



# History, politics and dogs in Zimbabwean literature, c.1975–2015

**Innocent Dande & Sandra Swart**

Innocent Dande is a PhD Student in History in the History Department at Stellenbosch University.

Email: dandeinnocent@gmail.com.

Sandra Swart is a Professor of History at Stellenbosch University.

Email: sss@sun.ac.za

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Zimbabwean fiction writers have engaged with dogs as objects, subjects and even actors. This essay focuses on the pivotal forty-year period between 1975 and 2015, which saw the end of white rule, the rise of an independent African state and the collapse of that state. In analysing how selected writers have variously made use of dogs, we discuss the extent to which writers deal with human-dog relations. We buttress our point by examining key pieces of fiction in which dogs appear and we unpack the extent to which fictive representations of humans and dogs approximate lived relations in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings. We show the enduring relevance of dogs as metaphors of power in the Zimbabwean political landscape. We contend that such canine allegories have a history and explore their usage by creative writers over the last forty years.

**Keywords:** dogs; literature; politics; Zimbabwe.



## Introduction

Dogs not only prowl Zimbabwe's urban streets and roam the rural hinterland but, indeed, the very corridors of power. In 2015 Zimbabwean Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, responded to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (Tsvangirai) party's claim that "you can rig elections but you will not rig the economy" by stating that "barking dogs will not stop an elephant from moving about" (Teamzanuplive).<sup>1</sup> Mnangagwa's ambition to replace President Robert Mugabe in both the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party and government thereafter was challenged by a faction led by the first lady, Grace Mugabe, which he initially dismissed as harmless "barking dogs". When a Mnangagwa presidency increasingly became ominously likely in





November 2017, Grace Mugabe told her followers that “we do not want to beat a dog whilst concealing the whip” (263Chat).<sup>2</sup> The party and government promptly dismissed him from his official positions. He fled into voluntary exile and later recounted that he walked for 30 kilometres into Mozambique with President Mugabe’s security detail, which he described as “hunting dogs” in hot pursuit (News24).<sup>3</sup>

Two weeks later, Mnangagwa bounced back as the president of Zimbabwe on the wave of a military ‘coup’. At his first political address he chanted “*pasi nevanon-govukura*” (down with barking dogs). These recent vignettes show the enduring relevance of dogs as metaphors of power in the Zimbabwean political landscape. We argue that such metaphors have a history and explore their usage by creative writers over the last forty years.

We make use of creative works—by Mungoshi, Hove, Mabasa, Chinodya among others—between 1975 and 2013, which have used dogs in illuminating imagined pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial experiences, with a particular focus on politics. The essay is arranged in three chronological sections focusing on the different ideologies, themes and styles that writers have pursued in their quest to address the important political questions of their times. The first section examines the authorial deployment of dog allegories in literary works published during the long colonial era, which also grappled with aspects of the pre-colonial past. We show that these works are testaments to African experiences of colonial oppression but also romantic re-imaginings of the pre-colonial past. We contend that they were also politically motivated and inflected to serve ideological purposes. The second section examines works written in the first decade of independence, 1980 to 1990, which deploy dogs in ways that speak to and sometimes challenge the triumphalist and teleological narratives of the nationalist struggle. Works of fiction written in this critical decade show that novelists are deploying animals in ways that at times pander to, but sometimes also critique, the nationalist narratives. The third section focuses on works of fiction written between 1991 and 2013, which make use of dogs as subjects and agents, actors and allegories in considering the interrelationship of canines, class and the city. A central feature of these works, as we will show, is their disillusionment with the post-colonial nationalist project.

This article responds to works of literary criticism focusing on Zimbabwean fiction (Veit-Wild; Muponde and Taruvinga; Vambe; Muponde and Primorac; Vambe and Chirere; and Primorac). These literary critics argue that Zimbabwean novels, short stories and poems, written during the period under review, provide “counter-memories and counter histories” to monolithic colonialist, nationalist, nativist, patriotic and patriarchal versions of history (Kaarsholm 18). Such works of fiction offer us a subaltern alternative which challenge homogeneous histories that do not engage with the place of the ‘other’ (be it women, children and minori-

ties or, in our case, non-human animals) in the past (Muchemwa 197). Yet no one has yet engaged with these writers' handling of animal subjects in their works.

In analysing the authors' deployment of dogs in their works of fiction, we examine the use of dogs as metaphors in human society, challenging critics to move beyond anthropocentric readings of Zimbabwean literature. We concur with Lönngrén's notion (1–22) that anthropocentric interpretations close the door to understanding subjugated knowledge about human-animal relations. She proposes the need to prioritise surface plots/meanings because it is only at that level where animal literary agency is visible as opposed to penetrating deep into the text for its 'true' and/or 'veiled' meanings (23–32). This permits the reader to 'follow' the "tracks, traces, scents, presences and noises of animals" in the text not to kill, hunt or name the animals but to move 'alongside', 'with' and together with the animals in the text (26–7). In fact, dogs, we will show (as Kohn did in another context) "engage with the world and with each other as selves—that is, as beings that have a point of view," and that as selves they are not just exemplified but also represent and do so in their actions (Kohn 4).

Four Zimbabwean novels even incorporate the canine in their very titles: Mumvuma's *Imbwa Nyoro*, Gascoigne's *Tunzi the Faithful Shadow*; Fuller's *Don't let's go to the dogs tonight* and Mabasa's *Imbwa Yemunhu* (You Dog).<sup>4</sup> In our selection of novels, dogs are so central to their owners' actions that they become protagonists, which allows these novels to question solipsistic anthropogenic narratives of the past. Most of these novels make use of traditional oral songs, poems allegories, legends and myths useful in challenging the colonial version of the past (Vambe, *Story-telling* 3). Some of these authors also explore vernacular knowledge about the physicality of dogs, their behavioural traits, and the complex meanings that humans attached to them.

### Dogs of the pre-colonial past: the dog of the ancestors?

The earliest works of fiction, written during the colonial era from 1975 onwards, make use of canines as metaphors of power in the pre-colonial past. Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, which was published in 1975, is the most important novel in this respect. Set in the 1970s the novel makes occasional reference to events that happened during the pre-colonial period. During that time, the country was fighting for national independence. The novel paints such a pessimistic picture of both colonial power and the liberation war that literary critic Veit-Wild argues that in the novel there is "no way out, no hope of improvement, and no way back" (288) for Africans. She argues that the pessimistic outlook of the book works against the "making of a history" for its characters and the country at large. Yet the use of dogs in the novel challenges historical linearity as competing versions of oral traditions rupture both colonial and nationalist histories. The story of the



great wanderer, Samambwa (the man of many dogs), challenges the *ngozis* (avenging spirit) in the Mandengu family, referring metaphorically to the exactions put on Africans by colonialism and Rhodesian rule (Chirere 115). During the pre-colonial era Samambwa and his dogs flee from unnamed strife in the north and together they conquer other human societies in the country. He is:

A terrible hunter, with over twenty dogs and he lived on meat which he cut into strips and hung in the sun to dry, to be eaten later without salt. For years he wandered about in the great jungles of the north, and being alone, he soon forgot how to talk, even forgot who his parents had been, or where he had come from. And so he found himself among people again, on the shores of the Great Northern Lake. They didn't like him. They were afraid of him and his dogs, so they gave him presents and asked him to leave their country. He refused the presents but left their country, travelling south, following the game, followed by his enemies—people through whose land he passed and wild animals, night and day, stopping only to drink water or to gut an animal, or only long enough for the meat to dry. (Mungoshi, *Waiting* 128)

His dogs protect him from wild animals and human competitors, which suggests pre-colonial uses for dogs. They kill the chief “of a nearby tribe”. The elders of the affected community cunningly send him a young girl and beer in return for simply calling off his dogs (129). Their Trojan gift works. They force him to lead their military and to marry the young girl because they wanted to use both him and his dogs.

The novel juxtaposes the legend of Samambwa and his dogs with that of Magaba, who took the agency of his dogs for granted by following the treacherous call of the honey bird with disastrous effects:

The voice went on and on, farther and farther away from him, sweeter than ever before but fading and fading and fading till he couldn't hear it any more. With the voice gone, he realized that all his dogs had disappeared too. They were no longer with him. Maybe they were just around: so he called and called but the dogs did not come. He realized that they had deserted him and he was all alone. (156)

Dogs, in this book, save Samambwa from war, and hunger and are instrumental in his rise to power because he understood them whilst Magaba did not. The author uses these canine metaphors to convey the instability in the Mandengu family and in the country in the 1970s as both seek new leadership. The family struggles between Garabha, a restless, unmarried and uneducated man distrusted by his father, and his educated young brother, Lucifer. Garabha is a traditionalist who plays the family drum and is the spirit medium of the great ancestor, Samambwa. He is the opposite of Lucifer who relies on colonial technologies such as books and the radio and does not identify with his people's traditions. Struggles to find leadership in this family are set in a time of drought—physically and metaphorically—as future attainment of political independence is the ‘symbolic rain’ suggested in the title of the novel. His deep understanding of his dogs was the only

reason ensuring the success of Samambwa in subduing opponents and in hunting, thereby allowing him to perpetuate his dynasty whilst Magaba fails dismally because he does not try to understand his dogs. Metaphorically, the dogs represent the ordinary people's capacity to follow only good leaders who do not pursue illusory or selfish paths, as Magaba does (156).

In the short story "The Lazy Young Man and his Dog", published in *One Day Long Ago: More Stories from a Shona Childhood* in 1991, Mungoshi uses an under-dog narrative in which a dog leads its lazy master towards winning the hand of the chief's daughter in marriage. Although the dog, Dembo, is old and outwardly 'useless', it makes it possible for his lazy master to marry the chief's deaf-mute daughter in a very tough competition to make her talk. Except for the chief's daughter, Miedzo, the only other characters that are mentioned are the chief, the lazy young man and the chief's wife. However, it mentions Dembo more than twenty times. The indolent young man inherits Dembo upon his father's death. Dembo thinks for the young man because he is a conduit through which the father transfers knowledge to his son (53). Dembo realizes that "nothing would happen if he didn't put his limbs to use" and starts bumping into his master at every turn for him "to get a wife" as his mother becomes too old. On noticing her son's failure to comprehend the dog's message, the old woman informs her son that Dembo is telling him to get a wife. This brings a further difficulty because the lazy young man does not have decent clothes to put on to impress women. Dembo solves this problem by rubbing "himself against his legs" (55) to convince his master to use his coat as clothes for the journey to his mother's village of origin to find a wife. His visit to his mother's village coincides with an annual ceremony conducted by the chief of the area in which young men compete to make his mute daughter talk in return for her hand in marriage. Many prospective young men dismally fail to make her talk. Whilst he is engrossed in their performances, Dembo comes back from the dead singing:

Give me back my coat  
My summer and winter coat  
Couldn't you kill a goat  
And not rob me of my coat  
My grey and black spotted coat (56)

In the ensuing struggle, Old Dembo wrestles his skin from the young man, thereby exposing his nakedness and enraging the chief. He, however, succeeds in getting the chief's daughter to vocalise her surprise at this strange spectacle of nude necromancy (and who can blame her?). Thus, Dembo manages to get his erstwhile master to marry the chief's daughter and to secure his appointment as the chief's most important councillor. Dembo then disappears for good. The old dog functions in the same manner as the drum in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), which facilitates dialogue between history and the present, the living and



the dead. There is a Shona proverb which says *imbwa hora haifunhidzi/hukure nhando* (an old dog does not sniff/bark in vain) (Munjanja 9). Dembo epitomises this aphorism by using his knowledge and experience to influence events in his master's favour.

Interestingly, the very transgressive act of wearing dog skins—as the lazy young man did—has long been a taboo in Zimbabwe. In April 1972, Enoch Hove of Mufakose African Township in Salisbury, stated that “it is a curse of death for a man or woman to put [on] anything from a dog” whilst responding to the controversy regarding the use of dog skins to make coats (Reynolds). Even though Enoch uses a similar fable to elaborate his point, his narratives end with an embarrassed groom committing suicide. It appears that Enoch’s story works to discourage transgression of this taboo. That of Dembo and his master achieves a miraculous feat and speaks to the Shona belief that “if you think of eating a dog eat the alpha male”. The two tales can be analysed from many perspectives. In one respect, they reveal young women’s struggles to prevent arranged marriages. They also tell the story of moral weaklings who break time-honoured social proscriptions to achieve feats that the strong may have difficulties accomplishing. Indicative of his central significance, Dembo brings all the members of society—the dead, the living, the rich and powerful and the poor and weak—together.

These tales are in dialogue with each other, offering a lens into a shifting Shona view of dogs. These myths provide a multiplicity of ways of imagining the binaries of the rulers and the ruled, the powerful and the weak, old and young, even the majorities and the minorities. When Mungoshi wrote these short stories he was concerned “about human cruelty, human failures in understanding, how people look down at the disadvantaged or disabled” (Schmidt 38–40). Mungoshi uses orality’s “inherent elasticity, its capacity to be stretched in different directions, to be framed, to capture and represent different meanings, all at the same time (Vambe, *Story-telling* 15) in handling these issues. Mungoshi explains that although the book *One Day Long Ago: More Stories from a Shona Childhood* (1992) focuses on children’s literature, it also has lessons for adults (qtd. in Schmidt 41). In the two pieces analysed in this section Mungoshi acts as the old-world storyteller (*sarungano*) and uses dogs to think about power and powerlessness, and about history’s role in the present by borrowing heavily from Shona oral traditions.

Mungoshi’s use of Shona metaphors from oral myths, legends and folklores is antithetical to that of Laetitia Gutu, writing in *Shumba and the He-Goat and other Stories* (1978). Gutu used these oral forms and the dog metaphor to further colonial propaganda with a narrowly determinist reading of the pre-colonial past in which her protagonists are not allowed to imagine alternative realities. Gutu’s short story “Who is Most Important” deals with a man who lives with his faithful dog, a black cat and a hen in the pre-colonial period. These animals quarrel amongst themselves as each thinks that it is more valuable to their master and

they agree to swap duties to prove their selfish arguments. They all fail miserably and incur the wrath of their master. The government-controlled Rhodesian Literature Bureau published it in 1978, targeting African children (Granqvist 61). It fits into the political ideology of the colonial state by urging readers to be content with where they are. It deploys a dog as a character in an allegory buttressing the toxic taxonomies of the colonial society of the time. This allegory proffered the morality tale that each animal is important because of its unique contribution to the owner's welfare. It taught African children to accept their positions in society uncritically at the time their parents were fighting to liberate the country from colonialism. To use liberation war parlance, Gutu's dog is a *chimbwasunguta* (dog of the slavers on a leash) in that she deploys it to dilute African political consciousness.

### **Colonialism, dogs and the quest for independence**

Chenjerai Hove's two novels, *Bones* and *Shadows*, published in 1988 and 1991 respectively, use dogs to interrogate ideas about the 1970s war of liberation and the emerging nationalist historiography. The novels question the core values of nationalist historiography by focusing on underdog narratives written from feminist, minority and youth perspectives. These standpoints challenge nationalist historiography by championing a multiplicity of memories and insisting on inclusivity in history (Primorac 81–103). The two novels make use of the dog image in engaging with the materiality of colonial rule over Africans. In *Bones*, Hove uses feminist narratives of the spirit medium of Nehanda in the 1896/7 anti-colonial uprisings, of Marita, Janifa and of the Unknown Woman in the 1970s and early 1980s. This enables him to pass an indictment on both colonialism and the first ten years of independence in Zimbabwe (after 1980). When some characters in the novel go to work for Manyepo ("falsehoods/lies/liar"), an exploitative white farmer, they go with their gaunt dogs (43). Hove uses the physicality of these starving African dogs to exemplify the pernicious effects of colonialism on African livelihoods. His characters compare Manyepo's dogs, which are pampered, with their own dogs as a metaphor of colonial oppression and exploitation. Marume, a character in the novel, asks Manyepo in his soliloquy the following questions:

What about what you eat yourself? It must be food even God has not known how it smells. Manyepo, why don't you look at your dogs and our dogs? Your dogs are fat as hippos while ours are blown away by the wind. If you want to know how well someone is living, just look at his dog. Then you wouldn't come here and say bad things about us who work to give you a good life, Manyepo. (Hove, *Bones* 18)

A picture of an emaciated dog illustrates the levels of poverty that Manyepo's workers find themselves in both during the colonial era and early independence period (21). Conversely, Manyepo's dogs, kept for display purposes as status sym-



bols, eat better and live better than his employees do. Chisaga, Manyepo's cook, complains that after cooking the farmer says "thank you Chisaga, this was a good sauce, give some to the dogs as well" and instructs him to go out to play while "they eat hills of food, leaving some for the dogs even when I have given the dogs some good food. Sometimes I am lucky to get left-over food for my children too" (35, 45). This angers Manyepo's workers, including Muringi and Chatora, who out of nascent political activism, give Manyepo's dogs faeces and then move about the farm saying, "a dog is a dog, give it shit it will eat and ask for more" (45, 46). They target these dogs as proxies of the white farmer and the colonial system and use the fact that they eat faeces to shatter the colonial façade that divide purebred European dog breeds from African-owned 'mongrels'. Thus dogs, as in Mungoshi's and Gutu's novels and short stories, act as metaphors through which ideologies are conveyed and challenged.

In *Shadows*, Hove wrestles with nationalist narratives from both a feminist and minority perspective in delving into how Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces experienced first pre-colonial violence, secondly, the war of liberation in the 1970s and thirdly, 1980s post-colonial repression. An African Purchase Area farmer, Baba Johane, runs away to Salisbury from both the liberation war fighters and Rhodesian soldiers in the 1970s but is repatriated by the Rhodesian police. A neighbourly woman mistakes the police for government veterinary officials and starts defending his wife (Amai Johane) saying:

The women were not responsible for the paying of dog taxes or for sending the dogs for injections at the *vetinari* (veterinary). No, we cannot do that, we would not know how to answer the questions of the white *vetinari* who they say speaks through the nose as if his mouth is full of water. Even when he speaks our language, he calls people as if they were sticks or dogs, all the time speaking through the nose like one already drowning. They say he is already drowned in anger as if someone forces him to give injections to dogs instead of giving them to people. (Hove, *Shadows* 26)

The 1912 Dog Tax Ordinance aimed at financially burdening African dog owners in order to force them to cull their dogs. Africans resisted dog taxation and other veterinary interventions that they felt undermined their livelihoods that depended on dog owning, by a plethora of evasive strategies like using counterfeit dog tokens and exploiting loopholes in the Dog Tax Ordinances to their advantage. Overall, the two novels question the limitations of nationalist histories by focusing on subaltern stories of peasants, rural women and marginalized regions. These narratives use underdogs and their owners to move readers away from the hegemonic nationalist histories of the elites. Moreover, they did so when nationalist historiography was still in fashion politically and academically. Thus Hove's novels contest—albeit tacitly—prevailing Nationalist histories and politics by using vernacular understanding of the places of dogs in society to displace colonial, nationalist

and ethnic histories and also to highlight “other forms of communal memory” (Vambe, *Story-telling* 77). These novels challenge the black government’s political myths about the past (Primorac 82). It is important to restate that in the early 1980s the government was in the throes of suppressing Ndebele sectarianism in Matabeleland, while actively suppressing student and worker activism. Therefore, these stories provide an alternative history sympathetic to the underdogs in the early independence period by challenging the elitist nationalism of the new rulers.

### **His master’s voice? The state’s lapdogs, power and propaganda**

Perhaps the most scathing literary critic of nationalist histories of the 1980s is Freedom Nyamubaya, herself a veteran of the 1970s war of liberation. She abandoned secondary schooling in the 1970s and joined the liberation war, rising to become a field operations commander in ZANU’s liberation army (Scoones). In the poem, “The dog and the hunter”, Nyamubaya uses the dog as a symbol of the betrayal and exploitation of the masses/war veterans by the new ruling elites in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Hers is a feminist, gendered and class (workers and peasants) discourse countering the privileged status of male leaders in nationalist historiography by giving voice to the constituency of ‘mangy dog’: those left behind by the gravy train of independence and its attendant kleptocratic engine drivers. The poem uses oral traditions about hunting with dogs and the fact that dogs rarely benefit from bounties of hunts that were successful due to their effort. Therefore, the poem explores the unequal relationship between the dog and the human hunter in that the former hunts but does not get a reward or recognition from the hunter (see Musvoto 67–8). As a female war veteran, Nyamubaya felt that the ruling political elites in the late 1980s were side-lining the masses, especially women and rank-and-file war veterans (Mahomva, “Ghosts of History in the Pages of Today’s National Memory”). Nyamubaya describes the exploitative relationship as follows:

In scarcity, dog and master are friends,  
Tied around the neck,  
the hunter drags him along,  
In thick and dark forests,  
Zvichapera is loose.  
Behind trees and ditches,  
Game dodges the dog.  
With energy the dog sniffs,  
searching and chasing,  
Zvichapera plays it double,  
Heading trees,  
and collapsing on dirty rocks



With determination,  
Zvichapera struggles on (Nyamubaya 8)

The relationship, however, breaks down as soon as the dog catches prey due to the selfishness of the hunter in the same way that veterans of the war, workers, peasants and women were abandoned by the nationalist elites upon the attainment of political independence. The hunt creates an illusory bond between the hunter and the dog in the same way that the liberation war created fictive connections between nationalist leaders and the freedom fighters who were ordinary people. The name of the dog, Zvichapera (It will end), shows her disillusionment with a nationalist project which she accuses of not achieving its intended objectives. Like Zvichapera, the war veterans and the masses have to contend “with a big stick” whilst the ruling elites consume the fat of the land (Nyamubaya, 8). There is a Kalanga proverb *imbwa yabulaya muka inowopiwa makuse koga*, which means ‘If a dog kills an animal it is given fur only’ (Moyo 173). The poem echoes this proverb, but updates it by challenging nationalist elites and the narrow versions of the past they were propagating in the early 1980s.

In a very different way, Michael Gascoigne’s *Tunzi, the Faithful Shadow* (1988), conversely uses a *mangy dog*, Tunzi, as a propaganda tool for the government. The way this novel relates political issues such as the 1982–87 civil war, otherwise known as the *gukurahundi* (the early rain that washes away the chaff), panders to nationalist histories as propagated by the ZANU PF ruling elite in the 1980s. Although certain government programmes were developmental in that they included progressive legislations for workers (minimum wage laws and community development) the government labelled the Ndebele-based party, PF ZAPU, which had also fought to end colonial rule, as enemies of the state and dissidents. This flattened competing versions of history.

In the novel, a boy called Temba saves a ‘mongrel’ dog, later named Tunzi, from a snare and his parents permit him to keep the dog on condition that he teaches him domestic etiquette. The dog surpasses family expectations by saving Thoko, Temba’s little sister, from being bitten by a snake (20). Thereafter Jabulani and Mazula, variously described in the novel as dissidents, bandits, social misfits, poachers and robbers, kidnap Temba and Tunzi in order to use them as a distraction whilst robbing a local shop. Tunzi foils the robbery and saves Temba’s father from being shot by the two robbers (90–6). These impressive feats render the dog an animal hero who understands situations and acts in preventing harm to the family and community (11, 17). In other words, the dog acts as medium, just like the drum in Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain*, played this time by the government in propagating statist and reductionist histories of the country.

This novel glosses over the human rights abuses committed against the Ndebele-speaking minority who supported the rival PF ZAPU party by the Shona-

dominated ZANU PF government in the Matabeleland province between 1982 and 1987. *Tunzi* is essentially an ersatz adventure narrative, uncritically regurgitating government propaganda and covering up these atrocities (Tagwirei 48–50). The ministry of education in the mid-1990s prescribed the novel as a Junior Secondary School English literature set book because it painted the independent government and its programmes in a good light. It included a catalogue of developmental successes achieved by the ZANU PF government such as restoring ‘peaceful order’, building roads, schools, clinics, growth points, and the enactment of progressive legislation.

*Tunzi* was thus a propaganda tool—a dog held on a leash by the government and directed at children—in its indoctrination discourse about nationhood, belonging, and obedience to national authorities. Labelling the people they disagreed with as ‘sellouts’ was common during the liberation struggle from the 1960s up to 1980. Henkin (513) argues that both liberation wings of ZANU PF and PF ZAPU often killed villagers they suspected of supporting the colonial regime and boasted that they were killing ‘dogs’. Vambe further explained that “violence became very rife in both the (1970s) political and trade union movement” and that people became “extremely intolerant of any form of opposition or deviation, particularly from anyone of their race”. Such opponents were labelled “*imbga dze vasungate*” (dogs of slavers) (NAZ, ORAL/233 Interview Lawrence Vambe). Treating the Matabeleland region and its people this way shows the continuation of such narrow-minded nationalist discourses. *Tunzi* is thus as mangy as other African dogs deployed as a propaganda tool of the powerful.

### Canids and the cities, 1991–2005

As explained above, *Tunzi* was a transitional novel showing governmental shifts from a seemingly broad nationalism to an increasingly shallow one. On the literary front, novelists upped their fight for an open public space, narratives and histories celebrating diversity—especially after 1990. The works of creative fiction analysed in this section also show novelists appreciating cities as key in questioning state power. These authors borrowed from oral sources, just as in the preceding period. They infused their writing with social commentary coming from newspapers. In this new literary tradition, writers were fixated with canines, class and the city in writing about urban decay, destitution, inequality and ‘independence gone bad’ by the 1990s.

Hove’s short story, “Harare’s High Fences, Neighbours and Dogs”, published in 1994 mocks the new African middle class mimicry of ‘colonial’ security regimes that involve keeping vicious dogs, putting ‘beware of the dog’ signs on gates, erecting high walls and installing sophisticated security installations in residential



areas. The majority of the African middle class are presented as being obsessed with protecting their newly acquired houses, properties and cars—the new consumer's *lares et penates*. This serves as a critique of the comprador bourgeoisie by the novelists that depict them as drifting away from the masses. These new attitudes not only throw away African traditions of good neighbourliness in Harare's low-density suburbs, they also expose children to vicious dogs, painful rabies vaccinations and high walls as they negotiate the boundaries erected to demonstrate class advancement. Hove contended that there are “as many dogs as there are people” (22) in Harare, a fact evinced by newspaper complaints of this period (City of Harare Archive).

Shimmer Chinodya's short story “Strays”, published in 1998, complicates the relationship between canines, class (and race) and the city. The main characters, Sam and his wife, move into one of Harare's low-density suburbs in the 1980s and buy (from a white woman) a dog that is used to being pampered. This dog initially struggles to fit into African dog-owning regimes. Sam, a “hard *Mashona* type,” grew up in a society that believed that:

A dog is a dog. The average African dog is a little less than that. The average African dog is a creature to be kicked, scolded and have missiles thrown at it—an inconvenient extra mouth that threatens precarious supplies in seasons of drought, or on rare munificent occasions such as Christmas, will efficiently devour the mounds of leftovers. For some women, the dog is still a handy convenience for quickly getting rid of the baby's steaming stool, a reliable voice that, shut out of doors, will warn off strangers, potential intruders and creatures of the night. (74)

The author uses this trope to explore differences between African and white ways of keeping dogs—useful in writing multi-species social history. For him “a European dog is more than a dog”. It is a family member with a traceable genealogy, medical and funeral insurance and is included in one's will (75). Sekai Nzenza's article contends that European-owned dogs are treated like persons, their food comes from the shops and they visit the doctor when they fall sick. Some resource-challenged Africans envied this (Nzenza). These reasons, for Chinodya and Nzenza, mean that “European dogs” in class terms are above domestic workers in white homes, an unthinkable status in African middle class families in which domestic workers are often relatives. Little wonder that Sam accuses his new dog, Sango (bush/forest), for having “elitist tendencies” after it refuses African food (Chinodya 76). Sam is, however, “suspicious of the intimacy privileged people displayed towards their animals, seeing it as some kind of misanthropy” (76). This worldview explains why he does not buy a kennel, bone meal, flea powder, a bath tub and vaccination shots for Sango. As a diehard traditionalist, Sam sticks to ways of the past and superimposes a Shona worldview on a formerly exclusive European residential area (76–7) through his treatment of the dog.

Sango eventually abandons his ‘elitist tendencies’ and strays into neighbouring yards in search of bitches on heat. He changes from being a pampered pet to being a pest:

He seemed to know whenever somebody was going out, whenever he saw somebody was wearing boots, or carrying an umbrella or getting into the car, then he would slink up quietly behind the rosebushes and the crockery and bolt for the gate. Before you could swing or shout at him he would be out, racing across the tarmac into the grass and the trees of the adjacent farm. (80)

Initially Sam thought the dog was ‘straying’ but later appreciated his transgressive behaviour as liberating. The dog’s ‘straying’ echoes Sam’s own appetites for sex outside wedlock, his preference for traditional foods and for drinking beer at illegal and squalid bottle stores that betray his newly acquired middle class status.

Ignatius Mabasa’s novel, *Mapenzi* (Mad/Foolish people), published in 1999, provides an interesting counterpoint to Hove and Chinodya’s short stories in its handling of canines, class and the city. It criticizes the ruling elites for their sham democratic pretensions and their betrayal of the revolution. A white employer emigrates from Zimbabwe and entrusts Mai Jazz, her former domestic worker, with the responsibility of caring for her dog, named Salisbury at independence in 1980. Mai Jazz thereafter buys a house in Unit D Seke (Chitungwiza), a dormitory city of Harare. Her former employer leaves a fund and a fully paid-up two-year pet food account for the upkeep of the dog. After three months, Mai Jazz withdraws the money for herself and subjects the once-pampered dog to a new African dog-keeping regimes such as that described by Chinodya above. She also renames the dog “Harare” because “Salisbury” is not consistent with her position as a political commissar in the ZANU PF party’s *Chimedzamabhunu* (the one who swallows Boers) Women’s League Branch (100). This book criticizes the shallowness of the new political elites whose slogans materially fail to live up to the expectations of independence: the dog, the city and the country undergo name changes but these are merely cosmetic. Black elites merely replace white elites and the city’s poor start to suffer even more. The new regime wastes resources just as Mai Jazz fritters away the ‘dog fund’. Just like Sango, Harare, Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans get a lifestyle downgrade (143).

Changing the dog’s name from “Salisbury” to “Harare” conveys the author’s unsubtle allegorical device: that he sees both the city and the country as dogs with simply shifting masters. Salisbury/Harare is, moreover, as old as Zimbabwe since he was born in the year that the country won its independence (143). The author writes of veterans of the war of liberation struggling with psychological trauma fighting over rubbish bins with street children— just as the dogs were doing (55). Dogs are shown wrecking waste bins—they literally uncover that which the authorities would like to keep contained and secret. They exhibit agency their masters would prefer they did not possess. They complicate relationships between



tenants, property owners and neighbours by repeatedly stealing food thereby causing quarrels about how victims are to be compensated (43, 44, 61). Tenants sometimes beat their property owners' dogs and get their leases illegally terminated in the process.

This is further explored in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, set in 2005. It addresses the unsustainably high number of dogs in Harare's high-density suburbs in 'crisis' ridden Zimbabwe—almost a century after the colonial authorities dubbed the number of African-owned dogs too high. The state cannot provide security as is shown by the increase in the numbers of burglaries. Urbanites, however, resort to keeping dogs, which they are not capable of feeding. Harare becomes a city of noise populated by barking, yelping and growling dogs (1). Lack-  
ing adequate food provisions from owners, the dogs resort to scavenging in bins (119) where they fight with homeless people "for rare bits of food" (57). Similarly, in Ignatius Mabasa's *Mapenzi* a veteran of the liberation war struggles with dogs for leftovers in people's bins. Mabasa, in his column in *The Herald*, declares that dogs are a "barometer to measure the well-being of their masters" in the cities. His novel takes readers both to the countryside and urban areas and his verdict equally applies to the whole country. In the same article, he writes that "the eyes of a dog are a type of speech that says things the mouth is unable to say". Such speeches, as has been shown above, infuse animal-sensitive interpretations into the limitations of official discourses and histories.



### Straying human beings: Dogs, demons and deprivation

A very recent intervention on the post-independence state is offered by Mabasa's novel, *Imbwya Yemunhu* (You Dog), which was published in 2013. Set in the city of Chitungwiza, the novel uses traditional worldviews in grappling with experiences of liminal human beings in society whom it accuses of behaving, thinking and acting like canines. Musavhaya, the main character, does not measure up to societal, religious and family expectations and plunges into alcoholism and various vices, which earns him the sobriquet *Imbwya Yemunhu* (Tapureta). This phrase, *Imbwya Yemunhu*, has three competing meanings. It may refer to sentient dogs, to dogs owned by a person and to human beings who behave like dogs or a dog (Vambe, "Playing with the tension between Animal and Human Allegories in Ignatius Mabasa's Novel *Imbwya Yemunhu*" 46). His name, Musavhaya, is a Shona corruption of the word "surveying" (Mabasa, *Imbwya Yemunhu* 4, 23, 93) and this is caused by an evil person/spirit/ancestor who uses his 'numerous dogs' (meaning either other people or evil spirits) (4, 23, 30–1) to force Musavhaya into self-destruct mode. He 'strays' into places that satisfy his hedonistic impulses, thus taking readers with him to the other human dogs in politics, churches, families and throughout the country. He surveys Chitungwiza's sanitary lanes, beer halls,

locations, brothels, the criminal underworld, rural areas, beer halls, and houses for beer, drugs and prostitutes. The surveying also takes him to Hell and Heaven (35–6, 124–5). He behaves like a stray dog (93) that obeys its insatiable appetites, in the process overturns waste bins, and exposes the ugly side of society (122).

Yet his hyper-mobility and insatiable appetites are caused by the ‘man with (of) many dogs,’ who controls him and other human dogs. These include corrupt politicians (95), religious cheats, dogs, and loose married women who engage in extra-marital affairs. They also include Richard, who has an incestuous relationship with his mother, engages in homosexuality, and uses *muti* to get rich (94–5, 99, 104, 114, 140, 148). Musavhaya’s sister-in-law also practices bogus Christianity and is another ‘you dog’ (102, 123). Such human-dogs have intertextual connections with Brian Chikwava’s novel, *Harare North* (2009), which is set in Edinburgh. The narrator claims that:

I walk on the white line with suitcase on my head. Nothing can hit my head. I feeling like *umgodoyi*—the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the winds. That’s why *umgodoyi*’s soul is tear from his body in rough way. That’s what everyone want to do to me, me I know. (226)

Chikwava’s character, just like Musavhaya and the stray dogs of the post-colonial state, survives on the margins.

The ‘man with (of) many dogs’ holds Musavhaya and drags him into all sorts of places. He signifies the presence of an alien and terrifying force—the ultimate ‘Other’ and this forces Musavhaya to swing—like a pendulum—between good and evil (30). He is a comparable character to Mungoshi’s character in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), who possesses Garabha. Unlike Mungoshi’s character, this ‘man with (of) many dogs’ works against his medium by heightening his appetites for vices (76–80, 121) such that his medium behaves like “a dog that steals eggs”, regularly and is beaten daily for stealing. Because it is held on the leash by this controlling force, it continues to ignore rules, norms and all the customs so that it deeply descends into *humbwa* (dogdom/ behaving filthily like a dog) and gradually loses its *hunhu* (humanness) (76–7) as it is being wagged by its tail/appetites (107). The imagery of the tail wagging the dog points to the ‘invisibility’ of the leash controlling Musavhaya (22–3, 94, 96–7, 109–10). Garabha, in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), also ‘surveys’ the country. There are more similarities between Musavhaya and Garabha. Both are mediums of the ‘men with (of) many dogs’. They are artistes as well as delinquents who refuse to marry (Mabasa, *Imbwa Yemunhu* 112, 131). They also use their art to challenge dominant statist narratives. The only difference is that the one who possess Garabha does so positively for his medium whilst the one who possesses Musavhaya does that negatively for its medium. Thus the ‘man with (of) many dogs’ in *Waiting for the Rain* served nationalist narratives to



fight colonialism whilst the one in *Imbwa Yemunhu* allows for an exploration of patriotic historiography that came after the year 2000.

Musavhaya's 'straying' leads readers to other human dogs who are on the leashes of the 'man with (of) many dogs' (108, 113, 123–4). These other 'you dogs' are found in Pentecostal churches (124–6), African Independent Churches (118), and more importantly political parties and government. In one of his 'straying' escapades, a cockroach gazes at Musavhaya as he sits on the bed of one of his prostitutes and it accuses him of "being a dog that bites its own tail" and that raises dust into other people's eyes (84–5). In another, he admires a dog that has a leash, which he meets and envies because he feels that unlike himself the dog has an owner. Ironically Musavhaya, in this case, conveniently forgets the hold that the 'man with (of) many dogs' has over him (86). The most dangerous human dogs—*imbwa dzevanhu* (dog persons or 'you dogs')—belong to political parties and they use violence at their gatherings. They bite 'the tails' of other dogs and sing at political gatherings (152). Unlike these violent 'you dogs', Musavhaya is a dog that engages in philosophical reflection, writes books and tries to publish them (Mabasa, *Imbwa Yemunhu* 22–3). In doing this, he challenges official and elitist narratives of *humbwa* (dogdom/ behaving filthily like a dog/corruption/filthiness) practised by the ruling elites (3, 148). Like the stereotypical appetite-driven 'stray' dog he overturns political, religious and social dustbins and exposes various practices of *humbwa* in his 'surveys' (100).

The dogs in high political offices—just as Musavhaya is leashed by the evil 'man with (of) many dogs'—placed fetters on the political consciousness of the citizens. A prominent case involves how these evil 'man with (of) many dogs' in politics force the University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor Professor Kamba to enforce draconian laws on the university academic staff and students in order to limit their academic freedoms. Professor Kamba resigned from his job, refusing to be *chimbwa chawasungata* (dog on the leash) of politicians (41). Trying to turn university lecturers and students into compliant 'dogs' of the government was aimed at putting ideological muzzles and leashes on them.

Musavhaya's 'straying' as a "canine human being", takes him to Hell—*gehena*—where he meets the wife of the deputy president of the country (4–9). This encounter reveals further attempts to turn the citizenry into dogs on leashes by a corrupt and kleptocratic regime (10, 12). Musavhaya's conversation with her shows that the ruling class does not take critical scrutiny of its activities by citizens lightly. She accuses writers of being "careless with your so called art" and raising unnecessary controversies, which she calls *gutukutu* (odour) in the country (11). The wife of the deputy president accuses Musavhaya and other writers of "selling to outsiders our national problems" to media outlets such as CNN and BBC for financial rewards and popularity (12). She prescribes that writers needed to be 'prophets', 'healers', 'doctors' and teachers of the country in propagating official narratives of

the nation. She equates the raising of such ‘unnecessary controversies’ to defecating in the main house and not in the conveniently hidden places such as toilets. In the heated political moment of August 2016, Mahomva used Nyamubaya’s poem “The dog and the hunter”, to castigate journalists and writers in the same manner that the wife of the deputy president does in *Imbwa Yemunhu*. He twisted its original meaning and argued that the poem is symbolic of the dog-master colonial history of Zimbabwe and Britain (Mahomva, “The Game of Dogs and Masters”). He argues that the opposition Movement for Democratic (MDC) Party’s conduct, between 2000 and 2016, is synonymous with the unfaithful hunter attacking the “Mangy-Dog” that is the country, government, masses and the land. He does this by importing an allusion to Luís Honwana’s *We Killed Mangy Dog & Other Mozambique Stories* into the political situation in Zimbabwe.

Another artist in *Imbwa Yemunhu*, known to Musavhaya as the Resident Poet, conversely accuses the ruling party of the crime of defecating in public (91). Artists in the novel refuse to bow to government pressure to produce conformist art, insisting that “writing is a government on its own” (11). This enables them to challenge the narrowmindedness of government narratives. Such a stance is the reason why the post-colonial government does not support the publishing industry and this downgrades some artistes to pauperized critics feebly opposing government propaganda in beer-halls. In one instance, Musavhaya recites his poem, “Tsapo yeminzwa” (A heap of thorns) that captured the struggles of people who reside in urban ghettos that range from shortages of water and electricity to many others. It alarmed the government (11–2). It appears that the role of an inebriated and possibly mad artist who criticizes government excesses in the novel is moulded after Dambudzo Marechera, one of the leading Zimbabwean novelists, who refused to write in the service of the government in the early 1980s.

Government efforts to put leashes on the population—like the evil ‘man with (of) many dogs’—and to manufacture consent, disarmed some artistes by confining them to beer-halls as drunken armchair critics. It also forced some leading artistes into exile. The novelist Chenjerai Hove, one of the writers we examine in this essay, and *chimurenga* (liberation) musician Thomas Mapfumo, began living in exile after the year 2000. Thus, the new narrative of the nation propagated a narrow ideology of the past and its politics that has come to be known as patriotic historiography. Ironically, Hove’s novels, short stories and poems written between 1988 and the 1990s, and Mapfumo’s songs sung before 1998, fit neatly into the nationalist historiography of the 1960s up to the 1990s. The critical difference between nationalist historiography and patriotic historiography was the absence of artists such as Mapfumo and Hove and many others. During the era of patriotic historiography, government spin doctors—acting like the evil ‘man with (of) many dogs’—used schools, radios, newspapers, songs and even violence in pedalling historical distortions. The divorce between these leading artistes and the



new historiography accompanied the growing excesses of toxic nationalism that witnessed the abandonment of worker's rights, trade unionism, and fundamental human rights. Another defining characteristic of patriotic historiography was the central position accorded to former president Robert Mugabe ahead of all the other liberation fighters as the leader, historian, prophet, icon and visionary of the black people's struggles against colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni). He thus becomes like the 'evil man with (of) many dogs' seeking to put everyone else onto the leash.

Terence Ranger argues that from 2000 ruling elites in Zimbabwe narrowed nationalist historiography of the early 1980s (discussed above) still further by dissociating it from its developmental, socialist, human rights and welfare state policies of the past (Ranger 220). Although it now included—indeed, championed—war veterans and Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front politicians, whom it had previously incarcerated between 1980 and 1987, it further alienated other regions, ethnic minorities, trade unions, the youth and women. Such patriotic history was a polarising genre based on a Manichean model: dividing patriots from traitors, enemies of the state from friends, and gave excess legitimacy to the state and national leaders. It was opposed to academic history, and offered a simple, monolithic alternative from the first *chimurenga* to the second *chimurenga* and then to the fast track land reform programme—dubbed *jambanja* because of its violent nature—which was code-named the third *chimurenga*. In between these *zvimurenga* was nothing of historical interest for the connoisseurs of the new patriotic historiography.

Vambe ("Playing", 52–3) argues that Musavhaya and Resident Poet challenge these official narratives of history, because they suppress individual freedoms, is autocratic, corrupt, and aggressively "barks" and "bites," at the citizenry (52–3). These artistes challenge those 'official barks, bites, muzzles and leashes' with counter-narratives that are full of sadness, ugliness, narratives of the decay in the country, filthiness, vomit, odours, wounds and pus to displace patriotic half-truths (Mabasa, *Imbwa Yemunhu* 111, 115, 120). At one point Musavhaya wrote the poem "Tsapo yeminzwa" (A heap of thorns) (11), and whilst Resident Poet wrote "Gutukutu" (Odour) (91), questioning the democratic and governance deficits of the leaders. These oppositional artists question, challenge and mock official histories of the liberation struggle, on which the ruling elites base their legitimacy (103). They accuse these leaders of being political dogs (152). The Zimbabwean economy plunged into a crisis during this period, some of the indicators being the failure by high school and university graduates to find employment. In the novel, Musavhaya fails to get a job and ends up teaching at an unregistered college and also works at Colcom on a part-time basis because he knew someone working there (93, 101). Chitungwiza, the setting of the novel, is plagued by rampant corruption (58). According to Vambe, "in the novel's allegory of the

nation as a corrupt and rotten country, Chitungwiza takes on the role of metonymically standing in for that country” (“Playing”, 51). On the same metonymic level, Chikwanha bar in Chitungwiza, “our bar” as Musa calls it (“*kubhawa redu kwaChikwanha*”), becomes the “nest of rebellion where writers meet and oppositional poems are written”. The Resident Poet sees writers as dip tanks that produce knowledge about the kind of ticks that are sucking the country to forestall its demise (Mabasa, *Imbwa Yemunhu* 89–90). ‘Patriotic editors’ reject these artistes’ manuscripts to force them to conform and to practise self-censorship (120). In one instance, Musavhaya receives a letter rejecting his book manuscript with the comment that he needed to consider writing books “telling stories of the children of the soil” using nativist plots, narratives and themes (120, 151–2). By so doing editors are also portrayed as the evil ‘man with (of) many dogs’ stifling other ways of seeing and dampening the new *sarunganos* (story tellers) of the nation (89).

Dogs in Zimbabwean oral lore patrol the grounds between loyalty and rebellion in the human world (“They talk to dogs while they mean you” 37). There are vernacular ways of speaking to power, known as *kurovera kumbwa* (to hit others on the dog), in which a dog may be beaten and be told unpalatable truths that are in reality directed at people within hearing distance (Msimuko 51). Even the less powerful in society made use of such dog metaphors. In August 2016, Misheck Kaguru of Masvingo province was brought before the courts of law for naming his dog after then president Robert Mugabe (Van Vreden).

Dogs exist as both passive metaphors and as active agents (variously villains and heroes), in Zimbabwean literature. They enable writers to take readers to the most unexpected places, and their actions—silence or barking, obedience or straying—complicate political analysis. Moreover, novelists capitalize on both the physicality of dogs and on their shifting symbolic meanings (including indigenous knowledge about dogs which society has acquired over a long period). These writers particularly play with the idea of dogs as mediators between wild and tame, healthy and filthy environments, as pets or work animals, and as animal or almost-human.

## Conclusion

170

There have been three different epochs in the use of dogs in Zimbabwean literature. The first one is represented by Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* and the “The Lazy Young Man and his Dog” in which the author uses precolonial-era dogs in dealing with questions of the deployment of power. Hove’s two novels, *Bones* and *Shadows*, use dogs as metaphors to examine the materiality of colonialism for both Africans and Europeans. Nyamubaya’s “The dog and the hunter” and Gascoigne’s *Tunzi, the Faithful Shadow* introduce the dog as the symbol of both lower class oppression and as the propaganda tool of the ruling class respectively.



The third era was a key turning point in which issues of inequality begin to be dealt with, focusing on the triad: canids, class and the city. Dogs changed hands from whites to Africans (or vice versa) and readers are taken through the different social, racial and class constructions about dogs (and how these affect the dogs themselves, in some cases). In doing so, readers are shown that dogs as actors have their own point of view. A critical reading of the uses of dogs in the novels considered above show that these authors mined their ideas from vernacular knowledge (especially proverbs and oral tradition) in discussing human-dog relations in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. Considered together with the myths, legends, proverbs and oral traditions upon which they draw, the creative works constitute a significant body of knowledge available to scholars working on human-dog relations.

## NOTES

1. Video uploaded on *Youtube* by Teamzanupf live of the ruling ZANU PF party.
2. Video upload on *Youtube* by 263Chats. 263Chats is an online organization that publishes about Zimbabwe.
3. News24.com is a South African online news publisher.
4. The title of Mumvuma's novel, *Imbwa Nyoro*, is derived from the Shona proverb *imbwa nyoro ndidzo tsengi dzematowo* (humble dogs are the devourers of hides). It refers to people who appear to be humble and yet they end up doing wrong.



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171

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