgusted by the fact of a child being abused in that manner and he gives her ten shillings and chases her out of the hut. Makhaya portrays an attitude that is different from that of the old woman, who appears to believe that she is justified in using the young girl in order to get the much needed money. The old woman says she has never “known a man who did not regard a woman as a gift from God” (11), but Makhaya sees it differently:

What a loathsome woman, he thought, and yet how naive she was in her evil. He had known many such evils in his life time. *He thought they were created by poverty and oppression* and he had spent the last two years in jail in the belief that, in some way, a protest would help to set the world right. It was the mentality of the old hag that ruined the whole continent – some sort of clinging, ancestral, tribal belief that a man was nothing more than a grovelling sex organ, that there was no such thing as privacy of soul and body, and that no ordinary man would hesitate to jump on a mere child. (11, my emphasis)

As Ndebele argues in his notion of a return to the ordinary in the art of writing, the poor old woman is not depicted as only worthy of sympathy or pity but the author seeks to ask more questions about poverty, prostitution and child abuse resulting in a much deeper understanding for the reader. Head further troubles the traditional stereotypes that apportion certain behaviour to men and others to women, showing that men and women are different and some individuals triumph over conditions of indigence and some do not, regardless of their gender. Makhaya dismisses the notion that such action is a result of abject poverty, but suggests rather that oppressive patriarchal practices and beliefs are to blame. Gagliano in her analysis of Head’s novel concludes that “it is the deep conservatism of tribal ‘diehards’ and the irrational blocking out of literally life-improving knowledge and skills that arouse Head’s

wry sense of stultifying effects of this sort of social power” (Gagiano, *Achebe, Head, Marechera: On Power and Change in Africa* 44). I argue here that Head depicts poverty as not necessarily leading to evil, but rather that evil and selfish tendencies are exacerbated by poverty. The old woman’s predation on the young girl recalls Lara’s argument that the “creative process of the initial construction of the literary narrative [...] is followed by a return to the experiential dimension of the readers, where narratives gain influence and transform previous ways of seeing things” (19). The text enters the public domain in solidarity with the common good regardless of who promotes it; male or female; thereby challenging the commonly held view that men are abusers and women and children are victims. Martha Nussbaum explains how depictions like this can affect the reader:

Novels ... construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters. In this way, the very structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined reader invites the reader to see how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hope and desires. (7)

As shown by Nussbaum, the novel becomes a contested space with varying views to which different readers will respond in different ways by making connections with the characters. In line with this, Head is sometimes criticised for her portrayal of women as in the cases of the old woman (exploitative; corrupt) and the little girl (a prostitute) in contrast with Makhaya, who is morally upright in his refusal to defile the child. University of Botswana academic Nono Kgafela in her essay “The Representation of Women in Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*” charges that “Bessie Head to a great extent writes about women with a voice of a male writer (consciously or unconsciously)” (99). Even though Kgafela accuses Head of

“supporting patriarchal stereotypes” (99), I argue here that by painting this picture, Head provides a nuanced depiction of the situation in its complexity, with some women and some men (like the chieftains, Matenge and Sekoto) being evil and selfish. Head demystifies the false dichotomies of men against women that promote stereotypes against both sexes with each expected to behave in a particular way. The narrative nudges us to recognise the complexities of poverty as experienced by different people in Head’s fictional community.

As Makhaya moves through the drought stricken country, the deprivation and hunger become even more apparent and he asks himself “what the birds live on, ...The land on either side of the footpath was loose windblown sand and thorn bush” (12-13). In this quotation, Head evokes the reader’s empathy for the inhabitants and provide insight into how environmental conversion factors of bad climate and geographical location of Head’s fictional community, contributes to their poverty. The inhabitants of Golema Mmidi are unable to convert the hard work they put in at the fields into food because of the bad weather and poor rain. It is this barren and dry land that the Batswana till and till every year for crops with little success. His long walk through the drought stricken landscape is interrupted by a truck that stops and offers him a lift; a small sign that some Batswana are relatively well off, but remain helpful to those more deprived.

Makhaya next encounters an old man with impressive speech and interesting ideas. The old man, Dinorego, introduces the Batswana to Makhaya as follows: “Most of the time we Batswana live in the wilderness and loneliness. We are used to it but I don’t think you can stand it” (17). The last part of the quote echoes the previously mentioned belief in the local people and their ability to withstand tough conditions as opposed to foreigners who tend to be viewed as less capable of dealing with the situation. The old man’s view of Makhaya here

resonates with Uncle Ndara's view in *Born of the Sun* and Medusa's in *A Question of Power* in highlighting the special abilities of locals as opposed to those of visitors. Dinorego's assertion that Makhaya might not make it here suggests that the concept of "swimming" is not based on race only, but refers to the experiential knowledge that local people have, that equips them to deal with the harsh conditions. Dinorego's description of the Batswana echoes the description in the chapter epigraph by the country's former president, Mogae.

Dinorego finds Makhaya to be very attractive, but the old man is not ashamed of his own poverty. He reminds Makhaya that "a poor person like [himself] can still be hospitable" (17). The old man believes that despite their poverty, the people of Golema Mmidi can pull themselves out of the difficult conditions given the opportunity and with the right assistance. He tells Makhaya that "a lot is happening in my village and a well-educated man like you can bring a little light" (17). This statement which might seem contradictory to his earlier assertion that Makhaya may not be able to withstand the harsh conditions of Golema Mmidi, is in actual fact in line with the author's desire to show that with an approach appropriate to the situation, foreigners can play a meaningful role in getting locals out of poverty. Makhaya is impressed by Dinorego's enterprising attitude to local conditions as well as by the old man's positive outlook on life despite the difficulties they face.

Dinorego takes Makhaya to the village of Golema Mmidi whose name means "to grow crops", a name that suggests that those who live here are cultivators. The village is described as "consisting of individuals who had fled there to escape the tragedies of life" (18). The settlement is therefore made up of people who have a lot in common with Makhaya, who himself fled the apartheid regime in South Africa. The name of the village is also different from those of other local villages, because it is not a name of an "important Chief or

important event” (18). For the people of Golema Mmidi, unlike those of other villages, “necessity, even, in some cases, rejection and dispossession in previous circumstances, had forced them to make land the central part of their existence” (18-19). In this village Makhaya is introduced to power struggles between two brothers (who are chieftains), Paramount Chief Sekoto and Chief Matenge. The people of Golema Mmidi appeal to the Paramount Chief in cases such as banishment and appropriation of their property by the sub-chief. In addition to the chiefs, Head indicts pseudo nationalists (Joas Tsepe) who pursue their selfish interests to the detriment of the lives of the ordinary members of the community.

The author allows multiple voices to tell the story both from ordinary residents’ and from the chieftains’ perspectives. Each villager has a unique story to tell, while the two chieftains tell similar but also distinct stories of their interaction with the poor. Bakhtin’s notion of ‘polyphony’ acknowledges that each of these voices has its own perspective and weight within the text. By allowing multiple realities presented by various characters, Head does not offer only her perspective on poverty but accords the reader the opportunity to interact with the reality of poverty as it appears to each character. In analysing Head’s text I interrogate how the different characters claim a voice to represent their condition, their experiences and perceptions of poverty.

The two sovereigns in the text have the power to dispossess the people of their properties and they can therefore decide who should be rich and who should be poor. Chief Matenge is described as the face of the unfair practices that left the chiefs with everything while their people had very little:

Chief Matenge lived in the central part of the village in a big cream - painted mansion...The central part of the village was about two miles from the farm and it contained, apart from Matenge’s mansion,

one very poor general dealer's shop, which supplied the villagers with only the bare necessities like sugar, tea, flour and vegetable fats, and cheap materials and shoes; one three-roomed shack, which was the village primary school; and a square brick building that was the depot for collecting and distributing mail from the post office...A group of mud huts clustered about the cream-painted mansion, and in these mud huts the servants of Matenge lived, not servants in the ordinary sense, because they were paid no wage, but slaves he had received as part of his heritage. (44)

Head criticises the injustice of the chieftainship system where the exploitation of the poor is justified as a privilege of the chief. Matenge inherits servants who are not paid for their work, meaning that as the wealth is passed onto him by his parents, the poor pass on the chains of poverty and enslavement to their children. The poor therefore become properties of the royals that get handed down from one generation to the other. Achille Mbembe in "Necropolitics" argues that:

[a]n unequal relationship is established along with the inequality of the power over life. This power over the life of another takes the form of commerce: a person's humanity is dissolved. Because the slave's life is like a "thing" possessed by another person, the slave existence appears as a perfect figure of a shadow. (22)

The vivid juxtaposition of "the big cream mansion" and "a group of mud huts" as well as the contrast between "the mansion, the slaves and a huge cream Chevrolet" (44), further delineate the unfairness of the system and the 'shadowy' existence of the poor. The description shows the unequal relationship between the chiefs and the ordinary people. Matenge, however, sees nothing wrong with the situation, because "chiefs ha[ve] always lived in the mansions while people ha[ve] lived in the huts" (44-45). This view is shared by the Paramount Chief Sekoto, who is shocked by Gilbert's commitment to assisting local

people to fight poverty. Paramount Chief Sekoto's attitude towards the poor is that of exploitation and callousness:

He was widely known as a good chief, which is the way people usually refer to paramount chiefs. He attended all the funerals of the poor in the village, even accepted responsibility to bury those who were too poor to bury themselves, and built a school here and a reservoir there. But because he was a chief he lived off the slave labour of the poor. His lands were ploughed free of charge by the poor, and he was washed, bathed, and fed by the poor. In return for which he handed out old clothes and maize rations. And to a man like this Gilbert Balfour came along and spent an hour outlining plans to uplift the poor! Most alarming of all, the Englishman had behind him the backing of a number of voluntary organizations who were prepared to finance his schemes at no cost to the country. (20-21)

The Paramount Chief to whom villagers have to appeal if treated unfairly by Chief Matenge is explicitly shown here to be oppressive and to share his brother's view that as chiefs, they have the right to be rich and to exploit the poor. The difference between what Gilbert thinks about the ordinary local people and what the two chiefs think about them, is clearly articulated within the text, showing that the negative attitude of the two rulers impedes progress and development. Even as he allocates "a 250-acre plot for an experimental farm and a 7, 000-acre plot for a cattle ranch" (21), Paramount Chief Sekoto does it not to empower his people, but for his selfish reason of pitting Gilbert against his brother, Chief Matenge, with the hope that the Englishman will destroy Matenge for good. The Paramount Chief does not understand Gilbert's "habit of referring to the poor as though they were his blood brothers" (20), because to him and his brother the poor are less than human and do not deserve the comfort that comes with being rich. In this text Head highlights the need for a strong acknowledgement of human diversity in studying poverty in order to be able to appreciate Sen's various conversion factors of the capability approach to indigence. Through the conversion factors Sen argues that it is not enough to know the resources a person has at

their disposal rather there is need for more consideration to be given to the circumstances in which that person is living. In Head's fictional community, social conversion factors are in favour of chieftains who can easily convert resources (land and human-the poor) into functionings or a better life using their positions while the poor face more difficulties because as Sen argues "being poor in a rich society itself is a capability handicap" (*Inequality Re-examined, ibid*). Focusing only on what the chieftains or the people have will deny the reader the opportunity to fully appreciate the nuance provided by the text with regard to the factors that influence the enjoyment or not of such resources. Even though the majority in Head's fictional community are depicted as living in deprivation, the riches that are only enjoyed by the chieftains are vividly described to demonstrate the "capability handicap" that disadvantage the poor. The text illuminatingly shows how the poor are unable to get the best out of their cattle and land because of the powers and privileges bestowed on chiefs.

In order to continue exploiting the poor, Matenge turns to a cattle speculating business through which he exploits people by buying their cattle at low prices, only to sell the same for much more. He uses "the big cattle speculator" to cheat the farmers: "A cattle speculator works like this: a man brings his beast to him which he looks over and then says, 'Oh, I shall pay you six pounds for that beast.' But in his heart he knows he will get sixteen or twenty pounds for the same beast at the abattoir" (23). Matenge knows that the poor have no choice but to sell their cattle through him and he cashes in on this, becoming very wealthy while his people languish in poverty. This form of exploitation parallels the one practised by the colonizers in Diescho's text in the Namibian Chapter where colonisers force natives to sell cattle to them (at a price that was determined by them) in order to get money to pay tax. In Head's text, the unfair business practice is brought to an abrupt end by the arrival of Gilbert

and his introduction of the cooperative system that gives ordinary people better prices for their cattle.

Through the character of Joas Tsepe, Head launches a scathing critique of pseudo-nationalist leadership in Africa which seeks ways of making the lives of the powerful ever better and has no regard for the lives of the masses. The migrant protagonist Makhaya expresses a deep hatred for the Chief and the African ruling class for their insatiable appetite for more riches:

Well, the same thing is going on where ever there are poor people. Chief Matenge is one lout, cheat, dog, swine. But Matenges everywhere get themselves into a position over the poor. I hate the swine. Sometimes I do not know what I feel about the poor, except that I being poor too, say I have had enough of swines. (147-148)

The anger expressed by Makhaya is finally felt by the general public of the community that lived under the terror of Chief Matenge's reign for many years. The villagers get their revenge when the sovereign commits suicide. Matenge openly looks down upon his people and goes to all lengths to destroy the lives of those who challenge him, but his evil deeds lead him to suicide. Head as a fictional writer is able to re-imagine and re-enact the relationship between chiefs and their people in traditional Tswana communities in order to offer readers the perspectives of the ordinary people on their leaders.

Faced with the changing times, Matenge cannot bring himself to accept that poor commoners were now progressing and amassing wealth like chiefs:

Matenge came back to Golema Mmidi in mid-August and found himself faced with the progress of mankind. Commoners were up and about everywhere, busy like ants, building dams for themselves. They were also laughing and had some new language up their sleeve, like 'cash crops'. This sent

Matenge into a fuming rage. Barely ten years ago, the commoner had always to *approach a chief or sub –chief and ask him for permission to progress*. This desire for progress had usually taken the form of wanting to build a small brick house with a tin roof. But the brick houses were for chiefs alone, and how could an ordinary commoner want to bring himself up to the level of a chief? Or again, he might desire to set up a borehole for watering his cattle. The chief could say yes or no. If in some demented mood he said yes and then the commoner prospered, it would not be for long. This unfortunate man would one day be notified by the chief that a road was to be built in the pathway of his borehole. Would the commoner please quit? And not so many months after that the chief acquired a new watering place for his cattle. (164, emphasis added)

Matenge realises albeit very late that his power and capacity to dictate terms to the people has been seriously undermined. He can no longer stand in the way of progress because the people have developed a totally different mentality. Chief Matenge looks back with a sense of nostalgia at the times when he could unfairly dispossess commoners of their hard earned possessions. Head's explicit reference to the need for a commoner to ask for permission to progress in the past, indicates that the reason why there was little progress and poverty was rampant was that the sovereigns had other priorities than improving the lives of their poor subjects. It is one of these subjects (who is described as a "wretched creature in smelly rags and tatters" – 198) who delivers a message to Paulina that the chief has a case against her. When Paulina goes to the court as summoned by Matenge, the villagers decide to accompany her because they know that Matenge "never called them unless it was to destroy an inhabitant of Golema Mmidi. He had never done one act of kindness towards the villagers, seeming to be placed there only for their torture. They gathered their tattered coats about them and shuffled towards the centre of the village" (199). The vivid description of the poor ordinary residents of Golema Mmidi who come together to face their oppressive Chief is similar to the situation of the beggars in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* (1994) as discussed in Raditlhalo's essay, who descend on the rich to demand justice:

Outside the 'villa Adja Awa Astou' the beggar rang the bell. Leading the way, the beggar pushed open the door, followed by his retinue ... A legless cripple, his palms and knees covered with black soil from the garden, printed a black trail on the floor like a giant snail. Another with a maggoty face and a hole where rags, grabbed a white shirt and putting it on admired himself in a mirror, roaring with laughter at the reflection of his antics. A woman with twins, emboldened by the others, tore open a cushion on the settee and wrapped one of her babies in the material. On the other cushion she rested a foot with a cloven heel and stunted toes. (108)

In the same fashion, the masses who suffered silently for many years at the hands of Chief Matenge, reach a point of no return, and confront their tormentor head on. In unity, the villagers have the courage to face Matenge, who crumbles in defeat. A vivid and unforgettable description of Matenge evokes his fall:

Matenge had not expected this. He stood in the shadow of his enclosed porch, watching the crowd. When they turned and walked towards the gate of his yard, he retreated indoors, in panic, running from window to window and door to door, barricading himself inside. The servants, observing his panic, crept like stricken shadows out of the back door and fled into the bush. He was left alone with his panic in a dark, locked house. He walked to one of the windows and looked down into the yard. The villagers had all seated themselves on the ground, with their faces turned expectantly towards his house, waiting for him to come out. And they would wait and wait and wait now because this was the end of the road for them and Matenge. Big, slow tears rolled down the rutted grooves of his cheeks as he stood watching them. (201)

The sight of tears rolling down Matenge's cheeks marks a victory for the ordinary people of Golema Mmidi, because they can now reclaim their dreams and aspirations which were put on hold for so long by the selfish actions of their chief. Even as Matenge weeps, the villagers have no sympathy for him as they remember all the trouble he has caused them over the

years. Makhaya, who (with Gilbert) has initiated an agricultural revolution in Golema Mmidi, leads the way into Matenge's compound, where he finds the chief's "still body hanging from a rafter" (203). The death of Matenge represents a new dawn for the people of Golema Mmidi, who from there on fully dedicate their energies to fighting poverty and improving their lives. It is a vivid example of how solidarity and demonstration of resistance among the poor can (and sometimes does) bring an end to or lessen their oppression and exploitation.

The Triumphant Rise of the Poor

The suppression of the people of the fictional village of Golema Mmidi denies them the opportunity fully to explore their capabilities and also prevents them from taking advantage of new opportunities to escape from poverty. The talents and leadership qualities of women such as Mma-Millipede and Paulina Sebeso come to the fore when they are given a chance to lead an agricultural revolution aimed at lifting their community out of poverty. The two women rise to the challenge to claim back their lives and assume leadership roles in the village. Mma-Millipede is described as coming from "one of the poorest [families] in the village. But the recognition Mma-Millipede gained for her religious views soon brought her the attention of the chiefs" (73). The attention she gets from the chiefs leads to her getting married to the son of the reigning chief, Ramogodi, who took pride in sleeping with many women in the village. The text brings out Mma-Millipede's strength as she picks up the pieces of her life after being dumped by Ramogodi and she becomes "a trader of all kinds, and she also purchased the skins of wild animals, which Dinorego made into mats and blankets" (75).

Mma-Millipede's story is linked to that of old man Dinorego who was her lover until Mma-Millipede was forced into a marriage with the chieftain. Their story delineates the struggle to return to the ordinary – to their dreams, which were put on hold when Dinorego's parents were “forced to arrange another bride for him with all speed” (74). The two characters and their ability to recover from oppressive and destructive interference in their lives and ultimately to become influential members of their community represent qualities of the Batswana and their ability, as previously referred to, to survive very difficult situations. Paulina Sebeso survived the suicide of her husband, who killed himself after being accused of embezzling funds belonging to his employer. After her husband's death the company, “anxious to regain its money, dropped the court case and immediately seized the property of the dead man ... thus dispossessed of a home almost overnight, Paulina moved, with a son aged ten and a daughter aged eight, to the village of Golema Mmidi” (83). Paulina's positive attitude is further illustrated in her creativity in making up for the unavailability of “a suitable stuffed-up breast bodice in a country like Botswana, especially if you have to live in the bush, so she was in the habit of stuffing hers with carefully crumpled bits of paper” (83). The improvisation is similar to Makena's in *Born of the Sun*, because the two women do not fold their arms and feel helpless about their conditions, but seek innovative ways of meeting their needs. Paulina's character is an indication of a return to the ordinary as articulated by Ndebele because despite all the problems facing the community and more especially women, the text seeks to show that the people of the fictional village of Golema Mmidi still endeavour to continue with their lives.

Paulina's strength and courage develop as she has to face the challenges of life alone while the other women “all had permanent lovers or husbands while [she] had none” (102). She is described as being different from the other women of her village:

Paulina was not like the women of Golema Mmidi, although she had been born into their kind of world and fed on the same diet of thin maize porridge by a meek, repressed, dull eyed mother. But even as a small child she kept on putting her nose into everything ... But through her life she had retained her fresh, lively curiosity and ability to enter an adventure, head first. It was all this that really distinguished her from the rest of the women, even though her circumstances and upbringing were no different from theirs. She had travelled a longer way, too, on the road of life, as unexpected suffering always makes a human being do. (104)

Head asserts the power of the human spirit, indicating that the journey that Paulina takes makes her stronger than other women who are cushioned by the presence in their lives of husbands or lovers. She continues here to place emphasis on the value of experiential knowledge, as it makes Paulina stronger and wiser. The author, I argue, adds more nuance to her depiction of experiences of poverty by showing that through determination some people manage to rise from poverty to respectable positions in society, while others do not. Paulina is one such a person who through focus and resilience earns the respect of other women, who are initially in a better position than her. Lara suggests that “women’s identity formation has been more a process of invention than a recovery of something lost, hidden or forgotten” (93), and, in Paulina, Head evokes a poor but vital woman who improves her life despite the absence of role models in her community.

When she is told that her son is sick, Paulina decides to travel to the cattle post to fetch him, and the wife to a man whose cattle post is near hers (Rankoane’s wife) wonders how Paulina can even think about doing this when the “bush is full of dangerous beasts” (172). Paulina retorts: “People in comfort and safety sa[y] things like this to people who always faced the storms and winters of life” (172). A comparison of the two women shows that Paulina is tough and fearless because she has always had to deal with her problems, while Rankoane’s

wife is shielded from harsh realities by her husband. Paulina's troubles are compounded by the death of her son, Isaac, at the cattle post due to tuberculosis. This disease, which also kills migrant workers in *Born of the Sun*, is "a major killer in the country, and the small boy with his red feverish eyes was seriously ill with it. Also, the diet they were eating now, plain porridge with salt and water and no milk, must have brought the boy's ailment to a serious stage" (171). The poor diet weakens the immune system of the young boy and he is therefore susceptible to opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis, but it is the boy's bravery and staying power that deeply touch the reader and wins him sympathy and admiration. At a tender age, Isaac is saddled with the responsibility of looking after his family's cattle and he stays on, even as he is coughing blood and the cattle are dying from drought.

Upon arrival at the cattle post, Paulina and Makhaya find no sign of life: "[t]here was only a heap of clean, white bones lying on the floor. They lay in a curled, cramped position with the bones of the hands curved inward. The white ants and maggots had vied with each other to clean all the flesh off the little boy" (183). Paulina is for once in her life protected from this harrowing view, because Makhaya decides that it would be too much for her. The sight of the bones and the vivid description of a drought stricken environment indicate how difficult it is to live in this area: "[i]t was just as though everything was about to die ... During the night, a cow that had belonged to one of the cattlemen had lain down to calve and died in the process. A jackal had hovered near her the whole night and at dawn set himself to devour the new born calf" (181). This is a powerful, haunting image of the destructive power of poverty, and of what valuable lives it destroys while the predatory flourish.

Through the vivid imagery of life and death, Head manages to highlight the ability of characters like Paulina to live through it all and how they become motivation for the people

of Golema Mmidi to accept change and embrace new methods of farming and crop production. Makhaya in trying to convince Paulina to sell her cattle (before Isaac's demise) argues that:

Poor people are poor because they don't know how to get rich. I also live in this small dark room and I have counted the change over and over. I'm tired of counting the change. I'm going to be a millionaire. But poverty is like glue. All the poor people stick on me and they have to become millionaires with me. By this I mean that there will be no poverty left in Africa by the time I die. (148)

Makhaya implies here that it is possible for everyone to become a millionaire contrary to views held by sovereigns like Matenge and Paramount Chief Sekoto who believe that affluence is a preserve of a certain class of people. Makhaya believes in the capability of poor people and argues that they remain poor because they do not receive the right assistance and guidance from their leadership. He warns that the poor in Africa, where "poverty was not a shameful sin to be hidden under the bushes" (151), would one day (unarmed as they are) "pitch themselves bodily on the bullets, if that was the only way of ridding themselves of the oppressor" (151). To further illustrate the poor's struggle for emancipation, Head posits that:

[The people] had been straining together in one direction for years, and Matenge had been straining in the opposite direction, always pulling them down. Because of this they had politely avoided him, but today they wanted to see his face when their cattle were dying while his cattle were safe, way up on the northern border where a river that flowed the year round and the grass was good and salty and green. They wanted to see this man who had all the privileges, who had never known a day of starvation in this country of two years of good rain and seven years of drought. They wanted to know what his mood was like after these years of silence and mute disagreement. They wanted him to know they were not after his Chevrolet or big house. They would even tell him this with gentle smiles and pleasant gestures and reassure him that it was only their lives they wanted to set right and he must not stand in their way. (200)

After putting their dreams and aspirations aside for many years, the peasantry are now fed up with Matenge's attitude and are ready to face him and fight for their rights. The agitation of the crowd is further captured in the narrator's observation that "The Matenges and Paramount Chief Sekoto's did not have to lift up the spades and dig earth. It cost them nothing to say yes, yes, yes, build your dam because we have no water in this country. But it gave them a deep and perverted joy to say no, no, no" (202). As Raditlhalo observes, the poor are "a background against which writers launch a fierce criticism of African rulers" (170).

Following Matenge's demise, Makhaya's dream which he shares with Gilbert, overrides the negative attitudes held by the chiefs. The chiefs would rather have the poor remain poor because the status quo favours them. The stark contrast between the interests of the two competing forces is best illustrated in their vision for the community of Golema Mmidi. Gilbert wanted "Golema Mmidi to be a cooperative in everything as that was the only way of defeating the land tenure system in the tribal reserves and the only way of defeating subsistence agriculture which was geared to keeping the poor man poor until eternity" (177). Head here critiques poverty alleviation programmes that aim for short term relief and not long term solutions to poor harvests and shortage of food. Head demonstrates that, by promoting subsistence agriculture, the rulers manage to perpetuate poverty and make the poor dependent on their chiefs. Head's literary depictions provide space for the contesting views on poverty alleviation to encounter each other as everyday lived realities of the people of Golema Mmidi, and not as theoretical questions as is often the case in most poverty studies.

Shannon Young in "Therapeutic Insanity: The Transformative Vision of Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*" introduces the concept of "authentic struggle for a fuller humanity"

which I argue sweeps through the village (led by Gilbert and Makhaya), but those who are at the forefront are women like Paulina and not the men. This paradigm shift is also depicted as central to the fight against poverty. The author makes it clear in the text that the shift is critical, but she also argues that a change in outlook should extend to issues of tribalism, which she sees as fuelling poverty. Examples of this can be seen when an entrenched dislike of one group of people leads to members of the so-called superior tribes shunning drought resistant crops just because they are associated with so-called inferior tribes. The refusal to plough these crops perpetuates poverty and affects agricultural production.

Furthermore, Gilbert's vision is to change the attitude of the local people, who seemed content with subsistence farming even though it does not yield much. He argues that:

It was as though the concept of working with acres and acres of land was incomprehensible to the majority of poverty stricken people, who were content to scrape a living of a thin ribbon of earth. There wasn't much bother and fuss about subsistence living either. Large chunks of the year went by just watching the sunrise and sunset, and who knew too if the subsistence man did not prefer it this way? It was easy, almost comparable to the life of the idle rich, except that the poor man starved all year round.
(138)

The above quotation portrays the "unconscious dignity" with which the people of Golema Mmidi deal with poverty, as well as the "terrible mindlessness" induced by poverty, which even makes the narrator wonder whether they like this kind of life, suggesting that apathy can exacerbate poverty. By comparing the poor to the idle rich here, Head criticises the lack of action by the poor to change their condition. The rich can afford to be idle because they have everything, but the poor do not have that luxury because shortage of food is an everyday reality. Gilbert concludes that "voices had to be raised in Africa too, and they had to come from men like Makhaya who deeply craved a better life, not only for themselves but for all

these thousands and thousands of people who walked around with no shoes” (139). The end result of the agricultural experiment is pleasing, as it breaks traditional barriers and women now lead crop production and showcase their capabilities. Gilbert Balfour, after realising that “women were on the land 365 days of the year” (43), engages them in his agricultural project.

Matenge’s demise furthermore allows the community to confront strong tribal beliefs which had hampered their development:

Year in and year out people had grown the exact same crops. Somewhere along the line they had become mixed up with tribal traditions. They had become fixed. They were sorghum, maize, watermelon, and sweet reed ... You just could not see beyond tradition and its safety to the amazing truth that you were starving – and that tough little plants existed that were easy to grow and well able to stand up to rigorous conditions and could provide you with food. (43)

The text reveals that the fight against poverty was made even more complicated by the traditional beliefs which are used to oppress women and condemn them to a lifetime of indigence. In her next text *Maru* (1971), Head pushes for a different kind of leadership, with the chieftain or the totems in that story choosing to go against the tide of discrimination against the Masarwa or Bushman people.

Maru

Bessie Head’s second novel *Maru* tells the story of an orphan who is despised by the Batswana because she is from a tribe that is considered inferior, the *Masarwa*. Political scientist Kenneth Good in “The State and extreme Poverty in Botswana: the San and Destitute” argues that “poverty has deep roots in Botswana. It is chiefly an indigenous production, bound up intimately with economic development, individual accumulation and

Tswana state formation” (185). Good further opines that “the historic position of the Basarwa or Bushmen or San [...] is that of underclass” (186). The lowly position of the Basarwa in the Botswana society means that they are abused and exploited by the other tribes. The Basarwa are as a result of the social stratification, poor and vulnerable; with no choice but to work as herders to the rich cattle-owners. In this text, Head creates new forms of power which challenges the existing ones by giving Basarwa a voice through characterization. The author’s selection of the heroine, a Mosarwa woman is an empowering technique to women and marginalised groups. Writing about the ‘illocutionary force’ of literary narratives written by women, Lara argues that they “make it possible to retell the story of the public sphere and the paradoxes of democratic theories” (8). Head is able to retell the history of the Basarwa in Botswana from the perspective of the Basarwa themselves through her fiction which evokes the readers’s empathy with the tribe.

Continuing her critique of tribalism (that influenced people into shunning certain crops because they were associated with the Basarwa), Head creates a heroine, Margaret Cadmore, who becomes a catalyst for change in a village where her people are slaves and are not expected to be anything more than that. Even though Margaret is a qualified teacher, her origins as a Mosarwa make Batswana society shun her. According to the social hierarchy which looks down upon the Basarwa, she is supposed to be a slave and peasant because of her origins. Margaret Cadmore is the daughter of a Mosarwa woman (who is found dead) and who is described as “... the woman who gave birth to a child on the outskirts of a remote village [and] had the same thin, Masarwa stick legs and wore the same Masarwa ankle-length, loose shift dress which smelt strongly of urine and the smoke of outdoor fires” (227). Even though Margaret had very little in common with this woman, she decides to identify with her origins when she could easily have passed for a coloured – a group that is considered

superior to the local people (Basarwa) and closer to the whites. A near perfect English accent would have ensured Margaret a better life, but she chooses to identify with her people who are slaves and servants to the ruling class. This courage, I argue, makes her attractive to future paramount chief Maru and his friend and fellow “Totem” [aristocrat] Moleka.

Renowned writer Chinua Achebe provides a cynical indictment of African post-colonial rulers in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). The economic disparities between the rich minority and the poor majority cause friction between the two groups, and Achebe’s character Ikem Osodi concludes that “[t]he very words the white masters had said in his time about the black race as a whole, now we say them about the poor” (37). The argument Osodi makes is that poverty replaces race as the divisive factor in communities as shown in *Maru* where the Masarwa are treated as slaves.

Head’s story captures the division of people according to classes that are rated differently in society. In the story it is evident that access to resources and the right to own material things moves from being a prerogative of whites only to being reserved for the elites who, in the context of *Maru*, are chiefs and members of the so called superior tribes. In a vivid description of the unfair economic practices, the writer explains that:

Cattle thieving worked like this: it was known that the Totems owned the best bulls. Sometimes a handsome bull appeared amidst the herd of an ordinary man and he’d suddenly find himself surrounded by the vultures. Usually scouts did the dirty work. They’d say to the petrified man: “I say, where did you get the money to buy such a bull? It can’t possibly be yours. You must have stolen it from the chief.” And without further ado off they would go with the beast. (43)

The “cattle thieving” (which is reminiscent of the cattle speculation business of Matenge in *When Rain Clouds Gather*) denies the majority of the people the chance of amassing wealth because of their status in society. The divisions and the categorisations of people according to their status and race are evident from the beginning of the novel. The story begins with the birth of a Mosarwa¹³ child whose mother dies during child birth. The nurses at the missionary hospital disregard the mother’s body on account of her being a Mosarwa, but the missionary’s wife, Margaret Cadmore (senior), rebukes their behaviour and decides to look after the child. Head in this text foregrounds the issue of forced social divisions and paints a global picture of colonial style racial divisions (even though it clearly happens at a local and ethnic level), which also serves to deny the oppressed access to economic resources.

The text is important to this chapter as it addresses the destructive and divisive effects of tribalism and ethnic identity thinking and the need to overcome this legacy of prejudice, which is shown to exacerbate and maintain the poverty of the underclass. Head also provides an optimistic account of the role chiefs can play in reversing the fortunes of the poor and marginalised when the young heir to the throne in the small village of Dilepe, Maru (who shares his name with the title of the novel) tells his sister that “If [he has] a place, ... it is to pull down the old structures and create the new” (68). The decision by Maru to marry Margaret, who is considered to be of low class, gestures towards the benefits that liberated Africans can reap by breaking away from ethnic divisions, which stand in the way of development and economic emancipation. The arrival of Margaret in the village of Dilepe to teach therefore changes the village, as the son of the chieftain goes against the people’s strong prejudices against the Basarwa.

¹³ Head uses the word *Masarwa* (which is derogatory and is used to demean the tribe) instead of the widely accepted *Basarwa*.

Head in her second novel continues with her thesis that the “sovereigns” control the economic activity and thereby are the ones who decide who can be rich or poor. The Basarwa are predetermined to be slaves and poor because of the position of their tribe in society, but Head shows that by attaining education Margaret gains the sophistication that attracts influential members of the society to her. The helplessness of the Basarwa at the hands of the stronger Bamangwato tribe is challenged by a more assertive and confident Margaret. By reversing roles, Head makes the chieftains agents of change in *Maru*, while the community chooses to “keep their prejudice and pretend Maru is dead” (222) after he marries Margaret. In her first novel, the reverse was true, as Matenge was pushed to the brink by the masses who demanded justice and equality. This comparison shows Head’s belief in rooting out evil and selfishness from all levels of society in order to have peaceful human existence that is free from poverty and other challenges. In “Irony and Schizophrenia in Bessie Head’s *Maru*”, Modupe O. Olaogun opines that:

contrary to the interpretations of *Maru* as a simple dramatization of good versus evil, or male power (Maru and Moleka) versus female submissiveness (Margaret and Dikeledi), the dominant images of these characters and of the society they represent are above all those of ambiguity. (70)

I argue further that these dominant images present a complex situation where not even the powerful, like Maru and Moleka, are content with what they have. The two have a record of competing for women and in all their escapades they do not care about the happiness of their victims. The power axis changes with the arrival of Margaret who makes the two go against their traditional prejudices. The depiction of the ability of the rich and powerful to be agents of change is consistent with Head’s treatment of the topic of evil and good, poverty and wealth as well as power and weakness in her next novel, *A Question of Power*, where characters exhibit all these qualities at different times and under different circumstances.

A Question of Power (1974)

In her third novel Bessie Head continues her focus on the ‘ordinary’ with an exploration of the theme of the ability of the oppressed and poor to extricate themselves from such situations. Michela Borzaga in an essay titled “‘The Rediscovery of the Extraordinary’: A *Question of Power* by Bessie Head” writes: “what is the ordinary then? It is that whole world that has been suppressed by the brutality of the apartheid system” (32). Through Head, Borzaga critiques Ndebele’s explanation of the ordinary as “the deepest of dreams of love, hope, compassion, newness and justice” – all aspects that have been “sacrificed to the spectacle of group survival” (Ndebele 47), suggesting a more nuanced definition provided by literary texts. Writing about the central character in Head’s text *A Question of Power*, Borzaga in the essay mentioned above concludes that:

Besides ‘the living dead’, there are millions of people caught between the world of life, which in this article I will call the ordinary, and the spectacular/extraordinary or the ghostly realm —that world of death where violence and terror reign. Elizabeth, the central character of Bessie Head’s novel, is a case in point. This article contends that to be traumatised is to simultaneously inhabit these two worlds and to be torn between them, each with its different and contradictory temporalities. The traumatised subject always struggles to defeat the extraordinary in the attempt to return to a relatively safe and ordinary life. (30-31)

The text, which is widely seen as Head’s most autobiographical work, tells a story of power and how it is abused by those who have it to oppress and dispossess the powerless. Like the author, the protagonist Elizabeth is born in a mental hospital in South Africa and her white mother is declared insane for having a child by a black man. The text starts with a look back at Elizabeth’s troubled childhood in South Africa. Like Margaret Cadmore in *Maru*, Elizabeth is raised by a woman who is not her real mother; “[t]hey had kept the story of her

real mother shrouded in secrecy until she was thirteen. She had loved another woman as her mother”(15). When the husband to this woman dies, she resorts to selling beer to sustain herself and her family, making the conditions more unbearable for Elizabeth, who spent most of the time “crying because everyone was drunk and there was no food, no one to think about children” (16) – a sad picture of squalid poverty.

The protagonist Elizabeth, like Head herself, leaves South Africa on a one way visa, taking her young son Shorty with her. Elizabeth “read a newspaper advertisement about teachers being needed in Botswana. She was forced to take out an exit permit, which, like her marriage, held the ‘never to return’ clause” (19). In Botswana, she settles in the village of Motabeng where she is introduced to rural life because she has “always lived in a town, with a street light shining outside the window” (21), but she now had to get used to the darkness and absence of electric light. The text captures Elizabeth’s journey as she tries to integrate into the community of Motabeng where she encounters two imaginary characters, Sello and Dan, who dominate her hallucinations and thoughts. Clare Counihan in “The Hell of Desire: Narrative, Identity and Utopia in *A Question of Power*” suggests the following about these hallucinations:

Centered on Elizabeth’s consciousness, *A Question of Power* assembles a series of disorienting, interrupted moments of hallucination and reality that, approximately, trace Elizabeth’s trajectory in and out of insanity and sanity after moving from South Africa to Botswana with her son Shorty. At the same time that she interacts with various people in the village of Motabeng, Elizabeth sustains a prolonged and erratic dialogue about the nature of good and evil and power with two mysterious men, Sello and Dan. As the novel jumps back and forth through time, it gradually and indirectly emerges that Sello and Dan are in fact inhabitants of her imagination, paralleled by two real men in the village. (69)

The psychological struggle from insanity to sanity takes Elizabeth to the utopian alternative to the challenges that have resulted in her madness. Like Makhaya, Paulina and Mma-Millipede in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, who all had to go through some hardships before spearheading societal reconstruction in Golema Mmidi, Elizabeth goes through a tough time which prepares her for a better life. Shannon Young in “Therapeutic Insanity: The Transformative Vision of Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power*” captures the essence of this struggle: “Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* (1974) describes just such an ‘authentic struggle’ for a ‘fuller humanity’—it is a struggle that shakes the foundations of oppressive forces, offering in their stead a transformative vision of a more viable social order” (228). Young rightly captures the experiential knowledge which I argue helps characters adapt to their conditions, but Elizabeth’s struggle is also a movement towards reconstruction.

The similarities between Head’s first and third novels is also evident with the presence of change agents modelled around a South African man called Patrick Van Rensburg who also settled in Serowe during the time Bessie Head lived there and introduced a concept of education with production under the auspices of cooperatives. The role is played by Gilbert in the first novel, while in *A Question of Power* the role is played by Eugene. In her third novel, Elizabeth goes through a mental breakdown and is taken to a mental hospital and another refugee, Eugene, offers to take care of her son while she is there:

The heavily-built bearded man walked in, holding the small boy by the hand. He blinked his greenish-brown eyes uncertainly and sat down on the chair beside the bed. He put the boy on his knee. The boy was still tightly clutching his toy car. She had seen the man often in the central part of Motabeng village, but apart from a distant greeting had never had the occasion to talk to him. He was extremely reserved, aloof and morose by temperament, and often walked around with the gloom of doomsday on his face. He was an Afrikaner man from South Africa and the founder of the Motabeng Secondary

School. He said, simply: “[m]y wife will take care of your son until you come out of hospital. We are both refugees and must help each other”. (52)

This description of Eugene delineates his vision for the village of Motabeng and his intention to develop and empower the residents to help them to emerge from poverty and underdevelopment. Eugene (like Gilbert in the first novel) shares a dream with the “poor and starving” (57) people of Motabeng of a day “when every table would overflow with good food; roast chicken, roast potatoes, boiled carrots, rice and puddings” (57). The poor and ordinary people of Motabeng join hands and invest their energies in a communal gardening project which gives all of them a chance at a better life. Young concludes that “[t]he communal gardening project provides her [Elizabeth] with the nurturing interactions she needs to achieve more stability and feel supported” (234).

The garden project which resonates with the Agricultural project undertaken by the people of Golema Mmidi, represents efforts by ordinary people to find solutions to the challenges they face. Like Gilbert, Eugene inspires the people of Motabeng to explore different ways of improving their lives:

They formed the youth–development work – groups of the school and acquired skills in building, carpentry, electricity, printing, shoe–making, farming and textile work. Once this had been securely established, he turned his attention to the poor, illiterate villager. In him [Eugene] were the beginnings of local Industry. His house was already a clutter of hand–made goods; mats, blankets, baskets, wooden bowls and spoons, handbags of rough woven string and, in one corner of the room, a huge elementary loom for hand–made woven blankets. (68)

The people of Motabeng who were poor and oppressed by the powerful members of their society come together in the garden where identity and societal positions were not used to

keep other people away from economic activity and oppress them. Poverty is once again portrayed as a unifier which makes one appreciate other people under what Head calls “the brotherhood of man” (206). Elizabeth’s journey of disintegration teaches her to appreciate the ordinariness of the poor. Sello gives her “a huge pile of papers covered with small, neat handwriting. At the top of the first page was the word; Poverty” (30). The protagonist’s lesson on poverty is cemented when during one of her hallucinations she sees an Asian man who tells her:

You have never really made identification with the poor and humble. This time you’re going to really learn how. They are going to teach you,’ and he flung his arm dramatically into the air. At this gesture, a group of people walked quietly into the room. They were the poor of Africa. Each placed one bare foot on her bed, turned sideways so that she could see that their feet were cut and bleeding. (31)

In her illustration of the progressive results of communal enterprises and the useful input of outsiders who fully align themselves with local communities and conditions, Head illustrates some of the creative ways in which local poverty may be usefully addressed. In her portrayal of the destructive effects of felt distrust from locals towards outsiders (sensed by Elizabeth), ‘paired’ with her depiction of harshly condescending attitudes towards local people evident in some European ‘development experts’, Head makes vivid contributions to the understanding of poverty in a dry African country and to the evaluation of ways in which it may be addressed.

The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales (1977)

In this segment I discuss only those stories that address poverty as a central theme beginning with a story called “The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration” which, as per the author’s own words at the end of the story, chronicles a “romanticised and fictionalized

version of the history of the Batalaote tribe” (6). The story begins with an explanation of the tribe’s dependence on chiefs, who have unlimited powers over their people. The powers enjoyed by chiefs include the power to determine when the people can begin ploughing: “[a]lthough the people were given their own ploughing lands, they had no authority to plough them without the chief’s order” (1). The tradition which is common amongst the Tswana tribes up to today has been criticized by Head who, as Gagliano observes, “suggests that a tribal lifestyle may lend itself particularly readily to the propping up of a tyrant of Matenge’s ilk [in *When Rain Clouds Gather*] since it establishes as tradition the profiteering position of a single leader or ruling family, or favoured group at the expense of a whole people” (138). This statement points to how chiefs impoverished their people while at the same time exploiting their labour. As illustrated in Head’s first novel, some chiefs use these powers to dispossess the masses of their wealth. Matenge in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is a case in point.

In this story however, Head’s protagonist Sebembele sacrifices all these privileges by claiming “Rankwana [his deceased father’s third wife] as his wife and expos[ing] the secret that the fifth son, Makobi [is] his own child and not that of his father” (2). Head uses this character to demonstrate the possibility of achieving change in traditional society, as Sebembele chooses to forgo his position and leave his people in order to enjoy his love with Rankwana. To show the significance of Sebembele’s decision to deviate from the norm and find a place for his love, the author highlights that a “chief lacked nothing” (3), but he still elected to sacrifice all his privileges by leaving. The statement that a chief like Sebembele had everything at their disposal but still opted to leave, is evidence that material wealth alone does not guarantee happiness and peace. For Head, one of the reliable ways of achieving inner liberation is through escaping and finding a better place. The journey motif which runs

across Head's writing is thus the solution to the problems besieging Sebembele and his people. Sebembele and his people move away in search of a better life like Makhaya and the inhabitants of Golema Mmidi in *When Rain Clouds Gather* as well as Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*. Like Maru, the chieftain forgoes his comfortable life in order to be happy and to live with a woman he loves.

Head continues to juxtapose rich and poor in her short story titled "Jacob: The Story of a Faith-Healing Priest" in which she insightfully argues that "transformations entail a fusion of horizons, a new and novel way of understanding oneself" (Lara, 157). Lara's foregrounding of the transformational ability of narratives resonates with the story of Prophet Jacob who is "very poor and lived in a mud hut... [and] walked around with no shoes" (20) and prophet Lebojang who is "very rich...live[s] in a great mansion and [drives] around in a very posh car" (20). Prophet Lebojang is depicted as a selfish man who uses his "stunning powers" (28) to "enrich himself from rich and poor alike" (28). To further buttress the point concerning prophet Lebojang's evil deeds, the narrator concludes that "Lebojang's relationship with people was that of a businessman. You paid your money and that was that" (28). Eventually she reveals his participation in the evil and practice of murdering children to obtain parts of their bodies for witchcraft purposes to increase and maintain his power and wealth. Head explores the conceptual value given to money in what she demonstrates throughout the story to be man's futile tendency to attach too much value to money which she argues often leads to destruction. Even though the importance of money cannot be ignored, Head evokes the well-known Judeo-Christian adage that "too much love for money is the root of all evil".

Like the two chieftains (Maru and Sebembele) who abandon their positions to gain happiness, Prophet Jacob gives away all his riches to be a true servant of his God:

There was a time when Prophet Jacob had been as rich as Prophet Lebojang. He had been the owner of a store in the big railway village thirty miles from Makaleng. He had a car, a beautiful wife who loved beautiful clothes, and two pretty daughters. To enable him to give his wife all that she desired, Jacob had even established a big beer-brewing business from which he earned huge profits. After twelve years of this rich and sumptuous living, a bolt from the blue turned him into a man of rags and tatters overnight. (21)

Following a robbery in which he loses everything, Jacob hears the voice of his God asking him “why have you forgotten me? It is I who has brought this trouble on you so that you may do my work. From now on, you shall only have your daily bread” (21). Jacob was born into a rich family with a German father who had “an eye to the cattle speculating business ... [and] had thousands of rands in the bank” (23). Poverty is depicted in almost biblical terms as a condition that assists human beings to better serve their God. The Bible in the book of Proverbs, chapter 8 warns against pursuing wealth to the total exclusion of the wisdom of God: “Let instruction and knowledge mean more to you than silver or the finest gold. Wisdom is worth much more than precious jewels or anything else you desire” (New International Version, 10-11). The message is repeated again in verse 19: “what you receive from me is more valuable than even the finest gold or the purest silver”. It is through a process of disintegration and purification that Jacob becomes a true prophet and a servant of God. In order for Prophet Jacob to serve his God better, wealth is removed from him overnight. This first happens when his and his twin brother’s wealthy parents die in a vehicle accident and their uncle is assigned to be their guardian and the custodian of their inheritance. The uncle did not only steal their money but also treated them atrociously, forcing them to live in squalor and be slaves to his family:

It was now claimed by the uncle and all the relatives that since the children were not pure Batswana by birth, they were therefore of an inferior species. They were fed according to their status. They were given plain porridge with salt and water at every meal, day in and day out, year in and year out. Their sleeping quarters were a ramshackle hut at the bottom of their uncle's yard. They slept on pieces of sacking and lived out their whole lives in that dog house. (24)

Jacob's life journey prepares him to be a servant of his God as he survives the trials and tribulations of life. As a result of the abuse, Jacob's twin brother Isaac died "worn out by the poor diet and hard labour" (25). The suffering throughout his childhood and the robbery form part of the challenges that prepare him for the life of a poor servant of God, who is not after enriching himself. Upon arrival in Makaleng, "no-one paid much attention to the church of Jacob because of his poverty..." (27), but he continued serving his God and assisted people of Makaleng: "a man in that gathering would have no work for a year and his family would be destitute. After seeing Jacob and participating in the worship of his church, the man would strike a job in two or three days; not anything spectacular, but his poverty would be eased" (29). The story portrays poverty in a positive light as something that is associated with God and with good. I argue here that Head is not suggesting that being poor always translates into being a good person nor is she saying all rich people are bad people, but she seeks to show that rich people are often overpowered by greed and the desire to amass more. The author illustrates that riches often cloud people's imagination and stand in the way of internal happiness which should be the ultimate goal for a human being. By contrast, Jacob who is poor and lives humbly earns respect, trust and love in the local community because of his integrity and concern for others.

In concluding my reading of Head's texts it is worth noting that, as I have already mentioned, her first three texts are a trilogy with a closely knit message that is tied to the author's life and

journey. The texts capture Head's own life of poverty, rejection and alienation in both her country of birth, South Africa, and Botswana, her adopted home. I have shown that in her depiction of poverty, Head relies on utopian visions of outsider characters who spearhead a reconstruction of the societies they join. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, such vision is driven by Gilbert, who brings the people of Golema Mmidi together to work for the improvement of their lives, while in *A Question of Power*, a similarly visionary character appears, in the form of Eugene. In Head's life, she interacted with Patrick Van Rensburg, who is well known in Botswana for introducing his notion of 'education with production', and I argue here that Head uses his character in the two books to chronicle his vision of gathering people into cooperatives to help them escape poverty and hunger. Head writes extensively and enlighteningly about poverty and hunger, partly from personal experience and partly because most of those among whom she lived in Botswana were poor, but she is not the only Botswana writer to do so. Nevertheless Head set a standard of recognition of poor people's dignity and social worth as an example to writers who came after her.

Unity Dow, the Law, Poverty and Economic Disparities in Rural Botswana

As already mentioned, Unity Dow is an important player on the Botswana literary stage and her writings address harrowing experiences of poverty, oppression and discrimination. Gagiano in "Getting under the Skin of Power: the Novels of Unity Dow" (2004) concurs and further argues that "Unity Dow is an important new voice from Botswana, presenting penetrating analyses of her society as a writer deeply committed to the exposure of malpractices and the endorsement of worthwhile customs in her immediate context" (35). Her first book, *Far and Beyond* (2000), explicitly addresses the topic of poverty in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As Gagiano in the same essay observes, "texts like Dow's three novels nevertheless seem to fall into a special category of socially 'interactive' or even

‘activist’ writing” (37). This first text is a literary-social engagement with the dreaded HIV/AIDS epidemic and cultural prejudices against women and the girl child. Dow’s practical engagement with societal problems and challenges calls to mind Lara’s “illocutionary force” through which the author hopes to contribute to change. Lara’s belief in the “the capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalisation, exclusion and prejudice” (8), finds expression in Dow’s style of writing which exposes societal injustices that are often hidden in the silence of the oppressed or weak members of society. Dow’s texts therefore articulate these injustices by giving the poor and less powerful a voice to speak.

The text begins with the positive and hopeful moment of the birth of Mosa (short for Mosadi-woman) who is the first and only daughter born to a poor, single mother, Mara. The reader is then shown Mosa’s journey through life from girlhood to young womanhood as she analyses her own challenges and those experienced by her mother as a result of the patriarchal suppression of female members of the society. Gagliano writes that in the text “there is an almost relentless uncovering of layers of suppression, silencing or violation of female persons” (39). Through careful selection of male characters, Dow uncovers the unfairness of patriarchy in which violence against women and girls goes unpunished. When Mosa’s maternal uncle molests his young niece, the sexual harassment is not exposed, but instead the girl is sent away from home. Another uncle is known for “routinely battering” (36) his wife and he also goes unpunished and no action is taken to protect the victim. Mosa’s mother’s partner is also depicted as violently abusive as he attacks her (Mara), in a drunken bout of anger. After hearing his mother’s head repeatedly “banging against the concrete wall, like a cracking watermelon” (106), Mosa’s brother goes to his mother’s rescue by attacking the man with an axe. Mara’s first employer, Rra Pako, also physically abuses his wife and likes to sexually harass and fondle Mara, who is their domestic worker. Poverty is depicted here as

capability deprivation because of the “resilient tradition of explicit or implicit – sexism” (*Inequality Re-examined*, 113).

The text chronicles the cultural inequality that oppressed women while at the same time placing all the responsibility of raising children on them. Any man who has children with a woman, on the other hand, can pay “four cattle stipulated by custom and [carry] on with his life without so much as a glance back” (6). The story continues with revelations about Mosa’s mother, Mara, who loses her two elder sons to HIV/AIDS in quick succession and moves from one traditional doctor to the other in search of answers. The two sons die of a new ailment, AIDS, but their mother, Mara, is convinced that they have been bewitched. By looking desperately for answers, she exposes herself to exploitation and manipulation by the traditional doctors. As a poor woman, she has no access to modern medicine. Mara’s condition is vividly depicted in the opening pages:

She was poor and unmarried; her last partner was so abusive that she was happy when he took up with another woman and left her. She had a badly-paying maid’s job. She owned no cattle, no goats and as she was fond of saying, if she had an itch, she would have to use her teeth to scratch it as she had no tools to do even that. (8)

Poverty is depicted here as making Mara vulnerable to people with evil intentions who trick her into spending her already meagre salary on traditional doctors. She tells one of the “bone throwers”: “I am a poor woman with nothing for anyone to envy” (8). It is my reading of this text that by telling the bone thrower about the death of her two sons, Pule and Thabo, Mara gives the traditional doctor ammunition to convince her that someone is behind the death of the two young men. Mara complains to the traditional doctor about the death of Thabo who, she says, was “a first year student at the university and was very clever [and that she had]

hoped that one day [he] would help [her] get out of poverty” (9). The doctor answers that “someone can see that you will be out of the poverty soon and that someone has dark thoughts about you. She is now working against your future. Even your employer has had bad thoughts about you. I can see all of it here” (9). Mara falls for the explanation simply because she is desperately looking for answers as to why her sons had to die at such a young age and has lost hope of escaping poverty in the foreseeable future with the help of this formerly promising young man.

In Dow’s view, some traditional heallers see an opportunity to swindle poor, unsuspecting people of their hard-earned money, especially when they are desperate for help. One form of evil that Head, too, sees as obstructing progress and the fight against poverty and starvation is presented in Dow as ruthlessly exploitative people masquerading as traditional healers making the fight against the AIDS scourge very difficult, while at the same time further impoverishing those infected and affected. The desperation of indigent, AIDS-affected families are to them merely money-making opportunities.

Dow presents a picture of the double tragedy faced by Mara, who is not only poor but also affected by AIDS as her two sons finally succumb to the disease, shattering her dreams of ever living a better life. The damage caused by “the diviners” in Mara’s life is clearly shown as going beyond the “P600 [payment], the equivalent of two months’ salary for her” (80). Not only do they further impoverish her, but by sowing completely unwarranted distrust between Mara and her best friend, they destroy her most valuable friendship and deprive her of a support system. A combination of poverty and AIDS makes the situation unbearable, but Mara fights on and so do her remaining children, Mosa and Stan. Mara forges ahead despite having been reduced to “no more than a tiny bundle of dusty rags” (29). Almost reminiscent

of Head's heroines, the poverty stricken Mara gets stronger and stronger from her tragedies, the same way the protagonist Mosa, emerges stronger and more determined to succeed, after dropping out of school due to pregnancy.

After her compassionate leave, Mara is determined to take the "six kilometre walk that will take her from her poor household to the more affluent house of Mma-Sanki" (52), her employer. The vivid picture reminds one of the mud huts surrounding the mansion owned by Matenge in Head's text. Mara's every-day journey, of "leaving behind the poor, sad house and looking forward to her employer's lavish one" (50) demonstrates the wealth/poverty divide in the society, and the way the poverty of needy single women like Mara becomes useful to richer families. Poverty makes Mara available to do domestic work at a less than princely salary, and leaves her no choice but to do 'dirty work' without grumbling. As a result of the situation Mara sometimes falls prey to the male employers' lust.

Mara watches as her oldest son withers away because of AIDS. In an effort to find answers, she is alienated from her best friend, Lesedi, because the traditional doctor tells Mara that Lesedi is the cause of her suffering. The special friendship that the two share is destroyed, as Lesedi is also told that Mara is the one who is bewitching her daughter. The two women were "both poor. Poor only in material things, that is. But they were rich in love and kindness" (159). The traditional doctors' pronouncements push the two friends away from each other, when they needed to be close and to hold hands during such very difficult times, depriving them in their poverty even of that "rich" resource of love, trust and sharing.

Unlike her mother, who resorts to traditional healers for answers to her problems, Mosa confronts her challenges head on and wants to fulfil her uncle Rich's prophecy that she will

go “far and beyond” (66). Mosa is determined not to be like her mother and does not want to be a “tired, gaunt, poor woman with five children living in a hot box and she knew that was herself as she would be in ten years, unless she got back to school” (32). Mara’s family (which was drifting apart following the death of the two brothers) also sought reconciliation amongst themselves in order to deal more effectively with their challenges.

On top of grieving for her departed sons, Mara has to worry about the lives of her remaining children; Stan who is said to have “constantly shuttled between poverty and plenty” because he lives mostly with an American teacher at his school (55), and Mosa who (her mother believes) is “young and confused” (55). The text illuminates how a rift deepens among the family members as the tragedies facing them unfold. Stan goes to stay with his teacher Mr Mitchell, while Mosa has to learn the hard way about the risks involved in unwise practices such as unprotected sex. After falling for a police constable and becoming pregnant Mosa has to pick up the pieces and reclaim her dream. Dogged determination allows her to return to school and attain excellent results despite being harassed by teachers such as Mr Merake who torments students demanding sexual favours. Mosa refuses and manages to fend off the teacher’s advances and concentrate on her school work, determined to emerge from poverty and obscurity and to go “far and beyond”.

Unity Dow, like Head, highlights the plight of women and girls in a poverty stricken and disease prone environment. Here women and girls are exposed to sexual abuse every day, which also makes them more vulnerable to HIV infection, but Dow presents strong women and girls who fight back against such abuse. Mosa is in the end free of HIV and the close relationship that she once shared with her brother Stan is restored, while her mother also rekindles her special relationship with her friend Lesedi, partly because of Mosa’s

intervention. This demonstrates that like the people of Golema Mmidi who suffered at the hands of the chiefs until they got together and presented a united force, the restoration of unity in the family allows them to override the beliefs of witchcraft and to escape the death trap. AIDS in Dow's text affects the poor more than the rich, as shown by the deaths of Pule, Thabo and Cecilia, all of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poverty is presented as a catalyst for the spread of AIDS, while experiences of poverty are depicted as a harrowing occurrence. Traditional beliefs remain a challenge, as it makes it difficult for people to accept that their children are dying of AIDS and not witchcraft, and Dow shows that these beliefs negatively affect progress in the fight against AIDS¹⁴. Dow's next text, *The Screaming of the Innocent*, deals extensively with the topic of poverty within patriarchal set up where women and children are vulnerable to rich and powerful men. In her next text, Dow tells the story of the ritual murder of children who are kidnapped and killed for purposes of muti collection. The practice is portrayed as being enacted mainly by rich and powerful men from urban areas and as being inflicted on poor people from rural parts of Botswana. The text evokes the victim's refusal to go quietly and to be silenced, which is a common theme across all the texts discussed here.

The Screaming of the Innocent

Early on in the text, the reader encounters a description of a woman who is married to a rich man and as a result presents an appearance that is envied by the many poverty stricken members of her community. Rosina is envied by her friends "for her professionally braided hair; each braiding cost P250, which was equivalent to the monthly wage of a housemaid. They envied her for her ballooning, brightly coloured Ghanaian outfits and fancy matching headscarves"(1). The other women in the community who were not as 'lucky' as she was to

¹⁴ For Unity Dow and Max Essex's detailed depiction of Botswana's success story of keeping citizens healthy through the distribution of free anti-retroviral drugs, see *Saturday is for Funerals* (2010).

be married to rich men like Mr Disanka can only watch the likes of Rosina in envy. Nevertheless Dow is quick to show that, even though Rosina enjoyed the comfort, she had to contend with the evil that comes with the riches, such as adultery. Mr Disanka is on the first page captured ogling a young girl – a future victim. Even as the text purports to present Mr Disanka as a good person, it also ridicules him by exposing the evil that he does. Disanka is reminiscent of both chief Matenge in his ruthlessness and paramount chief Sekoto in Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* in believing that by issuing a few hand-outs, he is a good chief, since he also seeks to cover up his actions through a few acts of philanthropy. The text establishes how Disanka uses his wealth to exploit the poor and keep numerous mistresses: "Occasionally, he returned to an old mistress and enjoyed a few weeks, sometimes months, of intimacies. During those weeks and months, the mother and the children had extra food and for an especially lucky child, perhaps even a new pair of shoes" (3). The narrator's sarcasm about such meagre charity towards the exploited and dependent is evident in this description.

Like Paramount Chief Sekoto, who built a few schools for the poor and sought to use this fact to justify injustices and prejudices he held against the poor, Mr Disanka builds a school "for the poor children" (6). The conflict and struggle for power between Mr Bokae (dubbed "Little chief"; "Sub Chief"; "Not Quite Chief" (11) and "the real Chief" (12), I argue, becomes the pre-occupation of the two leaders to the total neglect of pressing issues such as fighting poverty. The power struggle is also evident between the headmaster Mr Lotsane Mosi and his deputy, Mr Molatedi Sebaki, who ultimately takes over the reins following the death of the former. This tension between leaders recalls the envy of Matenge against his brother the Paramount Chief Sekoto in *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

The text tells a story of the mysterious disappearance of a young girl who is later found to have been murdered for muti or traditional medicine. Charlanne Burke in “They cut Segametsi into Parts: Ritual Murder, Youth and the Politics of Knowledge in Botswana” explains the phenomenon and introduces “two witchcraft realms” (205):

Boloji in which an individual manipulates materials for personal gain or harms someone, and dipheko, or ritual murder. Dipheko is technically not witchcraft since it is the process of procuring human body parts through murder to make into medicine to do witchcraft. (205)

As indicated in the explanation, after the murder, the body parts of the victims are used to make traditional medicine, also known as muti in Southern Africa. Burke indicates that the topic of ritual murder has been the subject of many studies in other disciplines such as Anthropology and History. Comaroff and Comaroff in *Modernity and its Malcontents* (1993) observe thus about witchcraft: “[I]ts occurrence is explicable only with reference to ... the ways in which, in specific contexts, it permits the allocation of responsibility for, and demands action upon, palpable human inequalities and misfortunes” (205). Burke quotes Geschiere in yet another study as noting “witchcraft’s ability to combine the local and the global (811), as new forms of wealth are shared by so few but desired by many” (205). Dow’s texts however indicate that those who resort to witchcraft and *dipheko* are often those who are already rich and are driven by greed to acquire more. In Dow’s text the sovereigns literally kill their victims as opposed to using other oppressive mechanisms captured in other texts such as the oppressive cultural practices in Namibian texts. The evidence from Dow’s texts further shows that even though economic inequalities exist, it is not the poor who resort to such measures as ritual murder, but rather the rich who then exploit the poor into assisting them. To say the poor are often manipulated into conniving with the rich is not to say their

actions are justifiable, and the author puts such poor people in stark contrast with their fellow poor members of the society who remain focused on legal means of earning a living.

Dow uses a young girl on National Service to lead an uprising of the villagers, demanding answers to this murder. The evil perpetuated by the sovereigns against the ordinary people runs through the text as the man sarcastically introduced as a “good father, husband, lover and businessman” (5) is shown actually to be an evil person who takes part in the gruesome murder of a pre-teen girl whom he follows and watches over time before the murder takes place. Dow presents the everyday struggles of the ordinary people who live in poverty but uphold moral uprightness, while some rich people (who have everything) engage in evil ways of acquiring even more wealth. The power of the rich over the poor is captured in the manipulation of a sickly, old, poor man, Rra- Naso, who is enticed through gifts, into taking part in the murder. In his tape-recorded confession, Rra-Naso declares:

He promised me five goats if I found him a hairless lamb, a child with no sins yet. He said he wanted a girl who hadn't yet had her first period and who hadn't been with a man yet. I'm a poor man, a weak man. And I didn't want to do it but he came many, many times; many nights, he came. He brought food. I was afraid to say no to his food: you can't say no to people like that. He was asking me but he wasn't asking me – he was ordering me. One time, he brought a bag of sugar and milk, and tea, and a dress for my wife. Then in winter he brought a blanket. Still I said no. And I was afraid – very afraid. Then he brought a goat. This was at Christmas, and we killed, and we had lots of meat. And when we ate it, I knew I couldn't say no to him anymore. When he left, he said, 'four more will come'. Goats – I mean 'four goats'. (209)

The confession of Rra-Naso shows the predicament that the old man faces, having to deal with poverty on the one hand and avoiding evil, or having to embrace evil and get relief from poverty on the other hand. The text provides a nuanced picture of the experiences of poverty,

with some people like Rra-Naso succumbing to temptation and allowing themselves to be manipulated by rich members of the society. In the text, Dow does not absolve Rra-Naso from wrong-doing, however, because there are many other members of the community who live in poverty but do not resort to crime, though we are shown that it is poverty that makes rra-Naso/ easy to intimidate. The emphasis on the fear that the old man was suffering, I suggest, illustrates cowardice and lack of courage on his part in a society where the majority of the ordinary people gallantly face difficult struggles with poverty. Like Matenge in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the old man commits suicide as the community demands justice for the murder of the innocent child.

The sovereigns in the text exercise power over the poor to the extent of taking an innocent life and then manipulating the legal system to protect themselves from the law. The group which comprises Disanka, the businessman; Sebaki, the headmaster; headman Bokae and the Minister for Safety and Security, collude to kill the child and then defeat the ends of justice. Justice is not delivered but at least approached when the masses revolt in a manner similar to that of the people of Golema Mmidi. The text ends by proclaiming that “the old man had resorted to death in order to silence not the rattling in his chest but the screaming of an innocent child” (215). The proclamation buttresses the argument I make in this section, that most of the poor and powerless portrayed by Dow refuse to succumb to their indigence and merely remain helpless, but instead rise to the occasion and garner dignity and justice through remorse. This theme is carried further in Dow’s next text, *Juggling Truths*, which explores in detail the struggles of a young girl growing up in rural Botswana during the period preceding independence in Botswana.

Juggling Truths

The theme of poverty runs through this text as Monei Ntuka tells the story of her childhood. The peace in the small village where people have adapted well to poverty is occasionally disturbed by “young men, donning the latest style hats and strutting like proud cockerels would arrive from the gold mines in South Africa” (3). This representation of a new money economy is juxtaposed to an agricultural economy. Monei affectionately describes the agricultural economy: “the fields would be green with promise and different types of wild spinach and berries would be flourishing everywhere. We, the children, would eat, run errands and play; eat, run errands and play” (3). In the description above, the environment is not as harsh as described in the other texts, because in this case the good climatic conditions lead to good yields, before the peace and harmony of the old economy is undermined by the new economy.

The society in this text is presented as poor relative to the new economy – where strange things like a “big hole dug into the earth in Gaborone where white people ... could swim” (22) are observed. The description of a swimming pool as a big hole on the ground points to its strangeness to the community. The society begins to realise their poverty, because new institutions like the school provides different food than what they are used to; “the school would provide bread, canned pilchards, oranges and even Cool-aid for a lunch break” (23). The disparities in the different lifestyles between the majority of people and the working class are vividly captured in the description of the diets and living conditions of the two groups:

Teachers had eggs and liver and bread for breakfast. They had a communal tap from which they fetched water pumped there from a borehole situated just outside the school compound. Teachers used pit latrines while almost everybody else used the bushes next to the river as

toilets. So teachers did not have *motogo* [porridge] for breakfast, or at least that was what we all thought. (25)

Poverty in this text is portrayed as becoming discernible with the advent of new and foreign foods and practices. The villagers are then made to look down upon their own foods and envy those eating the new diet. The doubt expressed at the end of the above citation suggests that the situation may not be as straightforward as it seems and not all those absorbed by the new economy would afford the kind of lifestyle associated with their class in the same way, as poverty affects the poor in different ways.

The text tells the story of a young woman who rises from poverty and from difficult conditions to excel in her education to escape abject poverty. Dow reiterates the theme of resilience, courage and perseverance in the wake of poverty as the protagonist, Monei, moves from bathing “with limited facilities...[where] occasionally, there was a bit of Vaseline to oil [her] constantly dry skin” (24) to a better life abroad where she goes to further her studies. Monei did not give up but fought for a better life even though she was surrounded by poverty and lack of ambition. The text encourages hard work; while Kabusu is described as poor and “walking on barefoot” (35), his condition is blamed on his laziness: “there is a lazy man! Won’t make himself the poorest pair of sandals” (35). The lack of initiative by the poor man is criticised here as demonstrating what Head calls a “terrible mindlessness” about poverty. Kabusu does not seem to want to seek creative solutions to his problem. The text also deals with the power struggles in the community which take attention away from pressing issues of basic survival. This theme is at the centre of Dow’s third novel, *The Heavens May Fall* (not discussed here) – which addresses the battle by ordinary, powerless people for their rights, which are being trampled upon by powerful and rich members of their community.

Moteane Melamu: Dedication to Survival

I begin my discussion of the third writer in this chapter by citing the Chorus of Women of Canterbury in TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* which Melamu uses to introduce his short story collection *Living and Partly Living: Short Stories* (1996):

There have been oppression and luxury,
There have been poverty and licence,
There have been minor injustice.

(Chorus of Women of Canterbury in TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (v))

In this segment I turn my attention to urban poverty as depicted by Moteane Melamu in his collection of short stories. The epigraph above introduces the short story collection as well as the author's focus on the everyday struggles of ordinary poor people whom he evokes as continuing with their lives despite harsh conditions. The striking caption from T. S Eliot, is followed by the author's telling dedication: "[t]hese stories are dedicated to the mothers of Africa who toil to make the lives of their children bearable in extremely trying circumstances". Born in the township of Sophiatown (South Africa) during the apartheid era, Melamu (like others of his generation of writers, Mongane Serote Wally Serote and Ezekiel Mphahlele) is concerned about poverty and the hardships that black South Africans faced due to the discriminatory laws of the apartheid regime. Despite his movement to Botswana, Melamu uses South African township dialects to add humour to his stories about the anguish of the lives of ordinary people in his adopted country of Botswana. Comparing Melamu's writing to Mbulelo Mzamane's "A Present for my Wife", Cecil Abrahams concludes that:

The same subject [that is addressed in Mzamane's text] is treated in a more serious and devastating way by Moteane Melamu. What makes Melamu's story particularly intriguing is the manner in which he uses the language of the ghettos. In one sentence the speaker is able to combine English, Afrikaans and a black language without difficulty. (108)

Abrahams captures the author's careful and often intricate use of language to give the poor and oppressed a voice to answer back at their tormentors. As I will show in my discussion of Melamu's text, his stories are often told from the perspective of the poor and told in the language of the ghettos which is a mix of more than one language. Tumi Thiba in a foreword to *The Unweeded Garden and Other Stories* (2006), also alludes to Melamu's use of language: "The gem of this third collection lies in the author's ability to infuse local dialect with impeccable use of English" (vii). This statement is also true of Melamu's first collection of stories *Children of the Twilight* (1987), which includes humorous stories such as the "Two Penny a Life" which are mostly based in South Africa. For purposes of this study, I will concentrate on his second collection of stories, *Living and Partly Living*, because of its focus on poverty.

The first story in the collection, "Betrayal", captures life in a poor neighbourhood of Peleng in the town of Lobatse. As a result of poverty, the area is associated only with bad things as the inhabitants of the more affluent sections of the town wonder "can anything good come out of Peleng?" (1). The narrator further reveals that "Peleng was associated with everything which the civil servants regarded as inferior" (1). The poor are looked down upon here as their area is also stigmatised. The author however adds a twist to the story through Thapelo Molosiwa, in whom, it is stated that "Peleng could rightly boast that something good had at last come out of its squalor" (1). Despite the poverty that surrounded him, as he was raised by a father who is shown to be a drunkard, Thapelo graduates "from the University of Botswana

with a first-class degree in Economics” (1). The success of the young Molosiwa earns his father bragging rights as he boasts to his peers about his son’s education in this epic story of a rise from rags to riches. The story depicts Thapelo’s rise “to the rank of Deputy Director of Economic Affairs” (3) within five years of his career as an economist with the ministry of finance. With everything going well for him, the protagonist marries Difiedile, a nursing educator who is also doing well in her career. The couple who are wise and financially prudent, however, disappoint their parents when they decide to marry at the district commissioner without a big ceremony as was expected: “Thapelo’s economist mind has convinced him that the big Gaborone social events which passed for weddings were nothing but a waste of money” (3). The decision not to splash the money and opt for a cheaper ceremony suggests a deep knowledge and awareness about the money economy. The story however is more than just about a rise from rags to riches as it also shows that there are other social skills that one needs in order to survive in life. The young protagonist’s happy marriage and the success story are put to the test by the arrival in the picture of a refugee woman, Maki.

Thapelo meets Maki after his wife leaves the country to go abroad to study and for the duration of her absence, “Thapelo and Maki were inseparable” (16). Upon the return of the wife, Maki dies and rumour has it that she died of AIDS while words reaches Difiedile’s ears that her husband has been cheating on her with the same woman who has died of AIDS. This puts a rift between the two and it drives Thapelo to committing suicide. The story illustrates that after escaping poverty, Thapelo fails to live up to the high expectations of his parents as well as those of his community. The pride of the Peleng community in the end conforms to the stereotype that nothing good can come out of the squalor of the township. He ends up resorting to alcohol abuse like his father and I argue that the text seeks to indicate that the

struggle to break off the chains of poverty and self-destruction is a life-long struggle. As it exalts Thapelo's hard work and rise from poverty, the text also warns of the temptations and challenges that lie on the way for all human beings; rich or poor.

It is my contention that some of the challenges and temptations are brought by greed and the love for power which is dramatised in the next short story, "No game for boys". In this story an uneducated man, Simon, rises from a messenger position to the high position of "Chief Immigration Officer" in the Ministry of Home Affairs due to hard work. He boasts that "one didn't need to be a university graduate to rise to the top in Government. All one needed was sheer determination, ambition and 'grey matter'" (37). All the hard work is however undone when "[a]fter twenty years' of service, Simon [is] summarily dismissed from his job.... [due to] some shady schemes to do with issuing residence permits illegally for a fee" (37). Even after his dismissal, Simon is still wealthy, with a house and cattle, but his greed is insatiable. His friend Ike exploits this to pull Simon into the dark world of ritual murder, apparently conducted to give him powers as he enters the difficult terrain of politics. The story ends tragically as he comes to the sad realization that the boy who was killed to "make [him] a man" (49) is his brother's son. Yet again a successful man loses everything due to an insatiable appetite for, this time, more power and riches. He is arrested alongside the traditional doctor and his friend Ike. This serves as another example of the 'self-perpetuating' effect of oppressive power, because after breaking the law to acquire his wealth, Simon gets away with it but he comes back for more and this time he gets punished.

In a humorous piece called "The First Lady", Melamu chronicles the life of a wealthy couple who imitate white people and copy their culture. The story is told from the perspective of a house maid who observes the behaviour of her employer who insists on being called

“madam”. The author gives the servant a voice and a chance to critique the behaviour of her employer and by telling the story from the perspective of the servant, the author allows for a carefree analysis and commentary, reflecting the maid’s views of her ‘madam’. The narrator introduces herself as “a poor country girl from Thamaga [a village]” (106) who works for a widow whose “late husband has left her a lot of money” (106). The difference in wealth seems to be the cause of the disparity in the outlook to life and the reason why the ‘madam’ has a confused identity. In her critique of her employer’s behaviour, the narrator wonders why “a widow who lives on her own... [would build] a big house with five bed rooms... [and even have] what she calls the family-room” (106). The story takes the reader on a journey through the life of “madam” and “master” when the man, Rre Pholo, is appointed ambassador to the United Kingdom. The author by assigning Rre Pholo a diplomatic post suggests an autobiographical element to the story, as the author himself was once Botswana’s Ambassador to the United States of America and High Commissioner to Zambia. The similarity between the author (a university professor) and the character are also captured in the description of Rre Pholo “the master” as educated and “a great one for books” (107). The description of the “madam” is less courteous: “[s]he thinks her Junior Certificate makes her better than some of us with only Standard Six” (108). The narrator shows a lot of respect for the “master” and she seems to believe that his death was caused by his wife who forces him to behave like a true master (of colonial times). An example of this is provided in the vivid description of the couple when they go to pay a courtesy call on the Queen:

You see, the woman really lived it up while she was what she called the ‘First Lady of the Embassy’, whatever that means. You should have seen her the day she and her husband went to Buckingham Palace to give some papers to Queen Elizabeth...Modimo![God] Did she preen herself? This face of hers was so heavily painted that it was difficult to know whether she was a Motswana or not. And as for Rre Pholo, leave it! He was dressed in this funny-looking long jacket split in the middle at the back

and a white tie on a funny stiff collar. There is a photo of him dressed like that on the wall here in the study. Now, whenever I feel like a good laugh I just look at it. It's too funny! (108)

In the above quotation, the author mocks the new black middle class who in their quest to justify their belonging to the same class as former colonisers, allows their wealth to cloud their imagination and confuse their identity. Wealth is depicted here as some kind of disease that makes people behave in a strange way while poverty is depicted as something that assists in keeping one's feet firmly on the ground as the poor remain in touch with reality and humanity.

The narrator's disapproval is further marked by the description of her employer as behaving "like the Queen of England. Nose in the air all the time, as if ... lesser folks smell" (106). Wealth seems to be causing the 'madam' to act in a strange way and to do things that the narrator fails to understand like having a "family room" while she does not have a family. I argue here that the character of the 'madam' (and to some extent her husband) is used by the author to critique the post-colonial black elites who shun their own people: "[madam] wouldn't make friends with other black people. She wanted only white friends, and their own ways of doing things she [madam] copied some of the ugly things of the English people" (109). In an effort to prove that she belongs to a superior class, 'madam' squanders her husband's money through endless trips to the shops. Despite her lavish lifestyle, 'madam' in the story is pitied by the narrator who concludes that "what heavy things Madam's heart must bear...Poor woman. Shame. Perhaps I've misunderstood her. But why can't she be herself? Why must she live this lie? Hey, the things we poor people see"! (118). The last part of this quotation, suggests that madam's behaviour is common among the rich and the poor often have to live with it but also see through the facades of the rich. Melamu continues with his technique of allowing the subaltern to speak in the next short story that I discuss.

The next short story in the collection; “The waif”, follows the life of a street child who from a young age has to fend for himself. Throughout the twentieth century writers across the world have dealt with the topic of street children as a growing concern but these interventions are usually done from the perspective of adults, leaving out children’s voices. In instances where children are made to tell their own stories, critics have questioned the accuracy of the recollections with some arguing that adult voices still dominate such stories. To mitigate against these, Melamu contrives the story so that it is told by a social worker who is amazed by the agility portrayed by the boy popularly known as “Bashi” [a derogatory term for ‘street kid’] whose real name is “Tshotlego” [hardship or poverty]. The author uses the two names to let the reader know early in the story of the disrespectful attitude to which Bashi was subjected even by his mother (who did not want him and did not have any plans for having a child when she did) and by the rich members of his community.

In his everyday struggle for survival, Bashi is ridiculed by the “*nouveaux riches* who live in that part of Gaborone which was variously known as ‘Engelane’, because the inhabitants spoke English all the time, or ‘Tshaba Ntsha’ as a result of the ‘Beware of the dog’ signs outside the thick walls barricading the wealthy from the poorer sections of the capital” (155). The author depicts the economic (class) disparities of post-colonial Gaborone and shows that the rich live in opulence while the poor have very little. This stark contrast between affluence and indigence echoes the economic success of Botswana, which has come with new challenges of what Henry George calls “poverty in wealth” (cited in de Mille 543-555), as some sections of the populations grow richer as the countries prosper, while the poor get poorer.

This chapter argues that this phenomenon of poverty amidst plenty arouses feelings of anger amongst the poor who believe they have every right to have a share of the wealth. Bashi after stealing from the shops, defends his actions; “What do they expect me to do? I was hungry. Don’t they know that I too have to live? Anyway they have so much in Engelane, I didn’t think they’d even notice one missing loaf of bread” (155). The author shows however that this anger is not always justifiable, as I hope to show in my discussion of this story that there are instances where the reader cannot but feel pity for Bashi, but there are other instances where sympathy turns to anger against the boy. The use of Engelane [England] to refer to the rich suburbs points to the author’s argument that links poverty to the adoption of western capitalist practices of individual ownership (as opposed to communal ownership in the rural areas) and competition. In Melamu’s urban setting, Bashi suffers the effects of poverty and neglect with no relatives to turn to, because family ties have been cut in the city:

At a very tender age, Bashi had learnt to scrounge around for morsels in order to survive. He’d initially depended on the charity and kindness of neighbours. But no one could continue indefinitely feeding another woman’s child while she raised not a finger herself to do anything for her own flesh and blood. No Bashi had learned very early to fend for himself. (160)

Melamu tackles the issue of street children and ushers his readers into the mind of a street child whose thoughts and struggles are observed and followed by a social worker. Through Bashi, the author continues his critique of ‘pseudo modernists’ who are described as more mean than white capitalists. Bashi tells the narrator that “you are different from the others. All they know is to drive around in their big, shining cars and speak English as if they don’t know Setswana. They won’t even give a hungry boy a single thebe” (156).

The anger in Bashi, is further projected in the story as he is annoyed by “seeing the Engelane people on Saturday afternoon, driving their overfed and over-dressed children to the Capitol Cinema. He’d be there outside the cinema hoping that some good Samaritan would spare him a twenty thebe piece to enable him to see one of his favourite kung fu films” (156). Through Bashi, Melamu offers an insightful social commentary and political observation from the point of view of the poor and oppressed who are ignored and silenced most of the time. I argue that this is an indication of Melamu’s use of the illocutionary power of the story to register the views of a street child which are usually estimated and summarised by adults. Bashi insists that the rich have to share their wealth with the poor and this attitude is vividly captured in the following incident:

With mounting resentment he’d watch the children from Engelane stuffing themselves with ice cream and Bar–One chocolates. If they could afford such luxuries, Bashi would reason, surely they could afford to give him twenty thebe he desperately needed. Summoning up courage, he’d accost one of them. Heela, monna ntlhabe ka twenty thebe hoo.’ (Hey, man, let me have a twenty thebe.) The fat little boy would stare at Bashi with eyes which looked as if they were about to jump out of their sockets. When he’d finally find his tongue, he’d shout: ‘Tloga fa, you dirty thing,’ and walk away from the impertinent street child. That Bashi couldn’t take. He’d shout at the bloated rude creature: ‘Nka go fothla ka klapa gone jaanong’ (I feel like slapping your face.) The fat boy would quickly disappear into the relative security of the cinema, safe from the wrath of Bashi. (157)

The above encounter between Bashi and a rich boy demonstrates the former’s insistence on fending for himself and for demanding a better life and respect from the rich. Bashi refuses to be abused by the rich and answers back and threatens the rich boy with violence. Bashi’s resolve to stand up for himself makes him a regular customer at the police station where he is always given a few strokes even before he is listened to. Bashi’s anger here is justified because it is a response to the abuse by the rich boy but his punishment at the police station

(even though grossly unfair) is a constant reminder to Bashi that wrong behaviour is wrong no matter who indulges in it. Even though the rich get away with their abuse of Bashi, the author in an effort to avoid romanticising the courage of the street kid shows him as being held accountable for his actions. The story clearly illustrates that Bashi should not get away with wrong-doing simply because he is poor, but rather that he should be treated fairly and if he is punished, those who abuse him should also be taken to task.

The narrator reveals the ignorance that is common among the more privileged members of Bashi's community about the realities of poverty as a station commander asks Bashi "why aren't you at school" (158). The station commander's ignorance of the plight of street children is further exposed when he asks Bashi whether he lives at home when it is obvious that a street child lives on the streets. The policeman is ridiculed here by exposing his ignorance when he asks questions, whose answers the narrator believes should be obvious to him. Bashi on the other hand, is depicted as more knowledgeable and ready to educate his more senior interlocutor. This episode is, once again, Melamu's social commentary suggesting that more often than not, society does not fully understand the poor, especially children, because they do not listen to them. Normally when Bashi comes to the police station he is just whipped without being questioned first but this question – answer session with the police chief, reveals the learning opportunities that are lost in silencing him.

Despite these trials and tribulations, Bashi soldiers on and seeks ways of surviving. As the narrator puts it: "[a]dversity...is the mother of resourcefulness. Bashi somehow managed to devise all sorts of ploys to survive" (160). He begins by offering "his services to shoppers who wished to have their heavy purchases carried to their cars" (161), but some abuse him and do not want to pay and he decides to change and try something else. His next move is to

move from one house to another in the rich area of Engelane begging, as he is “naive enough to think that when the rich ones saw a little poor boy they would feel compassionate and give freely” (161). Even though he sometimes succeeds in getting food, “in some places he’d have vicious dogs set on him by irate pot-bellied men who seemed to resent seeing poverty” (161). The text here explicitly delineates how some rich people shun the poor and look down upon them. The resentment is further demonstrated by an encounter between Bashi and a girl his age:

But [N]othing undermines one’s dignity more than being consistently referred to as a beggar. One afternoon Bashi got to this house, his stomach rumbling with hunger pangs. A girl about his age came to the door. He told her he was hungry and needed something to eat. She looked him over, contempt written all over her face. Even at her age she knew that Bashi was different from her. ‘Mma!’ she called over her shoulder, ‘mosimane wa mokopi are o batla dijo.’ (Mummy, here’s a beggar boy asking for food.) (161)

This extract vividly describes how the poor are shunned and how the negative attitude towards the poor is passed from the parents to their children through the process of child socialisation. The narrator bemoans that the girl in the above quotation has already been taught to look down upon the poor. She uses derogatory terms such as ‘beggar’ and she “mockingly [sticks] out her tongue at [Bashi]” (162), but the answer as to why she behaves like this is provided in the description of the girl’s mother as “an older version of the daughter: a short, fat woman” (162). The woman like her daughter shows no respect for Bashi and belittles him. Despite the depressing encounter Bashi takes up a ‘piece job’ in the woman’s garden even though he knows nothing about gardening. To illustrate the abuse of the boy by the rich family the narrator says “[a]t the end of the day he was given twenty-five thebe and fired” (162).

To further illustrate Bashi's resourcefulness, the story follows his struggle for survival as he employs one tactic after another without giving up. His next encounter is with an American couple who hire him to "clean the car and generally keep the yard as tidy as a boy his age could" (163). After two weeks of working for the Americans, Bashi's woes come back to haunt him when he takes a transmitter radio home, thinking that it was given to him: "the young fellow misinterpreted this gesture and took it that he was meant to keep the radio" (163). This misinterpretation lands him in trouble with the police and costs him the job as he is accused of stealing the radio. Following the radio episode, Bashi learns that his mother Matlhodi earns a living from prostitution, but he does not fully understand what this entails except that "it was frowned upon by the law" (164).

The story chronicles the resilience and agility of street children who defy difficult conditions to survive. The narrator concludes that "Bashi would never be caught with his pants down – or rarely was. There was a myriad ways of making money out of the inhabitants of Engelane and he always found a way of sharing their wealth with him" (166-7). Bashi's journey is temporarily interrupted by an uprising by residents of Bontleng who throw stones at passing vehicles to protest against the disappearance of a child. The poor people of Bontleng, like their counterparts in the previous texts discussed in this chapter, confront their rich and powerful counterparts about their evil deeds; "the wrath of Bontleng was turned against the people of Engelane" (165). The rich here are once again accused of kidnapping a child from a poor family, in a suspected ritual murder case. Bashi is caught in the middle of the onslaught on cars and he gets a lashing for his part in the "shattering of windscreens and the crashing of rock on metal" (166). The residents of Bontleng vent their anger at the economic disparities between the rich of Engelane and the poor who like Bashi remember "all the humiliation [they have] suffered in Engelane" (166).

To further illustrate Bashi's 'never say die attitude', the narrator shows how Bashi rises from the bed as he recovers from his latest beating to pursue another effort to earn a living. After being told he is too young to carry golf bags at the Gaborone Golf Club Bashi returns to the dust-bins to search for food. Although the rejection at the Golf Club represents yet another move by the rich to shun his poverty, he is launched into his next job by a white man who asks him to wash his car and pays him. While washing people's cars, Bashi experiences difficulties too because some people refuse to pay him. The boy however refuses to be exploited (like the poor who are often exploited by the rich) and resorts to instant "punitive action: deflate two or three tyres, and sit at a vantage point to observe [his victim] trying to jack up the car while cursing the author of his misery" (168). Bashi's efforts at avenging the abuse from his non-paying customers, sometimes gets him into trouble as some of the people continue their violence against the poor boy.

As already illustrated the story showcases Bashi's survival skills in the face of poverty, hunger and alienation. The street child's agility is nowhere better expressed than in the water pipe episode: "He'd discovered that running through the Island dividing the parking lot near the British Council building was a water pipe. How he did it was difficult to tell, but he succeeded in getting at the pipe and piercing a hole in it. From then on he had an unlimited reservoir" (169). Even though he gets into trouble with the law, Bashi is adamant he needs water to wash the cars in order to survive and he tells the station commander that he does not know anything about licences let alone what the word means. All Bashi is concerned about is earning a living. After getting a beating Bashi goes straight back to washing cars glad that the police officer did not confiscate his money. He remains cheerful and enterprising.

When the bigger boys push him out of business after realising he was making more money than they were (at the Golf Club), his last hope is rehabilitation under a government program. The story ends on an optimistic note with Bashi looking forward to a better future where “he would have a name. And not simply remain Bashi” (172). The author argues that the poor should not be denied their identity and individuality and be grouped as ‘the poor’. I argue here that the fight against poverty is also a fight to have a place in society and a fight for recognition and respect. Melamu’s short stories also show that (as Jeppesen argues) “people living in poverty become criminalised, objects of targeted policing [and they become] automatic suspects” (488) when there is a crime that has been committed. Bashi is always a suspect at the police station because he is street child.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in the texts from Botswana, poverty is portrayed as a complex phenomenon that transcends binaries based on gender, class and race. The portrayal of poverty is linked to the exercise of sovereignty by the chiefs and other rich and powerful members of society. I have shown by means of examples from the texts that, even though the ‘sovereigns’ have power and are rich, they still seek ways of consolidating their power and wealth while at the same time defeating efforts by the poor to uplift themselves. In portraying poverty, the authors hence demonstrate the extent to which it is intertwined with wealth and how the lives of the poor interact with and are affected by those of the wealthy. This richly complex contextualisation and experiential perspective is the knowledge contribution of literature to our understanding of poverty.

The exercise of power by the sovereign varies from exclusion of the poor from economic activity (in Head and Melamu) to the literal killing of the poor and weak in Dow’s texts.

Religion which is not institutionalised (as is in the texts discussed in the first chapter) is portrayed as playing a more positive role in transforming the community even though there are still those who see a business opportunity as people become more vulnerable due to challenges such as poverty and diseases. Melamu tackles the poverty in an urban setting, showing clear economic disparities among city dwellers. These disparities lead to modern problems such as street children, crime and squatting, which are addressed extensively in the next chapter on literary depiction of poverty in post-colonial Zimbabwean texts.

Chapter Three: Urban Poverty in Selected Zimbabwean Texts

Our hopes will die if we continue to see children dying every day and the cattle licking the soil as if it contains salt. We have learnt that we must free our people from poverty. Poverty is worse than war, they say. You can stop war through talking. You can't stop poverty through talking. So we must fight with all we have so that our people cannot continue to be buried in this ant-hill of poverty. (Hove 71)

The previous chapter discussed literary depictions of poverty from Botswana while the one before it focused on how texts from Namibia deal with the issue of indigence. It became clear during the discussions of the two national literatures that most of the texts focused on representations of poverty in a rural setting during the colonial era and the period immediately after independence. On the one hand, the Namibian texts traced the imposition of the money economy by colonial masters showing how this affected the lives of natives and plunged them into poverty. Bessie Head and Unity Dow on the other hand (in the Botswana context) explored how traditional rulers colluded with colonial powers to dispossess and disempower their own people. Moteane Melamu concluded the previous chapter and provided a link to this chapter with an introduction of the ordinary people's struggles with poverty in an urban setting where family ties that act as a cushion against poverty in the rural settings have been cut. In these two chapters the conclusion was that the authors seek to represent ordinary people's struggles with poverty and to show that amidst the grand narratives of either colonization or liberation, the masses strive to live meaningful lives, despite the often very difficult circumstances in which they find themselves.

As shown in the introductory chapter, Mikhail Bakhtin has identified the power of the novel to capture the varieties of speech that he calls 'heteroglossia'. Raditlhalo (2005) defines heteroglossia as "a dialogic process through which any claim to monolithic truth – as exemplified by politicians and their sycophants in one social institution – is shown up by contrasting it with another point of view in which no 'truth' is unproblematized" (172). The

texts I discuss manage to capture all the conversations between characters under different circumstances. Of more relevance to my study is Bakhtin's notion of dialogism in which he observes that, "a particular language in a novel is a particular way of viewing the world" (51). Cates Baldrige in *The Dialogics of Dissent in the English Novel* (1994) explains the concept further:

Whenever a character in a novel speaks, he or she reveals a perspective on reality shaped by concrete cultural factors such as class, occupation, gender, or generation, meaning that when fictional persons interact, what really come into proximity and often into conflict are the various self-interested and partial descriptions of the social system they articulate. (174)

In this chapter, I argue that featured writers show conflicting ways of viewing and responding to urban poverty by men, women and children. Some men resort to alcoholism, multiple concurrent sexual partners and violence on women (when faced with the humiliating conditions of township poverty), while others stick to hard work in order to feed their families. Women too are presented from varying angles with the majority of those who are poverty-stricken resorting to prostitution while others defy all odds to earn a decent living in a male dominated space. Through these depictions, selected writers from Zimbabwe make a strong argument about how complex poverty is, both as a socio-economic problem as well as a developmental challenge.

With a view to answer the call for a literary theory on poverty (that would utilize the nuances provided by literary texts), Gavin Jones in his book, *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in the US. Literature, 1840-1945* (2008), gestures towards a theory that investigates poverty as a stand-alone category that is not submerged in categories such as class and race. Birte Christ in "Towards a Theory of Poverty: Rethinking Race, Gender, Class in (American)

Cultural Studies” opines that Jones “makes poverty – and not class – his organizing frame of inquiry (149).

In trying to carry out this task, I will argue that in their depictions of poverty the texts I discuss in this chapter grapple with the broad themes of urbanity, modernity and modernism which have been discussed extensively by post-colonial critics. In this chapter I seek to illustrate that despite the focus by Zimbabwean writers on poverty at different times of the country’s development, critical analysis of the texts has not discussed literary depictions of poverty extensively in order to articulate the unique contribution of creative illustrations of indigence to the general study of poverty. There are however some studies which discuss poverty as a sub–topic and therefore not their main focus. A doctoral thesis by Godwin Makaudze on *Shona Fiction and its Treatment of Socio-Economic Issues in Zimbabwe*, while limiting its focus to literature written in Shona, provides useful insights for my study as it addresses themes of poverty, HIV/AIDS and shortage of food as well as lack of proper accommodation and sanitation. Anna Chitando in yet another doctoral thesis entitled *Narrating Gender and Danger in Selected Zimbabwe Women’s Writings on HIV/AIDS* comes closest to the focus of my study but she addresses poverty as a major contributor to the spread of HIV/AIDS as depicted in Zimbabwean writings by women. This study nevertheless provides useful insights to my discussion on gendered gradations of poverty. Using insights provided by these studies, the chapter will discuss poverty in the city in the wake of increased industrialisation in colonial Zimbabwe/Rhodesia. The topic of modernity and city life has been addressed by many scholars writing and commenting on the Zimbabwean canon.

Contributing to the debate on African urbanity, modernism and post-modernism, critics such as Grace Musila, Meg Samuelson and Annie Gagiano as well as Zimbabwean scholars such

as Kizito Muchemwa have argued that writers like Yvonne Vera problematize the history of industrialization in colonial Rhodesia where men were ferried from the rural areas to provide cheap labour in the cities while women were expected to remain in the rural areas. These critics point to what Meg Samuelson in her essay “Yvonne Vera’s Bulawayo: Modernity, (Im) mobility, Music, and Memory” terms “restless urban subjectivity” (23). I seek to show that this ‘restlessness’ is indicative of the everyday struggle for basic needs such as shelter and food in the townships where congestion and poor sanitation are a common sight. Much of the “restlessness” is caused by unfair labour practices which humiliate men with poor wages and deny them the opportunity to own land both for agriculture and for shelter. On the other hand, I seek to show that through a new kind of aesthetics some writers capture women’s relentless efforts to find ways of surviving in the city – a space that they are not expected to be occupying (according to colonial, nationalist and patriarchal narratives).

Writing a preface to *African women’s writing, Opening Spaces*, Yvonne Vera observes that:

If speaking is still difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women – much freer than speech. There is less interruption, less immediate and shocked reaction. The written word is granted its intimacy, its individual characters, its suspension of disbelief. It surprises in the best carnival way, reducing distances, accepting the least official stance. (3)

Vera shows how creative writers have managed to give voice to women and found them space in the urban discourse despite being omitted in officialdom. In reading gendered depictions of poverty I intend to utilize Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of the subaltern to bring to bear the topic of female subjectivity in both the male dominated traditional patriarchal system and the colonial hegemony. I seek to show that the texts depict the city as a discursive space which provides room for the subaltern to speak while at the same time

engaging and disrupting both the discourses of colonial and post-colonial nationalism in order to prioritise everyday struggles for survival. In this chapter I seek to discuss how selected Zimbabwean texts depict poverty in the period following the World War II and the second Chimurenga when urbanization escalated in Zimbabwe.

Flora Veit-Wild provides a useful guide to black Zimbabwean literature in her 1992 study *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers- A Social History of Zimbabwe Literature* which divides Zimbabwean writers into three generations according to their birthdates: “Generation 1: 1917 to 1939, Generation 2: 1940 to 1959, Generation 3: 1960 and later” (7). In order to stay within the scope of this thesis, this chapter will focus on the last two generations of writers because as Veit-Wild rightly observes they were “moulded by their upbringing and education after World War II, in the years of rapid industrialisation and social change in Southern Rhodesia” (8). As a result of the influence the writers focus on urbanization and life in crowded black townships.

Veit-Wild describes the third generation of writers as having been “children and adolescents during the war of liberation [and as such their] early experience of war has been a major preoccupation in their writing” (7). As Veit-Wild’s study is rather dated now, I propose a fourth category for the contemporary body of literature that divorces itself from the liberation narrative and instead focuses on the struggles for survival during the post-independence crisis. In an ambitious piece, “Dies Irae: Days of Wrath, Days of Crisis, A report on the Current Situation in Zimbabwean Creative Writing”, Patricia Alden quotes one of the writers whose work belongs to this fourth generation: “Younger writers are actually working against the idea of a national identity and are exploring different kinds of communities...we didn’t ask the old ones to go to the struggle. We don’t want to hear about that. We want to talk

about why there is no food on the table and about other pressing problems” (2). Most of these writers came of age after Independence and were not influenced by the liberation struggle but by the everyday struggles for survival in urban shanty towns. I argue here that these writers follow on earlier writers of the second generation like Dambudzo Marechera, who perpetually challenged the status quo, including the idea that writers have to follow certain trends at particular times. Even with this chronological genealogy, the amount of material is too much for a single thesis and hence the need for further selection of texts that I discuss in this chapter.

To achieve the kind of focus and scope I want for this chapter I further utilize a criterion based on periodization, quality of writing and the ability of the writer to provide vivid and illuminating ways of exemplifying poverty. This chapter therefore only discusses texts that give significant space to vivid portrayals of poverty in an urban setting. Following Abiola Irele’s sociological approach to literature, Veit-Wild argues that Zimbabwean literature can be “considered from two angles: how it was influenced by social and political factors; and how it responds to given social and political conditions and experiences” (5). In this chapter, even as I acknowledge that Zimbabwean writers were mostly influenced by the political, social and economic factors in their writing and as such their depictions of poverty are to a large extent representative of the experiences of the period in which they write, I maintain that each writer adopts varying narrative techniques in their attempt to capture the images of poverty at all levels of human life.

In recognition of the complexities of the Zimbabwean canon, this chapter uses Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones* (1988) to buttress the discussion of issues of poverty, similar to those discussed in the previous chapters but with a

focus on the effect of migrant labour and its exploitative nature, as they provide a useful discussion of an important epoch in the history of Zimbabwe. The two texts reiterate the theme of blacks being dispossessed of their land and having no option but to seek employment in the white owned farms and on the mines. I contend that this period marks the beginning of urbanization that then precipitated the mushrooming of townships in Zimbabwe as more and more people left the rural areas for cities. In addition to the themes of dispossession and displacement discussed in the previous chapters, these two texts also introduce the advent of women's participation in migrant labour as women too, get employed on farms as labourers.

Hove and Mungoshi are among second generation writers who “[w]ere the children of the 1950's and 1960's” (Veit-Wild 155). Unlike earlier writers who were raised by closely-knit families in the rural areas, the second generation writers “found themselves much less sheltered and guided by the family, much more exposed, as individuals, to social and political antagonisms” (Veit-Wild 155). Apart from the violent liberation war, these writers witnessed violence in every sphere of their lives from their families, to schools (which were highly politicised during the era) and to the everyday struggle for survival in the township. I argue that the experiences and upbringing that was characterised by urban poverty and squalid conditions are captured most succinctly by Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* (1978). This segment therefore will discuss Marechera's text as the main text to demonstrate his focus on urban poverty and on the alienated subjectivity of the colonized urban dweller.

In the last section of the chapter I explore the work by third generation writers: Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2008), who according to Veit-Wild's classification, were born in “1960 and after” (7). These writers

bring in fresh perspectives to society and politics in the post-independence Zimbabwe, providing a critical view of the failures of post-colonial leadership to improve the living condition of blacks. As part of the writing produced by the third generation of authors, the chapter also covers short stories such as “Queues” from *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003); “These are the Days of our Lives” and “Pay Day Hell” from *Writing Now* (2005). From *Laughing Now* (2007), another collection of short stories edited by Irene Staunton, the chapter will discuss: “A Land of Starving Millionaires”. The chapter will also discuss “In memory of the Nossie Brigade” and “Mainini Grace’s promise” from *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008). In this section of the chapter the discussion will therefore focus on the post-independence crisis in general and explore how selected writers depict poverty that arises as a result of the collapse of the economy.

The Second Generation Writers: Disillusionment on the Eve of Independence

Second generation writers took the baton from first generation writers such as Ndabaningi Sithole, Stanlake Samkange, Lawrence Vambe, Canaan Banana, Solomon Mutswairo, Herbert Chitepo and Bernard Chidzero. Veit-Wild makes an appealing conclusion about the circumstances that influenced the second generation of writers:

The specific quality of this group of second generation writer’s results, to a large extent, from the situation in which they grew up and started to write. Mostly born after the World War II, they went to school in the 1950s and 1960s, and began their writing careers in the 1970s...Political and cultural isolation from outside, fierce oppression inside and the general feeling of hopelessness made this period what later became known as “those years of drought and hunger”. (153)

This group of writers (who were writing in English) include Wilson Katiyo, Geoffrey Ndhala, Charles Mungoshi, Dambudzo Marechera, Shimmer Chinodya, Chenjerai Hove and

Tsitsi Dangarembga, among others. Unlike the first generation of writers, where there were no wellknown women writers, among the second generation of writers there are only two women. In this chapter I will discuss Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi, Chenjerai Hove and Tsitsi Dangarembga because of their explicit focus on the subject of poverty in their writing. Mungoshi and Hove's texts are discussed in so far as they tackle the transformation from traditional economies to the modern economy based on migrant labour. The two texts introduce the theme of migrant labour in the Zimbabwean context, providing useful continuities with texts discussed in the previous two chapters. Dangarembga's text introduces the gender dynamics to the dissertation's discussion of poverty and attempts by women and men to escape it.

Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975)

Mungoshi belongs to the second generation of writers because he was born in 1947, near Chivu, in colonial Zimbabwe. Mungoshi boasts of an impressive publication record, but in this chapter my discussion will be limited to his 1975 novel *Waiting for the Rain* that provides a useful picture of the collision between the modern economy and the traditional agrarian economy that was largely dependent on land. Literary criticism on Mungoshi, however, has largely classified him as amongst those authors who follow the nationalist aesthetic that was created by first generation authors like Stanley Samkange, and Solomon Mutswairo. The application of the term 'nationalist aesthetic', in my discussion of Mungoshi in this chapter will be restricted to cultural and revolutionary nationalism as I argue that his texts privilege community over individualism, showing how vulnerable the poor become with the collapse of family ties. Zimbabwean poet and literary critic Kizito Muchemwa observes that "a writer like Charles Mungoshi in *Waiting for the Rain* writ[es] in this tradition [and] [h]e develops a myth about the founder of the clan and the tribe" (1). In this study I concur

with Muchemwa's observation that myth plays a central role in Mungoshi's attempt to depict the disintegration of Shona culture in the wake of a new economic dispensation.

Florence Stratton in her essay "Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*" evokes Zimbabwean critic Musa Zimunya's assertion that "the myth of the Fugitive, or the Traveller, or the Wanderer, or the Hunter manifests itself over and over again variously in the Old Man, Garabha, Makiwa and Lucifer" (22). Through this narrative technique Mungoshi manages to provide an interface between the traditional and the modern by revealing continuities and conflicts in the lives of different generations of the same family. Mungoshi utilises this myth to capture the change in the lives of the community. Stratton observes: "on the land itself the very roots of the society are withering...the traditional economy based on cattle has been ruined by the imposition of a cash economy" (12). Mungoshi's text depicts the collapse of the moral compass despite efforts by parents to educate their children. As parents sell more and more cows to send their children to school, the problem of unemployed school drop-outs becomes more pronounced:

Chief Rukwa says he doesn't know what it will be like here in five or so years' time. Children turning against parents. Kimbini's head bashed in for him by first-born daughter because he dared beat their mother – his own wife – in children's presence. Chitau's fifteen-year old son got his aunt's twenty-five year old daughter with child. Two cousins of Chief Rukwa himself strangled and nearly killed old mealy-mouth Masiwa for her five dollars in silver they saw while she was looking for change at a beer – selling party. Fourteen-year olds, both boys and girls, victims of this new-fangled education system, just out of school, with nowhere to go, nothing to do – smoking dagga and drinking that illegal colourless chest-burning stuff – kachasu – at Chambara township. Stealing their parents' hard earned money to spend it on whoring and boozing over weekend in Enkeldoorn. (62)

Mungoshi in the above paragraph captures the anguish of parents as their own children become a danger to their lives. The authorial perspective is implicitly compassionate towards the parents who first of all are impoverished by efforts to educate their children and later by being robbed and brutalised by their own children. In addition to depicting the forceful introduction of the money economy, Mungoshi captures the moral decay that characterises township life as captured by authors who write much later (as I will discuss below). The author introduces the trope of an alienated urban dweller who struggles through crime, prostitution, juvenile delinquency and unemployment. By using Shona traditional mythology and the legend of Samambwa, the Founder of the Tribe, Mungoshi compares the traditional Shona way of living favourably to the emerging new economic order.

Stratton however rightly takes issue with Zimunya's suggestion of aloofness on the part of Mungoshi's text. I concur with Stratton that suggestions that Mungoshi is aloof in his writing misinterprets the writers' intricate representation of his culture. In another analysis that overlooks Mungoshi's balanced presentation of the turmoil brought about by the changes that were imposed on the Shona community, Neil Ten Kortenaar in a piece entitled "Of Fathers and Ancestors in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*" contends that the novel "although published in 1975, in the middle of the Zimbabwean War of Liberation, and set around the same time, ignores politics almost altogether in order to focus on a single and dysfunctional family" (31). In my analysis, I seek to show that this conclusion is not entirely accurate.

I argue that by focusing on the lives of one family and by limiting the events of the novel to three days that Lucifer (from the city) and Garabha (from his wanderings in the rural areas), come back home, the author manages to dramatize the tensions among members of the

family, thus providing a detailed depiction of a family's struggle for survival over three generations as they live on the Manyene Tribal Trust Land – a struggle that parallels and is a cameo of the larger socio-political changes and tensions in the land. The family is not depicted as desperate and at the mercy of the migrant labour system, but instead the author shows that all that the family needs is access to more fertile land that has been unfortunately taken away from them. Stratton concludes that “[t]he Mandengus are not presented as labour-worn peasants in need of a tractor [,] [r]ather, what they require in economic terms is access to more fertile land, such as the White-occupied Hampshire Estates which border the Manyene Tribal Trust Land” (20).

The text is set in a barren land because all the fertile land has been allocated to colonialists. The land where the Mandengus live, is said to be so “useless, too tired to support any form of life except the hard, thick-leaved charurwi ... the curse of the dry lands” (162). To show that there is no simple solution in sight; Mungoshi places conflicting demands on the two brothers with the educated Lucifer being expected to take over the traditional role of his father when the latter dies, while the more communal Garabha is propelled to leave in search of employment. The story follows the lives of the two brothers as they grow up in the Manyene Tribal Trust land. One of the brothers, Lucifer, is described as a young man who desires to make his parents happy so much so that he worries about his father finding out that “for the past six months he hasn't read a single book” (43). The theme of education being an economic panacea is demonstrated by Lucifer's childhood dream that, “when [he] grow[s] up, [he] shall buy [his] parents a big house and a beautiful car” (76). He feels that his parents have sacrificed a lot for him and he would therefore strive to get them out of poverty when he grows up and has a steady income. This genuine childhood commitment changes and is

replaced by Lucifer's resentment of his father and his wish that he had "a different father" (43) as he begins to feel trapped in squalor.

Through the change in Lucifer's attitude towards his parents, the text questions the validity of the assumption that education is a means out of the squalid conditions that most colonised subjects lived under. Philip G. Altbach in his essay, "Education and Neo-colonialism," argues that colonial educational policies were elitist and operating on very limited educational facilities. This argument concludes that the education given to the colonised subjects was not intended to fully equip them with the necessary skills, but rather, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, this kind of education is "the foundation of colonialist power and consolidates this power through legal and administrative apparatuses" (425). Mungoshi warns that any hope of a colonised student taking their family out of poverty through education is thwarted by the realities of limited opportunities for them in a segregated community. Even though Mungoshi views education as a positive development that may in some cases empower colonised subjects with knowledge, he cautions that colonial education also had disadvantages which often had negative effects on characters like Lucifer. As a result of education Lucifer is alienated and estranged from his community and family. The alienation changes Lucifer's perception of the poverty that his family lives under. During his childhood, the poverty in his life inspires him to work hard with the aim of offering his family a better life. After being exposed to western education, Lucifer wants nothing to do with his parents and his origins:

I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been elsewhere – of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and I never shall and if ever I leave this place, I am not going to come back. It is the failure's junk heap. Those who go to the towns only come back here to die. Home is where you come back to die, having lived all your life elsewhere. Home is a cluster of termite –

eaten huts clinging on the stony slope of a sun-baked hill. What is here that is worth loving? What is here – in this scrub, in this arid flatness, in this sun-bleached dust to love? (162)

Lucifer's view of his family's condition is drastically changed by exposure to the western education and traditions, which not only sensitize him to his family's material poverty, but make him, see it as contemptible.

In keeping with Mungoshi's narrative technique, which provides different viewpoints and perceptions, a child who is born to rich parents (Maraini) is presented as being quite the opposite of Lucifer:

Maraini's father owned a chain of businesses all over the African townships in Salisbury and so Maraini always had enough money to throw about on whatever he wanted. He was the best-dressed boy in school. Contrary to the general belief about the laziness of children born of rich parents, Maraini excelled himself at everything he put his mind to. He was always top of the class, and for the last two years of school, he was captain of the school football team, president of the Students' Union, chairman of the Debating Society, secretary of the Music Club, treasurer of the Drama Club, the School Librarian...Not that he was inconsiderate, a boor or self-centred in the manner of the rich – in fact, Maraini was the model of an honest, upright and gentle person. (70-71)

The juxtaposition of the two characters shows Mungoshi's refusal to perpetuate stereotypes of all rich children being spoilt and lazy while the poor are shown as hard workers who strive to escape poverty. To Mungoshi, circumstances vary from one individual to another as shown by Lucifer and Maraini. Lucifer hates Maraini for what he has and he is shown as being "full of conceit, self-importance and disgusting self-pride" (71).

Waiting for the Rain skillfully portrays the intersection between traditional and modern survival challenges, as experienced by a family whose members represent different perspectives on reality based on their generation. Education that is seen as an escape route out of poverty in other texts is depicted here as capable of causing tension between those with traditional expectations and those who have modern opportunities. Mungoshi chooses to focus on the experiences of the members of the Mandengu family, as different generations of the family are juxtaposed to illustrate the tensions and disagreements over the direction that the family needs to take for better prospects. Sons in the text reject their fathers in every generation, due to growing demands placed on the father to provide for the family, which the father's poverty prevents him from doing. In addition to the disintegration of the family structure, the text aids my focus on urban poverty by introducing the phenomenon of private land ownership where the colonisers had the most fertile land while the natives were rendered landless and with no option but to seek employment on the privately owned land or in the cities. Hove in the next text explores the issue of farm work, further exposing its connection with the modern proletarianization of labour.

Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988)

Chenjerai Hove was born in 1956 (in Mazvihwa) and was among the youngest of the second generation writers. He writes in both English and Shona, using oral conventions extensively to explore how rural populations struggled with poverty and deprivation especially during the liberation war of Zimbabwe. He traces their struggle after the imposition of the money economy that then forces them to leave their homes to live and work on white owned farms as labourers. In this chapter I only discuss *Bones* (1989), from which the epigraph to the whole chapter is taken. The epigraph shows Hove's approach to poverty and deprivation as a serious concern, suggesting that it is more of a concern than the war that rages at the time the

text is written. Even though the text does not address poverty in an urban setting, it serves to provide a discussion on an important topic in the history of Zimbabwe, which is the impoverishing and back breaking work on the commercial farms.

Hove adopts the oral tradition of telling children stories around a fire as his narrative technique in order to accord all voices the opportunity to contribute to the story. The text tells the story of a mother, Marita, who embarks on a journey to an unknown destination to look for her son, who decided to join the local forces that are fighting for the liberation of Zimbabwe. The mother cannot read and derives pleasure from listening to a letter written by her son being read to her many times by a young girl, Janifa, to whom the letter was written at school; “read the letter again for me please, please read it, read it all the time for me if you have strength” (7). The literacy of the younger generation is here being used to emphasize the mother’s longing for the absent son, who in contrast with Mungoshi’s representation of the son, fights for liberation on the battle-front. The son’s relatively educated state indicates also that he is equipping himself for a future away from wage labour on a white-owned farm – the lifestyle of his parents.

Hove uses a lot of imagery involving strength and weakness to come up with illuminating depictions of the conditions under which Marita and her people live. One such image is the reference to words; “words have weight, Marita,” her husband says in the fifth chapter (which is told from a perspective of this man). The shifting narrative voices allow Hove to distinguish the characters from one another. His skilful insertion of Shona words in the form of idioms and proverbs gives him room to create localised images of poverty and its effects on different characters.

Introducing yet another narrative technique that Hove uses in representing poverty, Molly Yancovitz in “Food in Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones*” writes that: “In *Bones*, food delineates privilege, economic class, and social position...Chenjerai Hove uses food to symbolize resistance against colonial control” (1). Food is a constant leitmotif in the text since it is because of the need for food that Marita, Janifa and Chisango seek employment on Manyepo’s farm. Janifa uses food to expose the hypocrisy of the white man Manyepo, in his effort to justify the inequality between him and his worker:

Marita, those who eat eggs of the hen say the eggs are not good for young mouths. Eggs are good, Marita. Good things are good things. Those who have them always want to make rules so that others cannot get to the good things. If eating eggs is a bad thing it must be so for all mouths, Marita. The hen that has tasted her own eggs never stops to leave some for those who also know eggs are good. They warm the mouth with new saliva. “Good things are not for everybody”, Manyepo says...Such a rule made by one who already enjoys good things is a bad rule, Marita. A bad rule for those who did not help to make it. (98)

Hove explicitly exposes the elitist tendencies of the more affluent people in communities who justify the privileges they have by suggesting that such privileges would not be good for the poor. Manyepo’s attitude is also indicative of the period in which the story is set, during Zimbabwe’s colonization by Britain, specifically at a time when the majority of fertile land is in the hands of white colonisers who embark on profit making businesses. In order to maximise profits, the white employers exploit their workers and ill-treat and abuse them. The need for food security puts the workers at the mercy of Manyepo, who uses food as a measure of control. The epigraph to the chapter points to the urgency of this issue, as the author compares poverty to war and reckons that poverty is worse because it needs much more practical solutions than negotiations – that can result in a ceasefire in a war situation. By

using the food imagery the author shows the seriousness of the issue, since food sustains life and as Chisanga, the cook, puts it: “one’s stomach is one’s ancestor...it [keeps] on rumbling and roaring like a lion, to make sure that all kept hearing stomach’s presence” (34).

The need for food also makes Chisango the cook a powerful man amongst his people and a very important employee to Manyepo. He works and deals with an important commodity that is difficult to find and as such he is in an enviable position. Being close to Manyepo exposes Chisango to the employer’s thinking and attitude towards the poor: “Manyepo do you know that the poor also see the rich? ... Look at me now, poverty is like a stubborn friend... [a]lways with me” (34). This telling exchange between Manyepo and his cook only happens in Chisango’s mind, because he is afraid to ask any questions and always responds to his employer by saying ‘yes baas’ – a phrase indicative of his cringing submissiveness. Chisango is silenced by his desire to keep his job in the kitchen, even though it does not help him out of poverty. He bemoans the constant poverty in his life which never changes for the better, without doing anything to improve his situation.

Chisango and other workers’ situation shows no advance on that of the previous generation.

Chisango laments the exploitation that his father suffered at the mines:

He died poor. Not a good thing for a man with many children. Maybe if one is poor, one cannot afford to be poor in the head. So he died poor. A poor man. A poor man with a shrunken skin and a missing toe. The mines can do a lot of things to you which are difficult to describe. Many things. (35)

Chisango’s lament about his father’s fate is made even more painful by the fact that he appears destined to the same fate, working as a farmer’s cook, a job that he knows is perpetuating his poverty. In this flashback, the author laments the trap of poverty that moves

from one generation to the other which he attributes to the dependence on migrant labour that has been instilled in the psyche of the labourers. Chisango refers to the health hazards of migrant labour, but suggests that the major damage is the psychological effect which takes away the spirit of self-reliance that the natives had before the introduction of the money economy.

Fanon in his analysis of the effect of colonialism on the colonised subject argues that the oppression results in an inferiority complex that makes the colonised vulnerable and places them at the mercy of their masters. In an effort to reassert their pride, men like Chisango turn to sexual gratification as a way of proving their manhood. Chisango wants to sleep with another man's wife, Marita, who instead exploits him and makes him steal some money that she uses to escape from the farm to go and search for her son. Through this act Marita asserts her refusal to be humiliated by either Manyepo or Chisango. She also refuses to accept that she has lost her son forever. Despite not being able to read and write, as well as being poor, Marita defends her dignity and she fearlessly takes on the challenge of finding her son.

Even though Marita ultimately dies in the course of the narrative, she is presented as a strong woman who makes the risky move. Marita's husband is ridiculed by Manyepo, who calls him "boy" and slaps him in front of his wife and children. Poverty therefore is depicted in Hove's text as a demeaning condition for most that exposes people to loss of dignity and to abuse. The text however provides the poor and oppressed workers with the chance of answering back to the abuse and ridicule of their employer. In Bakhtinian terms, the reader is accorded the opportunity to learn about the life at the farm from the point of view of various farm workers, Marita, her husband, Janifa and Chisango. This approach to gendered striations of poverty is a common thread throughout the literature discussed in this thesis. Dambudzo

Marechera in the next text explores all the themes tackled by both Hove and Mungoshi explicitly, indicating how such issues contribute to a troubled and indigent urban subjectivity.

Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger*: A metaphor for Zimbabwe's poverty

Dambudzo Marechera was born on 4 June 1952 in Vengere Township near Rusape. He was born into poverty to a truck driver father whose tragic death plunged the family further into poverty. The death of his father who was the breadwinner left Marechera's mother with no option but to engage in prostitution to get money to raise her children. Marechera provides a further description of his mother in the novella, with the narrator's mother described as drinking excessively to the extent of "smash[ing] up her words" (20), while she tries to communicate the death of her husband. The family as depicted in the text represents the chaotic life of the ghetto where Marechera grew up, seeing parents having to sacrifice their own happiness in order to raise their children: "[mother]'s face was long and haggard, scarred by the many sacrifices she had taken on our behalf" (19). This depiction of a troubled life echoes Marechera's own mother's life.

The writer himself had an eventful life that saw him move from Harare to Oxford, where he lived after being sent down from university for his anarchic behaviour and ended up on the urban streets and in parks in Britain and Zimbabwe. As many critics have pointed out, Marechera remained an outcast throughout his life. Veit-Wild in an essay "Words as Bullets: The Writings of Dambudzo Marechera" concludes that Marechera:

... embodies for Europeans the almost nostalgic image of the writer tramp, something less familiar to Africans, the Steppenwolf who survives on the fringe of society, always poor, homeless and alone,

sleeping on park benches, spending on drink what little he occasionally earns with his publications.

(113)

Marechera's life was a continuous protest against what he saw as an attempt to curtail the freedom of the individual as he refused to conform to expectations, for example; "[a]t the ceremony in London at which he was awarded the Guardian Fiction Prize in 1979, he hurled cups and plates at the chandeliers, finding the whole affair hypocritical and feeling that no one really understood him" (Veit-Wild 113). Marechera himself said of his upbringing:

In my own case, I have been influenced to a point of desperation by the dogged though brutalized humanity of those among whom I grew. The actual lives, the way they flinched yet did not flinch from the blows dealt out to us day by day in the ghettos ... The seething cesspit in which I grew in which all these I am talking about making something of their lives. (qtd in Veit-Wild 1)

In the quotation above, Marechera shows that his writing was influenced to a large extent by life itself and by the struggles of ordinary people for survival amidst squalor and poverty. As a result of this approach, Marechera's work has received much attention not only from literary experts, but also from young upcoming writers in Zimbabwe. Memory Chirere, in a piece called "Marechera-mania and Zimbabwe Literature", makes a compelling case for the cross cutting influence that Marechera has had on the writing community in Zimbabwe, but also on the entire country: "Although he died some eighteen years ago, Marechera is still public property. For the ordinary teenager the name of Dambudzo Marechera is synonymous with rebelliousness. For the many young writers across Zimbabwe, the name is about razor sharp brilliance" (1). The last sentence in Chirere's quote speaks to Marechera's colourful language and deft use of words in his writing, which paints vivid and illuminating pictures of the struggles of his people, the violence, the hunger, the collapse of family, prostitution and other social ills that became synonymous with the slums or ghettos where black people live

as they try to escape from poverty in the rural areas. The careful selection and vivid use of words is evident in the opening line of the novella: “I got my things and left” (11). The short sentence is captivating and makes the reader anxious to find out the cause of the decision by the narrator to desperately want to leave the house of hunger. Annie Gagiano in “Marechera’s Wordhorde and the Scrapiron of War” discusses the author’s powerful use of language and the effect it has on the reader: “Marechera knew the need to “use certain techniques so as to achieve a visionary apprehension of suffering in order to convince the reader that suffering is unique and meaningful and, at the same time, a universal expression of life” (41). In this chapter I want to suggest that as one of the earliest texts to address the topic of poverty extensively, the novella *House of Hunger* is a key text for any study of literary depictions of poverty in Zimbabwe. I argue in this chapter that Marechera’s pioneering work is an important resource for poverty studies in Zimbabwe and that it has influenced the desire by more recent writers to explore ways of representing poverty in ways that would move readers and authorities to find a solution.

The novella *The House of Hunger* (2009 edition) begins with “An Interview with Himself”, in which Marechera makes the pronouncement in the epigraph to this section, which I believe further proves his commitment to writing about poverty. In the same interview Marechera buttresses his commitment to using his work to represent the lived experiences of his people:

They range from the few owners of grocery stores right through primary school teachers, priests, deranged leaders of fringe esoteric religions, housewives, nannies, road-diggers, factory workers, shop assistants, caddies, builders, pickpockets, psychos, pimps, demoralised widows, professional con-men, whores, hungry but earnest schoolboys, hungry but soon to be pregnant schoolgirls and, of course, informers, the BASAP, the police reservists ... (3)

Marechera's novella describes the township squalor in settler exploited Rhodesia, symbolising an environment of poverty, hunger, alienation and a pattern of brutality in all human interactions. The first-person narrator tells the story around the spiritual and material poverty of his childhood in a colonial township, also highlighting how difficult life was:

In the House of Hunger diseases were the strange irruptions of a disturbed universe. Measles or mumps were the symptoms of a malign order. Even a common cold could become a *casus belli* between neighbours. And add to that the stench of our decaying family life with its perpetual headaches of gut-rot and soul-sickness and rats gnawing the cheese and me worrying it the next morning like a child gently scratching a pleasurable sore on its index finger. (18)

Through rich and descriptive passages like the one above, Marechera manages to paint a picture of a childhood full of uncertainty and everyday threat of child mortality. As a result of poverty, even diseases mentioned in the quote which are curable, become life threatening in poor communities. The passage also points to a troubled childhood deprived of a strong family grounding and support. Alienation, as a result of diminishing family ties, is a key theme in Marechera's writing. He employs the trope of a slum dweller who is cut away from family and communal ties. The disintegration of the family structure which was only beginning to show in Hove and Mungoshi's texts has here escalated in the urban space where everybody seeks their own survival and well-being.

The author foregrounds the theme of shortage of food and of fulfilment: "I couldn't have stayed on in that House of Hunger where every morsel of sanity was snatched from you the way some kinds of birds snatch food from the very mouths of babes" (11). Unlike Hove who introduces food as a control tool that the rich use to exploit the poor and hungry, Marechera explores the metaphor of hunger or the need for food to paint a picture of serious poverty –

both physiological and spiritual-intellectual – in the township. He weaves food and the everyday hunt for it as well as the possibility of losing it into the narrative, forcing the reader to visualize the uncertainty of not knowing where your next meal is going to come from in a seamless weave with the absence of any future prospect of a meaningful life under colonised conditions in Rhodesia. The situation is compounded by the fact that the protagonist's efforts to escape the hardships in the township prove futile in the end because (as Marechera's text concludes) "the house [of hunger becomes his] mind" (13). This statement suggests that poverty affects all the spheres of life and that escaping from it becomes impossible: it invades and colonises the mind. It is my reading of the text that it shows how the psychological effects of poverty affect the poor's confidence and hope to succeed in life.

Marechera uses a detailed description of a police officer to register his disapproval of the corrupt tendencies among government officials such as the police. He describes a police officer as a "a cocky six footer, lean and hungry and sly like a chameleon stalking a fly, The House of Hunger had not as yet had much to worry about this particular chameleon" (11). The description of the police officer as 'hungry' indicates that there are different forms of 'hunger' and that not all of them are genuine cases of deprivation. Marechera's disapproving tone labels the police officer's hunger as greed.

This leitmotif of hunger also shows poverty and deprivation as forms of violence, as Peter is said to have "hungered for the fight" (12). The statement shows that hunger and poverty can result in anger and violence in those who need food for survival: "Arrests became so much a part of one's food..." (13). The bitter irony here is that instead of being provided with food and other basic necessities, the poor slum dwellers get arrested for trying to earn a living. I argue here that Marechera seeks to indicate that as a result of poverty some people become

involved in illegal activities that get them into trouble with the law. However, the frequency with which the arrests happen make them meaningless as people are prepared for the consequences of their actions.

The quest to overcome 'hunger' is common in African literature, but Marechera goes further to show that the quest is a lifelong process that he equates to growing up and learning how to get around as those who struggle for survival console each other by saying: "You'll soon get over it ... Like the way babies get everything before they become immune to that strange malady of growing up" (18). The inhabitants learn how to survive the conditions in the townships and they offer each other support by squeezing together to accommodate more people. During the process of learning survival skills from one another some learn to respond with violence, which is also rampant in the township. The protagonist's brother Peter is one such character, as he is abusive and assaults his girlfriend Immaculate even when she is pregnant. Theorising on the violence in the colonial townships, Fanon concludes that, faced with debilitating poverty, inhabitants of the colonial town turn on each other in violence – a terrible illustration of the poor and oppressed inflicting violence on one another in their inability to hit out at their oppressors.

The culture of taking advantage of the weak provides an exact reflection of the larger capitalist society brought by the arrival of the colonizers and the introduction of the money economy. Marechera's *House of Hunger* fits Fanon's description of the 'native town' as "a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there; it matters not where or how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of another...The native town is a hungry town" (30). The inhabitants of the house of hunger are troubled by the condition of alienation and fracturing of identity as is

evident in the appalling depictions of the life of the protagonist which points to the collapse of institutions such as the family, the nation and then the state. The collapse of the institutions, largely because of colonial disruptions and policies, results in a chaotic and highly volatile urban space that fits Fanon's description of a "native town".

The urban space then becomes a contested and ruthlessly competitive space where survival is an everyday struggle. As a result of the confinement of the colonized subjects, the inhabitants of the house of hunger turn on one another as the violence of colonialism is taken down to the level of everyday individual interactions. The overpopulated urban space results in the colonial city being a place of havoc where violence is at the centre of everyday interaction.

The colonial legacy of overcrowded slums with poor sanitation, high unemployment rates, violence and crime has come to define African post-colonial cities. Derek Cohen in a review of Zimbabwean Literature characterises Marechera's novella as an:

unrelenting depiction of the stunning effects of poverty and its concomitants of cruelty and pain ... Living as he does a fragmented life, the protagonist of this tale, a boy in a Rhodesian township, charts his crazy existence by reference to violence, pain and revenge. (337-338)

As Cohen rightly points out, the violence that characterised the encounter between the settlers and the colonised permeates to daily interactions between the colonised subjects. As Fanon warns, "[t]he native's muscular tension finds outlet regularly in bloodthirsty explosions – tribal warfare, in feuds between sects and in quarrels between individuals" (42). The gender aspect of this is clear as men like Peter attempt to 'restore' their degraded masculinity by violently asserting power over the women in their lives.

Marechera grapples with the theme of gender, which is the focus of the next group of texts written by female authors. He explores how women and men as well as boys and girls cope with poverty under difficult conditions of a racially divided Rhodesia. During the colonial era, men are the ones who enrolled for hard labour in the mines or on farms while some women turned to prostitution for survival, others worked as housekeepers or housemaids, others hawked while others ran shebeens. As I will show later in a discussion of Vera's texts, the colonial system only wanted men for labour and the women were expected to stay in the rural areas. As a result poorly paid men yearn for female companions and end up being customers of the prostitutes, who in turn manage to survive in the city.

Marechera depicts a tumultuous life where the family is turned upside down and the women and mothers are forced to hold it together. Poverty pushes men to go in search of work, but they in the process neglect their roles as fathers and bread-winners in the homes, because even though they spend most of the time away, the money they earn is not enough to take care of their families. The situation is compounded by the recklessness of some men (like the narrator's father) who misuse money and abuse alcohol. The changes in gender roles and Marechera's approach to gendered gradations of poverty gives female characters leading roles in the narrative a strategy that Tsitsi Dangarembga also employs in her coming of age tale of the nervous conditions of the natives in colonial Zimbabwe.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden ... And these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. (Dangarembga, *Nervous Condition* 16)

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in 1959, in the town of Mutoko in colonial Rhodesia, making her a second generation writer. She spent her childhood in Britain where she began her

education, before going back to Zimbabwe to continue at a mission school in Mutare. Dangarembga then went back to Britain to study medicine at Cambridge University until she returned to her home country, Zimbabwe in 1980, shortly before it gained Independence under black majority rule. She has also been involved in theatre and produced a play entitled "The Lost of the Soil" (in 1983), a short story in Sweden entitled "The Letter" (in 1985) and another play in Harare entitled "She No Longer Weeps" (in 1987). In addition to these achievements she has also studied and produced films. The novel I discuss in this chapter, *Nervous Conditions*, won the African section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1989. I discuss Dangarembga's text here to provide a link between depictions of gendered gradations of poverty during the colonial era and the modern struggles with poverty by women as portrayed by Vera and other writers, whose writing focuses on contemporary issues.

The text tells the story of Tambu and Nyasha, two young cousins who grow up during the years of colonial rule in Zimbabwe, depicting the struggle of women and girls against poverty and against colonial and patriarchal oppressive practices. The two live very different lives until their teenage years, with Tambu living in poverty on her family's farm in Umtali while Nyasha lives in England with her more affluent and educated parents. Therese Saliba in "On the Bodies of Third World Women: Cultural Impurity, Prostitution, and Other Nervous Conditions" suggests that:

In considering the text's narrative strategies, it is interesting to note that the autobiographical details of Dangarembga's life coincide most with Nyasha's, and that she employs Tambudzai as narrator as a distancing device, one that gives the peasant woman the dominant voice. (131)

Unlike texts discussed earlier that portray diminishing family ties, Dangarembga chooses to locate her story in the Shona patrilineal family. I argue that Dangarembga's choice of narrative style combines the structure of family and the western notion of bildungsroman.

Christine van Boheemen-Saaf in “*Nervous Conditions* as Hybrid Family Romance: Dangarembga’s Appropriation of a Colonial Topos” opines that “[a]dapting the Western topos of the ‘family romance’ to the Shona family system, Dangarembga designs a specifically local vehicle to render the complexity and ambiguity of the ‘nervous condition’ of African womanhood” (15). I will argue here that this approach provides a nuanced depiction of poverty and affluence in one family, depicting the struggle for emancipation from within the family.

This coming of age novel narrates how young Tambu sees education as a possible escape route from poverty, but the option is not available to her immediately because of cultural practices that discriminate against women and girls and also because of lack of funds. As a result of this, her brother Nhamo is given priority over her to be educated and hopefully get a job. Babamukuru believes that “with money earned in this way ... Nhamo would lift [the narrator’s] branch of the family out of the squalor in which [they] were living” (4). The novel starts with a startling revelation by the protagonist that she “was not sorry when [her] brother died” (1). Tambu does not feel saddened by her brother’s death because his demise provides an opportunity for her to go to school. The text then takes a flashback to the period that precedes Nhamo’s death, and to the decision on who must remain in school (Nhamo or Tambu) when the family ran out of money for school fees. From the beginning of the story, the author paints a clear picture of the poverty in which the family lives:

Nhamo was forced once a year to return to his squalid homestead, where he washed in cold water in an enamel basin or a flowing river, not in a bathtub with taps gushing hot water and cold; where he ate sadza regularly with his fingers and meat hardly at all, never with a knife and fork; where there was no light beyond the flickering yellow of candles and home-made paraffin. (6)

By locating the narrative within a family, the author is able to tap on stories of other members of the family and she is able to allow such stories to unfold alongside those of the two protagonists. Nhamo's attitude to his family's condition helps the reader to perceive the extent of their rural poverty. A further description of Nhamo's attitude towards his family's condition shows that his view changes after he is exposed to the more luxurious life at the mission school:

All this poverty began to offend him, or at the very least embarrass him after he went to the mission, in a way that it had not done before. Before he went to the mission, we had been able to agree that although our squalor was brutal, it was uncompromisingly ours; that the burden of dispelling it was, as a result, ours too. But then something he saw at the mission turned his mind to thinking that our homestead no longer had any claim upon him. (7)

The narrator, Tambu, rebukes her brother for changing his attitude towards his family's condition from an 'unconscious dignity' to being ashamed of the family's situation. Even though Tambu clearly does not approve of her brother's attitude (and dedicates the bulk of the book to justifying why she was not distressed by Nhamo's death), she also harbours aspirations of escaping the poverty through education.

As a result of her ambition to acquire Western education in order to escape from poverty, Tambu when told that she has to leave school because there is no money to pay school fees, confidently says "I will earn the fees" (17). The narrator is determined to raise the money by growing maize and selling it. Tambu's response is representative of the positive image of female characters and their resolve to confront challenges posed by poverty and the gender based discrimination they face. As Tambu's mother suggests in the epigraph to this section, things were more difficult for women and girls because patriarchal practices further

marginalised them on top of the already difficult situation of rampant poverty in black communities within racist colonialism. The author insists on the ability of Tambu and other characters to rise above the challenges, however. Tambu questions her mother's analogy of the fate of black people and women:

I thought about this for several days, during which I began to fear that I was not as intelligent as my Sub A performance had led me to believe, because, like my father, I could not follow the sense of my mother's words. My mother said being black was a burden, because it made you poor, but Babamukuru was not poor. My mother said being a woman was a burden you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission ... I decided it was better to be like Maiguru, who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood. (16)

The text juxtaposes the two families of Babamukuru and that of Tambu's father (Jeremiah), showing how Babamukuru's hard work took his family out of poverty. Tambu says Babamukuru is different and he hadn't "cringed under the weight of his poverty ... [b]oldly, Babamukuru had defied it ... [t]hrough hard work and determination he had broken the evil wizards' spell" (50). As Tambu observes above, Babamukuru and Maiguru are examples of people who defy the odds to live better lives and to assist other people. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi in "Reading Masculinities in a Feminist Text: Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*" describes Babamukuru as "a top achiever... [who] overcomes the odds of race and economic deprivation to become a highly Western-educated, thoroughly professional man of considerable circumstance and authority" (205).

While Babamukuru works hard to succeed in life, Jeremiah is portrayed as a lazy, feckless person who resorts to begging and to hero-worshipping (and sponging on) his brother. The author disapprovingly reveals Jeremiah's ineptitude when he suggests that if he had had

Nhamo's brains his family would be living a better life in a "brick house with running water, hot and cold, lights" (5). The statement that tends to suggest that Babamukuru succeeded because he was intelligent, and Jeremiah failed because he was not is disqualified by Jeremiah's own concession that his brother used to work very hard at his schoolwork. Responding to a question as to whether Babamukuru was "sharp at his lessons" (5), Jeremiah answers "not exactly sharp ... [b]ut he used to read" (5). Upon realizing that he has confirmed that the difference between him and his brother is that he is lazy and his brother is a hard worker, Jeremiah suggests that Babamukuru was "lucky... [h]e got the chance [to go] to the mission at an early age" (5). Babamukuru's success through education brings another perspective to the role of education in the fight against poverty, under a Shona patriarchal system.

Following the Shona tradition (of taking care of the extended family), when he returns from England where he obtained a Master's Degree Babamukuru calls a family gathering to discuss ways of "ensuring prosperity of each branch of the family" (44). The family agrees that Jeremiah's branch needs help and it is then decided that his son Nhamo be taken to study at the mission while staying with Babamukuru. Education takes centre stage in the family discussion and members of the family who have varying levels of education are portrayed as managing to feed their families while Jeremiah is unable to do so, both because of lack of education but also as a result of his poor work ethic.

Jeremiah does not only lack education, but he also fails to work hard to provide for his family. He reacts angrily to Tambu's request for seed to earn her own fees in order to remain in school. Unlike her father Jeremiah (who depends entirely on Babamukuru's goodwill), Tambu is determined to work hard in order to get an education: "If you will give me some

seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize” (17), she says. Through Tambu’s project, the text presents land and education as two sources of living that offer an escape route from poverty. The land which represents the agrarian economy still forms an integral part of economic activity in the rural areas where Jeremiah and his family live. Providing a clear link between land and education, the narrator reveals that Babamukuru impressed missionaries who thought he was “a good boy, cultivatable, in the way that land is, to yield harvests that sustain the cultivator” (19). The connection between land and education echoes the theme of displacements that I discussed in the previous chapter. As a result of the long and protracted liberation war, land is at the centre of the developmental trajectory of Zimbabwe.

Tambu’s grandmother provides an opportunity to glance back at the politics of land in Zimbabwe through an illustration of Babamukuru’s rise to success. She tells Tambu how rich her great-grandfather was, until they were removed from the fields which had rich soil and from which they had been able to harvest both for consumption and for trade. Commenting on the violent land invasions in the post-independence era, scholar Mahmood Mamdani in “Lessons of Zimbabwe” details the long history of the Zimbabwean land dispute:

Though widespread grievance over the theft of land – a process begun in 1889 and completed in the 1950s – fuelled the guerrilla struggle against the regime of Ian Smith, whose Rhodesian Front opposed black majority rule, the matter was never properly addressed when Britain came back into the picture to effect a constitutional transition to independence under majority rule. (17)

Mamdani provides a historical background to the land issue in Zimbabwe, arguing that because it has never been addressed properly it led to the violent land occupations captured by texts that I discuss later in the chapter. In a telling description, Dangarembga echoes

Mamdani's conclusion by articulating the process through which black communities were displaced from more fertile land to less fertile land by the British colonial system, thus rendering them destitute:

Your family did not always live here, did not move to this place until after the time that I was married to your grandfather. We lived up in Chipinge, where the soil is ripe and your great-grandfather was a rich man in the currency of those days, having many fat herds of cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce bountiful harvests. All this he could exchange for cloth and beads and axes and a gun, even a gun, from the traders. They did not come to stay in those days; they passed through and left ...Wizards well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land. On donkey, on foot, on horse, on ox-cart, the people looked for a place to live. But the wizards were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less of land for the people. At last the people came upon the grey, sandy soil of the homestead, so stony and barren that the wizards would not use it.

(18)

The story of the colonial encounter between Tambu's ancestors and colonizers puts the condition of their family into context, showing that the displacement from more fertile land contributed to the squalid condition described by the narrator. Tambu says her grandmother gave her history lessons, but it was "[h]istory that could not be found in the textbooks" (17). The old woman tells Tambu that "the third-born son, [Tambu's] grandfather, lured by the wizards' "whispers of riches and luxury and driven by the harshness of the homestead, took himself and his family to one of their wizards' farms" (18). The determination and resolve to emerge from poverty led Tambu's grandfather into the slavery of migrant labour and his family is ultimately thrown off the now white owned farm. In a painful description of their defeat, the narrator shows how the family now "[d]estitute ... travelled back to the homestead ..." (18). It is from this picture of hopelessness that Babamukuru manages to build a life for himself, his family and the family of his brother. Despite having land to cultivate, Jeremiah's

laziness ends up depriving his family of the much needed food security. Tambu's ability to make the land yield profitable harvest shows up her father's laziness and dereliction of duty. In Jeremiah's case, Dangarembga suggests, poverty becomes an excuse for laziness and lack of enterprise.

The story provides the thesis with an opportunity to fully gauge the effect of the collapse of family ties in the city space by showing that Jeremiah's family survives because of the assistance received from Babamukuru. Babamukuru in the early pages of the story sees himself as a provider and rebuts Maiguru's complaint of what she sees as overspending on his part: "if I, as head of the family, don't provide food, who will provide" (122), he asks. I argue that Tambu gets a chance to gain education through the help of the extended family of Babamukuru, an opportunity that would not have been available if the Shona tradition of extended family was not intact. Jeremiah's family and other characters such as Lucia are cushioned from the most debilitating effects of poverty by their reliance on Babamukuru. Compared to Tambu, the narrator in Marechera's text suffers because apart from his mother, he does not have another support base to fall back on.

The patriarch Babamukuru is not celebrated in the novel, however, as he is portrayed as an oppressor to his daughter Nyasha and his wife, Maiguru. Maiguru remains under the shadow of her husband Babamukuru despite being educated; making the point that education alone could not emancipate women from poverty and patriarchal oppression. Babamukuru insists on his masculine authority and this causes friction between him and his daughter Nyasha. In a heated debate he tells Nyasha: "I am the head of this house ... anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made" (114-15). His character shows the negative aspect of dominant masculinity that intends to stop women from

asserting themselves and independently contributing to the welfare of the family. Despite his success, he fails to have a happy relationship with his family, who end up being miserable despite having material riches. Tambu says: “we hardly ever laughed when Babamukuru was in earshot, because, Maiguru said, his nerves were bad” (102). Through the family dynamics the author analyses what becomes apparent in the next group of texts where women take more drastic measures to lay claim to a position in the economy.

The text shows that girls were often denied the chance to attain education. Following Nhamo’s death, Babamukuru declares that “there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need ... Tambudzai must be given the opportunity to do what she can for the family before she goes into her husband’s home” (56). Poverty is depicted as affecting the majority of the people, but the story shows that women and girls face the double burden of poverty and patriarchal oppression. Tambu decides from an early age to fight her way out of poverty, but other characters like Takesure and Jeremiah are resigned and accept their situation as it is. Lucia (who also seeks refuge with Babamukuru, but later in the text, asserts herself and begins to acquire some education) tells Babamukuru: “[w]e both know I can’t go home...[t]heir sending me here in the first place, it was because there was no food, and no work either at that place, isn’t it?” (127). Tambudzai uses the appearance of Lucia to introduce her mother’s family:

My mother’s family was very poor, poorer even than my own. At the time that my father took my mother, there were no cattle at all in my grandfather’s kraal. Because of this, some people had believed it was a blessing that the first two of my maternal grandparents’ children were girls. (127)

The description of the family shows the centrality of the theme of poverty in the story as it is presented in its different facets. The women are more vulnerable to poverty because of

cultural practices that disempower them, but the text tells of the complexities of the issue citing differences in approach and reaction even amongst women. For the purposes of this discussion I opt to leave out the debate on the alienation that Babamukuru's children suffer as a result of what Tambu's mother calls the "Englishness" (207) and the pain that Maiguru lives through for a long time despite being educated and rich. The story gives all the characters a voice to articulate their reaction and attitude to poverty, even the poor and illiterate women like Tambu's mother. Tambu's mother boldly tells Babamukuru that "I am poor and ignorant, that's me, but I have a mouth and it will keep talking, it won't keep quiet" (142). Dangarembga takes the reader inside the lives of four women and their men as they struggle with poverty and the need for basics such as food and shelters as well as patriarchal oppression. Tambu struggles with the poverty that she is born into, while her cousin and fellow protagonist, Nyasha, is born into the lap of luxury. The two end up sharing their concerns about gender inequality that makes poverty more unbearable for women than for men, however. As the story of Maiguru shows, even educated women cannot escape the patriarchal oppression of the Shona culture. When Tambu leaves for the mission, she believes she is leaving behind the poverty of her family. She paints a picture of herself as a poor peasant in a

tight faded frock ... [with] broad-toed feet that had grown thick-skinned through daily contact with the ground in all weathers ... corrugated black callouses on my knees, the scales on my skin that were due to lack of oil, the short, dull tufts of malnourished hair. (58)

Tambu has high hopes of a better life at the mission and she sees herself as leaving behind the peasant identity. She is embarrassed when she is unable to use modern gadgets like the light switch in her cousin's bedroom. When she returns to her parents' home after living at the mission for a while she becomes even more aware of the squalid condition of "thatched roof

of the kitchen ... failing out ... [g]reat holes gap[ing] in the crumbling mud-brick walls” (125). Tambu, who rebuked her brother Nhamo for being ashamed of his poor background, tells of her own transformation due to exposure to a better life at the mission. She rebukes her mother for not cleaning the pit latrine which she says was once salubrious when she (Tambu) cleaned it daily, but now has “faeces and urine contamina[ting] every surface” (125). Tambu shows that the situation of the latrine is made worse by lack of hygiene and she takes it upon herself to clean the toilet; another illustration of her refusal to allow poverty to demean her.

Dangarembga’s narrative technique allows her to lay bare the theme of poverty in her text, showing how Tambu’s reaction to poverty changed over time and as she is exposed to various circumstances. Tambu herself suggests a variation in her attitude towards the poverty in her family and her expectation of the life in the mission when she comments that “had I been writing these things at the time that they happened, there would have been many references to ‘palace’ and ‘mansion’ and ‘castle’ ... I can now refer to my uncle’s house as no more than that – a house” (62). The shifts and turns in the lives of the characters depict different versions of poverty that attract varying reactions from individuals and groups depending on the situation. The story paints a holistic picture of life with both rich and poor people, successful and less successful as well as hard working individuals and some with a poor work ethic. The struggles of these different characters who occupy different levels of societal interaction, becomes even more pronounced in literature written by the next generation of writers who engage even more explicitly with socio-economic issues in a declining economy.

Third Generation Writers in Zimbabwe- writing poverty amidst the crisis

As Veit-Wild rightly observes, this generation of writers is like their predecessors “open minded and critical of society and politics in post-independence Zimbabwe” (8). In this section of the chapter, I discuss Yvonne Vera, Valerie Tagwira and Petina Gappah. Since all the authors that I discuss are female, the discussion will lean more towards literary depictions of gender and poverty as interlinked factors. Even though Marechera paints a strong figure of his mother who does everything to educate her sons, the plot is not as ambitious as the ones for the above texts. Dangarembga too, despite having female characters who challenge patriarchal hegemony, in her text has Babamukuru who remains a strong patriarch who refuses to be questioned by anyone. Vera’s text, which I explore next, provides a utopian/dystopian end, with Phephelaphi claiming a symbolic victory against patriarchal control represented by Fumbatha, but at the cost of her own life.

Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* (1998)

Vera was born in 1964 in Bulawayo, in the former Southern Rhodesia, to parents who were both teachers. Her first collection of short stories, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, was published in 1992, followed by *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1997), *Butterfly Burning* (2000) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). For this chapter, I discuss only *Butterfly Burning* and the choice as already mentioned is informed by the text’s explicit focus on poverty and urban indigence.

Vera is known for her “dense poetic prose, her allusive style”, and it has been said that “her ability to handle the most difficult subjects and confront taboos often evokes strong and

diverse responses in the reader” (Muponde and Taruvinga xi). This citation from the introduction to the collection *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2002) is an indication of how much Vera’s fiction is valued and in this chapter I seek to discuss her illuminating visual depictions of poverty in her new aesthetics. In her defiance of established narrative devices, Vera shuns a linear narration and allows her story to be moved backwards and forward through flashbacks and snapshots into the future. As Jane Bryce writes in her essay “Imaginary snapshots: Cinematic techniques in the writing of Yvonne Vera”, this new aesthetics is an effort by writers such Vera (and Marechera before her), to “evolve a new way of rendering this reality, one that departs from established conventions of narrative structure” (40). Bryce quotes Vera on her writing process:

I’ve always been visually oriented, and before I worked at the National Gallery, perhaps my larger influence was film, and how images are prepared, constructed and made to move. I also have a strong leaning towards photography. When I’m writing, I start with a moment – visual, mental – that I can see, and I place it on my table, as though it were a photograph. (39)

The chapter seeks to explore this art in order to delineate Vera’s literary depictions of poverty in her text *Butterfly Burning*. I seek to demonstrate that Vera’s text is richly poetic in its depiction of poverty. Vera’s writing is similar to that of Marechera because the two authors use a rich language to produce a unique oeuvre that introduces new temporalities in the creation of a modern Zimbabwean subjectivity. Identifying the similarities between the two authors, Zimbabwean scholar and literary critic, Kizito Muchemwa – in the essay, “Vera’s Fictional Palimpsests: The Land, City, and Peripatetic Bodies” – writes:

Vera’s immediate predecessor is Marechera, whose influence on her poetic language, the use of the montage narrative technique, the motif of the photograph, and synaesthesia is very evident. Both are writers of colonial and postcolonial trauma and the city. (284)

While agreeing with Muchemwa's observation, I argue that Vera differs from Marechera in that she creates space for female protagonists in the fictional city and gives them a voice in a male dominated space. In keeping with the motif of the photograph, *Butterfly Burning* is divided into a series of scenes, each of which presents a touching picture of the lives of the people of Makokoba Township. These pictures of a difficult life characterised by a struggle for food, shelter and clothing, are made even more moving by the 'snapshots' that take the reader deeper into the lives of the characters, revealing secrets and laying bare the fears of each individual as they make their way in the colonial, racist context in which they find themselves.

Even though critics have tended to focus on Vera's depiction of the price women pay in a patriarchal society, this chapter seeks to expand the lens and explore Vera's rich descriptions of township life while at the same time linking the squalor, violence and pollution to the colonial legacy. Fanon makes a compelling case for the differences between areas within the colonial city that are designated for the blacks and those that are reserved for the whites. The description of a native town as "a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire" (39), fits the Makokoba township which is portrayed in Vera's text as a place where:

[t]he men adapted to challenges more debilitating than these...The work is not their own; It is summoned. The time is not theirs; it is seized. The ordeal is their own. They work again and again, and in unguarded moments of hunger and surprise, they mistake their fate for fortune. (3)

Like the town in Fanon's text, Vera's township is poignantly described as a place where "hostilities [are] too burdensome to give up" (4). Sidojiwe E2 township in Vera's text

resembles Fanon's 'native town' down to the children who "sit on empty, rusted metal drums and talk of cars passing along Jukwa road, a street of tarmac which stretches longer than they can see" (12), casting the envious look of the native at the settler's possessions.

Vera echoes Fanon's characterization of a colonized town as a troubled town which is marked by overcrowding and violence. The squalor in Africa's overcrowded cities has come to be a common thread in African modernity. The highlight of the scramble for survival is vividly portrayed in a description of the behaviour of the rich towards the poor:

The shop owner does not sell the Red Seal Roller meal: Instead, he makes the people scramble over it. He throws the many bags from the balcony of his double-storey store which is decorated with curled, red-painted metal, shaped like lace. The bags tumble and tear from the collapse. The many arms scramble forward. (37)

I argue that through the behaviour of the shop owner in the above quote the author depicts her displeasure at how the rich often treat the less privileged who do not have any choice but to endure the humiliation. The scramble for the spilt food shows how desperate the poor are for something to eat, while the detailed description of the behaviour of the shop owner is indicative of how the colonial system disadvantaged blacks and left them at the mercy of the white colonial entrepreneurs. The choice that the shop owner makes not to sell the food and the description of his house, suggest serious economic disparities in the community, a situation that gives him an advantage over the poor. The constant *leitmotif* in the text is the need for food which also characterises both *The House of Hunger* and Hove's *Bones*. Food is used here in a similar manner as in *Bones*. The shop owner derives power from the fact that he has a commodity that people need and as such he ridicules them by making them scramble for the food.

Food as a manifestation of power recalls Michel Foucault's 'art of governmentality' which he argues is made more manifest in the governance of the poor. Claire Edwards in "Cutting off the King's Head: The 'Social in Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault'" writes: "[p]overty is extremely important in governmentality because through it 'a new rationality imposed itself ... one which tied the existence of poverty to the destiny of society itself' (140)." I argue that Vera's usage of the symbol of food brings into play the theories of power (as articulated by Foucault and others) and the everyday experiences of power in a context of poverty. Foucault argues that the introduction of the modern economy gave the government powers to "exercise towards all its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of the family over his household and goods" (Foucault 92). Vera's text explores the power relations between the poor and rich, showing that like governments who may use national resources to control citizens, the rich also manipulate the poor, who desperately need their assistance.

The scramble for food articulates the desperate situation in Vera's township where the inhabitants of Makokoba have to "fight unguarded moments of Hunger" but despite their efforts to unite in their quest for survival "[p]overty prevails over innocence" (4). Vera here writes about urban dwellers that have just arrived in the city from the rural areas showing how their dreams of a better life are shattered by the harsh realities of the city with its laws that do not recognize the existence of the migrant labourer in the city. Their innocent desire to work and support their families in the rural areas is soon replaced by the desperate need to survive "within the [city's] cracks ... [un]noticed and unnoticeable" (6). Writing on this point in the essay, "Habitable Space: Urbanity and Becoming in Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*", Erik Falk quotes Zimbabwean literary critic Lawrence Vambe, arguing that:

From its inception, the Rhodesian settler state marked the gradually emerging urban space as “modern” and white and legally enshrined an apartheid system – through laws such as the 1930 Land Apportionment Act and the 1934 Industrial Conciliation Act for instance – that intended to exclude black subjects from urban modernity by making them visitors in the city rather than full-blown city dwellers. (248)

The laws sought to ban blacks from the city while at the same time using their labour to construct the city. I argue that the unjust laws impoverished blacks as they denied them the right to own prime land and forced them into crowded shanty towns. In a paper titled “Slums as Expressions of Social Exclusion: Explaining the Prevalence of Slums in African Countries,” Ben C. Arimah, an expert with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) writes:

One of the most enduring physical manifestations of social exclusion in African cities is the proliferation of slums and informal settlements. People living in these settlements experience the most deplorable living and environmental conditions, which are characterized by inadequate water supply, squalid conditions of environmental sanitation, breakdown or non-existence of waste disposal arrangements, overcrowded and dilapidated habitation, hazardous location, insecurity of tenure, and vulnerability to serious health risks. Slum residents are also excluded from participating in the economic social, political and cultural spheres of the city— all of which create and nurture capabilities. Consequently, slum dwellers— many who are poor in the first place— are made poorer by the various forms of exclusion that they face. (2)

I argue that the exclusion from the city and consequently from the economic activity impoverishes the slum dwellers and leads to their restlessness. The exclusion that Arimah alludes to is depicted in Vera’s text as being a product of the migrant labour system that necessitated the movement from rural areas to the urban centres for gainful employment.

Vera uses the journey motif to capture this movement and to articulate the resultant poverty. Through the journey motif Vera is able to reconfigure the binaries of urban and rural, modern and traditional as well as build a case for the importance of understanding human experience beyond these binaries because poverty cuts across all of them. Muchemwa in the essay quoted above opines that “*Butterfly Burning*, the most urban of Vera’s novels sets urban subjectivity in the context of movement that connects the country and the city” (280). The text delineates the journey from the rural areas to the urban in search of a better life, showing that upon arrival in the city people are confronted with a different reality. The arriving migrants assist one another regardless of where they come from because they face common challenges such as lack of basic necessities – shelter and food. Samuelson in the essay alluded to in the introductory part of the chapter also describes Vera’s writing techniques:

The modern subject emerges from these fictions as an inherently restless one; railing against colonial containment and articulating its desires for an elsewhere, it finds expression in Vera’s privileged tropes of music and trains; both travelling tropes, music and trains in these texts are rendered as figures through which movement across rural/urban and national boundaries is articulated. (22)

The trope of the train and the motif of the journey both reflect the author’s articulation of the movement from rural areas to urban areas in search of jobs. The restlessness identified by Samuelson emanates from the harsh conditions of migrant labour. In the first scene of the narrative the author depicts the structural violence of colonialism and racism in the exploitation of black men. The image of exploited workers with “bent backs in the sun...clad in torn white shorts, short sleeves, naked soles [with] palms bleeding with the liquid from freshly squeezed grass’ (1) provides an illustration of the exploitative nature of colonial migrant labour and the induced poverty and degradation of the indigenes.

The text describes how difficult life is for inhabitants of the slums, with the narrator describing Makokoba as “fresh with all kinds of desperate wounds” (6) and Bulawayo as having “nothing to offer but surprise; being alive is a consolation” (6). The description paints a picture of a situation where one’s life is always under threat, as depicted by the snapshot of the brutal execution of seventeen men who (we later learn) included the father of Fumbatha (one of the leading characters in the story). The description of the incident paints an unforgettable, gruesome picture: “The dead will remain in the tree for days. Their legs tied together, their hands hanging close to their stomachs ... beyond the Umguza River, the women raise their voices at dawn to mourn seventeen men and thousands more. Their resistance to the settlers has been silenced” (8). Annie Gagiano in “Barbed Wire and Dreams in Late Colonial Rhodesia: Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*” writes: “To mark colonial power acquisition, seventeen bodies of indigenous men, executed for resisting the colonial incursion, were left hanging from the branches of a tree on the edge of the ruined city” (146).

The picture of the men hanging from trees for days forms part of the second scene in the text, which introduces Fumbatha and his life of hard labour and little fulfilment. In this chapter I argue however that despite the seemingly hopeless picture, the story skilfully weaves in the courageous efforts by individuals who, despite being faced with the constant threat of starvation, “learn how to move through the city with speed and due attention, to bow their heads down and slide past walls” (6). Gagiano reiterates this point and argues that:

The black subject (but not citizen) thus literally co-constructs urban modernity in the colony...[b]ut after ‘almost twenty years’ of this labour Fumbatha and Phephelaphi – and other, much larger township families – live in one roomed asbestos shacks with dirt floors, subject to colonial supervision and police raids. (Gagiano, *Barbed Wire and Dreams in Late Colonial Rhodesia*, 147)

The black subject is crucial to the construction of the city, but as Gagliano rightly observes he is not supposed to be in the city as a result of the compartmentalization of the colonial city that I alluded to in my discussion of Marechera's text. In the third scene children demonstrate the resilience of blacks to continue living in the city despite laws prohibiting their stay. The children continue playing even as they can "smell this and that squalor of every kind" (21). When a fire breaks out, the children stop playing, but it all appears to them that "a special ceremony is being enacted for their benefit" (21). The story shows how the children are not troubled by the death of men who are killed by the explosion of the tank they were working at, but are instead moved by "ordinary desires, like hunger" (22). In the description of the behaviour of the children Vera refuses to paint a picture of a defeated subaltern, but tries to indicate that the city offers the oppressed some kind of freedom. Despite the violence and the squalor around them, the children "see rainbows and are assured of their own kind of permanence" (14).

The fourth scene introduces the exploitative nature of the migrant labour system, showing that migrants find themselves trapped further in a violent atmosphere that promotes the proletarianization of their labour as they continue surviving. Proletarianization is a Marxist concept that captures a social process where people move from being unemployed or self-employed (often managing by means of subsistence Agriculture) to being forced to accept money as wages for their labour.

The exploitative nature of the migrant labour system is illustrated in the fourth scene where "Fumbatha rests beneath debris and rubble. He is lying on his back with the empty khakhi bags of cement for a pillow and a small grey blanket under his body ... He feels heavy not just

tired. *The smell of cement has the effect of pulling him down and pinning him to the ground*" 18, my emphasis). Smell here is used to point to the squalor in the townships where poor drainage systems, pit latrines and overcrowding are a common feature. The pressure for survival that Fumbatha faces is intimately conveyed to the reader in a paragraph that contrasts his struggle and the amount of work he has done:

There is the pressure of survival, and money is needed for shelter. For almost twenty years Fumbatha has done nothing but build, and through this contact, Bulawayo is a city he understands closely, which he has held brick by brick, on his palm, felt the tension of effort over his back. He has held this city, without a clear emotion of anger or love. (25)

The quotation above reveals the intimate connection that Fumbatha has with the city despite being prohibited from walking on its streets. I argue that the process of urbanization while at the same denying men the freedom of movement it accords them a sense of pride when they look at their work. Vera dismantles the dichotomies of oppressor and oppressed, showing that colonial modernity involved both subjectivity and resistance:

Fumbatha's body bends to pick up an instrument and his shoulder swings to throw an object; this is not submission. An anger is gathered in the most solitude of his mind, in the folds of history most charitable to oneself. It is simultaneous with the forced action, it precedes and follows in the familiar way in which sound follows the fall of an object on a hard surface. (72)

Vera manages to depict the unfairness of the migrant labour system by exposing the amount of work Fumbatha has done for the city for very little in terms of rewards, while at the same time showing that Fumbatha and his co-workers are not completely defeated. However, despite the many buildings he has built for others, he still does not have proper shelter.

In the same scene Fumbatha meets Phephelaphi who becomes a key figure in his life. Fumbatha, which means ‘fist’ in Shona, is a name indicative of the character’s lifelong, back breaking labour and continued resistance, but the fist is relaxed by the meeting between Fumbatha and Phephelaphi. In introducing herself Phephelaphi explains why she was given this name, indicating a background of poverty and a state of homelessness:

My mother named me Phephelaphi because she did not know where to seek refuge when I was born. She slept anywhere. She had no food in her stomach, but her child had to sleep under some shelter. She had hard times. As soon as I was born her struggles began. When I was born, she had given me another name. She called me Sakhile. Then she discovered that Makokoba had no time for a woman who was raising a child on her own, so she renamed me. (30)

Vera utilizes names as symbols to indicate that poverty and the struggle for survival are central to the lives of the people she writes about. The two leading characters in the text have names that echo the life in the township which comprises hard work, starvation and poor shelter. In a dissertation titled “Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera, and David Dabydeen,” Erik Falk reveals that Phephelaphi, “means ‘where will I find shelter’ and acts as metaphorical compensation for the material and economic safety she lacks” (76). Phephelaphi accepts that “if she had any money and proper means her mother’s death would be hers, now it belonged elsewhere [because] she had nothing” (35). I argue further that the name and the condition it denotes tends to be Phephelaphi’s destiny in the end, as she finally claims victory by taking her own life. Her suicide as I will argue later is her way of taking charge of her body which Fumbatha seeks to own as if it were the land that he has been disconnected from.

It is not until the seventh scene that the reader is drawn back to the life of Phephelaphi and Fumbatha and shown how they manage to overlook the poverty that is all around them to find happiness and love in one another's company. A paragraph that describes their room reveals the couple's life of happiness within poverty, deprivation and squalor:

Phephelaphi and Fumbatha had a bed though it creaked and sagged and scraped down to the floor. A paraffin stove. A wire running diagonally across the room above the bed where they placed their clothing and let it hang down to partition the room; the bed split in two, the top half on one side, the bottom on the other. The cooking was done on one side and they bent under the skirts and trousers and sat on the bottom half of the bed and held painted metal plates and ate hot meals from their laps. (47)

Despite the seemingly over-crowded conditions, the couple appear in love and enjoy each other's company. The 'unconscious dignity', with which they face the reality of poverty and overcrowding, recalls Bessie Head's concept that was discussed in the previous chapter. They are aware that the "walls were thin" (48) and that neighbours could hear their every move, but they continued with their lives. In the eighth scene, the story returns to the issue of migrant labour and zooms into the migrants' struggles from the moment they arrive at the train station. As shown earlier, the situation of migrant labourers is a desperate one:

So the most congested place is the railway station, with its waiting rooms, where people linger for months with nowhere to lodge. With no direction. They move from room to room and tuck their semiprecious belongings under the wooden benches, on the cement floors ... Bodies lie in rows, raised from the ground, but there is not enough room so the floors are seen covered with bags and restless bodies. From waiting room, to waiting ... And those who have not found a place along the benches soon learn to sleep through frenzied beat. (54 – 5)

The picture shows the overcrowding at the train station and it is clearly an allusion to the influx of rural migrants to the city as a result of industrialization. The majority of men left rural for urban areas to seek gainful employment, but “others find jobs while the rest stay where they are and let time remove hunger” (56). The author depicts the resolve and tenacity of the migrants who take their difficult situation in their stride; “they welcome the newly arrived and press their backs further against the wall so that these too can find room” (56). The migrants defy all odds and remain united in the face of a lack of jobs and shelter; they remain tolerant and accommodative of new arrivals despite the congestion and lack of sleeping space.

Gendered poverty in *Butterfly Burning*

The women had other ideas about their own fulfilment; not only did some of them arrive in the city independently of the men, they remained in these single shelters no matter what threat was advertised, they gave birth and raised children on the palms of their hands. Bicycles had either policemen or black women on them. The women rode into suburbs where from sunrise to sunset they kept, clothed, and fed white children from their own breasts. In the evening, they returned to Makokoba and cooked dried fish, or anything with a strong scent to it, stewed it into an irresistible succulence. They craved something possessing the hint of rivers or an expanse as wide and fascinating as the sea. (Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, 103)

Through vivid descriptions of poverty in the lives of women, the story evokes gendered aspects of poverty, showing how some women resort to prostitution and selling illegal beer in order to survive. The epigraph to this section shows a departure by the women characters (led by the protagonist, Phephelaphi) from societal expectation of how women should behave and what they can do or not do. This has been labelled the writer’s attempt to carve a new path and a new aesthetics. Writers like Bessie Head and Unity Dow in the previous chapter have also gestured towards a similar aesthetic by giving their female characters leading roles in

their texts. The female characters are depicted as strong and tenacious, managing to juggle many responsibilities at a time.

The narrative accords women space in the urban environment and allows them to showcase their response to the challenges of poverty and deprivation. The process of urbanization offers oppressed groups a transformative opportunity as it destabilizes boundaries set by traditional gender stereotypes. The city offers women like Deliwe and Zandile the opportunity to assert their own existence which is independent and not bound to any man. These women are “determined to find [the city’s] flamboyant edges, its colour and light” (143). Some women choose to do odd jobs in order to feed their families, while others resort to prostitution and running shebeens. One such woman is Deliwe, who “laughed at the women selling the vegetables and said they were the laziest people she had seen in Africa” (62). She runs a successful shebeen where people can buy alcohol at any time and she is presented as a strong woman who is unfazed by her numerous brushes with the law.

Zandile resorts to prostitution in order to survive in Makokoba, and she is throughout the story, referred to as a friend to Gertrude, the supposed mother of Phephelaphi. Zandile is introduced in the fifth scene as one “who made no distinction between white men and black men when it comes to pleasure and exchange” (40). Despite the knowledge that the reader obtains towards the end of the story that Zandile is Phephelaphi’s biological mother, she does not show any connection to her. She actually “laughs aloud as she remembers her friend Gertrude, stubborn impossible Gertrude who brought a baby strapped to her back to every possible appointment with every possible stranger” (42). The full story behind Phephelaphi’s birth comes later in the text in scene nineteen when it becomes clear that Zandile is Phephelaphi’s mother:

Zandile could never kill her [Phephelaphi] because she was her own true mother and knew it. She had given her over to Gertrude to keep. Zandile could not kill her own child to whom she had given birth and nearly died while doing it because this child refused to come out on its own ... Zandile did not want either this child who refused to be born or the bold magnificent scar left falling below her navel which ruined the mood of her every subsequent encounter with each man. A child was an agony then, with absolutely no man she could point to and share the burden with. She could not keep the child. (143)

The story gives a clear picture of the circumstances that Zandile found herself in and the choice that she made of giving the child away. The proclamation that Zandile could not kill her own daughter when juxtaposed to her decision not to raise her, unlike Gertrude who chose to carry the baby to all her appointments, suggests a complex situation where different characters respond differently to similar circumstances. Zandile chose to pursue the glitz and glamour of the city, while Gertrude selflessly raises the child as her own. Despite living in poverty and having to sell her body to survive, Gertrude still manages to raise the child successfully. Zandile on the other hand intended to throw “the child into a ditch and wal[k] away” (144).

Phephelaphi turns out very differently from Zandile and she yearns for much more than just being a wife or having a man to share her struggles. Zandile warns her: “[y]ou are not a man, Phephelaphi ... [w]hat are you going to in Makokoba without being a man? ... Makokoba is unkind to women like you who pretend to be butterflies that can land on any blossom they choose” (129). Despite the advice from her mother Phephelaphi forges ahead with her dream of being a nurse; she has no intention of becoming the typical ‘township wife’. She insists that she wants to “become a nurse at the hospital” (71). Even though Phephelaphi ignores her

mother's advice, it is Fumbatha with whom she later lives that prevents her from following her dream.

The next set of texts explores similar struggles in contemporary Zimbabwe during the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina – the now notorious government urban slum clearance campaign as well as the struggles by women for survival in the era of HIV/AIDS.

Writing Crisis – Post-Independence Writing in Zimbabwe

The paradoxical truth that troubled societies somehow produces some of the most interesting writing available. (Gagiano, online review of *Writing Still*)

As indicated in the introductory part of the chapter, literary works that I place in the fourth category of Zimbabwean literature were published during the post-colonial crisis and as a result focused on the effects of poverty on ordinary people in urban spaces. Unlike the first three categories where I categorise writers into generations based on their birthdates, this category comprises writers who belong to different generations but have written about the post-colonial crisis. In this section, I discuss Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2008) alongside the Weaver Press collections of short stories, *Writing Now*, *Writing Still*, *Laughing Now - New stories from Zimbabwe* and *Women Writing Zimbabwe* as well as *Long Time Coming – Short writings from Zimbabwe* published by amabooks. The focus of these texts is on depicting lived realities of poverty and as the summary of the collection *Laughing Now* states, the intention of most of the short stories discussed here is to “demonstrate the enduring capacity of Zimbabweans to find humour in even the most difficult of circumstances”. The epigraph to this chapter, which is also taken from the same summary, does buttress the point that writing

during the post-colonial crisis sought to depict struggles of ordinary people in the different aspects of their daily lives.

The stories will be organized into thematic groupings, with those that grapple with economic collapse constituting one group while those that discuss the combined effect of poverty and on HIV/AIDS form another group. Gappah's text will be paired with short stories that address the economic meltdown while Tagwira's text will fall under those that tackle the HIV/AIDS affliction in the post-colonial setting. The two texts cover a wide array of issues (which I will highlight in my discussion) but their focus on the collapse of the economy and HIV/AIDS, will be central to my discussion. David Coltart in a developmental policy document titled "A Decade of Suffering in Zimbabwe: Economic Collapse and Political Repression under Robert Mugabe" argues that "[s]ince 1994, the average life expectancy in Zimbabwe has fallen from 57 years to 34 years for women and from 54 years to 37 years for men ... [s]ome 3,500 Zimbabweans die every week from the combined effects of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and malnutrition". In this quote Coltart identifies the main issues of the period addressed in this section. The texts written during the economic collapse depict the hardships in people's lives as a result of shortage necessities such as fuel and food over and above foreign currency.

Texts discussed here articulate the economic meltdown of the 2000s following the controversial land redistribution exercise instituted by the war veterans and supported by the government of Robert Mugabe. As Coltart shows in the quote above, the quality of life declined in Zimbabwe and the life expectancy also plummeted. Various studies have shown that the country's economy had shrunk by almost two thirds since 2000. The country, which

was formerly seen as the bread basket of Southern Africa, ran out of basic supplies of food, gasoline and foreign capital.

Gappah's story provides background to the economic collapse by depicting the demolition of the shanty town of Easterly while the other stories chronicle the bitter absurdity of the life of poor people trying to earn a living despite the chaos of economic collapse and rising state corruption. Albert Camus and other writers like the Irish writer, Samuel Beckett, have popularised the notion of "absurdity" as a conflict between individual efforts to derive meaning from life struggles with the irrational world. Stories here capture an irrational world where fathers are incapacitated and cannot provide for their families (and they struggle to come to terms with the situation); wealth and money are losing value to the frustration of owners; there are long queues for basic necessities (with people standing in the queues for hours and often returning with nothing) and general anxiety around the unpredictability of life as the post-colonial Zimbabwean crisis constantly increases.

An Elegy for Easterly (2009)

Petina Gappah, a lawyer by profession, was born in 1971 in Kitwe, Zambia and has law degrees from the Universities of Zimbabwe and Cambridge. She currently lives in Zimbabwe and is an Open Society Fellow for 2012-2013. Her first collection of short stories has attracted many positive reviews and has been published in six languages. The collection was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and won the *Guardian* First book Award in 2009. The collection of short stories shows, in an often darkly humorous way, how Zimbabweans at all levels of society struggle to learn new ways of earning a living following the collapse of the country's economy that led to mass job losses and increases in commodity prices. The shortage of commodities in the supermarkets as well as the shortage

of foreign currency resulted in a booming black market at which items were sold at exorbitant prices. Gappah's stories depict ordinary people's efforts to survive in this chaotic situation of economic depression and hyper-inflation.

The title story is a lamentation for the destruction of the shanty town of Easterly, which is made up of "houses of pole and mud, of thick black plastic sheeting for walls and clear plastic for windows" (27). The squalid conditions in the township are further shown by shortage of basic amenities such as water as indicated by the long queues of people "waiting with plastic buckets to take water from Easterly's only tap" (27). Gappah foregrounds the theme of poverty early in the story with this description of the shanty town. After painting the picture of Easterly, the third person narrator introduces a beggar, Martha Mupengo, who is the laughing stock of the township as she habitually raises her dress and asks: "May I have twenty cents" (28). The mentally unstable woman is even the object of entertainment for children; she is however the epitome of the terrible conditions in the township. Without romanticising mental illness, Gappah shows that the depression and stress that characterise Easterly farm, is having negative psychological effects on the community of farm workers and informal traders. The farm has a fair share of mental illness, murders and adultery and as such Mupengo is not an outcast but both a product and a reflection of the harsh conditions the community faces. Mupengo's pregnancy is accounted for in the text and the birth of her baby coincides with the demolition of what the government terms "illegal structures" in the settlement, leaving countless people homeless. The demolitions are reminiscent of *Murambatsvina*, the clean-up programme, also captured in Tagwira's text. The chaos created by the demolitions and the poverty afflicting the community result in an unstable environment characterised by the unstable mental conditions of many residents.

The residents of Easterly come up with courageous and innovative ways of surviving the poverty, however. Tobias's mother, MaiToby worked hard at her sewing machine to raise her son. MaiToby is owed "ten million" (30) by another female character who is also portrayed as working hard to fight poverty, MaiJames: "MaiJames operated a phone shop from her house. She walked her customers to a hillock at the end of the farm and stood next to them as they telephoned" (30). The dramatic picture of what the residents have to go through in order to be able to communicate also captures the lighter side of the situation by indicating that by responding opportunistically to the desperate situation, MaiJames provided the township with most of its gossip because she listens to everyone making a call.

The everyday struggles for survival shown through careful and intricate characterisation, are juxtaposed with the insincere and dishonest conduct of the government with regard to conditions in the township. While poor, ordinary characters confront their situations in order to find solutions, the government seeks to hide the poverty from the eyes of outsiders. In preparation for a visit by the queen of England the government resorts to a desperate attempt to conceal the truth:

The government cleaned the townships to make Harare pristine for the three-day visit of the Queen of England. All the women who walk alone at night are prostitutes, the government said, lock them up, the Queen is coming. There are illegal structures in the townships they said – clean them up. The townships are too full of people, they said, gather them up and put them in the places the Queen will not see... [a]nd so the government hid away the poverty, the people put on plastic smiles and the city council planted new flowers in the streets. (32)

The story shows how the post-Independence government fails to address the challenges facing their people, but instead chooses to conceal the reality of abject poverty, overcrowding and prostitution. The narrator shows that this is a fruitless exercise as even more people come

to live on Easterly farm. The authorial voice buttresses the argument that the trend of rural – urban migration of people in search of employment is a reality that cannot be wished away. Women come in waves to the city to look for jobs and better living conditions.

Gappah shows her disillusionment with the post-Independence government for presiding over the collapse of the economy. She blames the government for the economic hardships faced by ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe. Through a story told by BaToby, the reader is taken back to the good old days “before a loaf of bread cost half a million dollars” (32). The price of the bread echoes the story of “A Land of Starving Millionaires” which I will analyse shortly. The fact that the price of bread has skyrocketed is indicative of the value of the Zimbabwean Dollar, which also plummeted. The price shows that inflation rose as a result of the economic collapse. Through the powerful tool of storytelling, the author provides witnesses to the better life who are still alive and can compare the past and the present. The narrative provides testimony from BaToby, who shares a joke with the children: “Before the president was elected, the Zimbabwe ruins were a prehistoric monument in Masvingo province. Now, the Zimbabwe ruins extend to the whole country” (33). Through humour and jokes Gappah captures the reality of life in a stressful environment where people choose to laugh at their situation instead of crying. Writer Aminatta Forna, in her *Guardian* review of Gappah’s collection, observes that “through humour and compassion, she [Gappah] depicts that most quintessential of African characteristics: the ability to laugh at life, for fear of crying (275).” BaTobby cracks a joke even as he blames the collapse of the economy on the government and its failed policies.

The indictment of the government continues in the reference to the influx of foreign goods into the Zimbabwean market. There is a humorous description of one side of Mbare:

On the other side, among the zhing zhong products from China, the shiny clothes spelling out cheerful poverty, the glittery tank tops and body tops imported in striped carrier bags from Dubai, among the Gucci bags and Prada shoes, among the Louise Vilton bags, the boys of Mupedzanhamo competed to get the best customers. (36)

The quotation above paints a complex picture of the socio-economic situation in the township where the poor people can only afford low quality cheap garments from China while the rich buy expensive European labels. Through the wrong spelling of the famous Western label “Louis Vuitton”, Gappah makes the point that the market is flooded by cheap rip-offs sold by the Chinese. The fake goods find favour with the local consumers because they cannot afford the originals. The quotation paints a clear case of poverty amidst plenty, as economic disparities become more pronounced in the society. Dress code and clothing labels are in this instance clear signs of wealth or lack of it, with the poor easily identifiable by the misspelt Chinese brands while the rich can afford the better quality originals.

The story ends the way it started, with the beggar Martha at the centre of the narrative during the “winter of the birth of Martha’s child” (42). The birth of the child coincides with the failure by Josephat’s wife to bear children. After rescuing the child by literally playing the role of a midwife, she takes the baby away to be her own. In a perfectly placed flashback, the author reveals to the reader the circumstances that led to the pregnancy. The reader is shown how Josephat raped the mentally disturbed woman: the child that Josephat’s wife takes is actually that of her husband. Poverty in this story is depicted as a product of economic policies that encourage economic disparities, instead of closing the gap between the poor and the rich. The next story from the collection, “The Mupandawana Dancing Champion,” explores the socio - economic challenges much more deeply by tracing the life of an old man,

who continues surviving even after losing his job and returning home with only a few pairs of small sized shoes.

“The Mupandawana Dancing Champion”

When the prices of everything went up ninety seven times in one year, M'dhara Vitalis Mukaro came out of retirement to make coffins in which we buried our dead. (Gappah, Dancing Champion, 113)

The text tells the story of an old man who works for one company for thirty years and is forced to retire without a pension at the end. The story begins with a scene where M'dhara Vitalis is forced out of retirement to find a job because of rising costs of living and high inflation. The narrator is a teacher who observes “life, and teach[es] geography to school children” (114) and is thus able to give a detailed picture of the situation in Mupandawana. The third person narrator makes it clear from the beginning that the conditions in Mupandawana are harsh and difficult despite the optimistic picture painted by officialdom. Even though the vision espoused by the District Commissioner is “town status for Mupandawana by the year 2065 ... the only real growth is in the number of people waiting to buy coffins” (114). The disconnection between reality and the vision of the District Commissioner shows the author’s dim view of the official rhetoric that often misleads the public.

The growing demand for coffins is an indication of the deteriorating conditions of living in the township. The humorous tale reveals how Mdhara Vitalis is forced into early retirement because of foreign currency shortages. The early retirement and the author’s naming of Vitalis as Mdhara (Old Man), even though he is not that old, is indicative of a reduction in life expectancy. The author dramatizes the issue of age to demonstrate that life in Mupandawana is unpredictable and uncertain. Mdhara Vitalis’ age is not clear:

To appreciate [M'dhara Vita's] skill is to understand that he was an old man. They had no birth certificates in the days when he was born, or at least none for people born in the rural areas, so that when he trained as a carpenter at Bondolfi and needed a pass to work in the towns, his mother had estimated his age by trying to recall how old he was when the mission school four kilometres from his village had been built. As befitting one who followed in the professional footsteps of the world's most famous carpenter, he had chosen December 25 as his birthday, so that his age was a random selection and he could well have been older than his official years. What was beyond dispute was that he danced in defiance of the wrinkles around his eyes. (127)

Life in the township is a gamble and the inhabitants have to continuously see new ways of surviving the poverty. The reduction in life expectancy means that the age at which one could qualify to be called an old man is drastically reduced. The author tackles serious issues such as rising mortality rates (symbolised by the booming coffin business) and the tragic loss of jobs with a lot of humour, while at the same time depicting the sordid and tragic reality of abject poverty.

After working for many years in the city, the protagonist returns home with nothing more to show than pairs of shoes that are not even his size:

M'dhara Vitalis was forced to retire three years earlier than anticipated. His employer told him that the company was shutting down because they could not afford the foreign currency. There would not be money for a pension, he was told, the money had been invested in a bank whose directors had run off with it...to England. He had been allowed to keep his overalls and had been given some tools that he had used in the factory. (116 -7)

The experience of this man in the migrant labour system exposes its unfairness as well as its exploitative nature. The quotation lays bare the looting of the Zimbabwean economy by foreign investors who invest their profits in offshore markets such that their businesses do not benefit the local economy in any way. The rights of the workers who produce the wealth are not protected in the business transaction, confirming the imperialist motives of some western business ventures in Africa. Even though the story highlights the collapse of the economy and the shortage of foreign currency and demonstrates how these factors adversely affect businesses, it also points to the role played by some foreign investors in looting the economy.

M'dhara Vitalis does not give up on life after losing his job but goes back home where he manages to survive through farming. He manages to build a homestead with “money earned from the factory” (118). To show that the protagonist is a hard worker, the third person narrator observes that after his retirement M'dhara Vitalis and his wife “managed well enough, somehow, making do with little until the drought came in two consecutive years and inflation zoomed and soared and spun the roof off the country” (118). Despite the difficult conditions, the couple's hard work and determination keeps them out of poverty. While highlighting the collapse of the economy and the subsequent struggle for survival, the author celebrates the protagonist's tenacity, hard work and ability to adapt to situations in his life as they come. When the drought and the collapse of the economy render his agricultural undertaking unproductive he goes back to the city in search of another job. Even though he fails to get a job because of his age and the availability of many unemployed youths, his determination gets him a job in Mupandawana as a coffin marker.

Ironically, M'dhara Vitalis's excellent work ethic earns him the title of “coffin maker with the nimblest fingers” (119) in the area. The story juxtaposes the protagonist's hard work with

the work of the two carpenters who were fired because of the old man's efficiency. The author manages to highlight the struggle for survival among ordinary people like M'Dhara Vitalis, while at the same time rebuking the unfair and exploitative labour system. The protagonist is exploited by his employers in the factories as well as by the Member of Parliament for his area, who has a "stake in two most thriving enterprises in the growth point" (119). The story exposes the corrupt nature of political leaders like the Member of Parliament who also exploit the poor masses. The story comes to a humorous and moving end with M'dhara Vitalis dancing and the crowd watching and urging him on:

"I am Vitalis, shortcut Vita, ilizwo lami ngiVitalis, danger basopo. Waya waya waya waya!" He got down to the ground, rolled and shook. We crowded around him, relishing this new dance that we had not seen before. He twitched to the right, and to the left. The music was loud as we egged him on. He convulsed in response to our cheering. His face shone, and he looked to us as if to say, "Clap harder." And we did. *It was only when the song ended and we gave him a rousing ovation and still he did not get up that we realized that he would never get up, and that he had not been dancing but dying.* (128-9, emphasis added)

Gappah uses the trope of music and dancing to depict the chaotic situation in the township, but her story is not overwhelmed by the tragedies of poverty, political dictatorship and economic meltdown. M'dhara Vitalis forges ahead with life, seeking refuge in his other skills of dancing and carpentry. The use of the music trope gestures towards the sense of humour of the people of Mupandawana who continue to see the lighter side of life despite the challenges they are facing. M'dhara Vitalis "dances [himself] to death" (130), symbolizing a triumphant end to his life. The story of his death becomes headline news alongside the story containing a prediction that "inflation was set to go down to two million, seven hundred and fifty-seven per cent by year end" (130). M'dhara Vitalis's story provides the readers with an alternative

to the more depressing story of inflation, and if a reader “folded the newspaper three-quarters”, they cannot see the story of the inflation and all they see is the “story about M’dhara Vitalis” (130). The author uses grotesque realism, humour and irony that provide a sordid picture of how people’s lives were turned upside down by the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. The story displays the power of the narrative to expose the conflict between various speech acts performed by different characters. In a straightforward and linear plot, the story chronicles the severity of the situation while at the same time exalting Vitalis’s resolve to survive at all costs. Shimmer Chinodya in the next story explores the socio-economic deterioration of Zimbabwe, with queues symbolising an economy that is on a downward spiral.

‘Queues’ – Shimmer Chinodya

Shimmer Chinodya was born in 1957 in Gweru, in the then Rhodesia which makes him a second generation writer according to Veit-Wild’s classification. In this section, however, I wish to show that older and established writers like Chinodya can form part of the fourth category of post-colonial crisis literature since the focus here is on the economic collapse and the subsequent struggles for survival by ordinary citizens, the majority of which live in urban slums and ghettos. Chinodya has had an illustrious writing career with several publications to his name, but in this section I discuss his short story “Queues”, which is part of the short story series *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003) edited by . In this story, Chinodya’s experience and talent come to the fore as he tells a story of long queues for amenities such as petrol. The author weaves the history of his country into the narrative, beginning by disclosing the salary of Sisi Elizabeth “in the mid-seventies [which was] twenty dollars a month working for white people” (43). Through this strategy Chinodya compares

the queues for petrol during the post-colonial Zimbabwean crisis to life in Rhodesia under colonial rule:

Once upon a time in the days of Sisi Elizabeth a loaf of bread cost twelve cents and you could buy a kilogram of meat for a dollar. Twice upon a moon your father sent you, by registered mail, two dollars pocket money to last half a term. Thrice upon a star you ate chicken and chips for twenty-five cents, and with Sidney at the end of the term you patrolled the train at night, munching five-penny mints and Choice Assorted biscuits. Four times upon a sun your father sent three siblings to boarding school on a milkman's pay. Five times upon a galaxy you had rice and chicken for Christmas. Six times upon the universe *you were poor, but you survived*. (44, emphasis added)

The author presents a nostalgic look at what life was like before independence, indicating that even though the wages appear to be low and exploitative, the people managed to survive better than they do after independence. Sis Elizabeth managed to survive on a twenty dollar salary and even though she was poor, she was able to take care of members of her extended family like the narrator. The author shows that with no modern agricultural equipment like fertilizers, people still managed to get decent harvests. The narrator concludes: “[y]ou were dirt poor, but you seldom starved” (45).

In this political allegory, Chinodya dramatizes the history of Zimbabwe and shows how people survived the harsh conditions of a divided colonial urban milieu. Angus Fletcher, in *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964) argues that “allegories are the natural mirrors of ideology” (3). As a literary narrative an allegory makes sense on its own but also mirrors reality. Chinodya's allegory re-examines competing life styles and experiences of people from different walks of life who are forced to wait in long queues. The story re-examines the interaction of the people who come from different backgrounds but also

juxtaposes post-colonial struggles for survival with those of the past. The narrator argues that in “67 and 73 [there] was drought” (46), but no one starved as they were served “yellow sadza” (46) imported from Malawi. The story of the country’s historical journey towards total collapse is told in juxtaposition with the narrator’s love story with Rudo,¹⁵ making the two movements almost dependent on one another. The juxtaposition shows that ordinary people continue to lead normal and meaningful lives despite harsh economic conditions. Chinodya narrates how the country earned the reputation of being the “bread-basket of the region” (46) through the success of the agricultural sector after Independence. The story movingly chronicles acts of looting and abuse of resources that followed;

We declared independence, after that long bitter war, in 1980. In the late 80s we tried to unshackle ourselves from the past. Out went the chains of the old constitution and in came the new. Out went the premiership and in came the presidency ... Of course, there weren’t enough funds. It wasn’t easy. We massacred each other. We manufactured enemies. We squandered resources. (47)

The exchange of old chains for new chains symbolises the perpetuation of economic challenges faced by the masses. Through the symbol of chains the author enters the debate on unfulfilled promises of Independence as economic freedom continues to elude the masses even after attaining political freedom. The poor masses are depicted as continuing to be in chains of poverty while the ruling elites squander the national resources. The authorial voice dismisses the common explanation by the government that it does not have money as an invalid excuse.

Chinodya questions the expenditure of the government which spends more on security by suggesting that the nation is under threat from enemies which only exists in the imagination.

¹⁵ Rudo is Shona for love.

The squandering of resources through increased expenditure and exorbitant lifestyles of the ruling elites leads to the total collapse of the country's economy. The ruling elites scramble for "the national cake [which the narrator says] was getting smaller but suddenly everyone wanted a piece" (49). The metaphor of a cake which is wanted by everyone tellingly captures the struggle for the luxuries of life which runs across the societal spectrum:

The teachers wanted the cake, before it was even baked. The nurses wanted it. The doctors wanted it. The soldiers wanted it so badly that they sent in battalions in brand new Bedfords to bring it back in truckloads...The peasants wanted it...*Pastors and priests in the pulpits of poverty pined for Lazarus' pitiful morsel.* (49, emphasis added)

Through the metaphor of the cake, Chinodya revitalises an old image which has been labelled a cliché by some critics. The scramble for the cake is a metaphor for the corruption that plagued most newly independent African states in which all ruling elites sought to inherit the wealth left by colonial masters while the poor were mere spectators. The metaphor presents a chaotic picture of total moral degeneration where even church leaders have abandoned the ideals of their religion to also compete for the wealth and escape poverty. Poverty is depicted here as a product of poor leadership, failed government policies and also of greed. The ruling elites wanted to have all of the 'cake' to the total exclusion of the peasants who also need a piece for survival. In a humorous way Chinodya represents the tug of war between Zimbabwe and international agencies, which offered advice on economic policies, showing how the advice was ignored, much to the peril of the country's economy:

Later on the world agrees to go upstairs for a cup of coffee...She counted off on her fingers our crimes and shortcomings and reproached us but we did not listen. She said, 'Stop giving ex-combatants grants,' but we did not listen. She said, 'Stop subsidising commodities,' but we did not listen. She said

‘Stop controlling prices,’ but we did not listen.’ She said, ‘Devalue your currency,’ but we did not listen. She said, ‘Stop tampering with the land,’ but we did not listen. She said, ‘Stop grabbing farms,’ but we did not listen. (50)

Through personification, the author manages to depict a vivid picture of the dialogue between Zimbabwe and the International community as things were getting out of hand. In the above quotation, Chinodya depicts some of the failed economic policies as well as some of the poor management of resources that led to the collapse of the economy and subsequently the abject poverty that Zimbabweans had to live under, queuing up for everything:

Last Wednesday I was in the petrol queue all day. I phoned the garage and they told me they might have something that day and when i rushed out there I found a kilometre-long stretch of cars waiting. It was six in the morning. I was hungry and unwashed and hastily dressed ...We talked about houses in the townships where one could buy, at five or six times the normal price, unlimited supplies of bread, sugar, maize, mealie-meal, salt and cooking oil without having to join a queue. We talked about queues at the banks, in the supermarkets, in the pubs, at the bus stops, at the mortuaries, at the cemeteries. (57)

The conversation of people in the queues indicates an economy in decline as there is a shortage of everything, which results in long queues everywhere. The other end result of the shortage is the emergence of a thriving black market where goods and commodities are sold at exorbitant prices. Life revolves around queues, and poverty is shown as a demeaning condition that takes away human dignity by haunting the victim in all spheres of their lives. Doubt Mabhena in the next story lives through the challenges and his life echoes the futile absurdity of the struggle by ordinary people to escape poverty in the city.

“Pay Day Hell”- Christopher Mlalazi

As a child, Doubt Mabhena thought his father strong and capable. But when he became an adult, he realised that he was very poor, and fighting a pathetic battle against unrelenting city poverty. (Mlalazi 189)

The epigraph above is the opening paragraph of Mlalazi’s short story that continues the trend of depicting helpless fathers who are unable to feed their children and families adequately. The theme of diminishing and vanquished masculinities runs through the story as the man fails in his duty as a provider for the family and as a result of this the children see him as weak and incapable of saving them from poverty and starvation. Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde in *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society* explain the issue more succinctly:

Absence, literally and figuratively, is about the forced retreat of the male body from various sites of visibility and authority. Literally, because of the current economic meltdown and political mayhem, a new migrancy on a massive scale is dispersing and re-configuring Zimbabwean manhoods, fatherhoods and masculinities ... In the long and often indefinite absence of men, women left behind take on the roles of ‘men’. The reverse is true in instances of women leaving men at home as they become international migrant labourers. Men take on the roles of ‘women’. (xviii)

In line with Muchemwa and Muponde’s analysis, Mlalazi’s text tells a story of a figurative absence of a father figure, because even though Doubt stays with his children, he is unable to provide for his family. Despite working at Malcom Steel and also working on Saturdays, he still cannot afford “transport fare” (189). The story is about poverty that moves from one generation to the other, from father to son, as Doubt inherited his father’s job at Malcom Steel following his death. Poverty is a constant feature in the family’s history:

The life of the late Doubt's father, with his wife and seven children had also been an odyssey of single rooms in other people's houses, his only furniture a sagging iron bed which Doubt had inherited ... Doubt's siblings were now scattered across all the townships of Bulawayo, each a lodger and near vagrant – as if these sad states were a family trait; a curse placed on them by an angry spirit. (190 - 1)

Adopting a more direct and realist narrative style, the author depicts how difficult it is for poor families to escape the grip of poverty because most poor children are denied the chance to go to school and as a result suffer the same fate as their parents. The author's choice of 'Doubt' as a name for the character articulates the uncertainties of the life that poor people live from one generation to the next:

Doubt's father had also worked for Malcom Steel as a general hand until, a little the worse for spiritual wear, he'd been smeared to the tar in a hit and run by an army truck one pay -day attempting to cross a busy street. As fortune would have it, a semi-literate Doubt had been employed to take his father's place by the company. Like all his siblings, Doubt had only reached Grade 2 and could barely scrawl his name. Mabhena senior felt that too much schooling left too big a hole in his wallet and deprived him of the chance to indulge in *tototo*. He did not think of the larger holes left in his children's minds. (192)

The authorial voice here indicates that even though Mabhena senior was poor and struggled from one pay-day to the other, he could have prioritised his children's education over his drinking. The author clearly disapproves of the self-indulgence and despicable parental selfishness to take his own indulgence in drink as more important than ensuring his children's education. Education as shown earlier can be an opportunity for children to escape from poverty and therefore by jeopardising the education, Mabhena senior denied his children the opportunity to improve their lives. Poverty is depicted here as perpetuated also by unwise

decisions and lack of vision on the part of parents. Doubt also follows suit and denies his own children education:

Doubt had already decided that Ndlala [his son] would not go to school. He could not afford the school uniform and the school books, and in two years' time the price would have increased tenfold. Sometimes he wondered if his son had already fathomed that, like the deceased Mabhena senior, he was just another city desperado, weak and scared; his aggressiveness towards his family only empty bluster. (197)

The story shows how poor families remain poor from one generation to the other as they lose the opportunity to gain education and get better opportunities in life. In some instances (as shown with Doubt's family) the loss of the opportunity is not due to circumstances beyond their control but because of selfish and irresponsible choices of parents. Doubt feels "as if he was stuck in the same rut and his father's fate was lying in ambush for him around the corner" (197). The description of Doubt's son Ndlala is telling:

Thinly built, with the telltale slightly bulging stomach, he was dressed in a dirty pair of patchwork shorts which were torn at the back, exposing a small dusty buttock. His shirt, carefully sewn by his mother, had once been a banner advertising an expensive Soul Brothers concert at white City Stadium. (189)

The quote above paints a picture of a malnourished child who is deprived of proper meals as well as decent clothing. The torn and tattered clothes reveal the level of indigence in the family, but the creativity displayed by the boy's mother is applauded as she makes her son a shirt out of an advertising banner. The boy is an exemplification of the poverty that weighs hard on the family as Doubt himself is described as "a disillusioned old-young man" (193) who from "one pay day to the other...lived by the grace of the Mabhena ancestors..." (192).

He is further described as follows: “Wolfishly lean of a body, Doubt had a fast receding hairline, a few white hairs on his temples, and his cheeks sagged, giving his face a permanently disconsolate look. The neighbourhood children called him ‘khulu’, grandfather. He was twenty-eight years old” (192). Doubt looks like an old man at the tender age of twenty-eight while Vitalis is much older, even though he is forced to retire three years before the usual retirement age, indicating the declining life expectancy in the country.

The text presents an example of shrinking masculinities through a weak father who continuously loses respect from his wife and children, but it also presents an image of an enterprising mother in the face of shortage of food in the house. Doubt’s wife “like most township women ... believed that it was the duty of the man to furnish the luxurious lifestyle and the woman to indulge in it” (193). This view of women as dependent on the husbands is further supported by the fate that befalls Doubt’s mother when his father dies:

Doubt’s mother had tucked in her tail and retired to even more destitution in the drought-stricken rural areas soon after his father’s death. Unfortunately for her, she returned to the land at a time when her body, ravaged by age and city tribulations, was useless for any profitable physical labour in the fields. Sometimes she wrote to her city offspring asking them for food – anything – by chicken bus: none of them ever replied – they did not have anything for themselves, so what was the point. (191)

The affective impact of the description of Doubt’s vanquished mother forces the reader to sympathise with the poor who lose their dignity due to poverty. The description leads the reader to imagine ‘the body’ as the site of impact for poverty. The body receives all the blows of poverty and Doubt’s mother is ultimately unable to engage in physical activity when she returns to the rural areas. The story also depicts the effort made by women to contribute to the welfare of their families, however, as shown by the reference to Doubt’s mother’s

battered body, suggesting years of hard labour. Doubt's wife also works hard with her sewing machine, even though she holds the view expressed above – that the husband should provide. She also has a history of working hard and selling tomatoes to earn a living. As Chitando states in her thesis, women end up even selling their bodies to earn a living: “Before they got ‘married’, Siphwe used to walk the township streets selling tomatoes, and sometimes her body on the sly” (193). The story's well calculated flashbacks show how a hungry and vulnerable Siphwe offered her body to Doubt in exchange for food. This practice (of selling her body in exchange for money and other valuables) continues even after marriage. Because Doubt struggles to support his family, Siphwe turns to Ndlovu, a pickpocket who “screwed Siphwe and shared his lunch with her and Ndlala. Sometimes he gave her money” (195). The short story provides a vivid picture of the mosaic of everyday, individual struggles for survival.

“In Memory of the Nossi Brigade” by Zvisinei Sandi

The next story, by Zvisinei Sandi, provides a comic perspective on experiences of poverty and deprivation. The story begins by providing the reader with a glimpse at the economic inequality in post-independence Zimbabwe as the poor can only observe “posh 4x4s” (117) passing by while they wait for hours for public transport into town. The long wait for a bus allows the older members of the waiting crowd to take a nostalgic journey into the past, as if (as the narrator suggests) they are trying to “comfort their rumbling stomachs” (117). In this glimpse into the past the men remember a time “when there was so much food on campus [that they] reserved the bread for cleaning ... shoes” (117). The years of plentiful food are juxtaposed to the shortage that characterizes the post-independence era when “everyone

wears the same hungry look” (117). The imagery of hungry looks recalls the metaphor of hunger discussed extensively in Marechera’s novella.

In a nostalgic flashback the narrator also remembers his own years at university, where the different groups of students are indicative of the various classes in society: “the grannies and uncles from the Faculty of Education ... then the SRB – young people with a strictly rural background ... the University Bachelor’s Association...and the Nossie Brigade” (118). The difference between the groups is measured by the ability to speak fluent English or not as well as one’s appearance. Poverty is depicted as the determining factor as the class to which one is assigned, with the poor rural students belonging to one group which is described as “good students, for they alone seemed to know that for good reason the place was the university, and not the Hill of Pleasure” (118). Poor students worked hard at their studies while the rich and mostly urban students were “the chic of the Hill of Learning, and fashion was their everything ... [t]he very air they breathed was imported from London” (118).

The author mocks the snobbery of rich students who behave as if they can actually have their air imported. The mockery of the inflated sense of self-importance that the group displays indicates that the author disapproves of the students’ unrealistic efforts to belong to a class of former colonial white masters. The pressure to look rich and to belong to the upper class makes students with a poor background like Fari ashamed of their roots and forces them to keep up false appearances. Fari is uncomfortable with the revelation by Madeline, who betrays that she (Fari) “used to sell cooked maize on the cob just outside, [Madeline’s family’s] house” (122). Fari denies this truth because she does not want to be associated with the poverty in which she grew up and she does not want to be seen as part of the lower class

of students with a strong rural background. The story depicts an intriguing struggle for belonging, as everybody wants to be part of the elite.

HIV/AIDS: a Further Scourge in a Hungry Nation

The difficult living conditions (depicted in the above segment) are made worse by the outbreak of an incurable disease¹⁶ (HIV/AIDS) that mostly affect the poor, who cannot afford the demanding diets and expensive medication needed by people living with the virus. Many sociological studies have linked the spread of HIV with poverty, showing that the poor are more susceptible to the disease. The World Bank's 1997 report explained that "widespread poverty and unequal distribution of income that typify underdevelopment appear to stimulate the spread of HIV," while the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in 2001 concluded that "[p]overty, underdevelopment, the lack of choices and the inability to determine one's own destiny fuel the [HIV] epidemic". The conclusion of most of these studies is that reducing poverty may be the only viable long term solution to the scourge.

The texts that I discuss challenge the notion that poverty fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS by painting a much more complex picture that requires an equally diverse response. The texts show that even though in some instances poverty leads people to risky behaviour, there are other factors such as gender and power relations which also have a bearing on the issue. Through illuminating depictions of poor people suffering from AIDS (and thus being unable to work in order to earn a living), the texts show that some people resort to risky behaviour when faced with poverty while others continue with hard work despite the harsh conditions. As a result of the collapse of the economy, family ties are also broken as one or both parents have to travel to neighbouring countries in search of employment. The texts present a much

¹⁶ Zimbabwe introduced the life prolonging Anti-Retroviral Drugs only in 2004.

more complex picture of the link between poverty and AIDS by highlighting the emotional effect on both the sufferers and their families. The impact of the disease and its relationship to poverty varies from one person to another, with people living in a similar environment reacting and coping differently.

Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2008)

Valerie Tagwira was born in 1974 in Gweru and grew up in Rutendo (Redcliff) for the greater part of her childhood. She was educated at Monte Casino Secondary School (Macheke) and St James High School (Nyamandlovu) as well as at the University of Zimbabwe's Medical School, from where she graduated in 1997. Tagwira is a Zimbabwean medical doctor, an author and a member of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. She currently lives in London and frequently visits her home country, Zimbabwe.

Tagwira's first novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* explores poverty in the densely populated slum of Mbare, through depicting the lives of Onai Moyo, an abused wife and mother of three who earns a living by trading at the market, and her friend Katy Nguni, a vendor and black market currency dealer. The novel juxtaposes the lives of these two friends, showing Onai's struggle to feed her family while her abusive husband, Gari, engages in extra-marital relationships because he believes he has fulfilled his responsibility to his wife and their children by allowing them to stay in their house, whose most valuable furniture is an old TV set which gets stolen in the opening scene of the text. Katy, on the other hand, has a loving husband who works hard to provide for his family and to pay study fees for their daughter Faith, who is at law school.

The burglary that occurs at the beginning of the novel introduces the reader to the life of Onai, who has no one but her young children nearby as the robbers ransack their already depleted household belongings. When Onai confronts her husband about coming late and finding the thieves already gone, she gets a brutal beating that lands her in hospital. I argue that Onai represents many poor women in abusive marriages who cannot find the strength to leave because they will not have anywhere to go where their children can be accommodated. The narrator through multiple first person narration shows that Onai's reluctance to leave the abusive marriage is closely linked to poverty. Onai remembers the words of her mother who told her (concerning marriage) that "once you get in, you stay" (7), and she considers that if her mother had left her father she could have "ended living on the streets with her two young brothers, reduced to a life of begging and petty crime" (7).

Tagwira manages to centralise the issue of poverty as part of a major factor in growing domestic violence. Concerned about her friend's abuse, Katy believes that "if only there was a way for Onai to earn enough money to buy a house of her own and take care of her children" (17), she could leave her abusive husband, but John (Katy's husband) is quick to remind her of the reality facing women in their society: "Be serious, Katy. This is Zimbabwe. A poor woman will always be a poor woman ... Onai will never own a house. She is an unemployed dressmaker who works as vegetable vendor. How can you imagine that she could buy a house? Where will she get the money from?" (18)

John's intervention bluntly sums up the challenges facing poor women in patriarchal Zimbabwean society. The odds are stacked against Onai, who cannot own a house because she is a woman and poor, no matter how hard she works. The narrative validates this point later in the story when she is chased out of the house by Gari's brother when her husband dies

of AIDS. The tradition that abuses widows and dispossesses them of their homes that was evident in the discussion of Namibian texts resurfaces here, leaving Onai with no shelter.

In direct contrast to Onai's abusive marriage, Tagwira introduces the deep love and trust between Katy's daughter Faith and her rich boyfriend Tom Sibanda. The couple love and respect each other, but the author through one of her many 'witness voices' reveals Faith's recognition that "unlike Tom, she had been surrounded by deprivation, squalor and poverty for most of her life" (20). The difference in their upbringing and backgrounds influences their understanding of issues. Tom irks Faith when he warns her of the impending operation to close the market places and all the illegal structures like shacks. Faith dismisses her boyfriend's warning as far-fetched, because "half of Mbare's population lives in shacks" (22) and would have nowhere to go if their shacks are demolished. Tom's apparent lack of appreciation of the situation in the Mbare slums annoys Faith, who feels the need to defend "people like her mother and the rest of the disadvantaged people of Mbare" (22).

Faith's parents also dismiss Tom's warning as "another absurd rumour that the university students had invented to stir up trouble" (28). Tagwira uses the conversation between Faith and Tom to show that the poor have to take huge risks in order to survive while the rich and powerful flout laws willy-nilly. Responding to his daughter's protest against him smuggling grocery in at the border, John says: "the line between what's legal and what is not has never been as blurred as it is now" (27). He argues that there is no way that they could raise Faith's university fees without taking the risk of being part of corrupt system in which bribery is the order of the day. The system is so corrupt that even high-ranking police officials are involved in the illegal trade in foreign exchange money. With her father's explanation in mind, Faith concludes that "their lives had become one big obsession with obtaining food, and making

sure that the meagre groceries stretched as far as possible” (27). This indicates the level of poverty in the society and how desperate they often are to get basic necessities – and this family is distinctly better off than Onai’s.

The climax of the novel is the execution of the “operation” that Tom warns about earlier, leaving the majority of the people of Mbare homeless and displaced. Tagwira’s text here offers an allusion to the 2005 “Operation Murambatsvina” (operation clear all the rubbish), which rocked Zimbabwe. This procedure, that was officially known as “operation restore order,” started in 2005 and was aimed at demolishing what the government of Robert Mugabe called “illegal housing” (Potts, 2006). As a result of the urban slum clearance campaign and the closure of the markets, Onai and many of her colleagues are left with no way to earn a living. Such government brutality leads to Onai’s liberation war veteran neighbour’s suicide and it also results in children tragically killed as a shack is demolished. It dispossesses the poor people of Mbare of their valuables that are destroyed in the process, thereby further impoverishing them and rendering many both destitute and shelterless.

The text presents the desperate situation of Onai’s family, now on the brink of starvation, but Onai (helped by her children) continues to show tenacity and desire to survive the odds. Onai and her children resort to illegal hawking with a constant threat of arrest, but it is a risk they have to take. When the children are arrested Onai stops the illegal trade. Onai’s troubles escalate when Gari brings Gloria, his prostitute girlfriend, home as his second wife. Through Gloria, Tagwira introduces AIDS as a major factor in the lives of the people of Mbare, who are often exposed to the dangerous disease because they are forced to resort to prostitution in order to survive. Sheila, another female prostitute who seeks assistance and accommodation from Onai, contracts the disease because she did not want to die of hunger: “when I was a

prostitute, I didn't care about catching HIV ... I thought I would die of hunger, anyway ... As a prostitute, I could at least die with a full stomach. Now that I know I will die of AIDS, I think dying of hunger is far much better" (62). Sheila's change of heart when she is at death's door indicates that she has learnt her lesson because she now knows that AIDS is much worse than hunger. The story captures Sheila's coming of age which unfortunately happens too late when she has already contracted AIDS. In her naivety Sheila believes that her promiscuity is justifiable because hunger and poverty are unbearable until she gets sick and feels the pain of suffering from an incurable disease. Sheila's realisation and confession that her decision to risk her life in order to earn a living was not wise, is further shown by her reliance on Onai for help (who chooses the path of hard work and a clean life). Even though Onai is still exposed to Aids through her husband's actions, the story endorses her hard work and commitment to the welfare of her children.

Onai is thrown out of the home following her husband's death and she has no option but to send her children to her mother in the rural areas. Throughout the challenges, Onai portrays strength and resolve to survive. Tagwira's text ends on a positive note with Onai having a house and being reunited with her children. Compared to Vera's Phephelaphi whose 'victory' is shown by her decision to take her own life, Tagwira is more hopeful in her depiction of female victory over poverty and female oppression (which make women more susceptible to poverty). The depiction of Onai's battles indicates that poverty permeates all spheres of life, but women are more especially vulnerable to it because of a combination of traditional patriarchal practices and the modern migrant labour system that perpetuate practices that discriminate against women.

“These are the Days of our Lives”- Edward Chinhanhu

Chinhanh’s story “These are the Days of our Lives” is linked to Tagwira’s story because of its focus on the theme of HIV/AIDS as an aggravating factor of the collapsed economy. The story chronicles the difficult life of a father, Freedom, who has to face his hungry and wailing children who cry “Daddy, my shoes are torn. Daddy, I am hungry. Daddy, school fees. Daddy, my pen, my socks. Daddy this. Daddy that...He felt so helpless” (63). The story which is set in the township echoes the figure of a helpless and battered masculinity which is introduced by Marechera. Freedom is rendered helpless by poor rains as he is unable to utilize “his tiny plot by the Sakubva River” (63) on which “[g]eneration upon generation had ploughed, planted and harvested...” (63). To show how difficult life is, this piece of land that sustained many generations before Freedom was now nothing more than a ‘dirty’ and useless piece of land. The poverty stricken Freedom and his family have to face a difficult situation made worse by deteriorating climatic conditions and the collapsing economy. Freedom’s situation is made worse by the tragedy that left his wife helpless after “her brutal beating by the Botswana Police for ‘border jumping’ during one of her visits to sell pottery and doilies” (63). The poverty and lack of food exposes the couple to AIDS as they described as “both evidently HIV-Positive, with red lips, weight loss, frequent headaches, diarrhoea and so on” (63). The author introduces the theme of AIDS, a disease that is often discussed as being common among the poor as compared to the rich. In her doctoral thesis titled *Narrating Gender and Danger in selected Zimbabwe Women’s Writing on HIV/AIDS* Anna Chitando links poverty to the spread of HIV/AIDS:

Characters that leave rural poverty in the hope of leading better lives end up trading rural poverty for urban poverty. In many respects, urban poverty is worse as they have to contend with fixed monthly charges for rent and transport. They also have to run daily living expenses. Poverty dehumanises individuals, who, in the end, fail to pause and reflect on their actions. Furthermore, poverty caused by

the death of the bread winner in a family, forces young girls to enter the sex industry when they are left to head the household. The working class operates a 'hand to mouth' system that leaves no space for savings. As a result, the death of the worker (in most cases the father), threatens the viability of the family. Poverty makes it difficult for families to save if they have many relatives to take care of. There is need to realise that poverty is both real at the individual as well as the structural/national levels. (63)

In the quotation above Chitondo discusses women's vulnerability in Virginia Phiri's *Desperate* (2002), and argues that poverty is among the leading factors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In the current short story the woman is depicted a strong figure who contributes to the economy of the family. She is actually the most industrious family member as she takes the initiative to cross the border into neighbouring Botswana to conduct business in order to earn money for her family. The text however does not blame either Freedom or his wife for bringing the HIV, but suggests that it could be as a result of the assault the wife suffers at the hands of the Botswana police, who also stole her money after assaulting her. She lost "all her money, passport and remaining goods, and she had also sustained facial and bodily injuries" (63). The incident also suggests sexual violation.

Faced with all these challenges, Freedom wanders into town, moving from one beer selling point to another with the hope that he will meet his old friends who he hopes will give him some money to buy food for his family. As he walks, Freedom ponders about the difficult days they were living in when "almost everybody who went to work...was a millionaire" (65) due to the collapse of the economy and the decline in the value of the Zimbabwean dollar. He wonders "how long it would be before everyone became billionaires [but he concludes that with] [t]he dollar was falling, it could be soon" (65). The bitter paradox of seemingly huge sums actually measuring dire poverty does not escape the reader. Freedom also mentions the long queues depicted in the last short story, showing that people queue to receive medical

attention, to get fuel (and he feels good that he does not have a car), as well as at grocery shops where food supplies are inadequate. As the situation worsens, even the money supply is short and there are long queues at banks.

“A land of Starving Millionaires” by Erasmus R. Chinyani

Chinyani tells a story of a small scale micro-lender who is struggling to collect his debts because his customers face serious economic challenges as a result of the collapse of the economy. The author utilizes sarcasm to tell a painful story that arouses mixed, complicated and ambivalent emotions in the reader. The story starts with a desperate effort by the ‘millionaire’ to recover his money that is owed by people who are unable to pay due to various reasons, ranging from sickness to bankruptcy. Against all odds, the millionaire recovers his money from relatives of his sick debtor by lying to them about knowing a healer who can assist the sufferer. The theme of poverty and the leitmotif of hunger are foregrounded in the description of the ‘millionaire’ in the opening paragraph:

THE MILLIONAIRE STAGGERED TOWARDS the long line of tuck-shops. The stagger of an inveterate beer-drinker after one bottle too many. Only he hadn’t gulped anything for quite a long time. Four days to be precise. Not even a sip of tap water, due to the unpredictable water cuts in his part of the city. He hadn’t eaten anything either, or nothing but the national staple they now call air pie a euphemism for one big slice of nothing. (38)

The sarcasm that is inherent in the use of the word ‘millionaire’ shows that the Zimbabwean economy has collapsed to a level where it is meaningless to have a million because the money is worth very little. The above caption provides a description of how desperate the situation is for the man, also known as Baba vaAlphabet because of his many children and wives. The moving picture of the man “hunched under the weight of a huge plastic sack” (38)

carrying “one million three hundred thousand dollars in single notes” (38) draws the reader into the misery suffered by this man who, before the collapse of the economy, was a proud father of his many children. The man’s disappointment is depicted when he is told that “the prices of foodstuffs quadrupled this morning...[h]alf a loaf of bread now costs one million five hundred thousand” (38). When the message is delivered, he “doubled back as if he had been dealt a swift upper-cut” (38). The pain of not knowing what he is going to feed his “huge family” (38) is compounded by the recent birth of his “hungry triplets”.

In his quest to feed his wailing family, the millionaire pursues people who owe him money, albeit with very little success. The first debtor commits suicide, meaning that Chimbado, the millionaire, “kissed his money goodbye in an unprecedented fashion” (40). His desperation leads him to shout obscenities at the dead man while the crowd of mourners looks on in a state of helplessness. After failing to get money from the first, he leaves for the second whom he finds on his death-bed, having fully blown AIDS. Not willing to lose his money again, the millionaire comes up with a plan:

Although the place smelt of death and poverty from floor to roof, his money-lender’s instinct rose to the fore and he could see how to squeeze some money from the already grieving family. Experience had taught him that distressed relatives would often be willing to do anything to save themselves from another death; trade anything in exchange for their dying relative’s life – even their souls. (41)

In a desperate move to get his money the millionaire lies about the sick man being his friend and about knowing a healer who can help him. The family of the sick man fall for his trick and each contributes some money that amounts to the “exact money their sick relative owed him – Z\$1,3 million” (42). His success is very short lived, though, as he takes the money to the tuck-shop and he is told it cannot buy even half a loaf of bread. His life ends tragically as

he is knocked down by a speeding “legislator’s blood-red luxurious Mercedes” (42). The story ends with this tragic incident, but leaves questions as to why the accident happened: “Perhaps his ears had been too deafened by hunger, his mind too loaded by the sack full of poverty and his eyes too blinded by rage and despair” (42).

The story in a straightforward way follows the life of a man who had a thriving money lending business, who gets impoverished by the collapse of the economy because his debtors are unable to pay him and even if they pay, the money is worthless. The story paints a desperate picture of abject poverty and despair amongst families, with children crying on empty stomachs. The leitmotif of hunger runs through the story as it permeates all spheres of life in the text, as characters in different places and different occasions are constantly nudged by noisy empty stomachs and by wailing children, who need food.

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed literary depictions of poverty in three generations of Zimbabwean writing, and established that poverty is depicted as a key challenge facing the people throughout the history of the country. Earlier writers show ordinary people struggling with poverty under colonialism and segregation, the next generation depicts struggles with poverty during the war for liberation while the last group of writing paints a picture of a desperate situation of perpetual hunger and starvation in a collapsing post-independence economy. The discussion established a trajectory of poverty depictions which makes the struggle for survival and hunt for food key pursuit throughout the history of the country. During the war for liberation the fighters declare poverty as worse than the war, while the inhabitants of congested slums in the post-independence crisis are portrayed as preoccupied with navigating the squalid conditions under which they live. Poverty is also closely linked to the history of

violence in the country, as those who are desperate for food resort to crime for survival. Women in the texts discussed in this chapter, are depicted as the pillars of strength for their families during difficult times of starvation, sickness and homelessness. Diminished masculinities are also a common feature through the writings as absent fathers, who have left their homes to seek employment, or are weakened by sickness and unemployment, lose their ground to women who feed families by means of a range of different, desperate strategies such as illegal trade, prostitution and precariously legal trade at the market places. Selected texts from Zimbabwe draw on the country's historical events to provide rich lived realities of poverty as experienced by different characters, throughout the country's history. The texts portray similarities in people's responses to deprivation under different circumstances of colonialism, liberation war and during the post-colonial economic melt down.

Conclusion: Literary Depictions of Poverty as a Significant Resource

When I first conceptualised this study, it was difficult to position it firmly within a literary studies framework, largely because poverty has mostly been analysed and studied through quantitative approaches in research on this topic. As I worked on the study it became clear why many researchers in the social sciences have called for more qualitative approaches to research on poverty to complement the mainly quantitative studies already in existence. There is a growing consensus across the social sciences and among development agencies that qualitative approaches can complement the data obtained through quantitative analysis. As I read more on the subject, I encountered the strong argument for the consideration of literary depiction of poverty as a possible source of useful knowledge on indigence. As I have shown throughout the study, the lack of particular attention to literary depictions of poverty by literary criticism does not mean the texts themselves do not address the problem of poverty. Writers have written about poverty under varying circumstances, starting with the difficulties that came with the colonial encounter (Chapter One), to lived experiences of poverty under a corrupt and greedy traditional leadership in rural Botswana (Chapter Two) as well as poverty in the overcrowded post-colonial urban slums of Zimbabwe (in Chapter Three).

As we have seen, literature provides a unique opportunity to capture individual experiences of local indigence as it accommodates the multiplicity of voices that articulate these experiences. The various view-points on poverty often complement and at times contend against one another, providing a comprehensive and complex picture of how different people deal with poverty. Poverty in the texts constitutes different forms of deprivation from one person to another regardless of whether they belong to the same family, community or

country. The narrator's family in Hiyalwa's *Meekulu's Children* remains united despite the onslaught of acute poverty due to the loss of a bread winner, while the Mandengu family in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* presents a different picture of a fragmented family indicative of the collapse of the family structure in a modernising society. Even though the circumstances under which the two families live are different, they both face debilitating conditions of deprivation and they react in distinct ways. Individual characters' experiences with poverty at different levels in society also show that the differences and similarities cut across all texts and are not confined to either geographic location or the categories of gender, class and race. Courageous heroes and heroines are found in all the texts from the three countries: Marita in Hove's *Bones*, Muronga and his wife Makena in Diescho's *Born of the Sun*, Tambudzai, Maiguru and Babamukuru in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Phephelaphi in Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, MaiToby and MaiJames in Gappah's *An Elegy of Easterly*, Bashi in Melamu's short story "The Waif", Makhaya and Paulina in Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, as well as Mosa in Dow's *Far and Beyond* are examples of a similar resistant response to poverty, even though each response is uniquely courageous.

As demonstrated in this thesis, authors use different literary techniques to produce vivid descriptions of everyday struggles for survival. Some writers, like Bessie Head, Chenjerai Hove, Dambudzo Marechera, Yvonne Vera, Valerie Tagwira and short story writers from Zimbabwe (writing during the economic meltdown) engage more overtly with poverty, while other writers are less explicit in their treatment of poverty.

With reference to Namibian literature, Chapter One demonstrated how colonial disruptions, dispossessions and displacements impoverished native communities. This chapter explored the demise of the traditional economy and the introduction of the money economy as part of

colonialism. The writers, however, show that the injustices of colonialism continue into independence as poverty persists and marginalised groups like women remain underprivileged. The literature gives voice to these voiceless people and also showcases their efforts to survive. The poor are not uniformly depicted as victims, but the texts illuminatingly capture the differences and similarities in the way characters react to and deal with poverty, with some poor people appearing as victims while others are depicted as strong characters who confront their condition, undaunted. Diescho's text *Born of the Sun* provides a positive portrayal of rural life, with characters such as Muronga and his wife Makena talking proudly of the situation in their home. The text depicts the detrimental colonial intervention into a local barter economy that impoverishes a whole community, as its ways of living are rendered obsolete by the introduction of taxes which have to be paid in money. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist Murango insists that they are not seeking employment in the mines because "they are poor but because they need money to pay tax" (84). In this narrative alone, different characters in different places express their versions of events and interpretations of the condition that they (as individuals), and the community in general, find themselves in, providing different examples of experiences of poverty and highlighting the importance of experiential information in understanding poverty and its effects on people. The chapter further explores how the poor face the collapse of their traditional economy with courage and continue surviving under harsh conditions in the mines. The multiple voices, however, reveal that the courage and the resilience differ from one person to another, proving that poverty is a complex phenomenon that needs a multidisciplinary approach to be understood and addressed. Having demonstrated a move by studies from most social science disciplines to capture these complexities, this thesis brought to the fore additional types of insights offered by literary texts, that help us to understand as if from within, or from the

experiential perspective, what it is like to be put under a range of poverty inducing circumstances.

With a focus on rural poverty and related power dynamics, chapter two presents a picture of some poor people living positive lives despite the challenges they face, while often some powerful and rich people are driven by greed to seek more riches. In this thesis it was revealed that the writers avoid common dichotomies of the rich being evil and the poor being noble, but instead show that some rich people thrive on suppressing the poor while some poor people do not make any effort to work their way out of the squalid conditions that they live in. Presenting the complexities of poverty, the authors discussed in the chapter show how individuals and different groups of people survive from day to day on the edge of devastation, while at the same time delineating the potential that many ordinary local people have of lifting themselves out of poverty if given the chance. I argued that the “unconscious dignity” (Head’s expression) with which people carry or bear the burden of poverty should not be mistaken for lack of ambition. It should rather be noted that such ambition and potential are often suppressed by those who benefit from enslaving the poor and would like the status quo to remain as it were. The texts present certain situations where the oppressed realise that their individual and private struggles are not yielding any fruits and resort to public and collective confrontations with their oppressors. Greed often drives the already rich and powerful to seek more power and riches, thus exposing themselves to the wrath of the oppressed who sometimes feel driven to the point where they feel they have nothing to lose, and revolt against their oppressors. As the rich and powerful are not satisfied with the wealth and power they have and seek to amass more (and in the process impoverish the poor more), the poor on occasion respond by forcibly rejecting such exploitation.

Urbanization and slums have dominated poverty studies in other disciplines and in the third chapter, the thesis discussed the Zimbabwean experience of urban poverty. As with the other two countries, Zimbabwean texts capture colonial land dispossessions and displacements as a turning point in the history of the country. Following the loss of fertile land and the introduction of a new cash-based economy, locals were forced to leave rural areas for cities in search of jobs. This led to overcrowding in the shanty towns, since the blacks were supposed to provide labour for the whites and not reside in the city. Besides depicting squalid conditions in the slums, the selected texts also highlight how some residents manage to continue living creatively under the almost impossible conditions while some seek refuge in alcohol. The land problem continues into post-colonial Zimbabwe with the democratically elected government displacing residents of shanty towns in a campaign dubbed 'operation clean the dirt' (as depicted by Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*) which resulted in thousands of persons being internally displaced. The discussion in this chapter shows that the problem of poverty was worsened by the Zimbabwean economic melt-down of the 2000s, leading to more writing chronicling the shortage of basic necessities such as petrol and food. During these difficult economic times, the value of literature as a source of rich knowledge on poverty increases as more voices emerge (especially in Zimbabwean short stories) to document or 'archive' and implicitly analyse the people's struggles for survival and show bitter awareness of the degree of avoidability in the conditions of poverty depicted – exacerbated by poor governance instead of being addressed or eased.

The study established that literary depictions of poverty can be a source of authoritative knowledge on indigence, since they provide comprehensive and focused descriptions of lived experiences of poverty. The evidence from the texts proves the complexity suggested by the definitions adopted in this thesis. Some of the writers directly engage poverty as an object of

social inquiry and literary representation, while others are less explicit in their approach. A more overt approach is evident in Bessie Head's assertion that "[p]overty has a home in Africa – like a quiet second skin. It may be the only place on earth where it is worn with an unconscious dignity" (*Tales of Tenderness and Power* 41). The fictional texts are important documents of inquiry into poverty as they explore the topic on different levels, from individuals trying to escape from the "house of hunger" to communities and nations struggling to survive "the acids of gut-rot" (Marechera 13).

Through a general post-colonial studies approach, this thesis has endeavoured to demonstrate the power of literature to provide moving and instructive accounts of lived realities of poverty. The study illustrated that different characters in all the texts respond differently to poverty and deprivation, with some seeking innovative and courageous ways of surviving while others are driven by greed and ambition to commit evil deeds by the desire to escape poverty or to maintain privilege and power. Through the nuance that is made possible by the variety of viewpoints and narrative styles, literature provides a unique body of knowledge in the study of poverty as it manages to discern the complexities of socio-economic struggles at all levels of society.

As poverty continues to occupy centre stage in the global developmental agenda, there will be more opportunities for future expansion of this research. One of these would be the expansion of the scope to cover texts from other parts of the Southern African region as well as other regions on the continent. A broader survey on literary depictions of poverty may paint a clearer picture of the patterns, peculiarities and similarities of representation of lived realities of poverty in the various regions of the continent. The focus of my present project was representations of poverty in selected texts from three countries and as a result fully

focused and thorough investigations on each text would not have been possible. A more focused analysis of individual texts as well as those texts (from the three countries) that were not included in the current study is warranted. Later studies might focus on literary depictions of key sub-topics to the theme of poverty, such as the roles of gender, class and race factors, in order to further demonstrate the contribution of literary works depicting poverty to the overall understanding of poverty, yet the texts gathered for the present study have provided a rich mosaic of human experience. If, as the Bible says, we will always have the poor with us, texts like those chosen here fulfil important human obligations to take the poor seriously and to pay attention to the prevalence of poverty under particular conditions.

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