Nation in Crisis: Alternative Literary Representations of Zimbabwe Post-2000

by

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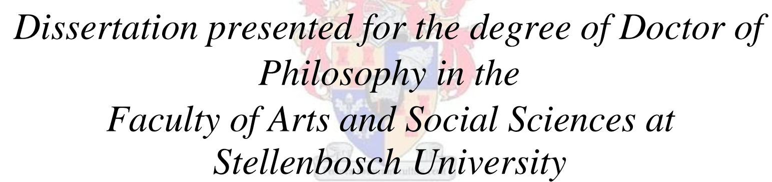

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The last decade in Zimbabwe was characterised by an unprecedented economic and political crisis. As the crisis threatened to destabilise the political status quo, it prompted in governmental circles the perceived ‘need’ for political containment. The ensuing attempts to regulate the expressive sphere, censor alternative historiographies of the crisis and promote monolithic and self-serving perceptions of the crisis presented a real danger of the distortion of information about the situation. Representing the crisis therefore occupies a contested and discursive space in debates about the Zimbabwean crisis. It is important to explore the nature of cultural interventions in the urgent process of re-inscribing the crisis and extending what is known about Zimbabwe’s so-called ‘lost decade’. The study analyses literary responses to state-imposed restrictions on information about the state of Zimbabwean society during the post-2000 economic and political crisis which reached the public sphere, with particular reference to creative literature by Zimbabwean authors published during the period 2000 to 2010. The primary concern of this thesis is to examine the efficacy of post-2000 Zimbabwean literature as constituting a significant archive of the present and also as sites for the articulation of dissenting views – alternative perspectives assessing, questioning and challenging the state’s grand narrative of the crisis. Like most African literatures, Zimbabwean literature relates (directly and indirectly) to definite historical forces and processes underpinning the social, cultural and political production of space. The study mainly invokes Maria Pia Lara’s theory about the “moral texture” and disclosive nature of narratives by marginalised groups in order to explore the various ways through which such narratives revise hegemonically distorted representations of themselves and construct more inclusive discourses about the crisis. A key finding in this study is that through particular modes of representation, most of the literary works put a spotlight on some of the major talking points in the political and socio-economic debate about the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis, while at the same time extending the contours of the debate beyond what is agreeable to the powerful. This potential in literary works to deconstruct and transform dominant elitist narratives of the crisis and offering instead, alternative and more representative narratives of the excluded groups’ experiences, is made possible by their affective appeal. This affective dimension stems from the intimate and experiential nature of the narratives of these affected groups. However, another important finding in this study has been the advent of a distinct canon of hegemonic texts which covertly (and sometimes overtly) legitimate the state narrative of the crisis. The thesis ends with a suggestion that future scholarly enquiries look

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set to focus more closely on the contribution of creative literature to discourses on democratisation in contemporary Zimbabwe.

OPSOMMING

Die afgelope dekade in Zimbabwe is gekenmerk deur 'n ongekende ekonomiese en politiese krisis. Terwyl die krisis gedreig het om die politieke status quo omver te werp, het dit die 'noodsaak' van politieke insluiting aangedui. Die daaropvolgende pogings om die ruimte vir openbaarmaking te reguleer, alternatiewe optekenings van gebeure te sensureer en ook om monolitiese, self-bevredigende waarnemings van die krisis te bevorder, het 'n wesenlike gevaar van distorsie van inligting i.v.m. die krisis meegebring. Voorstellings van die krisis vind sigself dus in 'n gekontesteerde en diskursiewe ruimte in debatte aangaande die Zimbabwiese krisis. Dit is gevolglik belangrik om die aard van kulturele intervensies in die dringende proses om die krisis te hervertolk te ondersoek asook om kennis van Zimbabwe se sogenaamde 'verlore dekade' uit te brei. Die studie analiseer literêre reaksies op staats-geïniseerde inkortings van inligting aangaande die sosiale toestand in Zimbabwe gedurende die post-2000 ekonomiese en politiese krisis wat sulke informasie uit die openbare sfeer weerhou het, met spesifieke verwysing na skeppende literatuur deur Zimbabwiese skrywers wat tussen 2000 en 2010 gepubliseer is. Die belangrikste doelwit van hierdie tesis is om die doeltreffendheid van post-2000 Zimbabwiese letterkunde as konstituering van 'n alternatiewe Zimbabwiese 'argief van die huidige' en ook as ruimte vir die artikulering van teenstemme – alternatiewe perspektiewe wat die staat se 'groot narratief' aangaande die krisis bevraagteken – te ondersoek. Soos met die meeste ander Afrika-letterkundes is daar in hierdie literatuur 'n verband (direk en/of indirek) met herkenbare historiese kragte en prosesse wat die sosiale, kulturele en politiese ruimtes tot stand bring. Die studie maak in die ondersoek veral gebruik van Maria Pia Lara se teorie aangaande die 'morele tekstuur' en openbaringsvermoë van narratiewe aangaande gemarginaliseerde groepe ten einde die verskillende maniere waarop sulke narratiewe hegemoniese distorsies in 'offisiële' voorstellings van hulself 'oorskryf' om meer inklusiewe diskoerse van die krisis daar te stel, na te vors. 'n Kernbevinding van die studie is dat, d.m.v. van spesifieke tipe voorstellings, die meeste van die letterkundige werke wat hier ondersoek word, 'n soeklig plaas op verskeie van die belangrikste kwessies in die politieke en sosio-ekonomiese debatte oor die Zimbabwiese krisis, terwyl dit terselfdertyd die kontoere van die debat uitbrei verby die grense van wat vir die maghebbers gemaklik is. Die potensieel van letterkundige werke om oorheersende, elitistiese narratiewe oor die krisis te dekonstrueer en te omvorm, word moontlik gemaak deur hul affektiewe potensiaal. Hierdie affektiewe dimensie word ontketen deur die intieme en ervaringsgewortelde geaardheid van die narratiewe van die geaffekteerde groepe. Nietemin is 'n ander belangrike bevinding van

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hierdie studie dat daar ‘n onderskeibare kanon van hegemoniese tekste bestaan wat op verskuilde (en soms ook openlike) maniere die staatsnarratief anngaande die krisis legitimeer. Die tesis sluit af met die voorstel dat toekomstige vakkundige studies meer spesifiek sou kon fokus op die bydrae van kreatiewe skryfwerk tot die demokratisering van kontemporêre Zimbabwe.

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION 1

ABSTRACT ii

OPSOMMING iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVE METAPHORS OF A HISTORICAL MOMENT 40

CHAPTER 3: THE CONTROVERSY OF ‘NATIONAL INTEREST’ 68

CHAPTER 4: “A STRUGGLE WITHIN A STRUGGLE”: CENTERING FEMALE PERSPECTIVES ON THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS. 110

CHAPTER 5: HOLDING THE STATE TO ACCOUNT IN POST-2000 ZIMBABWEAN FICTION 163

CONCLUSION: CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS 211

WORKS CITED 231

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the height of the post-2000 Zimbabwean economic and political crisis, the Zimbabwean/British writer Doris Lessing[1] (winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature) commented as follows on the state of writing in post-2000 Zimbabwe: "writers are not made in Zimbabwe. Not easily, not under Mugabe" (537).[2] Yet despite the restrictive and taxing economic and political situation in post-2000 Zimbabwe, the period is arguably especially productive in terms of both quantity (perhaps also quality) and critical attention. Literary production in post-2000 Zimbabwe, like the social life and political views of its people, is characterized by competing worldviews, perceptions and representations of the crisis. The Zimbabwean public sphere has been hemmed in by evident political censorship of dissident voices commenting on the unfolding crisis. In this cacophony of contending views, my study undertakes to explore the predominantly questioning role of contemporary Zimbabwean literature in its representation of the post-2000 socio-economic and political crisis, particularly against the backdrop of an unprecedented propaganda drive by the state and evident contraction of the expressive space.

The argument of this dissertation is that some literary texts published during this period present an alternative archive of the crisis decade which relates subversively to the imaginings of the crisis and its causes preferred and legitimized by the state. The study examines this 'alternative' archive which has been brought into being by creative literature, paying especial attention to the subtlety with which it in certain cases, confirms or alternatively undermines dominant (particularly state) narratives of the crisis. I examine a minority of narratives that do legitimize the official accounts in either subtle or more blatant ways as alternatives to the implicitly questioning stance of the (majority of my) texts that convey views dissenting from the 'official' or grand narrative concerning the state of Zimbabwe post-2000. However, my analysis strives to extend beyond comprehending the focal texts as mere fictional mimesis of state and anti-state rhetoric. Given that postcolonial Zimbabwean literature in general has been caught between contributing to the nationalist cause and critically engaging with the nationalist regime, my study seeks to cull from the

[1] Lessing was born in Persia, grew up in Zimbabwe and now lives in England.
[2] Lessing's Nobel Prize lecture was later published under the title "On not winning the Nobel Prize".

focal texts published in the post-2000 period, their unique discourses and to analyse how these relate to state-circumscribed discourses concerning the crisis.

Since my title refers to 'alternative visions' in the consideration of literary evocations that are alternative to one another – some quite close to the dominant state narrative, and others more subtly oppositional to it – satisfactory fulfillment of my task involves two related processes. The first is to demonstrate the correlation between post-2000 Zimbabwean creative literature and the crisis time-space. The second task is connected to the first; it involves examining how facets of literary discourse enhance the texts' capacity not only to function as aesthetically complex literary works (rather than mere oppositional political tracts or forms of counter-propaganda), but in most cases, as a body of writing, serving as a formidable and subtle counter-discourse to the state's grand narrative of the crisis, with an insistence on the ultimate validity of personal and communal experience above ideological claims. I focus on political implications and overtones of literary evocations of particular post-2000 Zimbabwean conditions, but my analysis takes seriously the literary art of the authors – such as vivid evocation and affective writing, as well as the use of techniques of implicit analysis (in contrast with overt commentary or a discursive style rather than representation through exemplification).

Background and context: the crisis and cultural production in post-2000 Zimbabwe

Before considering literary representations, one needs to have a sense of the actual conditions 'on the ground' to which the authorial renditions respond and which they evaluate implicitly or explicitly. This section aims to provide the social, economic and political context of the crisis time-space, particularly indicating the political and cultural pressures and discourses that I bring to bear in my analysis of the literary texts' generally subversive engagement with the state's grand narrative of the Zimbabwean crisis. Three quotations, respectively from a newspaper literary reviewer, a critic working on Zimbabwean literature and a leading Zimbabwean author, give a sense of present conditions of writing and the divergent positions adopted in the ongoing debate concerning the nature of the public sphere in this country. The first citation in particular makes clear the risk – of incurring accusations of lack of patriotism, even of national/racial betrayal – incurred by authors of texts that question the official line, providing an indication of how authors who do toe the line would earn support and praise. The second and third quotations serve to highlight the sense of curtailment (by restriction of

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opportunities and state discouragement and intimidation) experienced by writers critical of the ZANU (PF) government and its practices and representations of the state of the nation.

> Over the years, the country has witnessed an increased production of [literary] books critical of black rule, books full of exaggerations that suit the agenda of the west [...] Works by writers, who tell the true Zimbabwean story and support black empowerment and self-rule have found no publishers. (Shingirirai Mutonho, "Another book from a darling of the West" *The Patriot Online*)

> In today's Zimbabwe, the ruling ZANU (PF) is striving to exert control over all the aspects of the social production of space: spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces, claiming that this is necessary in order to reclaim and finally decolonize the Zimbabwean nation. (Ranka Primorac, *The Place of Tears* 177)

> During the liberation struggle I witnessed repression and now we are going back to those days when artists were forced to restrain, to keep under.
> (Tsitsi Dangarembga, "Artists cry out for space", *Financial Gazette*)

There are two dominant and predictably antagonistic narratives of the origins, causes and nature of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis. These views can be easily located in the unprecedented polarisation of political discourse that characterizes the post-2000 period. For Robert Mugabe and ZANU (PF), the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis is entirely a product of foreign machinations bent on sabotaging the government's black empowerment programmes, particularly the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (see the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe governor Gideon Gono's book *Zimbabwe's Casino Economy: Extraordinary Measures for Extraordinary Challenges*; Robert Mugabe's *Inside the Third Chimurenga* and the anonymously written booklets *Traitors Do Much Damage To National Goals* and *100 Reasons To Vote ZANU-PF* published by ZANU - PF). On the other hand, oppositional parties, particularly the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) delineate the crisis as a crisis of political governance. Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa (in their introduction to the book *Crisis! What Crisis?:*[3] *The Multiple Dimensions of the Zimbabwean*

[3] Though not clearly stated in the book, the title phrase can be connected to Thabo Mbeki's comment in 2008 that there was "no crisis in Zimbabwe". Amid a post-election political and economic crisis and a ravaging

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Crisis argue that there are multiple causes of the Zimbabwean crisis. However, Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya[4] contend that "Zimbabwe's plunge" (Bond and Manyanya i) originated in the financial meltdown of 14 November 1997 – the "black Friday" when the Zimbabwe dollar lost 74% of its value.[5] At the height of the crisis, Zimbabwe had a world record inflation rate[6] for countries not at war and was lowly ranked in most social, political and economic rating indeces such as the World Press Freedom Index, The Human Development Index,[7] the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, etc. The crisis reached a climax at the end of 2008 when a breakdown of the country's infrastructure caused a cholera epidemic that killed more than 4,000 and infected more than 100,000 people.[8] But outside its most visible forms, the crisis was more of a calamity of national values and morals; of the borderlines of what is lawful and what is unlawful being blurred. Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa list the major dimensions of the crisis at the center of my study. These are:

> [c]onfrontations over the land and property rights; contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship; the emergence of critical civil society groupings campaigning around trade unions; the human rights and constitutional questions; the restructuring of the state in more authoritarian forms; the broader pan-African and anti-imperialist meanings of the struggles in Zimbabwe; the cultural representations of the crisis in Zimbabwean literature; and the central role of Robert Mugabe. (ix)

Space for public expression and debate concerning these aspects of the crisis has been increasingly constricted as the ruling elite sought to project self-legitimating representations

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cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe, Mbeki's comment (although sensationalised by the media) drew widespread criticism.

[4] Their book *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice* (2003) is one of the most visible books to engage with the economic and political dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis.

[5] Many economic analysts attribute the "Black Friday" to government spending in quasi-fiscal expenditure, particularly the gratuities paid out in that year to the restless war veterans (see Bond and Manyanya's 2007 book *Zimbabwe's Plunge*).

[6] The last estimate by the Zimbabwe Statistical Office pegged the inflation before the dollarization of the economy in 2009 at 2 600 % while independent analysts put the figure much higher. See Steve Hanke and Alex Kwok's article "On the measurement of Zimbabwe's Hyperinflation" which pegs the inflation rate for November 2008 at 79,6%.

[7] The UN administered index ranked Zimbabwe in 2008 as the worst place to live in.

[8] See the article by Zindoga Mukandavire et al. entitled "Estimating the reproductive numbers for the 2008–2009 cholera outbreaks in Zimbabwe."

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of the state of the nation, at the same time stifling alternative voices commenting critically on the situation. Besides the widely documented and discussed clampdown on privately owned media houses and opposition political supporters, political intimidation and persecution of voices of dissent manifested in the unprecedented censorship of theater productions, music, creative literature and visual arts. The arrest in 2010 of Owen Maseko – a visual artist – for his painting exhibition (a display that most people would consider politically harmless because of its limited exposure to the larger population; that is, before his arrest) best exemplifies the political endangerment of the creative imagination in post-2000 Zimbabwe.[9]

In literary circles, the enormous corpus of creative literature published in the post-2000 decade prima facie suggests a conducive creative environment. However, a closer look at the politics of creative writing and publishing suggests otherwise. One of the anonymous Zimbabwean writers who responded to Patricia Alden's 2007 interviews on "the current situation of writing in Zimbabwe" bemoans what he/she feels is the dearth of 'freedom after expression' – the constant fear of persecution after publishing sensitive texts: "there is always self-censorship, a feeling of insecurity […] there is fear in writing […] but you presume the authorities don't read your book" ("Dies Irae"). In an interview with Ranka Primorac entitled "Dictatorships Are Transient", Chenjerai Hove, one of Zimbabwe's best-known writers, states that he had to flee into exile after falling out with state authorities keen on co-opting him into its propaganda machinery.[10] Another writer, Continueloving Mhlanga (who won the inaugural Orient Global Freedom to Create Prize for "applying the arts to oppose Robert Mugabe's regime"), has on several occasions clashed with state authorities over his attempts to hold the state to account through his political plays. One of these plays, *Overthrown* (in which two corpses march to the president's State House to demonstrate over the delay of their burial due to the economic hardships facing their survivors), has been censored and banned.[11] Apparently, the play's intention of "catch[ing] the conscience of the king" (to cite

[9] Maseko's paintings depicted the Gukurahundi atrocities in a sarcastic manner that the police deemed insensitive to the authorities. He was charged under the contested *Public Order and Security Act* (2002) with "undermining the authority" of President Robert Mugabe. Maseko's arrest precipitated a court battle which reflects the common incompatibility of free expression and repressive political power.

[10] In the same interview, Hove indirectly chides his contemporary and fellow writer Alexander Kanengoni whom he believes to have taken the regime's offer. Hove's criticism of Kanengoni is probably inspired by the fact that Kanengoni is a beneficiary of Mugabe's land reforms, now works in a state department and writes propaganda newspaper pieces for ZANU (PF).

[11] There is a significant number of such 'protest' plays which were banned because of their subversive themes. In 2008 the play "The Crocodile of Zambezi" was banned and its crew arrested. In 2011 the play "Rituals" (whose directors contended it was meant to promote healing and reconciliation after the bloody 2008

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Hamlet) was considered a threat to political hegemony and social stability. Borrowing Terence Ranger's phrase "patriotic history",[12] Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac in their introduction to the book *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* have argued that "under these circumstances, 'the patriotic narrative' – [a form of state endorsed representation of the problem situation which Ranka Primorac calls the 'master narrative' [*Tears* 6] and I will call the 'ZANU (PF) grand narrative'] – has arisen to assume the official position of sanctioned truth" (iv).

The official narrative of the nation is characterised by discernible politically-motivated exclusions, deletions and censorship of other narratives. This makes the state's grand narrative of the crisis suspect as an archive of information about the crisis. Quoting Benedict Anderson, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni judges that "nations just like heroes are not pre-existing entities but are imagined and created" and that as a result, "forging a nation includes the instrumental use of the media, the educational system, administrative regulations, propaganda, sometimes outright lies and selected fragments of history" (Ndlovu- Gatsheni 74). Besides contested legislation enacted in the post-2000 period such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002; the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 and the Interception of Information Act of 2006,[13] the ZANU PF regime used other mechanisms like the state controlled media to act as state functionaries assigned the role of exclusively promoting official points of view in the public sphere.[14]

The political polarisation of perspectives on the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe is readily discernible as replicated in cultural representations and interpretations of the land question. In

elections) suffered the same fate and its members were ironically charged for inciting public violence. The plays "No Voice No Choice" and "The Coup"were banned in 2012 by the Censorship Board on allegations that they promoted political violence.

[12] Ranger uses the phrase to refer to state-circumscribed and other narratives sympathetic to the state. While Ranger first used the phrase (in his 2004 article) in reference to the state's promotion of pro-ZANU (PF) historiography – what he calls "history in the service of nationalism" (215) – his follow-up article entitled "The Rise of Patriotic Journalism in Zimbabwe and its possible implications" zooms in on state monopolisation of the media in advancing hegemonic representations of the post-2000 crisis. However, of more significance to the present study is Ranger's recent comment about "patriotic history" in a foreword to Blessing-Miles Tendi's book *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe* (2010). Ranger says that in his previous engagement with patriotic history he "called for but did not develop an alternative, more plural approach to Zimbabwe's past" (xvii) – which, I argue, is the major preoccupation of most of the focal texts considered for this study.

[13] For a detailed analysis of the repressive nature of post-2000 laws see "The Media Sustainability Index – Zimbabwe 2009" prepared by the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe.

[14] While acknowledging the fact that the media are a more efficacious mode of influencing public opinion, I argue in Chapters 3 and 5 that some writers have (in the post-2000 period) used creative fiction to advance ZANU (PF) narratives of the crisis and its nationalist resistance rhetoric.

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various genres (especially music, theatre arts and imaginative literature), artists have overtly and covertly grappled with the government's Third Chimurenga[15] land reform policy. Some of these artists strongly affirm the Third Chimurenga's 'revolutionary' logic as did many pro ZANU (PF) musicians such as the war veteran, Cde. Chinx; the late government minister Elliot Manyika and other state-assisted groups, such as Chimurenga Choir and Pax Afro. Cde. Chinx's songs, for instance, demonstrate the convergence of artistic and (state) hegemonic interests, where the former becomes an overt conduit of the latter's symbols and paraphernalia used in gaining and sustaining legitimacy. This can be seen in one of his songs, "Nyika yedu yeZimbabwe" ("Zimbabwe, our country"), on the album bearing the Shona 'revolutionary' title of the Third Chimurenga land struggle – "Hondo Yeminda":

> *Nyika yedu yeZimbabwe ndimo matakazvarirwa/vanaMai naBaba ndimo mavari/tinoda Zimbabwe neupfumi hwayo hwese simuka Zimbabwe/tinodawo nyika yeZimbabwe/Zimba remabwe/tinoda rusununguko isu/tinodawo minda zuva rayo rasvika/hona vaMugabe imhare muZimbabwe/tose tinoda/VaNkomo imhare muZimbabwe* […] ("Hondo Yeminda")[16]

This song (like many others of the same political orientation) featured prominently on state-organised platforms like national galas and funerary functions for liberation war heroes affirming ZANU (PF) hegemony. As examples of 'patriotic' artefacts, such music is intended to saturate the public sphere with pro-establishment rhetoric that reconstructs the hegemonic episteme as an aspect of the nation's cultural being and hence social interest. Pro-government and pro-Third Chimurenga music received preferential airplay on all (state-controlled) public radio and television stations during the period when Professor Jonathan Moyo as the Media and Publicity Minister instituted the so called "75% local content policy", ostensibly to protect and promote the local arts and culture sector. The clear parallel between the musician's worldview and that of the state apparent in such music epitomises the intricate relationship between the political and the cultural spheres, where the latter has (during the

[15] The Third Chimurenga refers to a political philosophy and praxis involving the post-2000 anti-colonial nationalism spearheaded by ZANU (PF) which mostly manifested in the promulgation of black empowerment policies such as the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and the Indigenisation and Empowerment Act of 2007.
[16] "Zimbabwe is our country of birth/our mothers and fathers live in it/we want the country with all its riches/rise up Zimbabwe/we want our Zimbabwe/we want our independence/we want land/the nation's day has arrived/Mugabe is a genius/we all like him/Nkomo is a genius/we all like him…". For a fuller study of the political impact of jingles in the circulation of the Third Chimurenga see Mickias Musiyiwa's PhD study entitled "The narrativization of post-2000 Zimbabwe in the Shona popular song-genre: an appraisal approach"

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period in question) been significantly shaped and used by the former in the processes of production, transmission and defence of Third Chimurenga ideology.

In their study "Cultural Nationalism and the Politics of Commemoration under the Third Chimurenga", Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Wendy Willems contend that culture is inextricably part of the Third Chimurenga nationalism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems argue that: "[i]n the history of Zimbabwean nationalism, cultural performances and commemorations have been an essential part of ZANU-PF's attempt to popularise a form of nationalist politics that spoke to the heart, 'the politics of affect, emotion and drama, which we call the "politics of performance"' (947). To buttress their claim, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems cite Thomas Turino, who views "the forging of national sentiment [in post-2000 Zimbabwe as] largely involv[ing] cultural and artistic domains, with language, music, dance, sports, food, religion, and clothing style often being central" (947). Kizito Muchemwa extends this analysis, arguing in his article entitled "Galas, *biras*, state funerals and the necropolitan imagination in re-constructions of the Zimbabwean nation, 1980–2008" that the political clout enjoyed by ZANU (PF) in government enhanced the party's ability to harness culture for hegemonic purposes in ways that opposition parties could not. Muchemwa adapts Guy Debord's notion of the 'society of the spectacle' to re-engage (in the context of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe) with Mbembe's conception of the spectacular in the postcolony. Muchemwa argues that the state "sought to re-energise its patriotic metafiction through galas, *biras*, funerals, commemorations and other state rituals" ("Galas" 504). These are the paraphernalia of cultural nationalism, which for Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems is the domain of "failing regimes" ("Cultural Nationalism" 952).

Citing Maurice Vambe's essay entitled "Zimbabwe's creative literatures in the interregnum: 1980-2009", Alois Mlambo et al. hint at the dissident potential of creative literature that my study focuses on:

> Unlike the visible political institutions such as education, law and the security forces, culture is often less amenable to total destruction even in the face of the most brutal and dictatorial regimes. In fact a social, political and economic meltdown can even be the suitable condition of the rebirth of creative art as creative cultures authorise their own narratives in ways that both confirm and interrogate the condition of the country and of the arts, and allow a myriad of suppressed voices and interpretations to be heard. (89)

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There are earlier examples of the potential in creative literature to make possible alternative representations of time-space that challenge hegemonic (mis)representations, especially during the colonial period in Zimbabwe. Even in a climate of colonial intimidation and forced hegemony, black people continued to seek modes of challenging their subjugation and expressing their subjectivity and difference. The quest for voicing was critical to the nationalist struggle in Zimbabwe as elsewhere in Africa, since the liberation of the black psyche was imperative in the shaping of the revolution and diffusion of anti-colonial sentiment. This is why nationalist leaders had to resort to 'pirate' foreign radio stations like Radio Mozambique to broadcast home with revolutionary messages meant to counter the Smith government's self-legitimising claims and selective representations of the political during the Unilateral Declaration of Independence period and the time of the second Chimurenga.[17] More subtly, black writers braved widespread censorship to publish literary works that thematically and ideologically resonated with the aspirations and the resentments of the oppressed majority. Such texts as Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* and Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (which critique Rhodesian colonial power abuses) can be viewed as 'antecedents' of focal texts in my study because they exposed and questioned the essentialist and racist founding principles of colonial hegemony in almost the same way (regarding style and argument) that contemporary Zimbabwean literature reflects and challenges the silencing of alternative voices commenting on the post-2000 crisis.

Read with a consciousness of the real world of colonial Rhodesia, such narratives vividly evoke the immorality of a political system validating the perceptible Manichean relationship and inequalities between the colonial 'self' and the colonised 'other', in the process justifying the nationalist struggle in its subversion of colonialism. In this light, the anti-state political texture of post-2000 literary texts can be conceived of as reflecting continuity in Zimbabwean literature's critical engagement with state master narratives. Furthermore, such texts can also be read as representing a disjuncture from the state's liberation/anti-imperialist rhetoric. They explore different fissures of postcoloniality, nationalisms and identities. However, in the same vein and despite the discernible complexity of the concept of nationalism in post-2000

[17] Ironically, the same can be said about the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe which is characterised by the proliferation of the so-called pirate radio stations (such as Studio 7; Radio VOP; Nehanda Radio; SW Radio Africa; Visions Radio etc.) broadcasting into Zimbabwe from abroad. While these radio channels claim to provide alternative news and opinion on the unfolding crisis (against a backdrop of state monopoly of the airwaves), the ZANU (PF) side of government attacks them as imperialist and agents of hate speech.

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Zimbabwe, pro-establishment texts such as *Coming Home*, *The Chimurenga Protocol* and *A Fine Madness* also reveal continuity in their nationalist/anti-colonial resistance discourse. These texts are useful to my study in that they not only clearly show the politicization of the creative imagination, but provide the 'other side of the coin' in discourses about the Zimbabwean crisis, which is often conveniently occluded in opposition and western interpretations of the crisis.

Method and theoretical points of departure

This study mainly uses the Mexican theorist Maria Pia Lara's socio-literary theory concerning "the connection between public narratives and their 'disclosive' potentialities for emancipatory transformations" (4) as a tool to analyse the 'public' function and the transformative or critical and alternative workings of particular literary texts. Lara's theory (enunciated in her book *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*), though designed mainly to extend theorisation on feminist implications of the relationship of narrative to political power, is of relevance to my study because it holds up the dominated subjects' narratives as a challenge to distorted representations of themselves and those who hold power over them, which are inserted and maintained (by their oppressors) in the public sphere. Lara's theory projects literary narratives as mechanisms of dialogue – which for her "is not only a means of showing what makes one different, but also of showing that those differences are an important part of what should be regarded as worthy" (157). Literary works therefore assume an emancipatory role by means of exercising what Lara calls "illocutionary force" (5) for the marginalised social groups, whereby their narratives "configur[e] new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making institutional transformations possible" (Lara 5). This capacity of literary works to deconstruct and transform dominant elitist narratives in the public sphere by offering instead, alternative and more representative narratives of the excluded groups, is made possible by "the 'disclosive' capacities of language [that is:] viewing speech acts as communicative tools that provide new meanings and contest earlier ones" (Lara 4). The "disclosive ability" (Lara 6) of narrative necessitates a reconstruction of the notion of justice by way of delineating alternative experiences that constitute a symbolic deviation from previously held models of justice. A just and moral dispensation (which I take to be the implicit aspiration of most of

my focal texts)[18] envisaged by writers according to Lara's theory – is therefore a product of their conscious attempts to remould the public sphere through "new historical accounts […] that reveal the bias and distortions of earlier narrations [and challenge] the polluted representations of marginalized, excluded and oppressed groups" (Lara 171).

Lara's theory is largely informed by the writings of Hannah Arendt, a Jewish philosopher who uses the Holocaust experiences of German Jews to reflect on violence and the emancipatory effect of the recollection (and re-narrating) of the stories of those who suffered this as a critical step towards reclaiming justice in such books as *The Human Condition*: *Rahel Varnhagen: the Life of a Jewish Woman*; *Men in Dark Times* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. As Syla Benhabib also asserts: "storytelling is a fundamental human activity" (qtd. in Lara 92) because language is inherently "witness to the more profound transformations taking place in human life" (qtd. in Lara 94). Storytelling for Arendt, then, became a deliberate and purposeful remodeling of history, a task (and method) that – Lara argues – has been "successfully developed by feminists to influence gender and power relations in the public sphere" (Lara 39). The process of reformulating the notion of justice in the public sphere requires, therefore, a "narrative interventionism" that can chart a social and political transformation with a clear retrospective comprehension of injustice, as Lara illustrates using the example of Rahel:

> The retelling of the story of Rahel not only recovers in memory what has happened, but allows Arendt the possibility of a new beginning. She sought this beginning in the domain of politics, hence her conception of story-telling would have to cross into the dimension in which "redemptive" powers exercise collective remembrance and judgment. What had happened could then give rise to the narratively reconstructed possibility of a new beginning. (39)

Lara herself recognizes that her ideas are of relevance to oppressed, silenced and marginalized groups other than women and specifically to the anti-racist struggles of black people (see Lara 136, 157, 171). In Lara's example above (as in this study), the inadequacies of unchallenged and "incomplete" but dominant traditions in the public sphere are viewed as inimical to a people's search to make peace with their unreconciled past and to negotiate the

[18] I am following on Chinua Achebe's commentary: "[a]nd ultimately, I think what literature is about is that there shall be no misrule" ("Mapping out Identity" 25).

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injustices of the present. The 'new' narratives are conceived as filling this gap by enabling the reclamation of valuable but hitherto inaccessible details of the past and bringing them into conversation with other narratives already in the public sphere. For Lara, narration is a performative act of searching for a "new beginning": "[s]torytelling becomes the articulate social weaving of memories, the recovery of the fragments of the past, the exercise of collective judgment, the duty to go against the grain and promote with this retelling, a performative frame for a 'new beginning'" (40). Narratives are therefore seen as complex modes of communicating difference, alternative subjectivities and distinct identity (re)constructions in the creation of a new public.

The public sphere (incorporating the political sphere) is viewed in this study as a negotiated space in which narratives (in their ability to "become the vehicles for the construction of collective and individual narratives" – Lara 36) participate in the ongoing processes of social metamorphosis, working towards the establishment of a just society. Speaking particularly about the modern feminist project, Lara argues in earlier parts of her book that women have actually moved beyond simply offering resistance "to being owners of their lives" (8) and their narratives have come to show "how gender plurality allows all individuals to flourish" (8). Conversely, a multi-voiced Zimbabwean public sphere augurs well for the society's search for justice and equality against the backdrop of manifest state repression. The Zimbabwean writer (and his/her readers living in a political milieu where the curtailment of access to/and production of certain information is legalised), just like Lara's oppressed women, occupies a restricted, censored and surveilled space that disables him/her from "flourish[ing]". His/her narratives are (in alignment with Lara's feminist conception) inherently disclosive of his/her social and political entanglement, employing powerful and affective language to achieve "the communicative power of solidarity" (Lara 8). The claim that narratives can function as "attractors" of attention and solidarity in the public sphere can be linked to Martha Nussbaum's theorisation of the interplay of narrative and emotions in her book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. The "solidarity" that the oppressed seek (through their narratives) depends on the narrative's potential to affect the readership in a transformative way that changes their perceptions of reality and other (taken for granted) normative traditions. Thus, the more emotion and ideas the narrative is able to arouse in its reader – for instance, compassion for certain characters subjected to undeserved pain – the more it persuades readers to act and/or change their attitudes.

Lara conceives of the public sphere as an arena of conflicting narratives and perceptions, of "contested meanings and of exclusion" (8), in which the strength of narrative to transform power relations resides in its disclosive capacities (8). While her study does not get to the core of the various forces shutting out women from the public sphere, the present study identifies what Terence Ranger has termed "the patriotic narrative" in and of Zimbabwe as the major force contending "over the public space for relocating new meaning" (Lara 8) with writers of alternative Zimbabwean realities. However, while Ranger locates the "patriotic narrative" in non-literary sources (such as "patriotic journalistic narratives",[19] national ceremonial speeches and symbolic state functions), this study goes further to locate the "patriotic narrative" also (and in my study, mainly) in literary narratives as well as in certain "patriotic" songs and jingles. However, this is not to imply that the "patriotic narrative" as a hegemonic construct is reducible to just another mechanism of political survival that can therefore necessarily be differentiated from "emancipatory narratives" that oppose it. The nature of the "patriotic *literary* narrative" is far too complex for such a simplistic binary comparison. This is a result of the problem with defining the marginalised in post-2000 Zimbabwean political discourses. In an epoch in which the international (western) community slapped the Zimbabwean government with 'targeted sanctions', the official Third Chimurenga emerged to project ZANU (PF) as a political victim of western countries' flagrant violation of international law. The victim motif runs through the three 'patriotic' literary texts, problematizing dominant perceptions of the ZANU (PF) regime as dictatorial and instead constructing the Zimbabwean regime as the one which is 'marginalised' (in Lara's sense). In this light, the 'patriotic' literary narrative can also be perceived as 'morally textured'. Like the critical texts, the 'patriotic' literary texts are created from a victim-centred perspective and aim at redressing the unfair treatment of the Zimbabwean regime through well-reasoned facts. I therefore view the 'patriotic' literary narratives (just like the anti-state texts) as entering the public domain with their own meanings and perceptions and also aiming to gain "recognition" and "solidarity" in their own ways. The concomitant question is therefore: "whose recognition?" and "whose solidarity?"

A brief illustration of the conflicting temperament of the two kinds of narrative introduced above can reveal how their juxtaposition can be a working methodological approach to a

[19] Ranger argues in the article, "The rise of patriotic journalism and its possible implications," that the "patriotic journalism" practised by Jonathan Moyo's Ministry was "narrow" and "destructive" in the way that it closed down or forestalled debate on critical national issues.

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study of this nature. A case in point is Mashingaidze Gomo's novel *A Fine Madness,* which poetically represents negative images of an Africa reeling under western neo-colonial siege even after years of self-rule, constructing this image in an essentialist way that projects the continent as entirely beleaguered by terrorist groups, rebels and opposition parties sponsored by western powers to destabilize African "democracies that threaten to overwhelm white minority influence" (Gomo 52). The novel ends with the (re)affirmation of what Achille Mbembe calls "Afro-radicalism" as the narrator draws from his archive of a lived experience of war to declare that "African people must know that a madness that they believe in is a fine madness" (169). Evidently, Gomo's novel also invokes the aesthetic and expressive dimensions of narrative to configure African problems as mostly resulting from western constructs or perfidy and by implication spares the postcolonial establishment from blame. In depicting Africa as a perpetual victim of western neo-colonialism, the novel projects a victimised "subaltern" Africa that is also clamouring for "recognition" and the transformation of the international political and economic spheres.

A thematic reading of *A Fine Madness* in the context of contemporary Zimbabwean politics would reveal an intersection of the concept of "justice and the good life" (Lara 18) as engendered by the novel with the radical anti-western nationalist discourse of "The Third Chimurenga" that finds expression, for instance, in radio and television jingles advertising ZANU PF's vision for a "100% total independence" that would "indigenise" all production, commercial and industrial sectors in Zimbabwe. There is a clear connection here between what can be inferred as the novel's sense of social justice and that of the state. The novel can therefore be viewed as entering the public sphere as a sympathetic force to the state, advancing its rule by endorsing its scapegoating of British and (generally) Western racism and enduring colonialist attitudes towards Zimbawe as the prime cause of the local crisis – consequently subverting voices that are critical of the ZANU (PF) dominated government and its role in the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Using Gomo's novel (and also Olley Maruma's novel *Coming Home* and Nyaradzo Mtizira's *The Chimurenga Protocol*), Chapter 3 of this study traverses the various political dimensions of narratives participating in a way that supports the state's "patriotic history" narrative. But, as Lara suggests, "art is a form of rationality, expressive rationality" (53) and as such the aesthetic and political dimensions of what comes into the public sphere through the narrative medium means that various forms of "rationality" are manifest and these may be variously interpreted as either supportive of the political establishment (like Gomo's novel) or challenging it, as one finds, for instance, in

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Christopher Mlalazi's short stories "Idi" and "Election Day". Gomo's novel can be read as a "patriotic literary narrative" because its perspectival and aesthetic schema follows closely on the aesthetic and ideological trajectory carved out by the non-literary patriotic narrative. On the other hand, the 'alternative' nature of what I may call "non-hegemonic narratives" (such as the short story "Idi") can be located in the ways in which their evocative representations influence us to perceive biases, untruths and misrepresentations in the "patriotic narrative".

In seeking to identify and explain the points of intersection of literary works and the circumstances inhabiting their spatio-temporality, I follow on Lara's (re)conceptualization of Paul Ricoeur's mimetic narrative theory to stress the potency of such narratives to influence our conception of the world. Lara categorises mimetic representation into three distinct but relative stages, a procedure that explains how the "illocutionary force" of imaginative narratives informs the reader's perception of his/her own world:

> Mimesis 1 is the stage in which life is experienced and conceived linguistically in the everyday world of action; 'Mimesis 2' is the authorial stage of creative narrative configuration; and 'Mimesis 3' is the appropriation of "Mimesis 2" by the world of the readers. Narratives draw on the materials of everyday life, but, as the stories unfold in the public sphere, they return to and reconfigure life itself. In this way, complex webs of narratives emplot action, experience and speech, and stimulate further levels of those same categories in the subsequent readings and self-understanding. (93)

Lara further reinforces her belief in the impact of literary narratives in shaping the public sphere when in her commentary on "Jane Austen's narratives as a moral source" she contends that Austen's narratives are actually "agents with a specific view of justice and the good" (94). As Barbara Harlow also states, literary works (at least of the kind she calls "fictions of the future" 176) can involve us in a "futurological leap into the future" (177) where we momentarily escape the rigours of the dystopia of reality and begin to discover possibilities. This approach to the interconnectedness of imaginative narratives and notions of "the good society" is appropriated in this current study to illuminate the socially transformative potency of contemporary Zimbabwean literature. Referring to the novel, Ranka Primorac calls this narrative quality its "socio-analytical functionality" (*Tears* 13).

The pertinence of this study's conceptual adoption of Lara's narrative theorisation can be demonstrated with reference to one of the novels under study, Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*. The novel's "socio-analytical functionality" (Primorac, *Tears* 12) finds expression not only through its direct and indirect allusion to historic events, particularly the mass urban slum demolitions of circa 2005, but more importantly through its powerful evocation of the resultant suffering which moves the reader to feel and perceive injustice. Martha Nussbaum elucidates the means through which novels (generally) affect the reader:

> Novels […] construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the 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. (*Poetic Justice* 7)

The sense of injustice created and diffused into the reader's consciousness in the fictional realm of the novel is easily transposed into the real world of the reader (Mimesis 3), thereby influencing his or her perception of reality. I view this socio-analytical "applicability" of Tagwira's novel as driven mainly by the "illocutionary force" that is generated by the vividness and affective power of the novel's narration of the tragic consequences of the state's slum demolitions.

However, a more enriching study of *The Uncertainty of Hope*'s representation of the major social effects of Operation *Murambatsvina* can be achieved when one considers the tensions resulting from the contrast between the novel's and the state narrative's respective portrayal of this historic event. The state narrative characteristically shows a clear, defensive assertiveness that finds expression through the authorities' public pronouncements as one finds (for instance) in the Harare Mayor's statements (or, as shall be made clear in Chapter 2, the government's official response to the United Nations' damning report) on Operation *Murambatsvina*. On the other hand, there is what can be termed "the disclosive fictional narrative" which targets "the public domain as a sphere of solidarity" (Lara 109) with moving evocations of fictional life-worlds that reflect intensively the shattered lives of characters, their damaged psychological states and the distressing setting that reflects uninhabitable and

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ghastly new physical landscapes and environments. This affective potentiality of the narrative moves the reader's understanding of "Operation *Murambatsvina*" away from the official (re)presentations and perspectives and in effect questions not only the reductive tendencies of the official version of history, but also the state itself, that has ordered and justified the process that resulted in (such) suffering and destruction of livelihoods.

In the example above, the fictional narrative is viewed as capable of leading the reader into a "guided attention" (Currie 98) where he/she is "tuned" (Currie 98) to respond cognitively to certain realities. It is this "guiding" trait of the narrative that makes the reader "vulnerable" or rather, responsive to its perspectival suggestions – thus creating a subtle counter narrative, interrogating and expanding the limitations manifest in the archive of the official narrative concerning the depicted space-time. I consider this quality of the novel (and other focal texts in this study) to be a result of the fictional narrative's cogency, informed by its forceful use of language. For Lara (citing Habermas), the power of imaginative narrative (against the banality of everyday speech) resides in the narrative's potential to function as a performative "illocutionary act" (2). The "agonistic" character of speech-acts privileges the "ego" to produce a "powerful narrative that provides an account of the lack of justice created by situations of marginalization, oppression or exclusion" (Lara 3). The "illocutionary power" of speech-acts is seen as not only disclosing injustice, but also fostering an aspirational response that propels the hitherto subaltern "ego" to struggle for "recognition", "solidarity" and consequently emancipation. Read through this theoretical lens, a novel like *The Uncertainty of Hope* can be viewed as inhabiting a transformative space where the narrative as a form of speech-act assumes the role of "reorder[ing] values and beliefs" (Lara 3) in the public sphere. The projected, "re-ordered" world can therefore be interpreted as a site for analysing difference and alternative representations, which can in turn be brought to bear on (re)considerations of the actual.

Literary narratives are understood in this study as modes of utterance that are inherently communicative, that is, that are speech acts, in the sense of J. Hillis Miller's understanding of "speech-acts" as "speech that acts, […] a performative dimension of a literary work taken as a whole" (1). The "performative dimension" can only be realised when the text is brought into comparison or connection with the extra-literary components of context, as Mikhail Bakhtin (commenting particularly on the novel in the book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*) asserts: "From the very beginning, the novel was structured not in the distanced

image of the absolute past but in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality. At its core lay personal experience and free creative imagination" (*Dialogic* 39).

This interaction of fiction and the real makes novels potential, subtle sites for the archiving of some of the most crucial temporal realities and events. Consequently, the novel becomes a potential site for the analysis of the most significant spatio-temporal phenomena – for instance, issues of governance, race, land, history, etc. – in the case of Zimbabwe's last decade. But this "special relationship with the extra-literary genres" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 33) does not imply that novelistic meaning is as readily available as it is in everyday speech-acts. Meaning is conceived here as a result of a systematic relatedness of what Bakhtin calls "heterogeneous stylistic unities" (*Dialogic* 262) and "fundamental compositional unities" (*Dialogic* 263). The search for literary meaning in this study is therefore informed by a holistic close reading of the following "stylistic unities" that make up the "novelistic whole", as listed by Bakhtin:

> (1) Direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants); (2) Stylisation of the various forms of oral everyday narration (*skaz*); (3) Stylisation of the various forms of semi-literary (written) everyday narration [...] (4) Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth); (5) The stylistically individualised speech of characters. (*Dialogic* 262)

Invoking, for instance, a novel like Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, one realises the conspicuous attention it gives to the extra-literary, particularly historical events and circumstances as background in order to foreground new perspectives on the renewed discourse concerning Operation *Gukarahundi*[20] in a special way that allows it to say what has (and what has not) been said, for instance by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace report "Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A report on the disturbances in Matebeleland and Midlands, 1980-1988" or by contrast in state authorized history books. However, what makes Vera's novel a special "archive" of the disturbances is that it proffers (through evocative language and style) representations that influence readers to access certain levels of emotive knowledgeabilty which drives them to re-think the relation of the nation's agonistic

[20] *Gukurahundi* refers to the state purging of dissidents in the Midlands and Matebeleland provinces of Zimbabwe from the early to late eighties in which thousands of civilians died while others were maimed.

past to the contemporary surge of nationalist revivalism. In Zimbabwe's recent past, where master narratives systematically construct myths of national unity epitomised by the symbolic National Unity Day,[21] the affective dimension of awareness engendered by *The Stone Virgins* impresses on the reader the task of questioning, for instance, recent attempts to erase *Gukurahundi* from the national history script and also the recent 'expedient' projection of political figures formerly labelled "tribalists and enemies of the state" (such as Joshua Nkomo) as national heroes. Vera's narrative (unlike the other non-literary narratives) of Gukurahundi unfolds in a fictional life-world of two sisters (Thenjiwe and Nonceba) whose metanarratives of torture, mutilation and murder are poetically depicted, posing in the process the question of rememory[22] and its relation to the reductive state narrative.

Closely related to Lara's conception of narratives by (or representing) the oppressed as inherently disclosive and carrying moral significance is my invocation of Mikhail Bakhtin's theorisation of the interplay between literature and its context. Writing specifically about the novel, Bakhtin stresses its "special relationship with extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres" (*Dialogic* 33). According to Bakhtin, the literary text is "constructed in a zone of contact with the incomplete events of a particular present" (*Dialogic* 33). He propounds that the novel, by "cross[ing] the boundary of what we strictly call fictional literature" (*Dialogic* 33), employs the imagination to engage with the real, and in so doing assumes aesthetic but socially meaningful functions. As a study that considers literature in its historical context, the study draws extensively from the Bakhtinian principle of the "chronotope" – defined by Bakhtin as "literally, time-space": that is, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (*Dialogic* 84). In his essay "Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel", Bakhtin posits that "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (*Dialogic* 85) and that "out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serves as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work" (*Dialogic* 253). In focusing on the interplay between literature and a crisis situation, the study is informed by what I will call "the twenty-first century Zimbabwean chronotope".

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[21] The National Unity Day, celebrated as a national holiday on the 22nd of December was originally conceived to honour the ZANU/ZAPU peace pact that ended the *Gukurahundi* atrocities.

[22] In the sense of Sethe's practice of advising her black progeny of the importance of memory and remembering in their search for an (American) identity in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Rememory (etymologically a combination of the verb "remember" and the noun "memory") reinforces the past as the maker of the present.

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As revealed in the foregoing, Bakhtin's concept of "the zone of contact with incomplete events of a particular present" (*Dialogic* 33) suggests the prominence of space-time in textual reconstructions of reality and consequently, the importance of an intertextual approach to their interpretation. My understanding of intertextuality is informed by Graham Allen's seminal book *Intertextuality* which projects texts as "lacking in any kind of independent meaning" (1). Intertextuality assumes that literary works are congeneric in relation to other non-literary texts and therefore their meanings can be adequately inferred when the literary text is analysed in relation to these "other texts" (for instance, the "state narrative" in the Zimbabwean context): "Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext" (Allen 1). The notion of "other texts" relied upon by the literary text in the production of literary meaning in Allen's conceptualisation is much akin to Bakhtin's notion of "the unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality" (*Diaologic* 7) and Martha Nussbaum's idea of "the novel [as] a living form" (*Poetic Justice* 6), particularly in the way they situate literary meaning in the text's interaction with what can be broadly called its context. Commenting on Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism", Michael Holquist identifies the "other texts" as socio-historical forces that not only inform the production of literary texts, but their consumption as well: "Literary texts, like other kinds of utterances, depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and when it is consumed" (68).

It is, then, the innumerability of the "other texts", social and historical, which make the literary text look and function more as a reordering of "life" in its entire chaotic configuration, encompassing all of the "other texts". The literary text "orders" life "by reducing the possible catalogue of happenings [which are] potentially endless [into] patterns afforded by words" (Holquist 84). This resultant multiplicity of "texts" present in the literary text on which one focuses directly and indirectly influences this present study. Directly, besides underpinning the study's premise that "life" as complexly encapsulated in literary texts is productively comprehended from plural vantage points, it also prioritises the "social situatedness" (Allen 20) of literary texts which makes it difficult to analyse them outside their socio-historical context. But more than confirming the importance of context to our reading of literary texts, recognition of "other texts" reinforces the Bakhtinian concept of

"polyphony" according to which the literary narrative expresses meaning via a diversity of voices and points of views. Theorizing on the "polyphony" of literary narratives, (particularly the novel), Bakhtin posits that "the social diversity of speech types [and] the differing individual voices permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships" (*Dialogic* 263). Like Bakhtin, this study views the language of the literary text as first and foremost a social phenomenon whose social texture and temporal currency is appropriated by the writer to signify certain social issues. As Bakhtin says: "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adopting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (*Dialogic* 293). From this quotation, it can be deduced that in interpreting (literary) utterances in relation to their social and historical embeddedness, or as constituent of what Maria Shevtsova termed "popular speech" (749), one is able to decipher not only the social and historical underpinnings of the utterance, but also the coalescing circumstances around the speaking subject. Utterances can, therefore, be interpreted as archives of an imaginable (and possible) past and present from where conclusions about some of the most significant events and ideas of the time can be inferred. In having a number of contemporary Zimbabwean texts (and also genres like novels, poetry and short stories) conversing with one another, this study is able to cull from a diversity of 'voices', perspectives about the space-time of the 'crisis'.

While the postcoloniality of the "crisis" decade in Zimbabwe may show a certain distinctiveness, it also displays a considerable typicality that makes it interpretable by some of the long circulating (though sometimes debated) critical frameworks, especially the one offered by Frantz Fanon in his chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" from the text *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Fanon's critique is important to this study because more than lucidly projecting the paradoxes of independence as in part the consequence of neo-colonialism, it illuminates some of the major "localised" or indigenous causalities of the failures of post-independence that characterised the historic period in question. Fanon is therefore more important to this study when he reflects on the consequences of the postcolonial leaders' "politics of the belly" – which he finds the post-independence "national bourgeoisie" to be "speedy and pitiless" (Fanon 134) in instituting – and the awakening mass consciousness and subsequent protest that (must) result.

Since (as Fanon argues), the "national bourgeoisie" concentrates its energies on "replac[ing] the foreigner" (127), no sooner does the generality of the citizens awaken to this reality of the "new colonist" (Fanon 124) – that is,the postcolonial leader – than the nation makes a "heart-breaking return to *chauvinism* in its bitter and detestable form" (emphasis added) (Fanon 126). The people are persuaded (and eventually forced) to remain passive in response to the excesses of the "national bourgeoisie" whose penchant for silent conformity and slide into defensive rhetoric marks the advent of a dictatorship:

> The state, which by its strength and discretion ought to inspire confidence and disarm and lull everybody to sleep on the contrary seeks to impose itself in spectacular fashion. It makes a display, it jostles people and bullies them, thus intimating to the citizen that he is in a continual danger. The single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous and cynical. (132)

The erosion of the people's spontaneous support of the national bourgeoisie's "scandalous enrichment […] is accompanied by a decisive awakening on the part of the people, and a growing awareness that promises stormy days to come" (Fanon 134). The shift to personal interest marks "the fundamental immorality" (Fanon 135) of the "national bourgeoisie", but most importantly it marks the emergence of a more frictional relationship between the "awakening" people and their erstwhile leaders, which puts the leadership on the defensive "as a braking power on the awakening consciousness of the people" (Fanon 135).

Cardinally important to this study's focus and scope in its exploration of the postcolonial dynamics of the failure of independence (as typified by the post-millennial "crisis" decade in Zimbabwe) is Fanon's analysis of the vindicatory and oftentimes retributory turn of rapport between the national leadership and the subjects. The leader, for Fanon, falls back on certain earlier "heroic victories" and temporal identities, hoping, in the process, to mollify the people and to persuade (and even force) them to stay allegiant to the old "vision" of the utopian society despite its apparent elusiveness:

> The leader, because he refuses to break up the national bourgeoisie, asks the people to fall back into the past and to become drunk on remembrance of the epoch which led to independence. The leader, seen objectively, brings the people to a halt and persists in either expelling them from history or preventing them from taking root in it. During

> the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four time a year asks them to remember the colonial period and look back on the long way they have come since then. (136)

This predilection to "calming" and "pacifying" underlies this study's conception of the defensive and skeptical potentialities of the "patriotic narrative" and a projection of some aspects of literary narratives as counter-narratives, especially in Chapter 2 – "Alternative metaphors of a historical moment", where literary works like Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* and selected short stories are read as complex sites of cultural archives where voices of dissent and difference can be inferred. The study therefore pays attention to Chinua Achebe's assertion that "art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him" (*Hopes* 139). Achebe identifies two types of fiction; "beneficent fiction" that "imagines a collective sense of right and wrong" as well as the "malignant fictions" that "assert their fictions as a proven fact and a way of life" (*Hopes* 148). This is, however, not to imply that all state narratives are "malignant" and all literary narratives are "beneficent". The fundamental object here is actually to read literary works as indispensable and temporal constituents of culture, and therefore reflective of the people's individual and collective efforts to deal with their social problems. Focus is consequently placed on the various ways through which literary works can both reflect certain state occlusions or misrepresentations of "inconvenient" truths while maintaining their literariness. To achieve this, the study sets out to demonstrate the political implications and overtones of literary evocations of particular Zimbabwean conditions and to determine whether a chosen text or passage functions (for example) allegorically; symbolically; satirically; ironically; sarcastically; allusively; politically overtly or in any combination of such modes vis-à-vis the socio-political realities of the period in question.

There is a subtle yet discernible connection between the post-2000 political power struggle and the gender struggle in Zimbabwe. To explore this connection in detail, this study devotes Chapter 4 to a feminist analysis of the gender dimensions to the Zimbabwean crisis, arguing that during the economic/political crisis in government in this decade, the prevailing gender power-relations evolved into gendered appraisals of its impact and this created the potential for rather universal and biased conclusions. The phenomenon is probably best reflected (as implied in the second chapter of this study) in the state's patriarchal demand to think of the

nation's history as being an offshoot of the liberation struggle and, therefore, a story functioning solely to display the deeds of select male heroes of the *Chimurenga* wars. As Itai Muwati, Gift Mheta and Zifikile Gambahaya note, the masculinisation of the liberation war has triggered counter-reactions, particularly from women's pressure groups. Muwati, Mheta and Gambahaya assert that such resistance to exclusivist conceptions of history manifest in (among other sites of the post-2000 democratisation struggle) women's narratives of their experiences of the war. In their study of the Zimbabwe Women Writers Association's book entitled *Women of Resilience: The Voices of Women Ex-combatants*, Muwati, Mheta and Gambahaya conclude that the book aims to "[…] discursively furnish alternative historical voices that expunge official nationalist discourse" (172).

The literary engagement with the masculinisation of nation and state in Zimbabwe is not entirely a post-2000 phenomenon. Precedents in Zimbabwean literature can be found for such artistic intervention into the subject of gendered political power, for example, in Yvonne Vera's counter-discursive re-appropriation of the female figure in her novel *Nehanda* (1993). Here, the character Nehanda's historical role in some of the earliest anti-colonial uprisings foregrounds women's social centrality and intense involvement in the making of the nation. Vera's novel presents what may be one of the earliest post-independence literary contestations of the patriarchal occlusion of females in the political sphere, and is therefore an important work to begin to examine the (now widespread) post-2000 literary challenges to the gendering of political power in Zimbabwe. *Nehanda* is a re-appraisal of the story of Nehanda – the historic and mythic spirit-medium of the Shona people who inspired the first native uprising – initially in protest against the colonial hut tax.[23] *Nehanda* recreates the feminine revolutionary, not only to advance a female subjectivity, but more importantly, to make her the face and symbol of black resistance – and thus identify her with the birth of the independent nation. Nehanda's central role in the *Chimurenga* wars is linked to the mythical significance attached to her identity by the later generation of liberation warriors who identified themselves as her "bones" that would "rise" and defeat the settler regime in what is referred to as "The Second *Chimurenga*." This feminist claim to historical crisis disrupts previous male mythology of the *Chimurenga* wars in the sense of what Muchemwa and Muponde have called "the wars of men" ("Introduction" xviii). In addition, more than simply subverting androcentric constructions of heroism, nationality and history, Vera's fictional

[23] A form of taxation whereby Africans were forced to contribute to the colonial economy through cash, labour or livestock.

reconstruction of the Shona spiritual legend of Nehanda as the pillar of the *Chimurenga* wars becomes an act of re-gendering national memory.

In her novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga engages with the gender repercussions of capitalistic, colonially constructed familial hegemonies founded on gender inequalities in a colonial context. Dangarembga's novel illuminates the virulent, deep-seated familial frictions caused by phallocentric power relations by constructing an extended family riddled by antagonistic gender wars, pitting on one hand the patriarchal and tellingly named Babamukuru and his dauntless daughter Nyasha and on the other, the educationally empowered boy Nhamo and his deprived but determined sister Tambudzai against each other. Moreover, in *Nervous Conditions*, tradition and the evolving colonial monetary economic culture are both patriarchal and faces of the same process, coercively socialising women into submissive dependants. Femininity becomes a precarious infirmity that consigns the women characters like Maiguru to subservient roles in the family construct. In extricating men from rural familial responsibilities, the colonial system ensured both male and female tractability by assigning double parental roles to the now almost wholly 'domesticated' women, allowing men the 'adventure' of urban proletarianisation and release from domestic responsibilities. I view these pre-2000 feminist texts as precursors of my post-2000 feminist texts, critiquing traditional and state power abuses.

The crux of my Chapter 4 is the argument that the socio-economic and political implosion of Zimbabwe's past decade is characterised by seemingly insignificant but essential feminist "struggle[s] within a struggle" (Kwinjeh i) which can better illuminate the 'bigger' socio-economic and political problems characterising the period. I perceive literary representations of women's unique challenges in the face of the unprecedented crisis situation as constituting a significant, complex archive of struggle in which women (because of their historical marginalisation) suffer and fight gendered inequalities induced by a patriarchal political and cultural system that favours men and limits women's access to life's opportunities. I further contend that feminist narratives do not merely reveal women's vulnerabilities, but (more importantly) invoke such vulnerabilities as the first step to the creation of transformative narratives – narratives which tacitly imagine curative and exit strategies for women through their aesthetic appeal to the readers' affective responses. In this way, I view feminist texts as adding to the growing circle of oppositional voices in Zimbabwe that are creating a counter-discourse to dominant, authoritarian forces controlling the public sphere.

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The current state of critical approaches to post-2000 Zimbabwean literature

My study acknowledges the existence of a formidable body of multi-disciplinary research on the various dimensions of (and topics associated with) the Zimbabwean crisis. In this section of my introduction a review of selected relevant scholarly works about the Zimbabwean crisis and its representations in creative literature is presented. This is not only to situate my enquiry in a broader historical and critical context, but perhaps more importantly, to map out the study's intervention in discourses on the role of creative literature in "opening spaces"[24] for alternative imaginings of the nation in crisis. It is important to state at this stage that the debate on the causes, nature and management of the crisis is still open. In its preoccupation with the impact of the immediate political and socio-economic context on the creative imagination, and with the assessment of how literary texts can uniquely participate in balancing discourses about the crisis, my study aims to extend the analysis of contemporary Zimbabwean literature and society. Over and above propagandistic publications such Mugabe's *Inside the Third Chimurenga*; quasi-scholarly biographical/historical books such as Heidi Holland's *Dinner with Mugabe*; Martin Meredith's *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* and reports such as Michael Clemens and Todd Moss's "The Costs and Causes of Zimbabwe's Crisis", various scholarly publications and special journal issues have grappled with the topic.[25]

Among existing literary studies published in post-2000 Zimbabwe that take the Zimbabwean socio-political context into account, the edited collection *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* comes closest to what my study seeks to achieve. The 2005 publication of this text marks the beginning of a paradigm shift in the theory and practice of literary and cultural criticism in post-2000 Zimbabwe. *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* reinvents the participation of the disciplines of literature and literary criticism in the contemporary public cultural sphere by showing how

[24] This is the title of a collection of short stories written by women and edited by Yvonne Vera. The full title is *Opening Spaces: Contemporary African Women's Writing*.

[25] See, for instance, the *African Studies Quarterly* Special Issue entitled "Zimbabwe: Looking Ahead," (2003); the *African Identities* Special Issue on "The Culture of Crisis in Zimbabwe" (2010); the Concerned African Scholars' *ACAS Bulletin*: Special Issues on Zimbabwe 1 and 2 (2008); the *Journal of Peasant Studies* Special Issue entitled "Outcomes of Post-2000 Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe" (2011); the *Journal of Southern African Studies*' Special Issue entitled "The Zimbabwe Crisis through the Lens of Displacement" (2010).

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"the Zimbabwe culture texts relate complexly to the narrative of the Third Chimurenga" (Muponde and Primorac xv).

As a 2005 publication, the "new approaches" to literature and culture in *Versions of Zimbabwe* precedes the marked mid to late 2000 intensifications of what Muchemwa has called "polarising cultures" ("Polarising Cultures" 394) which culminated in ZANU (PF)'s 2008 electoral defeat and the unprecedented electoral violence which significantly disrupted and reconfigured the socio-political terrain. Thus, while most articles in *Versions of Zimbabwe* deal with major aspects of the Zimbabwean crisis (such as violence and the silencing of oppositional voices) on which my study also focuses, the articles do not grapple with the impact of the patent post-2005 deterioration of the political and economic situation on creative literature. In this light, my focus on the emergence and firming of the "patriotic literary narrative" which countered anti-state voices, for instance, hints at post-2005 forms of further alternative 'versions of Zimbabwe' that contributors to *Versions of Zimbabwe* would not have foreseen, given its publication date.

In the article "Coming to terms with violence: literature and the development of the public sphere in Zimbabwe" (in *Versions of Zimbabwe*), Preben Kaarsholm argues that the polarisation between democracy advocacy and 'Third Chimurenga' discourse underlies the polarisation in both political and literary discourses. However, I use the "polarising cultures" concept (Muchemwa, 394) informing post-2000 Zimbabwean literature in order to complicate our understanding of post-2000 political dynamics. I contend that the Zimbabwean problem cannot be reduced to a "democracy vs. 'the Third Chimurenga' binarism" (Kaarsholm, "Coming to Terms" 16). I therefore perceive the Third Chimurenga as a "master fiction" (Primorac, *Tears* 9) predicated on a certain understanding of space, time and human agency. Thus, despite the ZANU (PF) regime's evident despotic tendencies marked by its attempts to stifle alternative narratives of the state of the nation, the Third Chimurenga master fiction reconstructs the party as the champion of democracy. What I call 'Zimbabwean democracy' in Chapter 5 of this study, then, not only signifies ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 propensity totally to detach the Zimbabwean nation from western constructs of nationhood and systems of governance (an indigenisation demand), but also indicates the reactionary turn of the state's master-fictions.

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In her analysis of Hove's texts *Palaver Finish*, *Red Hills of Home* and *Rainbows in the Dust* Caroline Rooney views the subversion of democracy in post-independence Zimbabwe as premised on what she calls "a pervasive corruption of language" (57). Citing the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno (in his book *The Jargon of Authenticity*), Rooney reads the anti-state turn of Hove's literary and non-literary texts of the last decade as informed by his consciousness of the connection between the manipulation of language and the emergence and sustenance of authoritarianism. I borrow Rooney's critical perspective, not only in my own analysis of Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon*, but also in my framing of the patriotic narrative of the crisis which reacts to the counter-discourse created by the majority of my focal texts. I read the 'anti-state' focal texts as not only grappling with dominant (state-constructions) of the crisis, but also as using language to create an alternative archive or "versions" (in the sense of Primorac and Muponde's usage of the term in *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*) of the Zimbabwean crisis. Focusing on Chenjerai Hove's *Palaver Finish,* Rooney argues that the essays reflect Hove's "frustration with the over-determined cessations of dialogue" ("Corruption of language" 57). However, in my study, I read Hove's oeuvre in the last decade (including the book *Palaver Finish*) as embodying a counter-discursive narrative that dialogues with the state's master-fictions as well as other literary texts that validate the Third Chimurenga. I therefore read Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon* and other focal texts critical of the government as aesthetically engaging the state and its Third Chimurenga discourse in a discursively dialogical exchange such that in the end, the state narrative of the crisis no longer exists or functions as an epistemic and monological discourse that dominates what circulates in the public sphere as knowledge or information about the nature of the crisis.

To some extent, my study explores in finer detail the fissures and controversies attendant on *Versions of Zimbabwe*'s broad and interdisciplinary focus. Maurice Vambe's essay "The Poverty of Theory in the Study of Zimbabwean Literature" (in *Versions of Zimbabwe*), for instance, makes a contentious claim that previous reading approaches to Zimbabwean literature reveal a "poverty of theory" (86).[26] In the essay, Vambe criticizes what he calls "sociological approaches" (singling out books such as Flora Veit-Wild's *Preachers, Teachers and Non-Believers* and Musaemura Zimunya's *Those Years of Drought and Hunger*) that he judges as occluding literary qualities of the texts. While (besides his hint at a critical

[26] See footnote 26.

paradigm that locates literary texts in a broader system of traditional story-telling/orality in his book *African Oral Story-telling Tradition and The Zimbabwean Novel in English*) Vambe does not himself seem to suggest any working theoretical approach to Zimbabwean literature, my study partially responds to his claim. My use of Lara's theory not only reveals the compatibility of some western theories that make them useful in analyzing Zimbabwean literary texts, but also delineates the remarkably different ways[27] with which literary texts create counter-discouses against (or in support of) oppressive systems.

In an article entitled "Zimbabwe's creative literatures in the interregnum" in the *African Identities* Special Issue on the "The Culture of Crisis", Vambe launches a controversial and scathing attack on what he finds to be *Versions of Zimbabwe*'s partisan approach – its "celebrat[ion] of what they (Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac) call 'writing against blindness' [which] for most of the essays is the metaphor for ZANU (PF)" (96). However, I find Muponde and Primorac's phrase to reflect the manifest antagonistic relationship between literary and state discourses in the more immediate post-2000 period. My study therefore generally shares *Versions of Zimbabwe*'s interest in alternative versions of the crisis. In keeping with this objective, I view "writing against blindness" (Muponde and Primorac iv) not as symptomatic of a crisis of creativity or a form of covert oppositional political campaigning, but as an imperative process of pluralizing the public sphere and enhancing inclusivity in discourses on the crisis.

In their introduction to *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*, Primorac and Muponde view the official promotion of patriotic history as an "attempt to fix socially produced meanings by designating the possessing of 'land' as the sole source of African communal well-being […]" (xiii). Hegemonic interests vested in the ruling party's reconstruction of the blacks' reclamation of land not only underlie local political power configurations especially in post-2000 Zimbabwe, but also inform Zimbabwe's foreign policy. In a post-2000 crisis period marked by international spotlight on human rights violations, what Eldred Masunungure and Simon Badza have called "the internationalisation of the Zimbabwean crisis" (207) becomes an important manifestation of problems caused by ZANU (PF)'s attempt to claim exclusive agency over the nation's political affairs. As

[27] Comparisons can be made between Lara's 'pro-victim' approach and Marxist criticism's anti-capitalist stance. The Marxist approach is favoured in the Zimbabwean (University of Zimbabwe) academic circles because it promotes revolutionary politics (see Primorac, *Tears*).

Masunungure and Badza observe, the Zimbabwean crisis is characterised by "multiple definitions and multiple actors with multiple interests and strategies" (208). As shall be made clear in Chapter 5, besides the state's counter-rhetoric against Western pronouncements on political developments in the country, writers such as Mashingaidze Gomo have added their protest voices against Eurocentric neo-colonial interests in Zimbabwe and anti-state movements and discourses. While Muponde and Primorac contend that "the contemporary official demands for 'patriotic' behaviour and writing are not a sudden eruption" (*Versions* xv), I argue in Chapter 5 that the echoes of nationalist (Third Chimurenga) discourse in such texts as Gomo's *A Fine Madness* reflect a unique convergence of hegemonic and literary discourses. Compared to the nationalist writings of what Flora Veit-Wild categorises as the hallmark of second generation Zimbabwean writers,[28] the pro-state texts reveal a conscious intention to defend ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 political project and its flagship is the post-2000 Fast-Track Land Reform Programme. I link this disjuncture from pre-2000 nationalist writings to the post-2000 proliferation of new and anti-state writings which advance broadly democratic ideals shared by the opposition and civil society organisations.

In her article "The poetics of state terror in twenty-first century Zimbabwe", Primorac gives the earliest hint at the emergence of the post-2000 Zimbabwean 'patriotic' literary narrative when she reads Edmund Chipamaunga's latest novel *Feeding Freedom*[29] (which together with his previous 'Freedom' novels *A Fighter for Freedom* and *Chains of Freedom*[30] forms an anti-neo-colonialist trilogy) as "rehearsing and reinforcing" what she calls the state's "master fictions" ("Poetics" 437). Writing circa 2005, Primorac would not have foreseen the emergence of Third Chimurenga-endorsing texts such as *Coming Home*, *The Chimurenga Protocol* and *A Fine Madness*. These texts are consciously designed to participate in spatio-temporal political debates by constructing a counter-discursive narrative of the post-2000 socio-political crisis as alternative to that offered by 'anti-state' literary and non-literary oppositional political discourses. However, such texts can be linked back to the 2003 publication of Alexander Kanengoni's short story titled "The ugly reflection in the mirror" in

[28] Such writers are epitomised by Chenjerai Hove, whose nationalist vision in his novels *Bones* and *Ancestors* and poetry anthologies such as *Red Hills of Home* and *Up in Arms* reverberate with ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 Third Chimurenga land reform ideology.
[29] The novel was published in 2000.
[30] The novels were published in 1983 and 1998 respectively.

the short story anthology *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe*.[31] In the story, the dialogue between the narrator (a newly resettled black farmer) and his white neighbour whose land has been parcelled out to black families reveals the immorality and futility of most white farmers' intransigence vis-à-vis their reluctance to willingly offer land for the resettlement of landless black people. When read in the context of the widespread racial tensions underlying the actual Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (see Cathy Buckle's autobiographical texts *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* and *Beyond Tears: Zimbabwe's Tragedy*), the portrayal of the white farmer (Fleming) as accommodating and supportive of the land reform becomes ironic. Fleming's benevolence in helping out new black farmers settled on his land and his general critical anti-white attitude incriminate the wider white society and justify their forceful evictions from the land. Fleming's pro-black land philosophy is evoked as objective and represents the kind of sober racial disposition that the nation requires. The sparing of Fleming from eviction becomes symbolic. It portrays the evicted white farmers as the authors of their own calamity. In this light, Kanengoni's story's ideological alignment to ZANU (PF)'s Third Chimurenga discourse not only departs from his disenchanted engagement with post-independence politics (especially in his novel *Echoing Silences*), but also signals the politicisation of the creative imagination in support of the ruling party, its post-2000 land reform programme and fight for political relevance. This kind of politicisation of literary narratives is clearly a reaction to the intensifying decibels of anti-state voices. Since such post-2000 'patriotic' narratives as Kanengoni's story not only aim to promote the regime's Third Chimurenga policies but also to counter anti-state attacks, they can be read as reflecting a uniquely post-2000 strand of resistance literature.

Primorac rightly infers that the pro-regime literary texts which "[…] have so for escaped critical attention almost entirely [...] deserve closer scrutiny because they help to demonstrate that the political discourses surrounding the Zimbabwean 'crisis' were not a suddenly eruption" ("Poetics" 437). However, Primorac's reading of Chipamaunga's third and latest 'Freedom novel' *Feeding Freedom* as a teleological culmination of the patriotic trilogy seems to understate the profound impact of the emergent political pressures on post-2000

[31] In the same year, Kanengoni published an opinion piece entitled "100 days with Robert Mugabe" in which he defended the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme and the introduction of contested laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2002) and the Public Order and Security Act (2002). Through his new columnist role, Kanengoni countered Chenjerai Hove's anti-state opinion pieces which became the book *Palaver Finish*. Kanengoni's recent opinion piece entitled "Robert Mugabe: The last man standing" published in *The Patriot* – a state-aligned weekly newspaper – celebrates Mugabe as the only remaining Pan-Africanist after he (Mugabe) indicted the International Criminal Court for targeting African leaders.

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Zimbabwean literature. These political upheavals have over the last decade played out in literary circles in an unprecedented fashion. Thus, while Muponde and Primorac correctly assert that "the contemporary official demands for patriotic behaviour and writing are not a sudden eruption […]" ("Introduction" xv), the post-2000 proliferation of creative literature that critique the government's Third Chimurenga discourse and the appearance of pro-state literature which supports the government and counters its critics signify a new trend in the development of Zimbabwean literature. This new trend in the evolution of Zimbabwean literature also warrants critical attention.

Ranka Primorac's text *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* is an important contribution to my topic. Primorac argues that her book is "an exploration of the ways in which Zimbabwean fictional texts rehearse, refract and interrogate political themes and events" (2). Primorac's book exhibits an overarching concern with fiction's relationship with the various phases of Zimbabwean history, although Primorac herself claims to be interested in the colonial rather than the post-colonial period of Zimbabwean history. The title of the book (*The Place of Tears*[32]*: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe*) creates the impression that it deals with the post-2000 crisis. However, a closer reading of the book reveals that the term "modern" is used loosely. The book mostly uses pre-2000 texts which focus on the colonially-induced crises. Primorac argues that despite the fact that she mostly uses pre-2000 novels by established writers (such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chenjerai Hove, Yvonne Vera, Alexander Kanengoni) that "do not directly refer to the 'Zimbabwean crisis', they nevertheless contain a powerful commentary on some of its key aspects" (3). However, the fact that *The Place of Tears* engages with the post-2000 crisis as it relates to literary representations of pre-2000 colonially-induced upheavals informs the book's lack of urgency of engagement with the post-2000 crisis moment. I perceive my use of texts published in the post-2000 period as enhancing a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between contemporary Zimbabwean fiction and the social, economic and political pressures inhabiting the crisis time-space.

[32] This phrase (which is borrowed from Chenjerai Hove's novel *Ancestors*) vividly reflects the unstable socio-political condition of the space studied by Primorac. The phrase can be used more effectively (I believe) to describe the economic and political crisis attending the post-2000 period represented in literary works in my study.

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Chapter layout and overview of focal texts

In Zimbabwe's literary history, the last decade qualifies as the most productive. The vast corpus of novels, short stories, drama and poetry presents a rich pool of literary texts for study. However, I have clearly (and necessarily) been selective in my choice of focal texts. With the exception of Chenjerai Hove and Yvonne Vera – two established and renowned Zimbabwean writers – the study mainly uses texts by emerging Zimbabwean writers; writers whose writing careers seem to have been motivated by the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe. My bias towards the post-2000 generation of Zimbabwean writers is informed by the distinctive propensities of the post-2000 generation of Zimbabwean writers and the pertinence of their texts in highlighting the counter-discursive stance. An anonymous Zimbabwean writer who participated in Patricia Alden's survey entitled "Dies Irae: Days of Wrath, Days of Crisis: A Report on the Current Situation in Zimbabwean Creative Writing" best describes this unique dimension to post-2000 writing: "There is a boldness in the new writers. They take taboo issues on. You can't help feeling optimistic. They are very inspiring" (Par. 5). The new (young) writers understand their unique situation and the possibilities offered by fiction in a society crippled by political and economic strife. This is how some of them responded to Alden's question about their relationship to the older generation of Zimbabwean writers:

> The younger generation is looking for a break with the past. Politics is just about power struggles" […] "Younger writers have thrown all caution to the winds and are tackling political writing face on, whilst the established, for reasons they cannot be blamed, proceed with caution." "We younger writers now have something to focus on and identify with. All the earlier writing seemed to be about white versus black. Now it is a struggle between Zimbabweans." (Par. 6)

However, though largely existing in the shadow of the new writers vis-à-vis their engagement with the political and economic dystopia, the 'old' writers have not totally shied away from political commitment. In fact, some established writers such as Shimmer Chinodya (particularly in his book *Chairman of Fools*), Chenjerai Hove (in *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon*) and Yvonne Vera (in *The Stone Virgins*) deal with the uniquely post-2000

deficiencies of the ZANU (PF) regime.[33] Setting texts by old and new writers in conversation with each other not only bridges the generational gap but also reveals the trends and dynamics in the evolution of anti-state writing in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Hove and Vera stand out as some of the most consistent 'old' writers who have used fiction to challenge dominant narratives of national history.

The defining aspect of Chenjerai Hove's writings of the eighties to mid-nineties (texts such as *Up in Arms; Red Hills of Home; Bones; Shadows* and *Ancestors*) and of the past decade (*Rainbows in the Dust; Palaver Finish; Blind Moon and Homeless Sweet Home: A Memoir of Miami*) is their intertextuality; that is, the discernible convergence of the historical and fictional texts. As Bakhtin asserts (in particular reference to the novel genre), the literary text is "structured not in the distanced image of the absolute past but in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality. At its core lay personal experience and free creative imagination" (*Dialogic* 39). In this light, the evident reverberation of Hove's texts of the eighties to late nineties with the nationalist Third Chimurenga philosophy necessitates an enquiry into what seems to be an about-turn in his political 'vision' in the last decade. That is, whereas Hove's texts such as *Red Hills of Home; Up in Arms, Bones* and *Ancestors* generally (implicitly) support the liberation war and land reform (the twin bedrocks of ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 political campaign), his poetry collections *Rainbows in the Dust* and *Blind Moon* published in the last decade attack the regime as embodying and presiding over a rogue nationalist political system. While my analysis mainly focuses on *Blind Moon*, it makes brief references to *Rainbows in the Dust* despite the text's publication prior to the year 2000. Such references to a text which falls outside my temporal demarcations not only emphasizes the fact that Hove's anti-state stance in *Blind Moon* is not a sudden phenomenon, but also allows me to discern trends in the development of Hove's anti-state oeuvre.

Yvonne Vera, on the other hand, is one of the writers of the older generation who has shown a marked consistency in her critical engagement with the masculinization of political power in post-independence Zimbabwe. Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins* has been included in my list of primary texts because it epitomizes female-centered texts which construct an alternative historiography of the nation. I use *The Stone Virgins* as a launch-pad into my analysis of what

[33] Some 'older' writers epitomised by Alexander Kanengoni and Edmund Chipamaunga have written in support of the ZANU (PF) government's contemporary pro-black policies epitomised in the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme.

I call the "struggle within a struggle" – the use of literature in challenging gendered narratives of the nation through inscribing female experiences of the post-2000 period into the national narrative. As hinted at above, due to limited space, established writers (such as Shimmer Chinodya, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Charles Mungoshi) whose writings and visions have developed in many important ways over the years have been left out. Chinodya in particular has been consistent in his deployment of 'disillusionment' themes since the publication in 1989 of his novel *Harvest of Thorns*. *Harvest of Thorns* reflects on the earliest signs of the corruption of independence. This critical vision extends into the post-2000 period with publications such as *Chairman of Fools*; *Strife* and *Chioniso and other Stories*.

The dissertation comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 (the current, introductory chapter) provides an overview of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis in its political, socio-economic and cultural manifestations in order to establish the context of the study. I briefly discuss the various approaches that critics of Zimbabwean literature have to date used to evaluate Zimbabwean literature of the crisis decade. The chapter also provides an outline of my methodological/theoretical approach, with suitable brief illustrations and delineation of the chosen theoretical works employed in the course of my study.

The second chapter, entitled "Alternative metaphors of a historical moment", examines the selected texts' depiction of the Zimbabwean political and socio-economic crisis in contradistinction to official ones. I use Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands" from the short story anthology *Short Writings from Bulawayo III*; Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Idi" (from the collection *Dancing With Life: Tales From the Township*) to demonstrate the subtlety with which post-2000 Zimbabwean literature challenges the state's grand narrative of the crisis. In Ndlovu's short story, I read the familial conflict threatening to destroy the protagonist's (Ndlovu's) family as symbolising the political friction of Zimbabwe's last decade, where the political 'fathers' of the 'nation-family' (ZANU – PF) faced the challenge of the "rest of the family" (ordinary citizens and also opposition parties). Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* is read as an evocative representation of the 2005 urban slum clearance process code-named Operation Murambatsvina. I focus on the novel's power of description and affect in its creation of alternative perceptions of the lethal slum demolitions and how this can in consequence cast doubt on the state's versions of the event and its aftermath. In the context of anti-hegemonic sentiment exemplified by an anonymous Zimbabwean writer who views the Third

Chimurenga as "just propaganda […] the President's psychological war against home-grown opposition" (qtd. in Patricia Alden "Dies Irae"),[34] I read Mlalazi's short story "Idi" in this chapter as re-imagining the ruler-subject relationship in post-2000 Zimbabwe in a vivid way that makes state projections of the Third Chimurenga as the ultimate African democratic experience suspect.

Chapter 3 (which is entitled "Contemporary Zimbabwean literature and the controversy of national interest") assesses how some dominant political identity constructs have precipitated the 'Zimbabwean problem'. I focus on the chosen texts' participation in the urgent process of redefining state-manipulated but otherwise socially produced identity constructs and concepts such as the anti-colonial war; nationalism; Pan-Africanism; Afrocentrism; patriotism; etc. The focal texts in this chapter grapple with the Third Chimurenga land discourse. Olley Maruma's novel *Coming Home* is read as re-imagining the contemporary resurgence of race-inspired nationalism in post-2000 Zimbabwe. I place especial focus on how the novel re-visits the colonial to independence transitional moment to subtly reflect the continuities in white supremacy in a way that justifies the anti-white sentiment and philosophy of the Third Chimurenga. Closely related to but differing in important ways from *Coming Home* is Nyaradzo Mtizira's novel *The Chimurenga Protocol*. Mtizira's novel represents the Third Chimurenga through a fictional detective narrative concerning the symbolic loss and recovery of the Chimurenga Protocol – the blue-print and philosophy of the land reform process. I analyse *The Chimurenga Protocol* as demonstrating a discernible crystallisation of the fictional and Third Chimurenga texts to support the Third Chimurenga practice of land reform and its attendant hegemonic political discourses. Lawrence Hoba's collection of short stories in *The Trek and Other Short Stories*, on the other hand, is used to demonstrate the subtlety with which fiction can expose the politically hidden dimensions of the land reforms and the Third Chimurenga philosophy in general. My analysis of Hoba's short stories centers on their complex evocation of the flip side of the land 'revolution' that is occluded – not only in official narratives of the Third Chimurenga epitomised by Mugabe's book *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, but perhaps more importantly (in view of my focus on literary representations

[34] ZANU (PF) has actually consistently justified its clampdown on opposition parties and like-minded civil society organisations on the pretext that they are foreign funded and represent imperialist interests (See Lloyd Sachikonye's book *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe* and Blessing Miles-Tendi's *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe*).

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of post-2000 Zimbabwe) in literary texts such as *Coming Home* and *The Chimurenga Protocol*.

The fourth chapter, entitled "A struggle within a struggle: centering female perspectives on the Zimbabwean crisis", explores how female writers covertly (and sometimes overtly) negotiate the gender-skewed representations of the crisis. The chapter focuses on Yvonne Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins*; Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters" (from the collection *Writing Still* edited by Irene Staunton); Virginia Phiri's novel *Highway Queen*; Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Broken Wings" (from the collection *Dancing with Life: Tales from the Township* – despite its male authorship); Vivienne Ndlovu's short story "Bare Bones" (from the collection *Women Writing Zimbabwe*) and Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*. *The Stone Virgins* challenges and renegotiates state hegemony premised on self-serving inscriptions of history through a historically situated narrative of murder, rape and trauma. I examine how in this novel (as well as in Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters"), female subjectivity not only resuscitates previously silenced alternative voices commenting on the Gukurahundi (in particular, and female oppression in general), but perhaps more importantly, covertly alludes to some of the subtle ways in which women and girl children become political victims in contemporary Zimbabwe. I use Mlalazi's short story "Broken Wings" to further explore the gender and age-induced vulnerability of women in the context of the actual post-2000 shortages of basic consumer goods and the politicisation of government food aid programmes. Many of the problems faced by most black Zimbabwean women stems from their lack of cultural, political and economic agency. My analysis of Phiri's novel focuses on how the novel participates in the discourse on women's reclamation of the energy to negotiate (gender and class-induced) life-threatening forces and achieve self-actualisation in the context of the economic and political crisis. I read Phiri's novel *Highway Queen* as deploying the female victim topos in a clearly post-2000 Zimbabwe crisis setting to critique (and attempt to transform) prevailing patriarchal norms shaping identity formation. My analysis of Phiri's novel is focused on its narrative's power of affect produced by its unique prostitute-centred representation of society. I read the prostitute's perspective employed in the novel as heightening the novel's radical aesthetic and social impact, which enables it (the novel) to influence the reader towards awareness of the danger of ascribing stereotypical sexual identities to women. I re-invoke Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* here to further explore the roots (and routes out) of women's challenges and

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vulnerabilities, this time with particular focus on evocations of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS in an economic crisis setting.

Chapter 5 (entitled "Literary demonstrations of the ideal of participatory democracy") examines the oppositional character of the majority of the focal texts; that is, the extent to which they reflect the spirit of public contestation against the dominant political leadership during the historic period in question. The chapter also examines the selected texts' contribution to the creation of an alternative discourse on democracy in contemporary Zimbabwe. It deals with literary evocations of the violations of basic constitutional, human and civil rights, and stresses how the texts (re-)affirm and validate these rights. The chapter also explores (with reference to Mashingaidze Gomo's novel *A Fine Madness*) the emergence of pro-state literary texts that covertly (and sometimes overtly) support the state's philosophy and practice of what I call "Zimbabwean democracy". Gomo's novel re-enacts the Third Chimurenga-rooted ideology and praxis of 'Zimbabwean democracy'. The novel evocatively revisits the Democratic Republic of Congo War through the eyes of a 'patriotic' Zimbabwean soldier whose experiences at the battlefront shape his vituperative onslaught on western democracy and his passionate identification with the Zimbabwe government's anti-west and 'pan-African' discourse. Gomo's novel is put in dialogue with Chenjerai Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon* and Brian Chikwava's novel *Harare North* – texts which dispute Gomo's metaphoric tagging of "Zimbabwean democracy" as "a fine madness". Going against the grain of the contemporary state-centric demand for 'patriotic' history and representations of the crisis, *Blind Moon* and *Harare North* subvert the 'Zimbabwean democracy' concept as a hegemonic gimmick. I read the texts as imagining, instead, alternative democracies founded on the interests of victims of state human rights abuses. Tekere's autobiography *A Lifetime of Struggle* is furthermore invoked – not only to represent the marked proliferation of political autobiographies in the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe, but also to demonstrate how such a life narrative (especially in comparison to other genres such as novels, short stories, poetry, plays, etc.) foregrounds the personal life experiences and perspective of a former state actor to reflect and refract the evolution of 'Zimbabwean democracy'. Despite its first publication in 1984, my brief reference to Joshua Nkomo's autobiography *The Story of My Life*[35] helps to frame my analysis of Tekere's autobiography in a wider context which reveals the unstable relationship of the Zimbabwean political autobiography to official history. I view the

[35] Nkomo's autobiography was first published in London in 1984 and republished in 2001 in Harare.

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republication of Nkomo's text in 2001 as signifying a conscious effort to use the autobiography to challenge what Terence Ranger has called ZANU (PF)'s "rule by historiography" (217). The Conclusion then follows, where I briefly state the study's findings, suggest areas that await further research and predict some of the ways in which creative literature and its criticism are likely to relate to the changing Zimbabwean public sphere.

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CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVE METAPHORS OF A HISTORICAL MOMENT

The Zimbabwean crisis and the polarisation of perspectives

As the preceding chapter has indicated, the state, by virtue of its control of the instruments of public expression, has had an advantage, giving it control over what entered the public sphere as information about the state of society during this period. At the center of the struggle over the expressive space in post-2000 Zimbabwe is the controversy of what constitutes 'truth', particularly about the causes and forms of the crisis. The aim of this chapter is therefore to explore alternative glimpses of information, knowledge and truths through fissures created by fictional texts. My literary analysis in this chapter focuses on the place of creative literature in the struggle for pluralising representations of the crisis. In the context of the dominance of state narratives of the crisis, I particularly seek to demonstrate the unique participation of literary texts in delineating the Zimbabwean crisis time-space. Using the short stories "Hands" by Mary Ndlovu and Christopher Mlalazi's "Idi" (both from the short story collection *Short Writings from Bulawayo III*) and Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, I contend that creative fiction has played a unique role (among other cultural forms of voicing dissent such as music, theatre, film etc.) in challenging the marginalisation of alternative voices commenting on the crisis. My analysis of alternative evocations of the political and economic situation follows on Lara's understanding of narratives by (or about) excluded and oppressed groups as endowed with the "illocutionary force" (Lara 5) which can win support for their cause, "simultaneously transform[ing] preceding views of 'alter' and 'ego' such that after the action is performed neither party remains the same" (Lara 2).

In order to better understand the dynamics of the 'alternative' nature of some literary representations of the decade of crisis in Zimbabwe, a closer engagement with the historical context that gave rise to contested discernments of the socio-economic and political problem is necessary. A critical point to note here is that a dysfunctional economy epitomised by high inflation levels, chronic food and power shortages and political uncertainty, are factors that nurture the burgeoning of dissent and certainly worry many sitting governments. The ferment of opposition and popular demands for political change incites the government to react in

ways that counter calls and moves for regime change. Before analysing the focal texts, it is proper that I define the political context informing the political discouragement of the kind of alternative representations of the crisis found in the focal texts. In state discourses epitomised by the Third Chimurenga narrative, contemporary Zimbabwean society is usually viewed metaphorically as an 'evolving' offspring whose paternity is predicated on the biological metaphor of fathering. The ruling political class, in this case ZANU (PF), fathered the 'child' and this forms the basis for the party's claim to ownership of the country. Brian Raftopolous argues that in this hegemonic logic, "[…a] key tenet […] has been the re-awakenening of the Zimbabwean nation from the colonial nightmare into a more essentialist African consciousness, defined by the select bearers of the liberation legacy" ("Nation, race, nation" 182). The most decorated heroes of the liberation war, for example Joshua Nkomo, have their names carved out on national shrines with the paternal title "father Zimbabwe", and have been claimed by ZANU (PF) as a way of legitimating its claim to perpetual rule (see Ndlovu-Gatscheni's article "Fatherhood and Nationhood: Joshua Nkomo and re-imagination of the Zimbabwe Nation in the 21st century").

More importantly, the 'fathering' dimension of the national hero is given eminence in the psychological warfare in which the subjugated must see their domination as a form of liberation. The national 'father', like the traditional patriarchal father, flexes his muscles, prescribing worldviews about the state of the nation that all members are obliged to share both as a sign of reverence for the father's sacrifice and as an act of familial duty. The worldview ensuing from this crystallisation of gender, historical, biological and ideological considerations creates an affinity at both ends of the power balance to perpetuate dominance. For Nuruddin Farah, the patriarchal power system practised in most African societies informs their political power configurations. Farah argues that in such societies, the family is viewed as a nation in miniature where the dictatorial traits of the father figure in a family unit are analogous to the dictatorship of the head of state and government. Power relations, then, are replicated from the bottom and going up social institutions ending with the President as the ultimate 'patriarch' of the nation:

> [B]ecause African societies are authoritarian, it follows that our leaders would also become authoritarian […] the head of the family in Africa, the generality of fathers in Africa are authoritarian. The law is laid down by the father all the time, and the child must always follow. If he or she does not, then that child is considered to be [a] rebel

> and therefore unredeemable. There is very little communication in the family. ("When is our Millennium" 31)

In the often masculinised Third Chimurenga narrative (I discuss the problems associated with this ideological thread in Chapter 4 which focuses on feminist perspectives of the crisis), the recurring theme in the story of men in contemporary Zimbabwean literature is the antagonism caused by generational differences. It seems that though subjected to the same debilitating socio-economic circumstances, fathers and sons, the 'old men' and the 'new men', reveal antithetical interpretations of their social problems, informed by their equally polarised and contrasting grasp of history and its relationship to the dystopian realities of the present. Without oversimplifying the conflict, it would appear that the 'old men', guided by a memory of colonial oppression and the heroic revolutionary war that dislodged settlerism, are naturally conservative and reluctant to accept explanations of the ills afflicting society in terms of their failure to consolidate that revolution into a just sociopolitical dispensation. Such tendencies to valorise a monolithic and fixed interpretation of history create citadels of hegemonic power skewed in favour of the authors of that history. The 'old men' become participants in the gendered constructions of a hegemonic fatherhood. In Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands", this kind of hegemony can be seen thriving on the tactical exclusion of Bongani, the 'new man' who is deemed to be a product (as compared to his father, one of the older 'makers') of national history.

Fighting for turf: contested views of the crisis in Mary Ndlovu's "Hands"

Using Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands", I seek to demonstrate the subtlety with which fictional works as a form of a socio-cultural interventionist mechanism have engaged the biased and propagandistic representations of the Zimbabwean crisis and go on to engender a socially constructive altruistic discourse. As revealed in the preceding discussion, information is a critical factor in both processes of hegemony building and in its destruction. In analysing "Hands" as a counter-hegemonic narrative, I do not intend to merely stress its 'oppositional' temperament or the alternative realities it engenders, but more importantly, I reveal the depicted sense of political inclusivity inhabiting the author's creative imagination. Ndlovu's short story is important to my enquiry because it highlights the dynamics of the generational antagonism highlighted above. In representing victims of a masculine familial and national hegemony, the short story adds, in its own way, firstly to our general understanding of the

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reactionary tendencies of the oppressed and secondly, to our knowledge of the oppressors' 'technologies' of domination.

Mary Ndlovu's short story reveals the familial (and national) conflicts that arise as a consequence of the generational gap between a father and his son. Understanding its significance to the present problematisation of antagonistic political identity formations can be attained when it is read as an allegory, that is, when the life-world evoked in it is read as a complex microcosm of the real world. Here, the familial conflict threatening to destabilise and destroy Ndlovu's family comes to allude to (and even symbolise) the political friction of Zimbabwe's last decade, where the revolutionary 'fathers' of the "nation-family" (ZANU PF) were visibly fighting off the challenge of the "rest of the family" (opposition parties, mainly MDC). Viewed in this light, (the father) Ndlovu's constant threats to (his son) Bongani's obduracy can be easily understood as acts in the construction of what Achille Mbembe calls the "commandement" (*Postcolony* 103) – a postcolonial authoritarianism analogous to settler authoritarianism. Mbembe argues that the postcolonial establishment sustains its rule through an authoritarian reign over the public sphere: "[…] state power creates, through administrative and bureaucratic practices, its own world of meanings – a master code that while becoming the society's primary central code, ends by governing, perhaps paradoxically, the logics that underlie all other meanings within that society" (*Postcolony* 103).

In "Hands", the hegemonic "master-code" (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 103) claimed by Ndlovu and the ruling party by virtue of their patriarchally acquired leadership positions in the familial and national spheres is much akin to that previously used by the colonial government to suppress Africans. Whereas the colonialist used force as well as racial and religious myths to assume domination, in "Hands" Ndlovu (the father who represents the ruling party) invokes his familial patriarchal power to oblige his son Bongani to recognise the liberation war as the foundation for the legitimacy of the political incumbent. Ndlovu becomes, in his own eyes, the de facto moral compass and assessor of Bongani's political and personal loyalty with a mandate biologically and culturally acquired through his fatherhood. The patriarch on both the familial and the national planes seeks to subvert dissent by projecting himself as the undisputed "maker", "owner" and "overseer" of the family and, indeed, of the nation. The myths of "creating", "owning" and "overseeing" the family are intricately linked to the creation of a hegemony as the patriarch mystifies his authoritarianism as a disposition

functioning in the interest of the family. In order better to understand the fear that inhabits the patriarch's constant beleaguerment, it is imperative to make sense of Ndlovu's image of a good son as contrasted with his image of a bad son, depicted in his angry outburst at Bongani's participation in opposition politics: "Who do you think you are? Ungrateful bastard! Are you really my son? MaNgwenya, how did this intruder get into my home […] you wanted to live forever under Smith and the British" (39-40). Ndlovu's bigotry here is recognisably stimulated by what Muponde and Muchemwa have called a "superphallicism predicated on physical power" ("Introduction" xix) which allows the patriarch essentialist engraving of his "nationalist" past in every aspect of the present. Ndlovu is here demonstrating his characteristic obsession (with hindsight) to vindicate his perpetuation of the self/other binarism in attempting to intimidate Bongani into a forced familial and national hegemony. On an allegorical level, the past has a double effect; at once used by the older generation to seal off political space and also appropriated by the new generation as a trigger factor that inspires acts of resistance to all forms of closure.

The author subtly creates symbolic binary opposites of the old/young, father/son to foreground the conflict that results when the old (who presumably possess the knowhow) take it upon themselves to institute a "fetish" self (that is, one aspiring to be made sacred – Mbembe, *Postcolony* 103), thereby establishing an undisputed autocracy founded on the notion of fathering and knowing. In the praxis of the 'convenient' family concept constructed by Ndlovu, Bongani can only become his father's 'good son' when he reverently submits to his father's tyrannical "commandement" and political orientation; his self-serving blue-prints that effectively macerate Bongani's own vision and attempts to reconfigure cultural and political points of reference. Ndlovu demands Bongani's constant demonstration of fealty; ("the revolution takes time and needs to be supported, not challenged" 38), which he considers to be the duty of the "born-free" generation. As a consequence, the absence of such loyalty in Bongani attracts from Ndlovu the threat of the sternest disciplinary action a father can give – he will disown him: "I'm now ordering you to stop all this [opposition politics] if you want to live under my roof" (40). Tyrannical fatherhood is portrayed here as finding impetus in a centuries old patricentric tradition that values age and paternity. But Ndlovu's paternal supremacism evoked in this short story is further informed by a patriarchal tradition

steeped in the contemporary urge to give history anteriority in the production of both the political and the cultural spheres.[36]

As the father of the house (and a staunch member of the ruling party) Ndlovu builds his authority and legitimacy around a vitiated notion of history. For him, history is the only logical philosophical compass that the generation of Bongani must ever feel indebted to in their charting of the future. But Ndlovu's concept of history, stirred by his personal life experience, includes undeniable instances of political despoliation that makes it seem just another way of 'zombifying' bodies in order to dominate them. This kind of manipulation of the past is echoed by Primo Levi (a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust) who asserts that the past can easily be used by the powerful for selfish political ends: "the further events fade into the past, the more the construction of convenient truth grows and is perfected" (14). In "Hands", the past is whittled down to Ndlovu's nationalist achievements, the work of his 'hands',[37] which must be seen as an indispensable contribution to the 'freedom' that Bongani and his generation are 'enjoying'. But as André Brink asserts: "it is not the past as such that has produced the present or poses the conditions for the future […] but the way we think about it" (33). In "Hands", space to think about history is closed off and the prison functions more or less as a telling symbol of what awaits those who seek to metamorphose their personal 'thinking' into political praxis. The double identity of Ndlovu as both a patriarchal and nationalist character ignites the problem of succession and continuity which are the hallmarks of any governing authority and indeed characterise the crisis of Zimbabwean politics over the last decade.

In their introduction to the book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde find a definable "search for utopian families" (xix) in the contemporary Zimbabwean narrative. Muchemwa further observes how in the Zimbabwean nation 'family' "Nkomo[38] is re-claimed as father of the

[36] Much has been written about the hegemonic use of history particularly in post-2000 Zimbabwe. See, for instance, Terence Ranger's article "Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe"; Muwati, Mutasa and Bopape's "The Zimbabwean liberation war: contesting representations of nation and nationalism in historical fiction" and Muwati, Mheta and Gambahaya's "Contesting 'Patriotic History': Zimbabwe's liberation war history and the democratization agenda" and Norma Kriger's "From patriotic memories to 'patriotic history'in Zimbabwe, 1990–2005."

[37] Hands are used in the short story as metaphors of creating and owning something. Thus for Ndlovu, the ruling party deserves respect (not criticism) from the subjects it liberated just as he deserves loyalty from Bongani and his wife MaNgwenya.

[38] Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo was the Vice President of Zimbabwe from 1987 to 1999.

nation, Simon Muzenda[39] re-constructed as its 'soul' and Robert Mugabe offered as the son who interprets and implements its essence" ("Tell the Children" 1). Beneath the familial war of attrition between father and son in "Hands" is the problem of forging a national identity. Ndlovu is earlier incensed by Bongani's involvement in opposition politics and thinks he is "selling out to the British" (39) because he takes his own revolutionary nationalist orientation to be the mainstay of a true national identity. Ndlovu's anti-colonial war experiences guides him to view all phenomena from the vantage point of his 'personal' liberation war whims. His mantra of "political roots" (38) is informed by the paternal act of the war in which he participated, and this puts him on a collision course with Bongani, who is charting a new political identity as an opposition party activist. Bongani proves that change has to come as a result of collective and inclusive efforts that honestly appraise the past in order to use its lessons to chart a future. His political worldview reminds us of Achebe's insinuation that: "identity is not something which hangs like a milestone around [people's] neck[s]. It is something you can hold dialogue with" ("Mapping out Identity" 24).

The undercurrents of political totalitarianism and the counter spirit of difference and dissent it generates are highlighted in "Hands" through a symbolic conflictual biological relationship. In their youths (despite the different epochs they inhabit as youths), father and son share an ironically common disillusionment with the political establishment of their own time, which breeds in them a revolutionary urge to fight – Ndlovu, the colonial system and Bongani, the postcolonial native leadership. But notwithstanding their 'same blood' (which may as well symbolise their mutual sensitivity to oppression), the two characters demonstrate an opposite view on the politics of their current space which brings into question the role of history, experience and indoctrination in comprehending the present. Ndlovu's own determination to fight a war in the name of broadening his life's options awakens in his son a consciousness that even during the independence era, what really stands between the oppressed and liberty is the ignition of the dormant revolutionary spirit in the minds of the oppressed. The mind becomes both a site of oppression as well as the cardinal exit to liberation. Mary Ndlovu depicts the forces of a fusion of biological, cultural and political imperatives which are constantly demanding from Bongani a timid veneration of an otherwise abusive and authoritarian familial and political system. Bongani is therefore split between his quest for self-determination on the one hand and on the other, respecting the traditional family

[39] Simon Vengai Muzenda was the second Vice President of Zimbabwe from 1987 to 2003.

structure and the 'nationalist' politics that his father represents. Tradition is here shown as confining, prone to hegemonic manipulation and more so when it is appropriated by the powerful to keep captive and dormant the minds of the 'led'. One recalls an assertion by Steve Bantu Biko, the South African anti-Apartheid nationalist, that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed (137). Fanon, however, finds that mind (of the colonised) to be "envious" and inspired by "lust", hinting at its power-hunger (30). The political convenience that comes with one's ability to control minds is vividly depicted in the gullibility it breeds in the character of Ndlovu. In character, Ndlovu's approach to life as well as his familial and political worldviews are shaped by an essentialist political dogma that is cunningly grafted on to his unsuspecting conscience by the powerful. Ndlovu's past with its memories of colonial injustice, his nostalgia concerning the liberation war and his current trouble with his "rebel" son make him a ready recipient and fervent zealot of fascist political indoctrination. But despite his being a veteran of the liberation war, the architects of the political hegemony that he serves do not allow him any reflexive space to measure his received myths about their 'right' to rule against the unfulfilled promises of the nationalist revolution – a critical assessment which finds expression through the political restiveness of his son.

The construction of Ndlovu as a character who is always looking to the past made by his 'hands' as a prelude to the dystopia of the present leads him into the 'nationalist' trap where he naively begins to view the liberation war as a "fetish"[40] and political leadership as legitimately predicated on liberation war heroism. It is this high esteem that he places on the war (and the ruling elite which derives its legitimacy from it) that blinds him to finding fault with his own familial authoritarianism and more importantly the political totalitarianism of the former leaders of the liberation war. Ndlovu's threat to disown (the 'rebel' son) Bongani as a way of defending his 'nationalist' legacy is not only indicative of his [Ndlovu's] patriarchal political mentality, but also signifies, (through the symbolic bond of their blood relationship), the futility of such an effort. His view of his son as 'misled' indicates an ingrained fascist construal of dissent opinion as mischievously fabricated. This attitude on his part informs the conflict inhabiting the father-son relationship, which is symbolic of the reigning antagonistic subject-ruler relationship. The 'nationalist', represented here by Ndlovu, commodifies the past and cannot allow Bongani and his generation to "reject what

[40] I am using the term in the sense promulgated by Mbembe in *On the Postcolony* to define something unquestionable and sacred.

he [the "nationalists"] fought for" (38), because the liberation war is the most important source of their claim to legitimacy. This explains Ndlovu's imperviousness to alternative worldviews, knowledge and 'truths' – symbolised here by Bongani and his opposition party who threaten the stability of his hegemony, founded on shaky grounds of what Stuart Hall (citing Michel Foucault) calls the elite's "regime of truth" (49). Hall elucidates the distortive potentialities of hegemonic knowledge: "Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth', but has the power to make itself true knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practices" (49). Ndlovu's initial decision to subvert Bongani's moves to establish his own "regime of truth" can be read here as suggestive of the hegemonic deceit that inhabits the nationalists' unstable 'truths'.

Besides simply highlighting some of the systematic ways with which hegemony has been constructed and sustained in Zimbabwe, the short story "Hands" allusively enters the disputed terrain of the discourse on political causality. As revealed earlier in the study, ZANU PF's scapegoat for the economic crisis has been the claim of perceived foreign sabotage by western countries while anti-government voices blame ZANU PF itself for the rot. Invoking Gregory Currie's theorisation on "joint attention"[41] (95), one can easily see the author's interventionist political commentary as she shapes her characters, plot and events in a way which moves the reader to solidarity and sympathy with and interest in certain characters and not others. The author subtly guides the reader's emotions through creating the "subaltern" and victimised Bongani, whose oppressed condition is amplified by his powerless relationship with his father and also his symbolic jailing at the end of the short story.

The conflict in "Hands" is therefore informed by different perspectives, opinions, ideological and political orientations between father and son. The most remarkable irony in the short story, however, is that the two also show a striking similarity in their general reaction to social and political injustice. Their intricately correlating responses demonstrate not only the human instinct to confront life-threatening forces, but also reveals how much has remained unchanged with independence. In this way, the short story explores the problematic failure to transcend the politics of coercive hegemony through the character (and character of)

[41] The narrative's capacity to immerse the reader into its fictional life-world and influence them to perceive certain phenomena in particular ways.

MaNgwenya, Ndlovu's wife and mother to Bongani. With her own emotions naturally divided between her husband and son, MaNgwenya appears to function more as an arbiter between the warring ideological impulses and values of Ndlovu and Bongani. Her calm, considerateness and love for both the antagonistic members of the family endow her with the necessary impartiality in attempting to perform the reconciliatory act, while the reader is led to take her opinion for fact, especially when she is called upon to persuade Ndlovu to abandon or soften his nescient 'nationalism' to accommodate Bongani's difference as she reminds him: "Can't you see that he's just like you? Your father tried to stop you from joining the war, but you thought you knew better. Now you know deep down the whole thing has failed, but you are too proud to admit it" (40). MaNgwenya is used here to problematise the intricate relationship between the colonial and the post-independence epochs. It can, then, be argued that the authoritarian form of governance typified by Ndlovu in the independence era is also founded (as in the colonial period) on the ambivalent self/other binaries which are shown to traverse both the colonial and the independence periods. There is simply a racial inversion of what constitutes the "self" and the "other" in the independence period. When Ndlovu meditates, "who was Bongani fighting? Liberators. No, that could never be condoned. Selling out to the British …" (39), he is in effect strategically annexing Bongani to the white/British "other" and so justifying his exclusion from power.

As a form of artistic expression, allegory thrives on its polysemous nature to proffer multi-layered meanings and representations of space-time. Meyer Howard Abrams asserts that allegory "possesses a didactic potentiality" (85) which makes it a common style in writing by authors whose works engage certain forbidden zones. To a "mimetic critic" – defined by Abrams as one who "view[s] literature as an imitation, or a reflection, or representation of the world of human life" (51) – the short story "Hands" resonates with political and anti-hegemonic discourses championed by civil society and opposition political formations in the post-2000 period. To understand the complex interaction of narrative fiction and reality, it is important to have recourse to Lara's interpretation of Paul Ricoeur's stages of "mimetic representation" to see how the short story may be read as shaping and being shaped by the real world: "Mimesis 1[…] the stage in which life is experienced and conceived linguistically in the everyday world of action; 'mimesis 2' is the authorial stage of creative narrative configuration; and 'mimesis 3' is the appropriation of 'mimesis 2' by the world of the readers" (93).

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The didactic element in creative narratives (which often times make their authors potential targets for intolerant political regimes) derives from the interplay of Ricoeur's stages 3 and 1. The acquisition of the represented world (stage 2) by the reader in stage 3 opens him/her to other possible worlds, experiences and perspectives that engender a paradigm shift in the perception of reality. As Lara highlights further, "[n]arratives draw on the materials of everyday life, but, as the story unfolds in the public sphere, they return to and shape life itself" (93). Mary Ndlovu's concern with portraying the nuances of the emergent radical nationalist rhetoric and fascism makes her writing a complex political participant in as far as her represented fictional world resonates with oppositional discourses already active in the public sphere. In the succeeding section, I turn to Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Idi" to demonstrate how, besides reflecting and critically engaging with the patriarchal configurations of familial and political power (as in "Hands" above), post-2000 Zimbabwean literature also unpacks the complex instruments of autocratic hegemonic control, particularly in the use of violence.

Images of the dictator in Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Idi"

As mentioned in the background to this study in Chapter 1 and already demonstrated in the preceding section, the post-2000 Zimbabwean public sphere is characterised by competing narratives and perspectives concerning the political system. In trying to problematise further Arendt's previously evoked question vis-à-vis the condition of imaginative fiction in an oppressive political system,[42] I turn to Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Idi" to demonstrate how certain truths about the 'technologies' of political domination that often resist articulation or cannot be freely expressed in everyday language find indirect expression through the medium of fiction. My focus in this section is on the various ways through which the short story "Idi" counters the dominant narrative which establishes ZANU (PF) as the quintessential African nationalist regime. I situate the short story's political discourse in the broader debate on the dictator tag imposed on Mugabe and ZANU (PF), mostly by opposition supporters and western countries.

Evidence of the authoritarian turn of nationalism in post-2000 Zimbabwe abounds. Many events, official decrees and statements by ZANU (PF) attest to the totalitarian character of its

[42] Arendt asks the question: "what makes a government act as it acts?"

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hegemony.[43] The lived experiences of violence and coercion float in the imagination of the nation and easily become fodder for the creative imagination, as one finds with Mlalazi's short story "Idi". Reading "Idi" with the kind of awareness engendered by the foregoing, one notices a complex interaction between the extra-literary and the literary and the importance of imaginative fiction in decrypting space-time becomes discernible. Literary works evolve as a complex form of 'witness' to specific events and historic circumstances, just as Mamoun Fandy reveals (in the Arab context):

> […] often-times in an authoritarian setting, newspaper reporting and fictional accounts trade places. While Egyptian newspapers put forth fictionalised accounts of happenings in the country, the most insightful accounts of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak's eras can be read in novels such as Gamal Al-Ghitani's *Zeini Barakaf* […] The interchangeable quality of fiction and journalism is very common in settings where a confrontation with power prove costly. (7)

An essential element of political power abuse in Christopher Mlalazi's short story that my analysis focuses on is the destruction of space for freedom of speech which paves the way for the reign of the dictatorial episteme, accompanied by the ubiquitous threat of violent punishment to would be dissidents. I invoke Stefan Helgesson's understanding of the "ambitions [of narrative texts] to clear away conventions and misrepresentations and offer 'truth'" (112) to demonstrate the subtle ways through which the short story "Idi" deconstructs state-circumscribed notions of truth about its political conduct and consequently constructs an alternative image of the ruling elite. However, in analysing such reconstructions of state power in "Idi" I am aware of the subjective nature of the "truth of fiction" – to borrow Achebe's phrase – and of André Brink's assertion that "[a] story does not presume to bring to light 'the' truth, but at most a version of it." The "truth" that is held out to the reader by the author, narrative or characters thrives both on the strength of the narrative's "illocutionary force" (Lara 5) and its agonistic potential to affect the reader to experience a moment of what Gregory Currie calls a "shared emotional attention" (v). In Currie's praxis, 'truth' occupies a

[43] The most visible sign of this transformation was revealed by the March 2008 plebiscite (that even Mugabe's usual African Union allies declined to endorse), in which a campaign of violence and political persecution reversed the MDC's first round election victory. It is, however, President Robert Mugabe's widely quoted declaration shortly before the June 2008 presidential runoff election that "the pen cannot defeat the gun" that clearly proves ZANU (PF)'s tyrannical tendencies and overshadows the party's claim to be the paragon of progressive majority rule.

liminal space between a narrative's fictional version of the world and the reader's prior unaffected perception of his own real world. 'Truth' therefore materialises as a negotiated construct where the reader's "cognitive and affective take on the world" (Currie 94) is influenced by the narrative.

Mlalazi's short story "Idi" in *Short Writings from Bulawayo III* is a subtly created piece of art that invites the reader to share a subjective antipathy towards tyrannical political systems. In "Idi", the reader is led to escape the real world and to encounter an equally chaotic imaginary world in which some of the conditions and experiences of the real world are portrayed and solutions to them provided or at least hinted at. But far from simply providing an alternative fictional life-world, "Idi" is more socially significant for its subtle illumination of the anatomy of oppressive political systems, their instruments of hegemonic control and the psychology of their victims. Through his ingenious and strategic use of the first person narrator, Mlalazi explores the intricate love-hate relationship between the ruler and his subject in a way which makes the short story a subtle re-inscription of post-2000 Zimbabwean society. The story starts on a day when the narrator joins the township barber in conversation below a Thorn tree. It is from this makeshift barbershop that the narrator experiences sporadic hallucinations of some breath-taking encounters with an unnamed ruler. The hallucinations are punctuated intermittently by flashbacks to a tragic account of the narrator's insane brother which recurrently interjects the conversation. The hallucinations appear as illusory, dreamlike visions of politically abused township dwellers and opposition party supporters who exist in a state of constant harassment by a powerful, unnamed, tyrannical figure. The story ends as violently as it starts, with the narrator in flight, pursued by the tyrannical figure and his 'dogs of war' that include a policeman, a giant dragon fly and a machete wielding lady.

Mlalazi's preoccupation in "Idi" is not with the banality of the ruler's traits, but with the more salient complexity of his instruments of hegemonic control, as well as demonstrating the multifarious ways in which the victims react and relate to their physical and psychological abuse. Critical to the survival of the authoritarian system, as revealed by the seemingly invincible character of the ruler, is the penchant for total control of his subjects' mind-sets, his panoptic surveillance of the expressive space and disciplining of 'miscreant' minds and bodies. Restraint and censorship are the hallmarks of the ruler's continued reign, as revealed by the connotative semantic effect of the title of the short story. The title "Idi" evokes

ruthless political dictatorship as signified by the person and character of Idi Amin Dada, the historic and arguably most notorious African dictator who ruled Uganda from 1971 to 1979. The title therefore creates an atmosphere that readies the reader for a possible encounter with the (fictional) world of power, coercion and plunder. Further reinforcing the ruler's authoritarianism is the portrayal of the ruler as a fanatic adorer of Mobutu, another of Africa's infamous dictators (who ruled the then Zaire for more than three decades). Mobuto Sese Seko is famous for his 1970 election victory in which he outlawed competitors and 'won' ninety-nine percent of the vote unopposed.[44] In "Idi", Mobuto epitomises the enigma of a "fiend that lies like truth" and a model that the unnamed ruler in "Idi" aims to emulate. While the ruler in "Idi" is equally enchanted by violent hegemony, he is actually more intrigued by Mobutu's culture of excess and spectacle, as revealed in the description of the inside of the "state man's" posh car:

> A TV was in front of his plush white leather seat, and it was showing over and over again, a scratchy black and white clip of a young Mobuto Sese Seko sitting, nasty Chinese Godfather like, on a shaded platform carried on the shoulders of sweating militia along the afternoon streets of Mubji Mayi, whilst ragged povo lining it danced and ululated. Beside Mobuto was also carried, same style, Queen Fabiola of Belgium, then King Baudoin, all in sunglasses, teeth flashing in radiant smiles. (66)

The ruler's fondness for Mobutu's show of absolute rule and spectacle is not only suggestive of his own excessive and dictatorial inclination, but is also symbolically telling of the strategic ways of achieving and maintaining absolute rule. The primary 'tactic' that is ascribed to the ruler through Mobuto's video is the praxis of constructing a totalitarian order in which his tyrannical episteme is not questioned, just as the "militia men" in the video are silently "sweating" from the weight of Mobuto and his absolute monarchy friends from Belgium. The gagging trope recurs when the ruler tenaciously warns the narrator against writing disparagingly about him: "'Your mouth shall be your grave one day'" (66). This caution marks the violent turn of the "commandement" and its attendant paraphernalia as described by Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony*:

[44] We are reminded here of the Zimbabwean June 2008 election run-off which Mugabe 'won' by 90 per cent of the votes after the opposition leader Tsvangirai pulled out of the race citing state violence against his supporters.

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> It [fetishistic power] turns the postcolonial autocrat into an object that feeds on applause, flattery, lies: it becomes unaccountable – or in the words of Hegel, arbitrary to the extent that it reflects only upon itself. In this situation one cannot underestimate the violence that can be set in motion to protect the vocabulary used to denote or speak of the commandement, and to safeguard the official fictions that underwrite the apparatus of domination since these are essential to keep the people under the commandement's spell. (111)

In "Idi", the ruler's intimidatory and violent character dovetails with the recurring motifs of confinement, restriction and punishment which pervade the whole short story. There is a striking sense of disquiet and chaos ushered in as early as the first paragraph of the short story. The elements of nature are depicted as unsettlingly confrontational, with the "pine pointing *accusingly* at the afternoon sky" (emphasis added) (63). Besides this moment of 'natural' friction, we also encounter, in the second paragraph, a disconcerting image of the character of Qapela whose name and physique foreground the terror and tyranny embodied by the ruler. The name of the barber, "Qapela",[45] assumes a symbolic meaning conveying admonition and fear. There is a remarkable paradoxical and tragic schism in the description of Qapela as both a tyrant and a subjugated subject, all at once. We first see Qapela "Hitlering his moustache with a generator powered electric shaver" (63). Qapela's fondness for the "Hitler moustache" ultimately invokes in the reader, not only a foreboding of the almost universally reviled German dictator (Hitler), but most importantly, the universality of tyranny as a human inclination. However, a reading of the short story in toto reveals the author's deft construction of a fantasy-like action and nightmarish settings, plot and characters that function allusively. The Hitler effect, for instance, powerfully appeals to the reader as a subtle hint at the dispensability of tyranny. The narrator's escape from the "Nazi moment" of pursuit by the ruler's lady – whose golden bowl eventually transforms into a "Gestapo helmet" (72) on her head – is facilitated by the intervention of friends who show a readiness to fight back violently against the tyrant. The narrator's friends, their stones and yelling, are portrayed here as telling symbols of the potentiality of violent redemptive justice. Christopher Finlay, who prefers to call this kind of violence "revolutionary" (9), believes that it is a "natural process [...] and beyond moral censure [since it is for] the greater cause" (9). The viciousness and coerciveness of the ruler's dragon fly, the "Gestapo woman" and the

[45] This is a Ndebele name which can be translated as "be alert".

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police in their attempt to confine and maintain panoptical surveillance of the narrator, are symptomatic of the regime of terror maintained by "the party" in a postcolonial setting. As Fanon says:

> the party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilised. The party helps the government to hold the people down. It becomes more and more clearly anti-democratic, an implement of coercion. (138)

And:

> the party plays understudy to the administration and the police, and controls the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation but, in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline. (146)

The ending of "Idi" therefore reflects on the constant deep seated fear at the heart of what Mbembe has called "governmentality" ("Necropolitics" 34), which explains the ruler's affinity for instruments of control, here symbolised by the dragon fly, the "Gestapo woman" and the policeman.

Besides the apparent show of physical violence demonstrated by the narrator's friends, violence in "Idi" takes a more subtle form in the narrator's hallucinatory flashback story of his psychiatric patient brother. The narrator piteously recounts the insane condition of his brother (a former soldier forced to commit atrocities to bolster the ruler's regime) to make him a 'logical' if subconscious witness to the tyrant's repulsive and wicked arsenal of hegemonic control. The mad brother becomes, also, a site for encountering despicable atrocities committed in the process of muzzling dissent. In one of his violent trances, for instance, the brother is impelled by the memory of his previous murderous missions to murder his father and the narrator's wife. These cold-blood murders appear to the reader as a window into the acts of carnage on the much larger scale of state ordered massacres, where he participated in the crushing of dissidents. In his attempt to decipher the severity of his brother's monstrous transformation, the narrator nostalgically and melancholically goes into

memory lane, exhuming the young, uncorrupted and civilian brother who contrasts sharply with the older, insane, raping and murderous creature of the dictator:

> And when he came back years later, carrying a ceremonial knobkerrie, its head a tiny grinning human skull with a single coil of human hair pasted on its head, he was no longer the brother I knew. The brother, as infants, that I played hide and seek with on hot summer nights under the innocent stars. The loving brother who had protected me from bullies at junior school. (66)

The disparity between now and then revealed by the narrator effectively illuminates the complexity of the oppressor's modus operandi. He (the ruler) combines physical and psychological violence to create what Hannah Arendt has called the "implements of violence" (*On Violence* 42), whose callous implementation of the tyrant's mandate manifests in the killing act. The narrator's brother's mental derangement, again, allows us to witness the brother's processed self, the voice of the robot that occupies the body that has been 'disciplined' by the ruler. This is revealed in the descriptions of the brother's insane mutterings:

> Sometimes he muttered barely comprehensible things across the curtain at night as we lay, of killing father and throwing his body into a disused mine shaft. If that was not chilly enough, he ranted of raping the neighbour's wife, and if the husband said anything, of forcing him to drip burning plastic on her until she went to the devil, whilst his friends held a bazooka to his child's head. (67)

This unnerving description of savage debauchery does not only allusively attest to the dehumanising abuse of soldiers in the actual *Gukurahundi,* but also reveals how far tyranny is prepared to go to force a hegemony and the desperate choices available to victims of repression. The uneasy escape hinted at in "Idi" is violent confrontation, and this is subtly conveyed through the narrator's illusory, vengeful murder of his brother: "I killed him over and over, in my mind, and buried him in a shallow grave. He killed my beloved wife and father" (68). The killing act (even as it exists in the narrator's fancy) becomes the definitive way of fighting back, reminiscent of Fanon's argument in his "On Violence" chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The predilection to silencing dissent shown by the nameless dictator (one assumes that he is the Idi mentioned in the title of the short story) in "Idi" (and also in

"Hands" demonstrates how essential the domination of mindsets and censorship worldviews are in the grand project of hegemonic containment. In the following section, I invoke Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* to demonstrate how creative fiction by Zimbabweans attempts to extricate the social imagination from this kind of authoritarian stranglehold, to proffer a balanced and fuller understanding of one of the most devastating social control measures perpetrated by the post-indepencence regime – the 2005 urban slum demolitions known as Operation Murambatsvina.

The certainty of a man-made crisis in *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The urban slum clearances of post-election 2005 have been inscribed in the nation's history as a major public policy and political scandal that amplified the already heightened tension and suspicion between the rulers and the ruled in this politically volatile period (discussed above). It is therefore important to find out how the novelisation of the slum demolitions can make possible knowledge of the event that can be read as alternative to the state's grand narrative of the event. The timing and the setting of the mass displacements particularly have generated intense debate, with pro-government voices seeking to project a positive picture of the demolitions while most non-governmental organizations and civil society on the other hand perceived a subtle backlash on the 'dissident' urban population. Within the latter framework of perception, the demolitions were meant to force the 'oppositional' urban shack dweller to return to his/her rural home for some political re-education (David Moore 35), and (given the dominance of ZANU PF in the rural communities) such a returnee victim's political re-orientation and acquiescence to the rule of ZANU PF was almost certain. But as Mickias Musiyiwa (with reference to earlier similar demolitions in the 1980s) infers, the "bulldozer policy" has always been the post-independence establishment's response to urban migration that was straining the capacities of urban structures (66-67). Whatever the motive, what gives Operation Murambatsvina an immense political significance is the resulting magnitude of human suffering which made it a humanitarian catastrophe warranting the intervention of the United Nations. Furthermore, the extensive sympathy for the displaced from non-governmental organizations and opposition political parties transformed the victims into potential political expendables. Consequently, analyses and representations of Operation Murambatsvina became a contest of binary oppositions where the government sought to sanitize its image, while some non-governmental organisations, opposition political parties and other civic pressure groups used it to vindicate their regime change agenda.

Coming in the wake of yet another (2005) disputed election, the slum clearance controversy created a ruinous setback to the government's concerted efforts to construct and reassert its legitimacy. As stated in the foregoing, the state narrative, being one of the establishment's hegemonic apparatuses for power retention, tends to be characterised by omissions and inflations and to some extent a discernible mendacity that serves the government's political grand plan. The spin inherent in the conception of such narratives constructs and retraces conventions and patterns that guide the social and political conduct of the citizens, consequently reconfiguring perceptions of reality. But as Lara says (of literary narratives), the potency of narratives to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct power relations in the public sphere make them a cultural site for the reformulation of justice conceptions (7). In my overarching concern with the evocative representation of Operation Murambatsvina in Tagwira's novel, I emphasise the value of description in the swaying of emotions and the representation of arresting scenes of violence, homelessness, child labour, HIV/AIDS and the daily struggle for survival, which sway the reader's emotions towards compassion with the victims and in consequence doubt of the state's versions of the event and its aftermath. As Martha Nussbaum argues, the "self" is "constituted by its evaluative judgments with the areas of the world outside itself" (*Upheavals* 300). In the fictional world of *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the "self"/reader is guided to a judgmental perception by the narrative's affective rendering of troubled life-worlds, of victimised poor urban dwellers and unfeeling authorities. A consequence of this emotional guidance is the strengthening of compassion, functionally defined by Nussbaum as the "painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune" (*Upheavals* 301), which effectively paves the way for an "egoistic reciprocity" (*Upheavals* Nussbaum 301) between the reader and the sufferer.

Any serious discussion and representation of Operation Murambatsvina would necessarily invoke the political dimension of the demolitions. My approach to *The Uncertainty of Hope* is two-pronged.[46] Firstly, I seek to demonstrate how the novel (as compared to the state's grand narratives) creates a fictional sphere in which the reader can experience the tragedy of Operation Murambatsvina in ways that steer him/her towards certain perceptions of the operation which have not found expression in the state narrative. While much has been said

[46] I further invoke the novel in Chapter 4 which focuses on female-authored texts, this time exploring the ways in which it engages with issues of women's vulnerability to domestic violence, patriarchal power relations and HIV/AIDS.

and debated (and sometimes settled) about the physical impact of the demolitions, I instead attempt to demonstrate the power of *The Uncertainty of Hope* as a cultural construct that in a complex manner, but effectively, illuminates certain aspects of Operation Murambatsvina that differ markedly from the government's representation and validation of the event. Secondly, and adjunct to the first approach, I read the power of the novel to move its readers as carrying an implicit political charge, particularly focusing on the vivid descriptions of suffering of those affected and the callousness of the authorities, considering how these evocations ultimately guide the reader to certain cognitive apprehensions of Operation Murambatsvina which, apart from being in conflict with the state narrative, nurture in the reader a disapproval of the responsible governing authorities. The novel therefore enters the often dreaded political zone, albeit as a social and cultural artefact, exposing the glaring malfeasance of the political elite in this humanitarian calamity, thus contributing to the on-going quest for a moral and just society.

In order historically to contextualise the various ways by means of which *The Uncertainty of Hope* makes accessible otherwise "concealed", under-represented, exaggerated or misleading conceptions of the humanitarian consequences of the slum demolitions, it is necessary to trace the socio-historic background to Operation Murambatsvina, particularly relating to the dichotomous nature of the ensuing debate on the motive, impact, merits and demerits of the exercise. The political polarisation in the country tends to reduplicate in analyses of Operation Murambatsvina. At one pole, the ZANU PF government defended the demolitions as a noble act undertaken to arrest the continuing urban rot and to curtail illicit commercial transactions – touted as the major causes of the cataclysmic state of the national economy. Sekesai Makwavarara, the then state-appointed chairperson of the Harare Commission, in launching Operation Murambatsvina vaunted the programme as the logical culmination of the city of Harare's efforts to bring back the city's "sunshine status": "The city of Harare wishes to advise that in its effort to improve service delivery within the city, it will embark on Operation Murambatsvina, in conjunction with the Zimbabwe Republic Police. This is a programme to enforce bylaws to stop all forms of illegal activity" (qtd. in "Order out of Chaos").[47] The official position was that the demolitions were a necessary evil in the ongoing attempts to regularise the national economy and rescue it from an unprecedented collapse. With little or no interest in the root causes of the informalisation of the foreign exchange

[47] A report prepared by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum.

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system, the illegal vending stalls and expansion of slum shelters, the government imposed a declaration of intended demolition at short notice, without any ready mitigating measures to alleviate the obvious consequences for the affected communities.

The actual Operation Murambatsvina evoked a deep sense of the vulnerability of the urban poor. These are the 'raw materials' upon which the fictional textuality of *The Uncertainty of Hope* is formed and a reason for an analytical focus on the affective potential of the novel, as well as on the political consequences of the emotions aroused by its depictions. To situate my reading theoretically, I invoke Lara's concept of the interconnectedness of the moral and the political spheres, as she asserts: "societies can change their self-understandings precisely because moral, aesthetic and political issues are intertwined" (170). Following on Lara, I take on board Martha Nussbaum's congeneric reconstruction of the Aristotelian tradition of compassion and its ethical and moral significance in her book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, as well as some of the opinions articulated in response to her concept. Defined (by Nussbaum) as "a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune" (301), compassion "pushes the boundaries of the self further outwards than many types of love" (300). Nussbaum is here pointing to the "personalisation" of other people's afflictive experiences which occur at the realisation that the afflicted do not deserve their plight. In her attempt to distinguish between "sympathy" and "compassion", Nussbaum brings out the most fundamental dimension of compassion, that it is (as compared to sympathy) "more intense and suggests a greater degree of suffering, both on the part of the afflicted person and on the part of the person having the emotion" (302). The painful experience is contagious and has the power to transform the person having the emotion from an initial state of impassive witnessing to a certain level of involvement, in which the cause of the suffering is condemnable both by the victim and the witness. Compassion therefore leads to a "judgement that the other person's distress is bad" (Nussbaum 302).

In *The Uncertainty of Hope* Valerie Tagwira invokes the historic "raw material" of Operation Murambatsvina to offer a fictional account of intense suffering of women, children and vulnerable men who are discernibly our objects of compassion. As in the short story "Hands" analysed above, what is depicted evokes an overwhelming impression of a patriarchy losing touch with its moral duty and instead seeking to flourish at the expense of the "weaker" members of society, the women and children and certain men. The distinction between the

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victims and the victimised is made glaring as the plot unfolds and Onai, one of the major characters, falls into the abyss of affliction from where she eventually emerges with the help of a man to whom she had shown some kindness. But my focus here is on the affecting nature of Tagwira's representations of the impact of the shack demolitions which pervade the plot and of the setting in which Onai's journey into and out of ruin occurs. Such evocations of pain and injustice facilitate our understanding of the novel's ethical and political dimensions. Onai's problems are foreshadowed on the very first page of the first chapter where a sense of insecurity is overpoweringly present. Such vulnerability and timidity, though at the familial level, are symbolic of the susceptibility of the Mbare residents to the impending mass demolitions of shack dwellings. Of more significance to my approach here is the atmosphere of vulnerability, anxiety and uncertainty that results from the glaring absence of protection. This dangerous absence is illuminated through the evocation of enigmatic and slippery character of Onai's absent husband, Gari. The vulnerability of Gari's family, caused by his abscondment from the traditional duty of protecting the family, can be read as symbolic of the broader social challenges that threaten the poor as a consequence of the authorities' reneging from their socially protective role – as Onai, terrorised by a burglary she cannot stop, reveals in her diatribe against her undutiful husband:

> She was certain, moreover, that her loudest screams would not coerce her neighbours out of the safety and comfort of their homes. Nobody in their right mind would risk their lives by coming to her aid. Not at this time of night. So, apart from her children, she was well and truly alone. She swore under her breath at her absent husband. '*Uripiko nhai Gari*? Where are you Gari?' (Tagwira 2)

Interestingly, Christopher Mlalazi's short story "The Bulldozers are coming" (in the collection *Dancing with Life: Stories from the Township*) also employs the absconding husband motif to reflect on the vulnerability and terror suffered by the wife who, like Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, despairingly wonders why her husband disappears, leaving her to face the wrath of the demolishing bulldozer: "Where are you my husband? Her heart called out to the greying sky" (69). Returning to Gari, one notices that his moral delinquency not only reveals his fecklessness as a father, but also shows the extent of his irrationality, as he comes home to blame and severely assault Onai for the theft of the television. In the quotation above, Onai prepares the reader to witness Gari's irrationality and inconsideration that are reminiscent of the authorities' heavy-handedness in Operation Murambatsvina. The

terrifying awareness that she cannot find help, the helplessness of the children she cannot protect and the tension-filled speculation about Gari's whereabouts reflect intensely on the lack of family safety nets which also (easily) translates metaphorically into a dearth of social safety nets in the advent of Operation Murambatsvina. This familial handicap, signified in the person of Gari, comes to function more as an allusive precursor to the reproduction of the same defect, now at the national level, when victims of shack demolitions find no security from their "political fathers" and (just like Ruva, Onai's eldest daughter) have to deal with their "fiery but impotent anger" (3).

The setting of the novel, Mbare (where much, but not all, of the action happens) helps the author historically to contextualise the fictional narrative, and at the same time to sketch the novel's intended "meaning" effectively and vividly. In the racial politics of colonial housing, Mbare was demarcated a native suburb for blacks working in menial jobs in Salisbury, both as an "apartheid" segregative mechanism and a hegemonic tactic to have blacks compartmentalised in surveyable areas. The increasing rural-urban migration pattern resulted in the overcrowding of the suburb and that, coupled with the government's neglect, led to its condition of squalor – which has become a permanent feature of the area up to the present. Since the colonial period, Mbare has functioned as a 'dropping zone' for emigrating rural blacks, because it hosts the only long distance bus terminus for the city of Harare. The resultant population density that still characterises Mbare today is therefore a striking sign of the suburb's neglect and further deterioration, even after more than three decades of self-rule in Zimbabwe.

Mbare's history of overcrowding, neglect and anarchy makes it a suitable site for the scripting of the convincingly imagined social impact of Operation Murambatsvina in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. The represented worlds of burglaries, illegal shack dwellers and vendors (in the text) is given more urgency and impetus when read in the context of these historical facts. Mbare (in the novel) is home to Mawaya, the ritual vagrant, because the "*kutanda botso*" ritual he is performing requires him to experience extremes of poverty and suffering, but it is his description as we first encounter him in the novel that resonates with what Mbare has done to its habitants:

> The man occasionally stopped by her house to beg for something to eat. Quite frequently, she had spotted him competing with stray dogs for rare bits of food from

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> people's bins. Nobody could afford to throw away anything that was remotely edible, nowadays. These were lean times and it showed. Both Mawaya and the neighbourhood's stray dogs looked like walking skeletons. Mawaya's cheek bones jutted out like twin peaks on his gaunt face. Onai had no doubt that under his mass of rags, you could count the bones of his ribcage. (57)

The emaciated images of Mawaya and the stray dog become metaphors of the anguish of life in Mbare, metaphors which highlight the degree to which the residents of Mbare have suffered and do not deserve further calamities. With this vivid description of deprivation, the author stimulates the reader's imagination to perceive such a man as one who has been pushed down to the level of dirt and in so doing "guide [the reader's] attention" (Currie 98) to intense levels of commiseration with the man, which accompanies a deep abhorrence of the forces responsible for his situation. In identifying Mawaya with the dogs, the author is therefore not only "dirtying" Mawaya to prepare him (and the Mbare residents he symbolises) for the "dirt removal" of Operation Murambatsvina, but more importantly, to transform him and the Mbare victims into a figure of pathos deserving compassion.

In Shona culture, the dog is the most dirty and unhygienic of the domestic creatures (often contrasted with the "cleanliness" of the cat) and people who are despised are generally called "dogs".[48] We therefore envision Mawaya as symbolic of the dirt that is Mbare, and deserving of "cleaning". But the dirt here is given a human form to distinguish it from the infamous "maggots" as slum inhabitants were described by Augustine Chihuri, the Zimbabwe Police Commissioner, to stigmatising them as deserving mass clearance. Thus any attempt to "clean 'it' up" is exposed as inhumane. Dirt acquires an ambiguous significance. It is, at once, solid filth that should be cleared (in state narratives, this is the prima facie reason for Operation Murambatsvina, as signified in the Shona name "Murambatsvina" – one who detests filth), whilst (as Ashleigh Harris argues) on the political level, dirt becomes a symbol for all types of hurdles inhibiting ZANU PF's hegemonic control in the urban areas (49). For Harris, dirt has had political and sometimes racial overtones and undertones of exclusion and xenophobia since the colonial times when "[r]acialisation of dirt and illness played a significant role in justifying the creation of segregated African locations in colonial Zimbabwe" (41). Harris further notes how the ZANU PF government has similarly constructed the Third Chimurenga

[48] See Liveson Tatira's article "Beyond the dog's name: A silent dialogue among the Shona people."

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discourse as the final decolonising phase in which the country is returned to its "pure" state: "Mugabe places among the impure: the West; any political opposition to his rule; whites; and homosexuals, arguing, in each of these cases, that these 'impurities are *unAfrican*'" (44).

The dirt in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is pictured to us metaphorically in the form of the two emaciated bodies of Mawaya and the dog. As hinted to above, the "dirt" of Mawaya's state covers a human form, begging for food from Onai. This too takes a symbolic dimension. Mawaya becomes "dirt" appealing for and deserving help and not destruction. Any interventionist strategy that harms him further affects the reader to feel compassion with him and all the victims of Mbare who (later on in the novel) suffer the consequences of forced displacement. Compassion is evoked in the reader through the author's vivid descriptions of Mbare inhabitants' sufferings even prior to the demolition of hovels and vending stalls. Such vivid descriptions foreground the intensity of the people's problems, so that when the bulldozers finally come, the reader's compassion for the residents rises in direct proportion to the intensity of their crisis. This emotional impact of Tagwira's descriptions can be largely felt, for instance, if one considers the fate of another victim of shack clearances, the AIDS patient Sheila and her child. This is how they are described before the operation:

> Suddenly, Sheila's loud, racking coughs emanated from the shack and broke the noon silence. A grubby baby girl crawled cautiously out of the shack and looked apathetically at Onai. Her eyes were like pools sunk deeply within her skull. Sparse wisps of hair covered a scalp festooned with ringworm. Her undersized vest was overstretched tightly across her abdomen. She wore a dirty-brown nappy that looked no better than a rag. Emaciated limbs seemed to stick out from her distended belly, which accentuated her thinness. (60)

The physiological images of sickness, pain and total hopelessness not only tell the whole story of the dystopian space occupied by the poor, but more importantly, they are invested with affect and "illocutionary force" (Lara 5) which induce in the reader a hostile perception of the authorities. The implicit sense of social injustice readies the reader for the shock of experiencing even more catastrophes added to the slum dwellers' wretchedness by Operation Murambatsvina.

Additionally, Tagwira's subtle condemnation of the mass displacement of poor urban dwellers can be realised in her characterisation, descriptions of action, setting, dialogue and symbolic allusions. Arresting descriptions of the aftermath of the bulldozer's demolitions in Mbare, "emotionally [guide]" (Currie 98) the reader to experience the pain of loss and homelessness. In the process, (as Nussbaum argues), the judgment that the other person's distress is bad" (*Upheavals* 302) is generated. That "judgment" is felt strongly as the reader encounters the events leading to the destruction of Hondo's house and his subsequent suicidal death. Hondo is a veteran of the liberation war whose house to him symbolically as well as actually represents his reward for his participation in the national liberation struggle. In the wake of the demolition, the sense of the magnitude of this destruction foreshadows his own demise:

> When the work [demolition] was completed, the remaining rooms stood in the early morning sun looking crooked, casting an irregular, unhappy shadow over the ground. It was only a figment of Onai's imagination. Shadows had no capacity to feel or show human pain. The demolition team left for the next house in the line without a backward glance. (151)

The irony of the 'bad in good' is unmistakable as the deformed remnants of Hondo's house pollute the beauty of the morning sun and in the process sensitise the reader to the onset of the ensuing chaos and woe. The moving image of Hondo's "distraught" wife in Onai's embrace further discloses the emotional terror that afflicted the victims.

Nussbaum describes compassion as motivated by a context of inability to influence outcomes: "valuable things are not always safely under a person's control, but can in some ways be damaged by fortune" (*Upheavals* 314-315). But where the "fortune" is man-made, the suffering tends to intensify as the victims become conscious of the preventability of their fate, but are unable to convince those harming them to stop. Such is Hondo's calamity. Tagwira inverts traditional gender stereotypes to show his psychological devastation, not only at contemplating the destruction of his house, but most importantly, upon registering the callousness with which the people whom he sacrificed his life to liberate now destroy his only independence "trophy", the house:

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> Was this the reward for his sacrifice? How could this happen to him of all people? Flinging his hands in the air, in a heartfelt display of anguish, he cried out again and again: 'why? Why? Why? Nobody could answer him […] They did not know what it really meant to have fought in the war of liberation; so despite having also lost their homes, they could not fully identify with the sheer magnitude of his pain. (152)

Unlike his wife who accepts Onai's consolation, Hondo's dejection leads him to a ghastly suicidal death in spite of the advice – too matter-of-fact and insensitive to alleviate his outrage and sense of betrayal and devastation – to "be a man [and] get over it" (Tagwira 152). In this distressing portrayal of the demolition of Hondo's house and its agonising result, the reader is moved by the power of the description of the characters' pain to perceive the harm wrought by the slum demolitions. The empathy aroused by images such as the laconic description, "the train's wheels had sliced him across his torso and abdomen" (Tagwira 152) moves the reader to a state of passionate sympathy with Hondo and a deep condemnation of the system that has killed him. In this way, the author's vivid fictional depiction can be read as an affective way of adding an interpretive, personal voice to the descriptions of the historic crisis – one that arouses denunciation of the callous irresponsibility of those in power. More importantly, the pain pervading Hondo's life-world may be read as demystifying the official master fictions that projected the slum demolitions as benignly intended and executed in the interests of the urban population to return Harare to glory as the 'sunshine city'.

Tagwira's bleak portrayal of Hondo's losses draws the reader affectively away from the optimism of state rhetoric. The fictionalization of human experiences of the slum demolitions show the agonistic potential of narratives of pain which enable them to solicit compassion and expand the boundaries of what the state demarcates as important. Compassion here fuels indignation and moral condemnation as politically oppositional energies. In this way Tagwira's narrative participates in the public sphere as a forceful political 'statement' without being an overtly political text (or tract).

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt conceives of power as "correspond[ing] to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (*On Violence* 44). But as Gramsci asserts, hegemonies are not always created and maintained by willed consent of the ruled ("Selections" 3). This means that

whenever the ruler fails to get consensual empowerment, the immediate option at his/her disposal is coercion. The literary works discussed in this chapter take, as their focus, the various faces of non-consensual power and the resultant socio-political dystopia it precipitates. Read in the context of evident state hostility towards alternative voices commenting on the socio-economic and political problems of the time, the fictional works demonstrate a complex engagement with reality that goes beyond simple mimetic representations. In the process, the literary works do not merely resuscitate (through their various elements of representation) the drowned and persecuted voices that challenge power and its attendant "regime of truths" (Hall 49), but more importantly, they persuasively and iconoclastically hold them up as necessary participants in the urgent process of reinterpreting the major forces shaping space-time – as Lara says: "each new and broader narrative gives new meaning to society's own larger narrative" (93). The plurality of voices made possible by the entrance of imaginative narratives in the public sphere creates an opportunity for a holistic comprehension of the situation as previously dominant and unchecked narratives begin to be questioned and their veracity evaluated. In this view the human consequences of Operation Murambatsvina may not be adequately understood without imagining the pain that overwhelms Hondo (and other victims of Operation Murambatsvina) which leads him to a horrific suicidal death under the wheels of a train (in the novel *The Uncertainty of Hope)*. Neither can we fully comprehend the dangers of "fetishistic power" (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 111) of bastardised historiographies and narrow nationalisms of convenience on the national political level if we do not experience it at the micro-level of the injustice of the paternal episteme that demands forever to be recognised as the sole familial point of reference for cultural and political conduct in the short stories "Hands" and "Idi". In the next chapter, I extend the analysis of literary contestations of hegemonic narratives of the crisis, this time placing especial emphasis on how contemporary Zimbabwean literature re-discourses and re-evaluates the blue-print for the state's political conduct during the post-2000 period – the Third Chimurenga.

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CHAPTER 3: THE CONTROVERSY OF 'NATIONAL INTEREST'

Introduction

The preceding chapter (particularly my discussion of the short story "Hands") explored the tensions inhabiting post-2000 Third Chimurenga constructions of national identity. The critique of hegemonic imagining of the nation as a protégé of select political actors who claim its ownership through the act of ruling it hints at the complexity of defining the 'national interest' in this period. The marked political and ideological polarity characterising the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe complicates any delineation of what constitutes (or what is in) the 'national interest'. The question of 'national interest' brings forward the problem of definition – not simply asking: what is (or is in the) 'national interest', but more importantly, what, in the political matrix of 'the nation', informs its 'interests'? As revealed in Chapter 1, the post-2000 Zimbabwean political sphere is cluttered with hegemonic and counter-hegemonic attempts to redefine and reconfigure notions of nationhood. This politicisation of the concept of the nation makes it almost impossible to locate a single and valid or inclusive definition of the nation that fixes the elasticity of its manifestations and makes it impervious to the constraints of politics and other contemporary hegemonic demands. This chapter is concerned with conceptualisations of the 'national interest' supplied or implied in selected literary works published post-2000. The chapter delineates an emergent but discernible trend in the literary texts that situate themselves in the trajectory of broader dominant political discourses, in the process configuring variant notions of 'the national interest'.

In post-2000 Zimbabwe, the land question has emerged as the main focus of state-inspired modes of understanding the nation and its 'interests'. It is, therefore, imperative to explore cultural responses to and renditions of this approach to the problematics of imagining 'the nation' during the period in question. In this chapter, I explore the relationship of the selected texts' "subject of content" (Primorac, *Tears* 49) to state narratives of land (and belonging to or identifying with it). My analysis focuses on the focal texts' engagements with the crisis as it relates to the Third Chimurenga. It explores the various ways through which the literary texts not only politically relate to the Third Chimurenga narrative, but also how the texts go

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beyond what is already known about the crisis to engender a re-thinking of the role of creative fiction in imagining the postcolonial nation. I view hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of land and national identity as defining contrasting notions of the 'national interest'. Focusing on the blurring of 'social' and 'hegemonic' interests is crucial to a study of this nature, because it signals the instability and often discrepant tendencies of the respective 'interests'. In order historically to contextualise the literary discussion within the broader empirical discourse, I map out a socio-political trajectory of the contemporary Zimbabwean time-space in which notions of the 'social' and 'hegemonic' interests flourish, giving especial prominence to the resurgent Third Chimurenga nationalism. In focusing on the literary works' relationship to the state's Third Chimurenga land discourse, I explore perspectives on political and social significance attached to land that are manifested in the literary works' systems of signification, discerning the contours of their social/public and hegemonic engagement.

Lara's conception of literary narrative as a form of "expressive rationality" (53) informs my attempt to read the literary works as subtle (and sometimes self-proclaiming) participants in discourses on the land question and national identity. As Dominick La Capra suggests in his book *History, Politics and the Novel*, critical approaches to literary works (particularly novels) that seek to analyse the literary work's "symptomatic, critical and possibly transformative ways to [their] pertinent contexts of writing and reading" (4) must go beyond the "isolation often imposed by close reading" (5) in order to comprehend the complex interplay of reality and the artistic imagination. La Capra's comments subsume Bakhtin's conception of the novel as inherently "chronotopic", that is, the novelistic narrative as intricately and complexly intertwined with the vicissitudes of space and time. In view of this, I read the literary texts in this chapter as cultural products proffering particular kinds of ideological and moral vision that relate in complicated ways to the politics of, (and) definition and execution of the dominant (hegemonic) notion of the 'national interest' around land. My discussion therefore centres mostly on the interplay of literary art and debates for and against the philosophy and praxis of 'land reform' in post-2000 Zimbabwe. I view the constructed world of the focal texts as creating particular notions of the land issue which can be read as relating (avowedly or unavowedly) to the empirical Third Chimurenga grand narrative, but also to other contemporary social discourses. My interest in epoch-specific forms of imagining the nation in literary artefacts is, however, informed by a full consciousness of the danger in critical approaches that are "either narrowly historicist (in

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reducing [literary] texts to mere documentary symptoms of contexts) or formalist (in isolating and remaining rigorously but ascetically – at times rather preciously – within the internal workings of a text)" (LaCapra 7).

Evidently, the political establishment (especially in the period under study) has taken centre stage in defining (and sometimes imposing its notion of) land reform and nationalist identity constructs as the nation's most urgent interests. This interpretation of the 'national interest' is apparently and tactically steeped in genuine popular concerns linked to the unfinished business of decolonisation. In the context of the Third Chimurenga's prioritisation of past racial injustice as the present-day basis for policy and action, I explore the contemporary evolution of certain Zimbabwean literary works towards a political or hegemonic function, where a discernible thematic strand reinforces the state's rhetoric and line of argument; and also the revisionist attitude of some texts that reconfigure conceptualisations of land reform as 'the' central national interest. In probing the state of the discourse on land and national identity in the cultural sphere, I invoke the focal texts to reveal a complex (and sometimes evident) thread of relationship to the emergent Third Chimurenga nationalist discourse, focusing particularly on how some texts (*Coming Home* and *The Chimurenga Protocol*) evince an endorsing sensibility towards the state's Third Chimurenga discourse. I conceive *Coming Home* and *The Chimurenga Protocol* as 'alternative' narratives because they engender a pro-establishment aesthetics which not only echo the ruling ZANU (PF) party's Third Chimurenga politics, but problematise prevalent criticisms of the Third Chimurenga land reforms as a political campaign gimmick. My analysis of short stories in Lawrence Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories,* on the other hand, focuses on how they create a counter-discourse to state projections of the land reform and engender a rethinking of the Third Chimurenga (especially in its manifestly partisan and racial outlook), reconfiguring instead the importance of some generally unspoken and obscure(d) imaginings of the land and national identity.

Re-imagining and re-casting 'us' and 'them': ***Coming Home*** **and the contemporary resurgence of race-inspired nationalism in post-2000 Zimbabwe**

It is no longer adequate to imagine postcoloniality in literary-critical discourses as simply articulating an ideological theory and methodology of challenging self-serving myths in colonial European representations of Africa and Africans in the European canon of modernist

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grand narratives, which (as Ania Loomba asserts) were used by imperial societies "to impart Western values to the natives, constructing European culture as superior and as a measure of human values and thereby in maintaining colonial rule" (76). Although it seems that the impulse of "writing back to the empire" is waning, proponents of the Third Chimurenga discourse in Zimbabwe believe in the constantly metamorphosing forces of colonialism and a necessary perpetual formulation of counter-measures. Land reform and national sovereignty were (and remain) the mainstay of liberation ideology and independence. Therefore, for a nation like Zimbabwe which went through a protracted liberation war to achieve political independence, the most meaningful way of 'litmus-testing' the postcolonial present is to engage with the discourses with which the post-independence political establishment has managed or attempted to sustain self-rule and address pressing, colonially induced problems – chief among them, the racially inequitable distribution of land and wealth.

In contemporary Zimbabwe, the Third Chimurenga discourse that emerged to deal 'decisively' with the land question projects the colonial past as an important – indeed permanent and enduring – point of reference in its present search for justification, legitimation and even methodologies of land reform and national identity construction. It is in this context that the transitional (colonial-independence) setting of Olley Maruma's semi-autobiographical novel *Coming Home* becomes an important site to experience not just the authorial narrativisation of history and ideas, but also the convergence of the political and ideological implications of that authorially narrativised past with the state's versions of that past, which allows the novel to grapple with what Stefan Helgesson calls "the underlying logic rather than just the effects of a particular historical moment" (235).

What makes *Coming Home* a unique contribution to the burgeoning and diverse post-millennial Zimbabwean literary corpus is its subtle affirmation of the Third Chimurenga that is given impetus by its semi-autobiographical texture. The novel's back-cover blurb offers the initial hint at its 'patriotic' inclination: "In many ways, the novel skillfully unmasks the root causes of the West's hostility and demonisation of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe since his government's nationalization of farmland formerly owned by Rhodesian white farmers of mostly Anglo-Saxon origin" (Book cover). Without overemphasising the analytical value of this claim, I contend that it indeed highlights and justifies my intention to read the novel as a 'patriotic' literary narrative subtly aligned with the state's defensive Third Chimurenga rhetoric. Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization concerning speech genres can be

invoked to explain *Coming Home*'s cosy relationship with the Third Chimurenga discourse. In his distinction of what he calls "secondary (complex)" and "primary (simple)" speech genres in the essay "The problem of Speech Genres", Bakhtin categorises the language of imaginative literature (particularly the novel) as a secondary speech genre which acquires complexity in the process of "absorb[ing] and digest[ing] various primary (simple) genres" ("Speech Genres" 62) into its own system. As a complex utterance, therefore, the novel becomes a convenient site to encounter a wide range of processes, ideas and perceptions about time-space, since it is a product of the compaction of many "primary speech genres" that have a direct relationship with the real world. Transposing this Bakhtinian conception into an analysis of Maruma's novel, it can be argued that this novel (unlike much of the literary works published in the last decade) projects a life-world that (when read in the context of the historical and political context) may be largely interpreted as a "complex or secondary speech genre" supporting the government's political conduct, particularly the land redistribution exercise and other black empowerment policies encapsulated in the Third Chimurenga.

Coming Home's contribution to the contemporary debate on the politics of land ownership and the attendant discourse on race can be located in the quasi-autobiographical guiding narrative of the first person narrator and protagonist. My analysis therefore attempts a reading of the narrative voice and plot as constructing a radically discursive counter-discourse to white supremacy in the Third Chimurenga fashion. The narrative chronicles part of Simon's life that coincides with the end of his expatriate educational sojourn in England where he obtained a Law degree. Simon returns to a country undergoing a transition from colonial to black rule. The setting (a transitional period) effectively shifts the modern reader's mind back into the historically familiar past where the narrator's 'witness' account becomes the sole authoritative source or window through which the reader experiences a past repackaged to the taste of the narrator. The setting, therefore, allows for a 'strategic' relapse into the colonial life-world, where the reader (re)encounters the problems of white supremacy and black subjugation and starts to re-imagine their political and ideological significance on the post-independence side of the transition.

As hinted above, *Coming Home*'s semantic effect is intricately bound up with the construction of the narrator as an intellectual.[49] This narrator and narrative framing are given impetus by Simon's academic discipline – Law – which projects him as the voice of reason and justice. While race occupies the center of Simon's worldview, personal relationships and conduct, it most importantly informs the very narrative of the nation in transition that comes to us by means of his narration. A closer look at narrated instances of racial prejudice experienced by Simon situates his bitterness in the wider anti-colonial/Britain movement that forms the bedrock of the empirical Third Chimurenga. A critical observation that Simon makes as he scrutinises the transitional society (and one that feeds into the contemporary Third Chimurenga demands for at least total equality and at most black superiority) is that the white citizens do not only behave as if superior to the blacks because they own land, but because they *undeservedly* own it. Apparent in his descriptions of every racist moment and situation he encounters upon his return from England is a deep sense of disgust at and abhorrence of white supremacism; this appeals to the reader as a sign of anger building up whenever Simon is denied his sense of belonging to his original home by an outsider – as it would in any self-respecting native-born person. This fury leads to Simon's invocation of his intellectual arsenal to expose the false premise of his racial debasement, as can be seen in his encounter with a group of white supremacist Rhodesian soldiers. Here, Simon responds to a cruel shove by a Rhodesian soldier with vituperative criticism of the false basis of a belief in white superiority and the misplaced pride which to him shows up the soldiers' song, "Rhodesians Never Die", as a self-deluding temporal construct soon to be demolished by the 'real' black owners of the country:

> It [the song "Rhodesians Never Die"] was an ironical comment on Clem Tholet's curious notion of national pride, that he had conveniently forgotten that the "enemies" whom the Rhodesians wanted to prevent from "coming in" were, in fact, the indigenous sons and daughters of the land, whose blood was being spilled in the name of freedom. They had taken up arms against the white rulers because they were no longer prepared to live as serfs in the land of their own ancestors […] As the three soldiers went past

[49] We are reminded here of the unprecedented emergence of political intellectuals who created and circulated pro-state knowledge about the crisis. For a detailed study of the role of such intellectuals in the making and unmaking of a patriotic historiography of the post-2000 crisis, see the books *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* by Blessing-Miles Tendi and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's *Do Zimbabweans Exist?: Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State*.

> me, the one closest to me deliberately staggered into my path, knocking me hard against the wall. He was a blonde boy with a pimply face and a snub nose. (18)

The "stagger[ing] into [Simon's] path" (18) makes a striking and pertinent symbolic allusion to colonialism's violent disruption of the indigenous society. It can also be read as a symbolically revealing action indicating an invalid attitude of white supremacy glaringly in need of correction. The Rhodesians' pride is thus shown to be founded on loose ground – stolen land – a basis whose unsustainability, as Simon says, is exposed by the natives' resolve to fight in order to regain their own (now occupied) territory. Read in the context of a post-2000 Zimbabwean public sphere marked by autochthonic considerations of nationality[50] the white world crumbles as a result of its failure to distinguish between what is 'home' and what is 'foreign' land.

As hinted at above, the delineation of Simon as a studious intellectual endows the narrative with a scholarly quality that affects and influences the reader to accept the narrator's world view as brute fact. More than functioning as the narrative's and plot's lever whose voice is the only source of information about the state of the nation in a transitional period, Simon's descriptions of his life, acquaintances and occupation reflect on the politics of race relationships and national identity. Descriptions of Simon's place of abode (The Avenues), work place, family and social places are invested with subtle social and political commentary. Simon's place of work, home (both his urban and rural one) and drinking outlets emerge as sites of substantiation anchoring and certifying his nativist conceptions of the nation.The racial prejudice underlying these spaces connects whites in Zimbabwe-Rhodesians to those in England whose racist disposition is still fresh in Simon's mind. This construction of white identity reveals what Simon calls "a lingering hangover of imperial nostalgia" (32) which justifies their (whites) jettisoning out of the new Zimbabwe imaginary. Evocations of space can thus be read as producing a socio-political commentary on race and economic and power relations which relate avowedly with the Third Chimurenga's anti-white crusade.

[50] I am thinking here of the renaissance, renditions and wide circulation of such "patriotic" anti-white liberation war songs as Cde Chinx's *"Maruza Imi"* ("whites are losers") in the post 2000 era. This kind of music propagated and dispersed the emergent anti-white turn of black nationalism – almost in the same way that (a few years later) Julius Malema's 're-discovery' and singing of *"Dhubul'i Bhunu*" ("Shoot the Boer") created racial frictions amid revisions of land ownership and black empowerment policies in South Africa.

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The Avenues (where Simon lives with his cousin Samson) carry a symbolic significance as testimony to black people's reclamation of territory and re-assertion of their racial equality. Black people's economic potential is inscribed in the symbolic 'success story' signified by Samson's Avenues flat and encapsulated in the following description of the flats: "the comfortable Avenues […] had formerly been reserved for the whites under Ian Smith's colonial settler regime […] Ian Smith and his cohorts had been forced by the heat of battle to *grudgingly* concede that the days of racial segregation were over" (emphasis added) (2). More than simply guiding the reader's apprehension of racist policies inhabiting what Ranka Primorac calls the "Rhodesian space-time" (*Tears* 56), the description of space in the above quotation compellingly invites the reader to perceive the intransigence and ambivalence of whites on issues pertaining to redress of colonial imbalances. In the context of whites' actual reluctance to offer land for black resettlement in the pre-2000 period, awareness of their "grudgingly" conceding to black empowerment in this quotation obliges the attentive reader to draw parallels between the novelistic narrative and the Third Chimurenga's forceful expropriation of land for redistribution to blacks.

Like his urban home, Simon's rural space is depicted as an archive of colonial land and economic imbalances 'certifying' land reform as the indispensable corrective measure. Simon's subjective first person singular ('I') narrative acquires a representational dimension – what Robert Fraser calls the "representative 'I'" viewpoint (78) whose concerns strike the reader as a microcosmic evocation of the collective black national subject. Fraser's hint at the propensity of the postcolonial first person singular 'I' to morph easily into the collective 'we' proxy can be discerned in Simon's descriptions of the economic disparities caused by the racial land tenure system during his journey from Harare to rural Mhondoro. The journey motif functions more as an opportunity through which the narrative can amplify the scale of racial economic imbalance where the illegitimate inequality of racially skewed land ownership takes on firm political significance as Simon becomes fully convinced (in order to convince the reader) that black people's problems – their peripheral location in the trajectory of nationality – is born out of their loss of land and that they can, therefore, only achieve true liberation and nationality if they can win back the land. This is the very founding creed of the Third Chimurenga. Simon's journey to his rural home in Mhondoro becomes a metaphorical journey towards a form of experiential enlightenment that employs similar codes as the Third Chimurenga policy statements of black empowerment through land reapropriation. The rural setting provides Simon with all the paraphernalia of his nationalist argument and the signs

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and evidence he needs to buttress his prior, somewhat emotional and academic take on racial land imbalances in Rhodesia. The narrative first person singular is "explicitly construed as identical, and co-terminous, with the nation itself" (Fraser 77). Simon's story assumes a larger historical narrative style as he goes deeper into history to explain not just the colonial origins of the rural communal reserves, but more importantly, their historical existence as a clear proof and consequence of colonialism's untenable, racist land policies and exploitation of black people. The historical style of narrating events, causes and effects further validates Simon as a reliable narrator and informant, as can be felt in the narrative textuality of the following quotation:

> In 1930, the British colonial settlers, who had been granted self-rule by the British crown in 1923, enacted the Land Apportionment Act, which designated most of the best farming land in the area, "European Land". Reclaiming some of that land had been one of the main aims of the liberation war. (64)

To a reader who is au fait with the Third Chimurenga, the presence of established historical fact in the narrative text – something akin to what Graham Allen calls "intertextuality" (1) – not only endows Simon's critique with an impression of objectivity that easily passes for indisputable evidence in support of his attack on colonial prejudices manifested in the land tenure system, but subtly vindicates any corrective measure as due fulfillment of the revolution. Following Fraser's line of argument (above), Simon's seemingly private apprehension of racial dynamics vis-à-vis the colonial land and power economy can be read as not only ushering in a 'popular' political grievance characterising the colonial space-time, but as functioning (more importantly) as the Third Chimurenga land reform's very site of legitimation and justification.

Read in the context of Zimbabwe's post-2000 plunge into racial antagonism reminiscent of the liberation war and its setting in the colonial to independence transitional period, the narrative of *Coming Home* can be easily interpreted as not only subtly providing a case for the government's anti-white policies (especially land and foreign relations), but as lending itself to the anti-white grand narratives of the Third Chimurenga – where it begins to function (among the state's grand narratives of the Third Chimurenga) as a corroborating voice to the government's land reform policy. The novel reflects an obsession with actual national history which it re-creates and re-inscribes with a political urgency that is in sync with hegemonic,

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nativist delineations of the ‘authentic’ Zimbabwean identity. Invoking Fraser’s hint at the proclivity in the first person ‘I’ to function (or represent) the collective ‘we’, it is easy to discern how Maruma’s novel transcends the private confines and political persuasions of the narrator. In *Coming Home* (as in the Third Chimurenga grand narrative), the past is not ‘dead’ – it actually lives as the referential point to the political present.

Annalisa Oboe reveals the potential political commodification of the past in postcolonial novels:

> In the novel, the central temporal and spatial human co-ordinate is always the present [...] the past evoked by the novelist is no longer the unquestioningly ‘absolute past’ celebrated in the eternal language and immutable form of the epic; being addressed to/for the present, it rather becomes a ‘usable past’ which can be chosen and tailored. (20)

Zooming in on the aspect of ‘choice’ raised by Oboe, a closer analysis of the implicit socio-political commentary that can be inferred from Simon’s chosen incidents, events and ‘discoveries’ reveals a striking similarity with hegemonic interpretations of the same historical realities that have been ‘chosen’ and ‘used’ to legitimate the Third Chimurenga land reform process and the consequent anti-white spirit characterising the post 2000 period. As Simon journeys to his rural home, his narrative demonstrates a careful selection of reported colonial land and power imbalances which he impresses on the reader as justifying the autochthonous dimension of his nationalism.

The depiction of the colonial space-time in *Coming Home* reveals the novel’s implicit connection to the state’s deployment of that same past as defining and supporting its legitimation wars. The narrative chronicle of Simon’s visit to Mhondoro is loaded with implicit political commentary that prepares the reader for his eventual endorsement of ZANU (PF) and Mugabe towards the end of the novel. A critical dimension to the narrative’s focus on colonial injustice is Simon’s descriptions of the land and economic imbalance between blacks and whites. Here, the reporting first person singular narrative voice conspicuously becomes representative in the sense of Fraser’s assertion (above), affectively cajoling the reader to experience the reprehensibility of colonial black poverty and consequently to share in the logic of supporting the revolutionary ZANU (PF) and Mugabe. The racial land

ownership imbalances are narrated in a historical and persuasively factual narrative style that strikes the reader as brute fact to be internalised without further probing and (more importantly) lures the reader to perceive the justifiability of his ZANU (PF) political orientation. The reader is thus emotionally guided to experience the same awakening to the 'bare truth', to perceive the inequity of a racist system and consequently to affirm as valid corrective measures that (as hinted by Simon) involve the return of land to black people – the gist of the Third Chimurenga. In his description of the discrepancy between the black and white settlements, Simon puts a perceptible accentuation on land ownership which ultimately emerges as the 'maker' of the rich and powerful, whereas it is the lack of it which 'makes' the oppressed and poor:

> All along the route, there were lush green fields of maize and tobacco. In some open areas of the verdant fields, Jersey cows were grazing leisurely in scattered herds, their flywhisk tails swinging aimlessly in all directions. Outlined in painted stones against the hills on the left, were the words: KYNTYRE ESTATES, in huge white letters. On the right, irrigated fields covered with green stalks of wheat stretched as far as the eye could see. Occasionally, we drove past wretched looking housing compounds where the black farm workers lived. Most of these consisted of clusters of old grass thatched mud huts and crumbling ramshackle buildings. Many of the thatched roofs were so old that the dry, dark grey grass was falling apart. (64)

This description of the Blacks' dwellings (apart from its notable use of one of the Fanonian and postcolonial descriptive term, "wretched") signals black people's squalid existence, whose paucity is amplified by the contrasting 'obscenity' of the white farmer's plenty. However, Simon (being black and identifying with the impoverished and colonised labourers) does not seem to gaze at the white coloniser's wealth with the infamous "lust" of Fanon's "envious" colonised people (*Wretched* 30). Instead, the gaze that Simon gives to the plush wealth of the white farmer and master of the black servants is loaded with a subtle demystification of the injustice at the heart of the colonial Land Apportionment Act, whose racist intentions find conspicuous expression in the racial land discrepancies that metamorphose into racist power relations. To the conscious reader, the pithiness of the graphic juxtaposition of extremes, black poverty amid white wealth, provides a strong case for land redistribution as the pinnacle for total independence, a fact encapsulated in the "100% [black] empowerment" rhetoric of the Third Chimurenga. Land and economic

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empowerment become inextricably related in the political grand project of revising and re-auditing national independence.

Markedly, Shimmer Chinodya's novel *Harvest of Thorns* (1990) captures the same unjust land distribution vis-à-vis unjust colonial power relations more vividly, thus foregrounding the justifiability of Benjamin's response to the 'calling' of the liberation war as can be inferred from the following descriptions:

> The bus swept downhill, chugged through the townships, purred past the suburbs and cruised out into the green mountain flanks, into the wind, past breathtaking fields of maize and potatoes and sunflowers, whistling round bends through necks of granite jutting out to the very roofs of heaven. The passengers gazed at the rich farmland and indefatigable stretches of barbed wire claiming it. They looked out at hordes of blacks toiling in the green, the occasional sunhatted farmer strutting among them. They gazed at the khaki farm compounds of grass and dagga spinning past and the children waving and racing after them. (101)

However, an invocation of Bakhtin's principle of the "chronotope" to a reading of the strangely similar narratives reveals their disparate relationship to hegemonic grand narratives circulating in the post-2000 period. Besides its overarching 'post-independence disillusionment literature' thematic framing (which is forcefully conveyed through the metaphor of "harvesting thorns"), the anti-colonial tone of Chinodya's novel (a 1990 publication) may easily be read in the post- 2000 period as being 'caught up' in Third Chimurenga's revisionist emphasis on past colonial injustices. *Harvest of Thorns* both validates and ironises the liberation war effort. This may not be said (with the same kind of ease) about *Coming Home,* whose publication date (2007) discernibly coincides with a surge in 'patriotic' demands (and positive responses) to affirm state-circumscribed presentations and representations of the history of racial land and economic imbalances. While *Coming Home*'s date of publication does not necessarily bind its ideological treatise to particular temporal political persuasions, a reading of the novel inspired by Bakhtin's principle of the inextricability of novelistic meaning from the space and time of their production points to the novel's alignment with nationalist discourses that seek to re-cast and re-inscribe national identity formation.

Simon's journey to rural Mhondoro, therefore, becomes a psychological and intellectual movement towards a Third Chimurenga conception of total decolonisation that holds up the liberation war and black people's acquisition of land as flagships of any meaningful political independence. Again, unlike in Fanon's conception of 'lustful' colonised people,[51] the idea of land reform alluded to in Simon's description of the coloniser and the colonised appeals to the reader's sense of (in)justice and invites him or her to appreciate Simon's discursive and 'logical' conclusion – that in the post-independence epoch, land reform is imperative if such independence is to be real or complete. Land ownership becomes intricately linked with the attainment of racial equality, political power and true independence. Olley Maruma is here appropriating what seems to be a common trope in Zimbabwean literature – the concept of the colonially constructed "home" – to hint subtly but powerfully at the logic of land reform as a pre-requisite for true independence.

Charles Mungoshi's 1975 novel *Waiting for the Rain* uses the same trope of the colonially designated home to challenge the reader to judge the kind of (colonial) political system that warps a school-boy's sense of home and forces him to curse it in a touching and troubling diatribe:

> I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere – of some other parents […] What is here – in this scrub, in this arid flatness, in this sun-bleached dust to love? You go for mile after mile in this swelter and not here, not there, not anywhere is there a tree big enough to sit under. And when you look everywhere all you see is the naked white earth criss-crossed by the eternal shadow of the restless vulture. I have been born here but is that a crime? That is only a biological and geographical error. I can change that. (162)

Lucifer, the aptly named antihero in Mungoshi's novel (like Simon in *Coming Home*) not only finds home a repulsive and shameful place to come back to, but (most importantly) describes its lifeless aridity and the people's settler-induced cargo-cult mentality in a way that invokes (in the reader) a subtle condemnation of the real force behind the dystopia of this 'home' – colonialism. However, unlike in *Waiting for the Rain* where the reader is moved to

[51] In his famous description of the settler town, Fanon insinuates that exploitation 'cultures' the colonised to assume simple vengeful notions of independence that require the "take-over" of all of the coloniser's property and political position.

sympathise with Lucifer by a realisation that his entanglement is not merely a result of what Clive Christie calls “the accident of birth” (3), but that he is a victim of an alienating colonial education and a youth that have distorted his understanding of the deeper forces behind the problems of “home”, in *Coming Home*, sympathy for the colonised is courted through a mature and intellectual analysis of the dystopia of “home” by the Law graduate narrator, Simon. The anti-colonial sentiment discernible in both texts can be seen to relate differently to the Third Chimurenga’s own anti-colonial grand narrative. The “sociopolitical import” (LaCapra 11) manifest in the novels’ thematic and ideological framing situates the novels in different epochal discourses where their ‘literary meaning’ and social and ideological impact can be fruitfully apprehended in relation to spatio-temporal social, political and cultural discourses. In the same vein, the post-2000 space-time inhabited by *Coming Home* proffers unique social, political and cultural urgencies that make up “primary speech genres” (“Speech genres” 62) which transform into a more complicated system of signification – the combination of “complex speech genres” (“Speech genres” 62) that is the novel. In the following section, I extend my discussion of the burgeoning ‘patriotic’ literary canon in post-2000 Zimbabwe this time focusing on yet another new dimesion to the emergent state endorsing ouvre – texts which *openly* aim to affirm and legitimate the state’s land reform policies and attendant notions of national identity and sovereignty.

***The Chimurenga Protocol* as a ‘patriotic’ novel**

In the Third Chimurenga grand narrative, discourses of sovereignty – the nation’s self-sufficiency and self-determination – are founded on the dangers of perceived infiltrating forces which pose a threat to the nation’s sovereignty. Britain’s refusal to fund land reform in Zimbabwe is viewed as an implicit declaration of their intention to derail the people’s movement towards total independence and hence the rapid “fast-track land reform”[52] of the Third Chimurenga. The cultural sphere (especially its literary, theatre and musical dimensions) in Zimbabwe’s recent past has been faced with the political urgency of (re)defining the land question and its significance in the people’s search for self-determination and national identity. While evidently, many of the writers published in the post-2000 period have attempted to imagine ‘alternative’ national identities and sovereignties by means of narratives that create a counter-discourse to circulating state formulated

[52] In ZANU PF land reform discourse the term “fast track” is used to refer to the post 2000 land take-overs whose ‘fastness’ is premised on Britain’s alleged refusal to fund the ‘slow land reform’ of the yesteryears.

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conceptions, there is a marked and growing canon of literary works whose thematic and aesthetic texture resonates with the state's ideological grand narratives (as the foregoing section has already revealed). This is not, however, to subscribe to Peter Foulkes's reductive binaries of "conformist art and subversive art" (59). I argue, instead, that some fictional works construct life-worlds in which certain dominant state worldviews may either find subtle or overt affirmation, censure and or contestation. Foulkes's approach can, therefore become compatible with my own reading here if it assumes that it is in the realm of the fictional life-world that certain state world views are either confirmed or subverted, as he comes close to saying in his definition of what he calls a "demystifying art":

> [it is] by its nature a subversive and questioning art. It challenges habits and modes of perception, and produces new ways of seeing and interpreting processes and relationships. To do this successfully, it must be unpredictable, surprising, even shocking, and it must be inventive enough to avoid being submerged by an integration propaganda which will naturalise its technique in the guise of reproducing them. (56)

It can be said, too, that a work of art that can be read as "mystifying", that is, affirming certain dominant ideological worldviews, must demonstrate a similar 'inventiveness' that would remove its frame of reference from the domain of real or empirical propagandistic political tracts. In defense of his use of the metaphor "the novelist as teacher" in relation to his novel *Anthills of the Savannah*'s hard-hitting critique of emerging military regimes in Africa, Chinua Achebe described his notion of the "good teacher [as the one who] *draws* out [...] leading out, helping the pupil to discover…to explore" (emphasis as in the original) ("Interview" 141). Implicit in Achebe's argument here is the 'guiding' facet to narrative also identified by Carr as facilitating the process of perspectival sharing between the reader and the narrative. I invoke this notion of the narrative's 'guiding' capability to read *The Chimurenga Protocol* as (unlike *Coming Home's* covert and more subtle engagement with the Third Chimurenga discourse) a consciously political novel that blatantly attempts to 'guide' its reader to a sympathetic relationship with the Third Chimurenga's deployment of the "son of the soil" identity construct in the grand project of 're-establishing' the indigenes' 'true' independence and sovereignty through land reclamation.

Unlike *Coming Home* which uses the intellectual narrator to subtly guide us to share his Third Chimurenga-like worldviews, *The Chimurenga Protocol* is unequivocal in its overt

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reproduction of political and social interpretations and ideologies of ZANU (PF) in its narrative. The "Author's Foreword" is a convenient starting point in mapping out a working approach to the novel's 'patriotic' tendencies, because it summarises with clarity what can loosely be termed the novel's "authorial intention". The author blatantly defines his novel as a metanarrative in the 'service' of the broader hegemonic Third Chimurenga narrative, particularly its policy of land redistribution: "Thus the Land Acquisition Act of 2001 is an act of retributive justice to redress past injustice in land distribution. It is certainly not a senseless action as portrayed by hostile western governments and their ill-informed, relentless propaganda machinery" (12). On the government's foreign policy, Mtizira openly repeats the clichés of the state's anti-western nationalism, even replicating its stinging vocabulary in his crude, harsh condemnation of the British government's refusal to fund land resettlement in Zimbabwe: "the British government, in a cack-handed act of diplomatic lunacy committed the ultimate act of treachery" (12). Evident anger appears to inform Mtizira's affirming tone and justification of what he calls "the retributive justice" of the Third Chimurenga land reform, a trope that permeates the narrative of his novel. Most visibly and importantly, Mtizira openly proclaims his support for the political establishment, which he describes glowingly as "democratic" (13) and "visionary" (14). Mtizira reveals a demonstrable inclination towards the government's foreign policy and its stance on issues of national sovereignty and foreign (especially Western) influence in the country's domestic affairs. This overtly pro-establishment political orientation can be perceived in his explanation of the post-2000 economic 'crisis,' where he repeats the government's trademark scapegoat explanation – sanctions: "it is undeniable that the western imposition of punitive economic sanctions against sovereign Zimbabwe is a textbook of gross human rights abuse by the imperialist forces" (13).

However, Bakhtin's notion of novelistic "semantic openendedness" (*Dialogic* 323) refuses the author a monopolistic hold on the semantic reading of his creation. Bakhtin conceives of the novel as constituted of various "speech types" (heteroglossia) of which authorial speech is one (*Dialogic* 341). Besides the "authorial speech", therefore, "the speeches of narrators, inserted genres,[53] [and] the speeches of characters" (*Dialogic* 341) allow for multiple perspectives on the semantic or thematic unity of the novel. However, in *The Chimurenga Protocol*, I perceive such diverse voices as not only enabling the semantic effect of the novel

[53] The most patent example of which is the inclusion in the novel of an actual letter by British Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, written in 1997.

to be accessed through its "polyphonic" strands, but more significantly as validating and cementing the novel's semantic effect championed by its "authorial speech". While by their complex nature novels are prone to multiple perspectives and analyses, I comprehend *The Chimurenga Protocol* as demonstrating a discernible crystallisation of "speech genres" in support of the author's preconceived political intention – to support the Third Chimurenga practice of land reform and its attendant hegemonic political discourses.

My analytical focus is therefore on a semantic reading of the novel that gives especial prominence to the "authorial speech" and the way other "speech genres" appear to endorse its dictation of the novel's semantic effect. I delineate the "authorial speech genre" underpinning the political and ideological thread of the novel and discuss how other "speech genres" – characters, setting and direct socio-historical imports – corroborate the novel's patent pro-Third Chimurenga stance. In view of the above, a reading of *The Chimurenga Protocol* that "structurally" 'kills' the author and attempts to 'close-read' the novel without prioritising its "authorial speech" is doomed to overlook the novel's clear affinity to the Third Chimurenga grand narrative. In his overarching determination to 'fight the wars' of the state (declared in the preface), Mtizira immerses his novel in Third Chimurenga discourse, exuding a similar political and ideological flavour, made manifest in the novel's stylistic appropriation of a symbolic plot and a detective structure. Form, genre and meaning are inextricably bound up as the narrative is divided into three parts, each symbolically corresponding to the nation's historical stages from the first contact with imperialism to the Third Chimurenga epoch. My interest, however, is in the ways through which the first and second parts not merely build up to the final (third) part, but are firmly embedded in dominant, hegemonic projections of the actual Third Chimurenga as a logical and imperative culmination of the First and Second Chimurengas. In the novel's and indeed the Chimurengas' rhetorical (as contrasted with the historical) and structural logic, the interconnectedness of the three parts underlie its overarching invitation to read its final part (aptly tagged "Operation Mwana Wevhu")[54] as a teleological finale to the people's struggle against an untenable racist land and wealth distribution system. Concerning the novel's styling as a detective story, I analyse how the formal elements of detective stories discernible in the narrative can lend it to a reading as a 'patriotic' literary narrative. The most significant elements in my enquiry are characterisation and plot structure. I am particularly interested – not only in Mtizira's construction of the

[54] Meaning "operation child of the soil" – the mission given to the detective, Magura to recapture the protocol outlining the land reform process from the British-sponsored Chamunorwa in the third part.

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detective and antidetective/criminal figures, but more importantly, in how the characters acquire politically symbolic significance, particularly during what Dennis Porter calls the “logico-temporal gap” (29)[55] between the disappearance of the Chimurega Protocol and its recovery.

The compartmentalisation of structure is important to the reader’s apprehension of the political and aesthetic vision of the novel, especially considering its political message made manifest in its dedication to “the gallant soldiers of the First, Second and Third Chimurenga” (iv). Unlike the First and Second Chimurengas (which were marked by a general anti-colonialist unity of purpose), the Third Chimurenga is a contested nationalist phase that is usually identified with ZANU (PF). This is the first and clearest hint which indicates the novel’s pro-regime sentiment. In entering the space-time of the First Chimurenga and ending with a symbolic “operation” that successfully deals with “the empire’s treachery”, the novel creates an impression that its (political) ending is symbolically significant of ‘the solution’ to the protection of the national interest – the land reform process. As the title of the first part (The First Chimurenga 1896-1897) suggests, the fictional narrative is informed by the history of colonial land dispossessions – most importantly the spontaneity of the first armed native resistance to colonialism. The second part, “The Empire’s treachery”, is firmly situated in the historical circumstances of the post-independence era, particularly the “treachery” of Britain’s reneging from the Lancaster House promise to fund land reform in Zimbabwe; what ZANU (PF) perceive as neo-colonial attempts to derail majority rule; and its subsequent defeat at the hands of the Third Chimurenga symbolised by the recovery of the stolen Third Chimurenga Protocol in the third part of the novel.

The significance of the first part of the novel to a full discernment of the post-2000 resurgence of anti-white and anti-Western nationalisms of the Third Chimurenga can be best encountered in the novel’s ‘post-postmodern’ (re)construction of the ‘sins’ of the West’s colonial past to justify – not only the struggle for political independence, but most importantly, the expulsion of ‘unrepentant’ whites from the nation and the consequent black re-possession of and re-identification with the land. The novel encourages a re-imagination of an ‘authentic’ Zimbabwean identity premised on nativity and a past of colonial vulnerability that can be sufficiently corrected by land nationalisation and redistribution. The portrayal of

[55] In detective ficton, this is the ‘distance’ between the occurrence of a crime and its solution.

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colonists and subjugated natives in the first part of the novel reveals a discernible thread of conflicting binary opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed – forcefully configuring the native as an undeserving victim of callous foreign land invaders which evokes in the reader, a sense of strong detestation towards the colonist and inversely, a strong vindication of the rebellious and revolutionary spirit of the native fighter. The net effect of this proclivity to contrasting dualistic identities of the black oppressed and the white oppressor can best be understood in the context of the contemporary Third Chimurenga impetus to use the colonial past as the only basis upon which political and social transformative action against present land and economic injustice is premised.

The Chimurenga Protocol's deliberate setting in state-circumscribed notions of history is in apparent stark contrast not only with most post-2000 literary works' pursuit of re-interpretations and other fissures of history, but more importantly, the histories that have suffered neglect, erasure and fabrication in the hegemonic grand project. The first chapter of *The Chimurenga Protocol* begins with a hint at the setting of the narrative, which prepares us for a temporal journey into the colonial past: "Bulawayo: September 1896" (19). The space and time invoked here are important for an understanding of the narrative's preoccupation with especially awful aspects of the colonial land grabs. The date firmly situates the fictional events of plot in the broader historical and political epoch of the colonial moment where (just like in *Coming Home,* above) the re-lived experience of colonial plunder, butchery, the unfair racial legal system and total disregard for the native's humanity assume a certain immediacy and vividness that forcefully intensify the moral reprehensibility of the described injustices, especially to the modern reader. On the other hand, the place "Bulawayo" evokes the historical site of the first of the colonists' treacheries (the second of which becomes the narrative locus of the second part of the novel), where Cecil John Rhodes's emissaries John Moffat and Charles Rudd deceitfully persuaded King Lobengula, who ruled the Southern parts of the country, to sign what became the Rudd Concession that gave Rhodes the access to minerals (and later land) across the country. The setting of Bulawayo, however, can be most usefully read as a hint at the imperative of confronting the colonial trick, which is historically signified by the first armed uprising against the British South African Company that resulted in Rhodes's victory against Lobengula and a consequent eruption of the nationwide native revolt – the First Chimurenga – in 1896.

As in *Coming Home*, what makes the first part of *The Chimurenga Protocol* a fascinating contribution to the contemporary Third Chimurenga discourse on race, land and national identity and sovereignty is its preoccupation with depicting black people's estrangement from their land as the factor of their revolutionary action. This thematic thread may not strike the conscious reader as new to the Zimbabwean literary corpus. In fact, a good number of literary works published before and after independence engage with the value and significance of land and the rigours of living while estranged from it.[56] Yvonne Vera's novel *Nehanda* (1993), for instance, deploys the recreated figure of the spiritual medium Nehanda to reenact, not only the material value of land to indigenes, (but more importantly) their spiritual connection with it, which inspires their craving to regain it. However, the perspectival similarity such works share with the Third Chimurenga narrative is largely indirect, since their fictional life-worlds are clearly informed by pre-Third Chimurenga urgencies. The literary works, then, can be read as 'unconsciously' participating in the Third Chimurenga as its 'unconscious' sites for justification, or (according to Robert Muponde) as "veiled, perhaps unintended, complicities in th[e] 'Third Chimurenga' project" ("Land as Text").

However, while *The Chimurenga Protocol*'s thematic frame shows a discernible precedent, its overtly political and partisan texture demonstrates a unique demand to be read as a conscious metafiction in the service of the hegemonic Third Chimurenga master-fiction. Characterisation plays a major role in this novelisation of the Third Chimurenga race and land discourse. As LaCapra asserts, in fictional works that "contain programmatic elements in outlining desirable alternatives [such alternatives] would be embodied in the perspectives of characters" (4). The symbolically confrontational relationship between William Mason, the head colonist, and the captive native freedom fighter reveals what is cause and what is effect in the politics and sociology of the oppressor and the oppressed vis-à-vis the dispossession and the consequent fighting spirit to repossess land. Mason, described as "an emissary of Cecil John Rhodes, the former Prime Minister of the Cape colony" (21), takes on the face of the colonist in the first part of the novel. It is through Mason's actions, style of behaviour and principles that the reader is led to experience not only the antipathy of black people to land dispossession and their consequent colonial serfdom, but more importantly, the rational and moral validity of restoring land (and therefore power) to the indigenous people – the focal theme of the empirical Third Chimurenga. We first encounter Mason when he is

[56] Such literary works include Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, Charles Samupindi's *Pawns,* etc.

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described as “an adventurer in distant climes far away from England” (20), but shown to be suffering his first moment of terror. The object of Mason’s dread – the translated war cry of the Chimurenga wars, “Forward with the struggle for land” (20) – should be interpreted in the context of the novel’s re-inscription of the Chimurenga struggles for land and independence. The war cry, which is the first line of the novel and direct speech, is also markedly in the indigenous Shona language, “*Pamberi ne Chimurenga*”,[57] which carries connotations of the Third Chimurenga notion of the ‘perpetuity’ of the struggle against whites. The slogan, then, casts the native fighters’ struggle (Chimurenga) as the first in a series of struggles eventually won in the third part of the novel, which symbolically signifies the empirical Third Chimurenga.

Perhaps the most pertinent dimension of Mason’s character in view of my present reading of the novel as a deliberately hegemonic narrative is his immoderate racism, which effectively casts him as impervious to reform. This can be discerned in the barbaric ways in which he tortures the captured native liberation fighter, feeds him human waste and eventually kills him, “so that he feels the wrath of the white man” (26). Implicit in this construction of Mason’s abhorrent character is the permanent inscription of a denunciation and a subtle call for the natives to be prepared for successive counter struggles, which can be seen to eventually end with the natives’ reclamation of their land in the novel’s third part/Chimurenga. Mason’s depiction as a crude colonist does not merely hint at the racism of his future Rhodesian (and British) progeny that later generations of the captured fighter (represented by Magura in the third part) would fight, but also foregrounds the Third Chimurenga theme of Britain’s history of destabilising Zimbabwe. Mason emerges as more than a simple fortune-seeking or civilising agent – indeed as trailblazing Britain’s (and Rhodesians’) future interests in the country – as Mason reveals in his deliberations at the strategic meeting where he and Cummins are pondering tactics to suppress the native land revolt (the First Chimurenga): “We will not lose this war, Cummins, Her Majesty’s Government sanctions our mission and we plea allegiance to the crown. If we fail to crush this dissent, we may as well pack our bags and return to England as glorious failures. Is that what we want for the future generation of settlers?” (34).

[57] Literally translates as “Forward with the struggle”.

Britain's participation in the colonial project spearheaded by its citizens abroad is presented in a way that confirms its unclean human rights record, which (as Mtizira argues in the Author's Foreword) demythologises Britain's claims to champion democracy. Against the grain of widespread condemnations of the Mugabe regime,[58] Mtizira argues that "the nation of Zimbabwe remains a stable democratic country that needs no lectures from Western countries that practice the outsourcing of torture" (13). The striking defensiveness implicit in this 'exposure' of British hypocrisy for instance parallels Mugabe's 'advice' to the then British premier, Tony Blair: "Blair keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe."[59] This defensive trope is actually a distinctive feature of burgeoning reactionary 'patriotic' narratives and metanarratives aimed at creating counter-discourses to global criticism, especially emanating from Britain and other Western nations. Echoing Mtizira's self-justifying disposition is a frequently played song by Tambaoga[60] called "Agirimende" (popularly known as "The Blair that I know is a toilet") which 'nonsenses' and condemns Britain's persistent criticism of Zimbabwe's (especially land) policies by debasing his person and questioning his authority to comment on the situation in Zimbabwe. In *The Chimurenga Protocol,* British double standards and continuing neo-colonial interests (also captured in the aptly named second part of the novel "The Empire's treachery") become the basis for the formulation of nativist counter-policies as direct responses to perceived foreign (British) threats. In the same vein, the exploitative and disempowering effects of colonialism evocatively articulated through the moral bankruptcy and brutality of characters like Mason and Cummins in *The Chimurenga Protocol* associates the idea of land reform (such as that posited by the Third Chimurenga) with a national, pro-people and rational outlook. Also finding justification in Britain's colonial 'sins' is the Third Chimurenga notion of economic indigenisation captured in such slogans as ZANU (PF)'s 2000 election motto: "The economy is the land and the land is the economy".

Linked to the projection of Britain as a constant nemesis to Zimbabwe's sovereignty is the Third Chimurenga predilection for creating scapegoats by way of tagging in order to

[58] For a sustained discussion of the debate on democracy in post-2000 Zimbabwe see Chapter 5 of this study; Luke Zunga's book *Farm Invasions in Zimbabwe: Is Zimbabwe a Democracy*?; the book *Zimbabwe's Turmoil: Problems and Prospects* edited by Richard Cornwell and particularly Lloyd Sachikonye's *When a State Turns Against its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalized Violence in Zimbabwe.*

[59] At the 2002 Earth Summit in Johannesburg. See Ndlovu-Gatsheni's article "Making sense of Mugabeism in local and global politics: 'So Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe'" which discusses the nativist turn of nationalism and ZANU (PF) politics in the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe.

[60] Last Chiyangwa who is popularly known as Tambaoga is the front-singer of state-sanctioned propaganda jingles supporting the government.

condemn political opponents. In the propaganda booklet *100 Reasons To Vote ZANU PF and Cde. Robert Mugabe,* for instance, opposition parties (particularly the MDC) are branded "trojan horses", "puppets", "foot soldiers", etc., thus connecting them with perceived neo-colonial forces whose persistent involvement in Zimbabwean issues justifies the call for 'patriotic' vigilance in defence of national sovereignty. This political thread is not only conspicuous in *The Chimurenga Protocol's* symbolic construction of the aptly-named sell-out Chamunorwa[61] (who works in cahoots with British intelligence agents to destroy the land reform protocol), but is also relayed through what comes close to Bakhtin's concept of "inserted genres" (*Dialogic* 341) – British Minister Clare Short's actual letter to the Zimbabwean government refuting Britain's obligation to fund land reform in Zimbabwe. To a reader who is abreast of the historical significance attached to Short's letter in the Third Chimurenga grand narratives, the novel's vision of nationality, land and neo-colonial nemeses reads as overt duplications of empirical Third Chimurenga discourse. In the novel (as in the empirical Third Chimurenga), the letter becomes the logical pretext for the "fast track" turn of land reform and a nativist revision of nationality as bound up with descent. However, more than simply luring the reader to apprehend the vulgarity of British injustice, the novel projects the justifiability of a militant backlash akin to the Third Chimurenga land take-overs, as can be inferred from the Lands Director General's angry reaction to the contents of Clare Short's letter:

> As he re-read the letter, a quiet fury overcame him. What has possessed the British government in Whitehall? They have gone stark raving mad, he thought, shaking his head in disbelief […] This letter is tangible proof of British treachery and they cannot deny it, he thought in triumph […] If the British can arbitrarily break an agreement and refuse to pay for the costs of land reform in this country, then the contract that underpinned the Lancaster House agreement is no longer binding. Which means the door to the unthinkable is now wide open, he surmised […] In one ill-advised stroke, the colonialists had just returned the people's heritage to their rightful owners. (194)

Here, the world of the novel and that of the empirical Third Chimurenga intersect, each appropriating and constructing its ideological worldview using the same 'raw material' – the actual letter – and producing the same net ideological effect. As the fictional character reads

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[61] This is a Shona name that literally translates into "why are you my adversary?" – a rhetorical question pronouncing on Zimbabwe's indignation with British meddling.

a historical letter and comments on its political significance, the reader becomes aware of the political line that the author is drawing.

As revealed by Dziripi, in one of the many detective-like dialogues cum interrogations led by Detective Magura in *The Chimurenga Protocol*, the whites occupying Zimbabwean soil are still "settlers" (179) and therefore aliens with no rights to belong to or own the land. To this effect, Mtizira follows on Olley Maruma in *Coming Home* in depicting whites as incapable of attaining full postcolonial Zimbabwean identity. However, for Maruma, race and origins are not the only (or major) technical hurdle to the whites' assumption of a Zimbabwean identity. In *Coming Home,* White Rhodesians are depicted as willing to identify with (and to belong to) the land only in terms of their own illusory construction of it as the extension of England. However, while Maruma's novel creates a sense of whites as inspired by their sense of racial superiority and pride to freely decline membership of the black-ruled independent nation, Mtizira's novel projects the white race as a mark of their foreignness and basis for their disqualification from being members of the new nation. Mtizira's novel clearly delineates a deeply ingrained racial imagining of 'the nation' which accords with ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 rigidly discriminatory attitude to whites – exemplified by Mugabe's refusal to swear in Roy Bennett, the MDC's white nominee for the post of Deputy Minister of Agriculture in the Government of National Unity in 2009. At his party's 2010 Congress, Mugabe sarcastically lampooned the MDC for retarding the nation's march to total decolonisation and sovereignty by nominating a white person to government:

> Look at how they [MDC] worked with the settlers who destroyed us, turning us into semi-slaves. *Misodzi kutoti chururu kuchemera* Bennett. *Hanzi maelections ngaamire kusvikira Bennett apinda pachigaro*. *Kuita* swear in Bennett *inini* aah! *Zviripo zvimwe zvisingaitwe*.[62] (*Bulawayo24 Online,* "Mugabe will not swear in Bennet")

Mugabe's vengeful tone here suggests a disposition to 'think' the 'nation' racially.[63] His refusal to validate Benett's assumption of the Agriculture Ministry hence assumes symbolic

[62] "The MDC are shedding tears because I am refusing to swear in Bennett. They say elections should not be held until he is sworn in. Me swearing in Bennett! Some things are not possible."
[63] This topic is adequately addressed in Jocelyn Alexander's book *The Unsettled Land: State-making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003*; Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's *Do 'Zimbabweans' Exist? Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State* and Donald Moore's *Suffering for Territory: Race, place, and power in Zimbabwe*.

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significance. Firstly, as a descendant of British settlers,[64] Bennett is practically barred from belonging to the land and 'the nation' despite the fact that he was born there, speaks the indigenous Shona language and was elected as a parliamentarian for MDC. In fact, as Patrick Chinamasa revealed to Bennett in one of Zimbabwe's infamous Parliamentary clashes, the "white Zimbabwean" is, by the principle of *jus sanguinis,* a thief and murderer.[65] Constantine Chiwenga, the Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army, has also announced ZANU (PF)'s racial conception of nationality. Speaking at a political gathering in a constituency won by Ian Kay – a white MDC candidate – Chiwenga declared that the nation cannot be conceived of as liberated if whites are elected for public office:

> We want true liberation. We fought against the British, so what is this Boer (Kay) doing in this constituency [as an elected Member of Parliament for MDC] if the armed liberation struggle was a success? This time around everybody should put on a lion or crocodile skin and fight tooth and nail to regain the four constituencies won by MDC in Mashonaland East in March 2008. You did not work hard enough during previous political campaigns. (*The Zimbabwean Online* "No Boers in Zimbabwean politics")

In this undying or resuscitated spirit of racialised nationalism, the nation is "imagined [as a] community" (Anderson 14) of a shared race and history. Bennett therefore falls outside the 'imaginable' racial trajectory and consequently is defined as incapable of governing, or owning land in Zimbabwe – let alone leading the Agriculture ministry. *The Chimurenga Protocol* (especially in the second and third parts) constructs a fictional life-world that demonstrates the 'imperative' and feasibility of such conservative and nativist criteria of delineating and tagging nationals and aliens in the twenty-first century. This political aspect of the novel finds expression through the solving of the mystery of the "lost" Chimurenga protocol. The major sections of the second and third parts of the novel chronicle the disappearance of the Chimurenga Protocol – an essential document that contains the official government policy on land reform – and its dramatic recovery from 'the jaws' of Britain, keen on destroying it. Hamandishe Chamunorwa, a senior official in the aptly named Ministry of Land Reclamation tasked with overseeing and implementing the policy, falls prey

[64] Bennett's farm in Eastern Zimbabwe was taken over by the government. In 2004 Bennett was jailed by the Zimbabwean Parliament for initiating a scuffle with Patrick Chinamasa, the Justice Minister who had referred to Bennett as a spiteful man who could not "forgive[…] the government for acquiring his farm, but he forgets that his forefathers were thieves and murderers" (New Zimbabwe.com, "MP in punch-up with Ministers").

[65] See note 56 above.

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to the deceit of British intelligence operatives eager to sabotage the success of land reform in Zimbabwe. But before Chamunorwa can 'sell out' to the British and so handicap the land reform process, Panashe Magura the super-detective follows on his trail and just manages to foil the capture of the protocol and cut short the early celebrations of the British. However, the detective figure appears not only literally to bust the British's sabotage machinations, but more importantly (through the symbolic battle of Intelligence Operatives won by Magura against his British counterparts), to demonstrate what the novel projects as the nation's counteractive outmanoeuvring of the snags put in the Zimbabwean nation's way as it moves towards total decolonisation in the Third Chimurenga epoch.

The symbolic significance of the novel's structure is very marked, especially in the second and third parts. The structure helps the reader to situate the 'meaning' of the novel in the broader contemporary discourse of the Third Chimurenga land question in Zimbabwe. The name of the intelligence operation launched to recapture the Protocol, "Operation *Mwana Wevhu*", offers an important allusion on the novel's project as a "patriotic literary narrative". "*Mwana wevhu*", literally translating to "child of the soil", is the 'lost son' – Chamunorwa, the renegade custodian of the protocol – who must be stopped and realigned with the indigene's birthright, the land, before he sells it to the British. It would seem, therefore, that Chamunorwa's participation in the 'unholy' alliance with the British makes him lose touch dangerously with the very foundation of his being as a Zimbabwean – the land. Hence the operation is intended to rescue not only the land reform policy document, but also Chamunorwa's own wayward and traitorous disposition. Besides the fact that the term "*mwana wevhu*" (child of the soil) used by the novel was the popular phrase used by (and to identify) supporters of the Chimurenga war against the colonial regime and later the native government's land reform programme during the Third Chimurenga, symbolic events in the novel — such as the selling out of Chamunorwa; the involvement of the British in the disappearance of the protocol; also the eventual recovery of the protocol – discernibly coalesce into a symbolic version (re-narration) of the 'success story' of the empirical Third Chimurenga against all (especially British and Western) odds.

In *The Chimurenga Protocol,* genre does not simply "play a part in a character's predictability [where] a detective must, in principle, find the murderers" (Bal 124), but it (genre) provides a framework through which the 'criminality' of sabotaging the land reform process is vividly apprehended and internalised by the reader. Magura's diligence in his

search for the lost protocol suggests the certainty of success and the justifiability of his mission – the restoration of the protocol and thus, of the land reform process and black people's dignity. The second and third sections of the novel, therefore, cease to exist as simple crime fiction narratives. They acquire a firm ideological significance in tandem with the novel's overarching determination to support state notions of the Third Chimurenga land reform process. Magura's eventual recovery of the protocol, then, may be easily read as symbolically enacting the nation's defeat of Western neo-colonial machinations intended to sabotage the country's total disentanglement from the former coloniser. Just like Simon in Maruma's *Coming Home,* Magura's 'patriotic' disposition is founded on his firm conception of the validity of the indigenes' ownership of land to their attainment of full citizenship and 'true' independence. In this sense, Magura's detective identity does not make him a simple foil to Chamunorwa (the Chimurenga protocol thief), but functions on a symbolic plane as an ideological antithesis to the 'sell-out' disposition of Chamunorwa.

More than simply shifting the reader's sympathies from Chamunorwa, his construction as a round character whose 'moment of madness' transforms him from a 'patriot' Chief Lands Officer into a mercenary conduit of British neo-colonial interests gives Magura's detective mission (and its ideologically symbolic significance) impetus. The impact produced by the juxtaposion of the thief with the detective transcends the oxymoronic relationship of their 'traitor' and 'patriot' identities. In fact, as the novel ends and Chamunorwa recovers the lost protocol (while Magura dies a disgraceful suicidal death), the attentive reader will not lose focus vis-à-vis the novel's political function. Magura's speech at the end of the novel not only strikes the reader as a blatant recital of the actual ZANU (PF) political line of the past decade, but supports the novel's few moments of direct pro-ZANU (PF) sympathies. Magura's speech and the concluding remarks that follow demonstrate a fusion of the vision embedded in the constructed world of the novel with the real Third Chimurenga grand narrative, as can be deduced from the following quotation:

> Magura went on. Ever since 1896 every action directed by the British government towards indigenous Zimbabweans has been informed by a mix of greed and racial prejudice. But I am happy to say that the sovereign nation of Zimbabwe remains impregnable to colonial chicanery. The legacy of the Third Chimurenga is economic freedom and our people will enjoy the fruits of this momentous victory. Our President is an African icon, a courageous man who is ahead of his time. Future generations will

> thank him whole heartedly for his vision of a free and economically unfettered Zimbabwe […] Magura read the [newspaper] headline: LAND REFORM RESTORES DIGNITY AND WEALTH TO THE PEOPLE. (244)

In such instances of banal but patent pro-establishment rhetoric and other overt political allusions (like references to the historical Clare Short's letter) one is given confirmation of what the novel initially attempted to convey by means of a fairly subtle style – the support for land reform, as for the post-colonial political establishment and state-circulated notions of nationality. In the succeeding section, I shift focus to Lawrence Hoba's short stories in *The Trek and Other Stories* demonstrating how (unlike *Coming Home* and *The Chimurenga Protocol*) they critically engage with the state's Third Chimurenga narrative of land reforms and identity constructions.

The other side of the Third Chimurenga land reforms in short stories by Lawrence Hoba

From the foregoing it can be argued that writers are not exempt from social and political underpinnings of the forces operating in the empirical world. As Edward Said asserts (with reference to novels in particular), imaginative literary texts "are not *simply* the product of lonely genius […] to be regarded only as manifestations of unconditioned creativity" (emphasis in the original – 87). As the preceding sections have also demonstrated, there is reason enough to believe in the 'politicisation' of the artistic-literary imagination and a consequent need to explore further the intricate interplay between creative literature and the politics of Zimbabwe's dystopian socio-economic and political landscape of the last decade. While there are texts (such as Mtizira and Maruma's novels above) which champion state notions of the 'national interest', I use Lawrence Hoba's short stories in his collection *The Trek and Other Stories* to argue that alongside these (consciously and to some extent unconsciously) "mystifying" works, there are fictional texts about the post-2000 Zimbabwean land reforms possibly classifiable in Foulkes's classification as "demystifying art" (56). Basing my reading on Foulkes's general argument that "even though there are countless works of literature which, in Kafka's sense mythify, mystify and 'put us to sleep', there are also texts which 'awaken'" (35), I focus on how the 'literary vision' of Lawrence Hoba's short stories contribute to a "demystifying consciousness'' (Foulkes 59) of the Third Chimurenga's configurations of Zimbabweanness as an exclusive identity based on racial

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descent. I read Hoba's short stories as encouraging a complication and reconfiguration of such facile categorisations as the nativist and masculinist notion of 'real' nationals as "sons of the soil". In short, Hoba's short stories cast doubt on the Third Chimurenga's concept of land reform as (re)conferring full nationality on native Zimbabweans and ultimately realigning them into the "mainstream economy as leading voices and practitioners" (*100 Reasons* 16), hence my particular interest in the ways the short stories offer alternative perspectives on the land reforms to those proffered by the state's grand narratives and literary or other metanarratives.

Lawrence Hoba: a brief background

New Criticism's insistence on 'objective' analytical criteria and 'close reading'; Roland Barthes's structuralist insistence on "the death of the author" and Michel Foucault's notion (in his essay "What is an Author") of the "author's disappearance" (103) all seem to relegate the text's social and historical context to peripheral importance in favour of engagement with the text's inherent, telling signs. Foucault, in particular, invokes Samuel Beckett's influential question: "what does it matter who is speaking" (101) to buttress his idea of writing as a "question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (102). However, in my study of Hoba's short stories (below), I contend that studying or 'knowing' the author actually helps situate his or her work, not only in place and time, but more importantly, in relation to dominant epoch-specific discourses. Besides the text, the author and the historical context may command a significant "authority" in determining a text's 'meaning', as Edward Said asserts:

> There is first the authority of the author – someone writing out the processes of society in an acceptable institutionalised manner, observing conventions, following patterns, and so forth. Then there is the authority of the narrator, whose discourse anchors the narrative in recognisable, and hence existentially referential, circumstances. Last, there is what might be called the authority of the community, whose representative most often is the family but also is the nation, the specific locality and the concrete historical moment. (92)

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Said is here (to a greater extent) affirming Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony – in which a diversity of sources or voices within and without the text (especially in the novel) may all contribute to its literary effect.

My special emphasis on the "authority of the author" (Said 92) in the production of literary meaning is informed by the demonstrable influence of lived experience and milieu on Hoba's creativity and consequently the textual unities of theme, form and language. Lawrence Hoba is one of the young Zimbabwean writers who are variously identified in literary circles as the 'third generation'; 'born free' and to some extent 'oppositional' writers. Writing in a Third Chimurenga epoch where the dominant political creed demands certain loyalties and a very specific political orientation from certain age groups, and where most of the so-called 'born frees' have been associated with opposition political alignment, Hoba's youth easily becomes a factor in any attempt to retrieve something of the ideological substance of his literary works. This point is made more feasible and to some extent, plausible, by Hoba's apparent consciousness of the artistic and political 'burden' of his identity as a 'born-free' writer, as can be inferred in one of his earlier poems published online, titled "My politics". In this poem, Hoba (just like Mary Ndlovu in her short story "Hands" discussed in the preceding chapter) captures the otherwise deep-seated generational antagonism in Zimbabwean politics in the following lines: "Farewell/to our destiny/which we have again surrendered/to bitter old men/holding hands/with rehearsed camera smiles/promising us unity/they once shattered" (ll. 1-8). The speaker in this poem is defining his/her politics in terms of loss. The lost 'object' – "destiny" (l. 2) – implies a youthful life that can potentially grow and flourish, but whose progress is inhibited by the "old men". The unappealing description of the cause of the loss – "the bitter old men" (l. 4) – foregrounds the age-induced tension that becomes an age-induced political polarisation and conflict. In *The Trek and Other Short Stories*, it seems, the age factor manifests itself in the narrative view-point, since most of the short stories are either narrated by a child or by a recent university graduate whose sarcastic narrative tone reveals his marked detachment from the 'old' people's ideas and behaviour discernible around him.

The first short story in Hoba's collection, "The First Trek – The Pioneers", alerts us to one facet of the post 2000 period that has been 'tactically' excluded from the state narrative of the Third Chimurenga – the social and economic inconveniences of the land reforms. As revealed in my study of Mtizira's novel in the foregoing section, the novel (*The Chimurenga Protocol*) organises plot, action and setting around a pre-conceived intention to affirm the idea and

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praxis of the Third Chimurenga land reform process while evoking a negative image of all possible hurdles to the realisation of the project. In Hoba's short story, however, we encounter an impression of land reform that contrasts starkly with that offered by Mtizira's novel. In the fictional life-world of Hoba's "Trek" short stories, land reform is represented as ill-considered, badly-executed and not the panacea to black people's economic woes. "The Trek" is a trilogy of short stories in which a black peasant family's history is traced from the moment it leaves the unproductive soils of rural communal reserves,[66] resettles at a sugarcane farm taken over by the post-independence government from a white farmer and then goes back again to the communal reserves after failing to use the farm productively – and having been evicted by another powerful official. The journey motif operates on a symbolic plane, reflecting the futility of resettlement as the family gets entangled in the demands of the farming business and eventually (and ironically) finds peace upon their return to their previous rural home.

In "The First Trek – the Pioneers" the 'alternative' portrayal of the Third Chimurenga can be easily felt in the narrator's eccentric attitude to his family's resettlement attempts as he narrates the family's movement to and from the formerly white-owned sugarcane farm. This subjectivity is heightened by the short story's deft rendering of the land reform narrative from a child's view-point. There are several thematic and ideological implications to this type of narrative style which coalesce to bring out not only the narrator's impression of land reform (which appeals to his immature psyche as a form of simple house moving experience), but also the short story's subtle inscription of the darker, problematic side of Third Chimurenga kind of land reform process. In his commentary on the use of the child narrator as a narrative device, the writer Charles Lambert mentions some of the benefits that can be seen to accrue in Hoba's trilogy:

> One of the things I'm doing when I choose to use children as the channel through which the narrative is seen is what Henry James did with Maisie; I'm exploiting their clear-sightedness and innocence. Children see everything, but don't necessarily understand any of it. Whether they are protagonists or witnesses, they tend to be one step behind – or to one side of the attentive adult reader, which sets up an interesting narrative gap through which the unsettling elements can squeeze. ("Child narrators")

[66] Black settlements – largely a product of the colonial government's racist land tenure system.

While the child narrator (as Lambert implies) can see and interpret events as the narrative unfolds, in Hoba's short story this special emphasis on the gap in the narrator/narrative relationship is heightened by Hoba's own admission that, despite favouring a child-centred narrative, his short stories are actually targeted at an adult or mature audience: "I write for an adult audience. I think it takes much more to be able to communicate effectively with children. The choice was never made deliberately but it became apparent from story to story that the way I expressed myself was more for the adult audience than for children" ("Interview"). Hoba's comments here reveal his conscious use of the child narrator as a form of depiction that allows the author effectively to create specific impressions of the world for adult readers.

Michael Seraphinoff reveals how child-narrated stories such as Hoba's "The First Trek – the Pioneers" achieve seriousness: "Discerning readers will understand that [the child narrator] is a figure of literary invention, that his [or her] narration is the literary product of the adult researcher, organiser and arranger of the story" (3). In the short story "The First Trek – The Pioneers", the child narrator's "innocence and clear-sightedness" (Lambert par. 8) are sure to earn the readers' trust and sympathy and consequently would attach their understanding of the story emotionally to his line of seeing things and also to his arguments. The narrator's prominence as the only narrative source puts him in the category of narrators that Mitchell Leaska has called "narrator-observers" (164). For Leaska, "[b]ecause the narrator-observer, in reporting his story, is simultaneously interpreting that story, the reader's response to it and to his [or her] interpretation of it will inevitably be influenced by the impression he [or she] gets of the narrator, himself [or herself]" (164). Zooming in on the child's evocation of his 'new farmer' parents imagined with his characteristic, 'innocent' child-like keen attention to detail, one realises the Magudu family's opportunism that foreshadows their eventual degeneration into forlornly incapable farmers. The changing fortunes of the Magudu family (like the ill-fortune of the dispossessed white farmer) are solely premised on nativity. The Magudu family is not only depicted as penniless and overwhelmed by the financial demands of large-scale commercial farming (being an impoverished family whose 'all' can fit into an old scotch-cart), but also as simple peasants without any understanding of what sugarcane farming entails. The family's poverty, the first sign that their impending farming venture will be a disaster, is captured in a telling description of what appears to be their only valuable asset, the ox-drawn scotch-cart:

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> The old scotch-cart makes its way slowly along the old beaten down track. 'JJ Magudu, Zimuto' lies scribbled on both sides in black paint against the dark rotting wood. The inscription must be as old as the wood on which it lies. I do not know who wrote it. Even *baba* does not know because one day I asked him and he said that only his father, who is dead, knew about it. The axle is almost broken and the old metal wheels, brown with rust, make a squealing sound. (1)

While in Zimbabwe's impoverished rural societies, the scotch-cart actually assumes a symbolic significance as a sign of material advantage (revealed in Hoba's short story by the signature of ownership in the inscription 'JJ Magudu, Zimuto' on the scotch-cart), it certainly becomes a symbol of material paucity in view of the Magudu family's newly acquired status as commercial sugarcane farmers. The scotch-cart, depicted here as the family's most prized asset (and inherited from past generations) is symptomatic of their poverty and under-equipped state – an impression that pervades the short stories to signify the peasants' incapacity and their inability to use the acquired land productively. The narrator's description of the economic impoverishment of his family is notably yet intricately linked with *baba*'s fecklessness as a father figure and farmer. In the eyes of our trustworthy child narrator, *baba* is a lazy and repellent patriarchal figure who is entirely out of touch with the basics of farming, let alone the political and ideological significance of the land revolution in which he is a participant. The irony of *baba*'s notion of farming – which appears to the curious narrator as consisting simply of inscribing a metal board announcing his take-over as the new owner of the farm – can be felt in the narrator's child-like, inquisitive exposé of his father's personality; an analysis which unfolds as he sits in the scotch-cart en-route to the new farm:

> A metal board leans against the plough, 'Mr BJ Magudu, Black Commercial Farmer, Farm 24' is crudely scribbled in white paint. I have never known *baba* wanted to be a commercial farmer. One day he had come home after he had been away for several weeks and told *mhama* that he had got a sugarcane farm, together with the farmhouse, that had been acquired by the government. *Mhama* listened solemnly. I think baba should have written 'MRS' instead of Mr. He never works in the fields. The farm will be *mhama's* to run […] I know tomorrow we'll all be busy, Chido and I will be discovering our new home, *mhama* will be exploring her fields. *Baba* will be

> gallivanting, searching for the farmer who might have brewed a few drums of thick, rich *masese.*[67] (2-3)

Baba does not make any attempt to learn the farming trade. The narrator's negative perception and judgment of his father's uncomely character suggests *baba's* irresponsible happy-go-lucky disposition, the direct opposite of the commitment required to make a success of commercial farming. The sarcastic tone in which the child narrator describes his father's extravagant priority (booze) confirms the narrator's (and the reader's) suspicion that *baba* can never be a successful commercial sugarcane farmer.

Baba's preference for booze rather than farm work evokes questions about the validity of his land acquisition when he cannot (and apparently does not want to) use it. To a perceptive reader, then, *baba* is not just an ordinary failure. His peculiarly unappealing character is symptomatic of the badly planned land reform programme that he champions. In the context of the Third Chimurenga mantra, "the land is the economy and the economy is the land",[68] the short story emerges as a subtly dissident voice exposing the unreliability of the racial premise of the Third Chimurenga. "The Trek" trilogy can, therefore, be read as evocatively depicting the 'evil' supposedly made 'necessary' as the agri-based national economy is sacrificed in the name of land redistribution and black empowerment. This dissenting attitude towards state rhetoric projecting black land ownership as the ultimate sign of total independence and full citizenship reveals a fascinating element to post 2000 literary imaginations of land and 'nation'. It signposts a clearly defined divide separating the politically sceptical or questioning quality of Hoba's short stories from the affirmative, state policy endorsing and 'patriotic' works in the mould of Mtizira and Maruma's novels (discussed earlier in this chapter) and also Mashingaidze Gomo's poetic narrative *A Fine Madness*. Gomo's work (which actually resists genre classification because of its peculiar style characterised by a fusion of poetic and prosaic narrative), for example, rhetorically endorses the government's argument on land redistribution by depicting a cosmopolitan and self-conscious soldier's voice attesting to an Africa-wide neo-colonial exploitation and theft of African natural resources, reinforcing the imperative of black empowerment through land reform: "Is it fair or wise that African people should applaud and/be a party to such a

[67] Masese is a name given to all types of traditional beer brews.
[68] ZANU PF's 2000 Election theme.

cause?/A cause tailored to see future generations of African/people permanently dispossessed and future generations/of white Rhodesians permanently and unfairly/empowered?" (33).

Focusing on the portrayal of new black farm owners and depictions of lives on the resettlement farms in Hoba's short stories, the overwhelmingly unsavoury picture of land reform presented here is unequivocal. The vocabulary and discourse of "Maria's Independence", for instance, unmistakably evoke the '*jambanja*'[69] image of land reform and its resultant retrogressive social and economic impact. "Maria's Independence", unlike "The First Trek", is narrated from the point of view of an adult whose rationality pervades the whole short story with an air of subtle irony and light humour that amplifies impressions of 'new' farmers' uncouth approach to their new function and status. The narrator (who also takes part in the violent acquisition of farms) is visibly torn between a feeling of restraint spurred by his conscience and a 'revolutionary' demand for "*jambanja*" (violence and chaos) in the eviction of white farmers. His better judgment constantly lurks behind his narrative account of his obstinate activities, creating, in the process, a tug of war between his violent farm invader self and his moral and rational self. This internal psychological warfare between the narrator's 'rational' consciousness and his participation in specious political activities manifests in the ironic tone in which he describes his activities as a member of the supposedly revolutionary land occupiers. The narrator, it would seem, is reflecting on his moments of irrationality with full awareness of the contemptibility of his conduct. In fact, as he finds out, some of his colleagues in the farms simply become too enthralled and hyped by the adventure of dispossessing white owners to care about the economic significance and value of the land to their lives:

> For on the farms we had rekindled the old spirits. We started holding all night *pungwes*[70] as in the liberation struggle. This was the third revolution and had to be treated as such if we were to fully understand what it was all about. For there were some who only understood what they'd involved themselves in after more than three months on the farms. (5)

[69] The word means 'violence' or 'chaos'. It is mostly used to refer to "any means necessary" used to take over farms from whites. Its use in state land discourses is frowned upon because it carries negative connotations of disorderliness.

[70] The all night political vigils – a combination of entertainment and political indoctrination– which were popular during the liberation war.

Ironically, the narrator even derisively declares his (and the occupiers') 'small mind', showing an apprehension of his (and the occupiers') cynicism, as can be seen in the following description of the occupiers: "but we who rushed to grab were united in our poverty and of no use to a woman who looked far too complicated for our simple heads" (5). The image of a confused undertaking apparent in the quotations above demonstrates the ambivalence of the short story in its representation of an alternative image of land reform.

Hoba's short stories depict the land occupiers as superficial and frivolous in their attitude to their newly acquired responsibility for the farms. The trivialisation of what is supposed to be a terminal phase of the decolonising Chimurenga legacy conflicts with the expressed veneration of the land reform process in the state's grand narrative. This reverential attitude towards land reform is encapsulated in such claims as Mugabe's statement that the Third Chimurenga land reform is "the best thing that could ever happen to an African country" ("Transcript") and also ZANU (PF)'s "Reason 21 to vote Robert Gabriel Mugabe", that land reform "means uplifting the poor [black] segments of society to levels where they become active participants in the veins and arteries of the national economy" (*100 Reasons* 16). In such hegemonic narratives and in state policy endorsing 'patriotic' literary narratives as epitomised by Mtizira's novel (discussed in the previous section), land acquires a special eminence as the most basic need in black people's struggle to reclaim their dignity and full citizenship. However, reading through the short story "Maria's Independence" as guided by the 'witnessing' voice of the first person narrator, one forms an overwhelmingly discrepant impression of land reform, especially because of the unappealing portrayal of its enactors and supporters. Without directly engaging or criticising the empirical Third Chimurenga land reforms, the short story "Maria's Independence" builds a life-world that evocatively portrays unpleasant agents of a land 'revolution' whose reckless and wanton disposition (when read in contrast with glorifying state narratives of land reform) can move the reader to a "demystifying consciousness" (Foulkes 59) of the state's disingenuous generalisations concerning the Third Chimurenga. The readers are consequently led to re-imagine land reform outside and beyond the perceptible hegemonic inflations and deflations of the Third Chimurenga mystique.

In its intent to propagate a favourable image of its land reform process – and in order to hide the more questionable aspects of the process (mostly to do with its racial and violent dimensions) – the state's Third Chimurenga grand narrative vehemently contests all

vocabularies that unfavourably portray land reform. Such descriptive words and phrases as "land grabs", "farm invasions" and "*jambanja*" are perceived in the Third Chimurenga discourse as most derisively insensitive, not only to the plight of the land hungry formerly colonised people, but also to the unjustifiable colonial land dispossessions that previously instituted an inequitable racial land tenure system. The state's line of argument can be easily inferred, for instance, in the wake of damaging interpretations of the word "*jambanja*", such as Tagwirei Bango's comments (below):

> [t]he word *jambanja* which became part of our vocabulary in the past two years, helped people to accept their confusion with an executive order directing the police to ignore crimes classified as political. *Jambanja* means state-sponsored lawlessness. The police are not expected to intervene or arrest anyone in a *jambanja* scene because those taking part will have prior state blessing and approval. But, only one interest group, war veterans and ZANU (PF) supporters, is allowed to engage in a *jambanja*. (qtd. in Chaumba et al. 7)

The word *jambanja* therefore carries negative connotations that create an impression of the land reform as lawless and fraught with political favouritism and political manipulation. "Maria's Independence" enters this political and linguistic debate on the semantic comprehension of the philosophy and praxis of the Third Chimurenga land reforms with a subtle acclamation of the *jambanja* tag of the land reforms. Hoba's short stories (especially "Maria's Independence") portray a land reform process that – like the term *jambanja* – subverts approving and mystifying vocabularies of the Third Chimurenga land discourse. Besides presenting a miscreant but rational narrator who (even as he is a beneficiary of the land take-overs) proclaims the appropriative dimension of their 'revolution', the short story also depicts the often cited violence and chaos at the heart of the empirical land 'revolution'. In his trademark saturnine tone describing the group's violent land take-over, the narrator reveals the sturdy force accompanying their land reclamation: "The Masses/With clenched fists/Swept us onto the farms/ there we all met with neither hoe, tractor, plough, seed nor cow [...] for after many years of independent bondage, we sprang up to the ancestors' beckoning to return to the land, their land, our land. Lost through the barrel, won through the barrel" (4).

Implicit in the modus operandi used to respond to the "ancestors' beckoning to return to the land" is the use of violence, symbolised here by the "barrel" and also the "clenched fist" of violent nativist liberation nationalism. In equating the violence of his "third revolution" (5) to that of the colonialist, the narrator evokes almost the same antipathetic feelings against his own conduct that formerly colonised people had towards the coloniser. There is little to separate the imperial invader and the "third revolution" 'invader', except, of course the "beckoning" of the "ancestors" on the part of the latter. The land becomes a jungle, once more, and the fittest survive as the "third revolution" creed takes precedence over the country's formal laws. As the narrator reveals in the succeeding short story, "Having my way": "The justice of the farms was instant. The liberation war creed reigned – we refused to recognise the slow colonial justice system adopted by our government. We beat up thieves, chased out adulterers and severely beat or killed suspected sell-outs of the revolution" (20). The narrator recounts this slide into the law of the jungle where black 'revolutionaries' acquire their supposed fitness courtesy of an exclusive political alignment in a wry tone that suggests his awareness of the ignobility of such actions as well as a tinge of sarcasm indicating his inability to supress his inner conviction that aspects of a revolution of which he is ironically part are reprehensible.

Closely related to the violence topos in the narrative of the "third revolution" in Hoba's short stories is the recurring motif of chaos. The narrators in Hoba's short stories are peculiarly keen on relating the native land occupiers' penchant for trivia, disorder, lasciviousness and in depicting the entirely anarchic nature of their land take-overs. The land occupiers' inclination to the "*pungwe*" practice, "*kongonya"*[71] and "*masese brew"*[72] (which pervades most of the short stories) identifies them, not with the state narrative's 'patriotic' nationalists who embrace the Third Chimurenga land revolution as the teleological culmination of the Chimurenga struggle, but with a common buffoonery that shows them up as ordinary, lawless thugs and clowns seeking the temporal pleasures of dispossessing and owning. In "Maria's Independence", for instance, the land occupiers are depicted as obscenely hyper-sexual, constantly lusting after women and even taking turns to stalk Maria each time she goes to bath in the river.

[71] A sexually charged dance that was popularised by the Chimurenga *pungwe* virgils.
[72] Home-made beer.

Adding to the 'inconvenient' chaotic image[73] of the "third revolution" is the black land occupiers' constant fear of losing even their newly acquired land to other, more powerful blacks.[74] This sense of insecurity of tenure dampens some of the occupiers' commitment to work the land. As the narrator in "Maria's Independence" says: "Some had left their wives behind, either in the cities or in the sandy reserves, unsure of when someone with more power would come to chase them off the land and tell them to look for more unclaimed land" (6). In "The Second Trek", the child narrator reveals the callous eviction of his family from their new farm by a political figure whose identity is reinforced by the child-narrator's habit of identifying people by their physical stature: "[…] he [*sekuru*] seems unperturbed by the big *mesidhisi-bhenzi* parked outside the field. There is a man with a big stomach standing beside it. Maybe if *baba* worked hard he would also have a stomach like that" (29). The Mercedes Benz and the "big stomach" are, in fact, the prevalent twin symbolic motifs of political embezzlement in some Zimbabwean literary works such as Gonzo Musengezi's *The Honourable MP*, Julius Chingono's short stories in *Not Another Day* and Tendai Huchu's novel *The Hairdresser of Harare*. The "third revolution" is thus reduced to a mere political play where the political "small fish" are used by the big ones as expendable 'foot soldiers' to 'break in' – as *baba* literally "broke" (28) into the white farmer's farmhouse – only to lose it to the man with the big stomach and the backing of the police.

If (as Linda Hutcheon asserts) creative literature "force[s] the reader (not overtly ask[ing] him) to create a fictive imaginative world separate from the empirical one in which he lives" (211), that fictive world as constructed in Hoba's short stories reveals a complex yet close

[73] A significant number of literary works by young emerging writers focusing on the land reform process reveal this thematic strand. Such texts include Chris Gande's novel *Section Eight* and the various short stories and novella published in a special issue journal of the Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe which was edited by Dudziro Nhengu and tellingly titled *Exploding the Myths about Zimbabwe's Land Issue.* Some 'established' Zimbabwean writers like the liberation war ex-combatant and beneficiary of the post-2000 land reform process, Alexander Kanengoni (who now works for the state broadcaster and writes pro-government opinion pieces in the state-owned newspaper *The Herald*), have largely ignored the negative dimensions and rather concentrated on the 'revolutionary', positive dimensions of the land reforms, as one finds in his short story "The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror" in the short story anthology *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe*. The Zimbabwean academic Dave Mutasa has also published a novel in Shona language called *Sekai, Minda Tave Nayo* (literally translating into "laugh, we now have land"), which attempts to create a balance between the good and the ugly aspects of land reforms in Zimbabwe's post-2000 period. Styled as an epistle, Mutasa's book dramatises the hopes and frustrations of owning land when one is female and not well equipped to use it. The white autobiography epitomised by Catherine Buckle's books *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* and *Beyond Tears: Zimbabwe's Tragedy* present a (white) victim-perspective that is critical to our understanding of the psychology of the victims of the Third Chimurenga land reforms.

[74] This thematic thread is also captured in Gugu Ndlovu's short story titled "Kurima" – a Shona word for "farming" (in the short story collection, *Writing Now*) – in which farms are haphazardly issued to numerous black peasants who eventually have to yield them to 'connected', powerful politicians.

relationship with the empirical one in which it begins to function as a subtle critique of certain actual social and political processes. Unlike Mtizira's *The Chimurenga Protocol*'s overt claim that it depicts actual events of Zimbabwe's tumultuous recent past to construct a preconceived ideological vision, Hoba's short stories largely relate to the empirical world by implication. In other words, the semantic accessibility of Hoba's short stories is not contingent on the reader's prior knowledge of the post 2000 Zimbabwean Third Chimurenga land struggles. Even without the benefit of contextual knowledge, readers can easily perceive the message of Hoba's short stories – that land may not be every black person's panacea for a better life and that once he or she gets it, not everyone can use it effectively. However, historically contextualising the short stories can reveal the subversive relationship of their created fictive world to the state's Third Chimurenga grand narrative.

Reading Hoba's short stories in the context of hegemonic narratives that hold up land reform as "the best thing that could ever happen to an African country", one is struck by their subtly undermining attitude to the state's Third Chimurenga narrative. This major distinguishing feature of Hoba's short stories (especially when compared to Maruma and Mtizira's pro-government novels above) is underlined by the symbolic triadic structure of the "Trek" short story trilogy. To the narrator, this movement opens his (and the readers') eyes not only to some of the complexities of a sudden shift in lifestyle, material status and environment, but to the problems of an essentialist and racially skewed land discourse that assumes that every black person needs land and can utilise it for the betterment of his or her material status and that of the nation. Ironically, the overall impression created by the narrator in this trilogy is that he and his family are actually happy and better off in their rural communal reserves and not at their acquired (formerly white-owned) farm. The Magudu family's journey to and from the farm degenerates into a simple looting spree that results in their improved material standing in the village, as can be inferred in the narrator's bragging about the changed fortunes of his family upon their return from the farm:

> Mhamha took a lot of things from the *murungu's*[75] house. So many, we do not even use some of them. She made people repair our old huts and gave them chipped china plates, old clothes and other things she didn't care about. […] Now, our home is better than all the others in the village. I tell the other children about my bed which used to be

[75] Shona for "white person".

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> the *murungu's* child's bed. If they do not believe me, I show them the pictures of the *murungu's* children playing on it [...] We have two cows now. I don't know who brought them. I only came back from school and found the big cabinet, which *mhama* had brought with us, gone and in its place two big cows. I think the person must have found the cattle on the farms because they're bigger than all the other cattle in the village. (50)

In the plane of the fictive world of Hoba's short stories, the dangers of what Robert Muponde has called "overcorrected imbalances of land redistribution" (187) manifest in the characters' failure to identify with the ideological land tenets of the Third Chimurenga discourse. Besides projecting the land occupiers' repellent identities as looters, loafers and drunkards masquerading as the true or representative 'new farmers' of a totally 'liberated' nation, the vivid and dramatic rendering of the land occupiers' futile farming ventures moves readers to affective involvement and moral judgment that evoke scepticism towards state circulated land reform narratives in the public sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the turn of the century in Zimbabwe has seen the literary domain (alongside other sites of expression like the media, theatre and music) taking centre-stage in the processes of "mystifications" and "demystifications" (Foulkes's terms 59) of the state's 'master-fiction' of the "national interest" – the Third Chimurenga and its attendant autochthonous and "Afro-radical" (Mbembe, "African Modes" 240) nationalism. The focal texts analysed in this chapter exemplify a useful archive that testifies to the political, yet social function of imaginative literature especially in politically polarised societies such as Zimbabwe during the post 2000 decade, often referred to as a time of crisis for its inhabitants. More importantly, the starkly and complexly contrasting perspectives on Third Chimurenga discourses on land reform, sovereignty and national identity proffered by Maruma, Mtizira and Hoba's works reflect the wider, deep-seated empirical antagonism between seemingly 'independent' and 'non-aligned' writers in the mould of Hoba and state-policy endorsing writers such as Maruma, Mtizira and Kanengoni.[76] The next chapter builds on this political

[76] Prior to his appointment to the state's Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation board, however, Kanengoni produced some works that can in no way be read as state-endorsing. Such works include *Vicious Circle* (1983), *When the Rainbird Cries* (1988), *Effortless Tears* (1993) and *Echoing Silences* (1997).

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dimension to narratives of the crisis, focusing on how Zimbabwean women's lowly social and political positioning helped them to "create and generate solidarity through narratives which demand recognition, and at the same time, aim to redefine collective understanding of justice and the good life […] (Lara 1) in the context of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis.

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CHAPTER 4: "A STRUGGLE WITHIN A STRUGGLE":[77] CENTERING FEMALE PERSPECTIVES ON THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS.

Introduction: the urgency of gynocentric perspectives to the Zimbabwean crisis

Discourses about the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe have largely centred on the politics of regime-change. As the crisis dovetailed with the closing down of spaces for female expression, it gave rise to a gynocentric counter-struggle against the dominance of phallocentric interpretations of the crisis (See Lene Bull-Christiansen's book *Tales of the Nation: Feminist Nationalism or patriotic History? Defining National History and Identity in Zimbabwe*). Representations of this historic period in various media of representation such as literary fiction, film, and the print and electronic media have mainly accentuated the phallocentric vantage point at the expense of other worldviews. Yet although these eclipsed perspectives exist in the shadow of the perceived urgency of an economic and political crisis, I argue in this chapter that they are not secondary or insignificant and should be considered as equally exigent. This chapter explores how female writers covertly (and sometimes overtly) negotiate the gendered representations of the crisis with specific reference to literary texts published in the post-2000 period, focusing on (but not entirely limited to) texts by Yvonne Vera, Gugu Ndlovu, Virginia Phiri, Vivienne Ndlovu and Valerie Tagwira. The chapter is split into two parts. In the first part, I particularly zoom in on the female writers' engagement with the post-2000 resurgence of political and ethnic discourses around the *Gukurahundi*[78] from a specifically gynocentric point of view.

Using Yvonne Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins* and Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters", I focus on how the texts' focalisation of female experience create a discursive counter discourse to post-2000 dominant narratives of the nation. The crux of the second section analysing Virginia Phiri's novel *Highway Queen,* Valerie Tagwira's short story "The

[77] The title of one of Grace Kwinjeh's chapter in her book *Thirty years after political independence: Creating political space for Zimbabwean Women*.

[78] A term used to refer to the mass killings of mostly Ndebele-speaking civilians by government forces in the early to late eighties.

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Journey", Vivienne Ndlovu's short story "Bare Bones" and Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Broken Wings" is the argument that literary representations of challenges faced by women during the unprecedented economic crisis in Zimbabwe constitute a significant site of struggle. In this situation, women (because of their historical marginalisation) suffer and fight inequalities induced by a patriarchal political and cultural system that limits women's opportunities. These female-authored texts do not merely reveal women's vulnerabilities as exacerbated by the post-2000 crisis, but invoke recognition of such vulnerabilities as the first step to the creation of aesthetically transformative narratives – narratives which tacitly imagine combative or negotiation strategies for women by redefining the moral. In Lara's theorisation, such feminist texts fight "imaginatively, […] casting doubt on previous views of the reasons for cultural, social and political marginalisation" (3). The focal texts of this chapter add to the growing chorus of oppositional voices in Zimbabwe, creating another significant counter-discourse to hegemonic narratives concerning the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe.

Numerous groups and alliances sprouted in the post-2000 period to contest phallocentric interpretations of the crisis. The Zimbabwe Women Writers' Association in particular, supports women's participation in socio-cultural discourses by helping them to express themselves in creative and other literatures. The tellingly titled short story anthology *Masimba* (Shona for "power") published in Shona language by this association in 2004 clearly demonstrates the organisation's (and indeed the women contributors') commitment to fiction as a medium for questioning unjust cultural practices, institutions and value systems that inhibit female emancipation. The impact of these social movements is evident in their successful public demonstrations within the context of Zimbabwe's restrictive legislation. Magodonga Mahlangu,[79] one of the leaders of Zimbabwe's most militant women's movement, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), situates the women's struggle in the broader democratic struggle that was provided by the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the political establishment in the post-2000 period. Mahlangu holds the state responsible for women's problems, because of its hegemonic control and consequent curtailment of free

[79] Mahlangu and her co-leader of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) Jenni Williams have won several awards for their feminist struggle, including the 2009 Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award which was presented to them by the President of the USA, Barack Obama. The white factor in its leadership and the fact that most of their awards are conferred by foreign (especially western) organisations and countries have attracted criticism (and even suppression) by the state, which views the pressure group as 'unZimbabwean' and as an extension of neo-imperial interests in the country.

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expression requisite for emancipation. For Mahlangu, the state is directly responsible for (and benefits from) the prevailing gender-skewed status quo and the fear manifest in most women's silence on issues pertaining to contemporary problems in their social and political lives. A direct interrelationship between the literary arts and the Zimbabwean women's protest movement manifests, for example, in satirist John Eppel's praise poem in honour of WOZA women's sturdy fight against the state's crackdown on civil dissent in attempting to win back their civil and human rights. The voice in Eppel's "Song for WOZA" cheers WOZA women on to "disarm with charm the armed police" (l.9), fortifying the image of the women as naturally, physically, spiritually and even culturally endowed with a transformative appeal to reverse their oppression.

As women's pressure groups directly and politically battle with entrenched government patriarchy, female writers have for their part (especially during the post-2000 period) complemented women's political struggle through their gynocentric stance as women's social problems have intensified in the economic and political upheavals of Zimbabwe's past decade. One of the most distinguished female voices in literary circles to comment on political developments during this period is that of Yvonne Vera. Notwithstanding the huge critical acclaim she has received for her politically charged novel *The Stone Virgins*, my intention in this chapter is to place the novel's subtle re-inscription of the topical *Gukurahundi* violence (and its post-2000 dimensions, not least of which is a problem of ethnicity) in dialogue with post-2000 empirical discourses on the massacres and other female-authored texts focalising on female experience in order to grapple with the social, political and economic aspects of the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe.

Silenced voices, resuscitated memory and the problematisation of state historiography in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002)

> Sibaso's voice is the closest. It crushes between every other word before I can hear. His voice makes every other sound perish. I cannot hear, and tremble, lost and blind to everything except his versions of events, his persistent pursuit of what has happened here. (Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins* 103)

As indicated in previous chapters, in the post-2000 period history occupies an important place in Zimbabwean socio-political discourses. Its expropriation for hegemonic purposes has led to 'convenient' exclusions, reductions and inflections. As a counter-discourse to this abuse of

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history, Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins* is a unique and complex text – not least because it is written by a woman and puts a woman at the centre of its subversive re-inscription of politically abused history of the *Gukurahundi*. Fictionally narrativising history in *The Stone Virgins* is certainly a subjective undertaking not without political implications. The history that Yvonne Vera expropriates and re-constructs from a female author (and protagonist's) vantage point is, of course, subjective and contested. Doubting Vera's claim to be merely "interested in […] national history" (qtd. in Musila, "Beyond the Frame of History" 5), Grace Musila argues that generally Vera's writing in fact demonstrates "a more radical relationship with history than a backdrop" ("Beyond the Frame of History" 5).

Vera's literary engagement with the politics of gendering national history in *The Stone Virgins* is not entirely a post-2000 phenomenon. Precedents can be found in her oeuvre for such artistic interventions, for example, in her counter-discursive re-appropriation of the female figure Nehanda in her novel *Nehanda* (1993). *Nehanda* represents an initial gesture (by Vera) of 'restoring the feminine' in the national story. Here, the centrality (to the narratives of the text and of the nation) of Nehanda's historical role in some of the earliest anti-colonial uprisings foregrounds women's importance and involvement in the making of the nation. My current enquiry shifts focus to explore the subtlety with which the psychic impact of rape and violence – especially as manifested in the suppression of the female victim's voice and memory – can be read in turn (and paradoxically so) as the novel's complex attempt at speaking back both to the political stifling of debate about the Gukurahundi in particular and the contemporary discouragement of alternative imagining of the nation. This focus on the political significance of (a female) voice and memory in both *The Stone Virgins* is influenced by the pervasive politicisation and masculinisation of voice and expression in post-2000 state politics in Zimbabwe. In this sense, I find the right, ability and capacity to remember, speak and be listened to as occupying a critical dimension to the making and unmaking of political hegemony and indeed as characterising the antagonistic relationship between political and civil society in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Commenting on *The Stone Virgins*, Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo (citing the anthropologist Richard Werbner) argues that state-suppressed memories – what she calls "anti-memories" (117) – "create a space for […] the otherwise forgotten or absent to be commemorated, documented, narrated and even felt" ("Telling Versions of War" 117). What makes "anti-memory" a fascinating site for counter-history, I would add, is its experiential dimension – its capacity as a product of the marginalised to present what Grace Musila calls "intimate histories" ("Beyond" 5).

Much has been written about Vera's poetic use of language to explode 'taboos' attached to dominant narratives of the nation in almost the entirety of her oeuvre. I find its use in *The Stone Virgins* as enhancing the novel's illocutionary force – its affective evocation of the female (and also male) subaltern's victimhood. However, the illocutionary force embedded in the poetic narrative does not only move us into a compassionate relationship with the victims, but "discloses" (Lara 4) the injustice of their victimisation. As Lara comments: "[n]arratives that possess such 'illocutionary force' have the 'disclosive' ability to envision normatively – that is, in a critical way – better ways of being in a world of 'equality and distinction'" (6). The 'poetry' in Vera's language compels us to enter Nonceba's (and Sibaso's) traumatised mind as guided empathisers. An extract from one of the most chilling and arresting narrative moments depicting Nonceba's traumatisation at the hands of Sibaso can elucidate this point:

> He has sought my face. Held it. His fingers, the gap between my eyes, the length of my brow, the spread of my cheekbones, my chin: my lips, moving or silent. He cut. Smoothly and quickly. Each part memorised; my dark blood. My mouth a wound. My mouth, severed, torn, pulled apart. A final cut, not slow, skilfully quick, the memory of it is the blood in my bones. (99)

In this quotation the graphic portrayal of the mutilation of Nonceba's mouth is enhanced by the return of the first person narrative voice and its attendant conversational flair which draw the reader closer to the narrator's experiences. This bond arouses deeper sympathetic emotions and enlists affective alignment with Nonceba's subject position. Following on Lara's theorisation, the resultant vivid evocation of Nonceba's suffering "connect[s her] with the aesthetic realm, because […] the expressive sphere allows new experiences to be presented in the very act of describing them" (59). In this light, the evocative and poetic quality of Nonceba's descriptions of her experiences can be read as constituting what Lara (citing Gabriele Schwab) calls "tacit knowledge [which results from] communication about the personal core" (59). Nonceba's memories of her experiences, we are told, are hidden deep "in the blood in [her] bones" (99) thus enabling her to shield them from total annihilation by Sibaso. In retaining her memory, Nonceba manages to create and sustain a subjective position that is independent from Sibaso and his violent mechanisms of physical and psychic destruction. Nonceba's narrative, then, can be conceived of as both "self-critical and self-

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reflective" (Lara 109), enabling us to comprehend and interpret the nature of her ordeal in solidarity with her.

John C. Hawley reads *The Stone Virgins* as focalised on victim-centred narrative that resembles a "testimonio". Hawley's choice of the word "testimonio" (a term that is mostly used in international human rights tribunals instead of "testimony") indicates his belief in the gravity of Sibaso's acts of torture as crimes against humanity. Hawley suggests that the flair of fictional realism heightened by the narrative's testimonio form allows both the victim and the victimiser agency to tell their versions of the experiences, thus allowing readers to feel as if they are experiencing 'first-hand' the innermost motives of the perpetrator and the reactions of the victim, enabling us to 'judge' the event. Hawley connects Vera's depiction of both victimiser and victimised's states of mind to her overarching intention to re-script the *Gukurahundi* in a manner that would allow the novel to play a role in contemporary discussions concerning the event. Despite Gayatri Spivak's point that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28) and Kizito Muchemwa's comment (in relation to Vera's earlier novels *Under The Tongue* [1996] and *Without a Name* [1994] that "rape is a violent silencing act that takes the identity of a woman as a possession of the rapist" – "Language, Voice and Presence" 13), I argue that *The Stone Virgins'* styling as a testimonio enables Nonceba's traumatic memory to constitute an alternative archive of a witnessing subject's claim to 'truths' about the event. Nonceba's subjectivity can be conceived of as responding to what Joe Maggio has called "the essential Spivakian puzzle [… that is,] How can we account for the subaltern? How can they speak?" (426). As Lara argues, when subaltern subjects (especially female ones such as Nonceba) speak, their narratives are inherently agonistic, persuasively and aesthetically foregrounding new meanings of the moral. For Lara, "the agonistic dimension refers back to the expressive sphere, where the validity is granted by an appeal to the quality of an authentic or sincere expression" (9-10).

However, the function of the testimonio in *The Stone Virgins* transcends the mere disclosure of the victim/perpetrator's subject positions. Besides its capacity to recover voice and memory for the subaltern woman (who then stands as an indispensable witness in the reader's mental human rights tribunal), the testimonio allows Nonceba's experiential witnessing subject's perspective to acquire an affective and aesthetic dimension. The resulting "illocutionary force" (Lara 6) generated by Nonceba's passionate address forces us into a state of emotional solidarity with her and also with her victimiser who turns out to be a

traumatised victim of a higher (political) order. The "disclosive capacity" (Lara 4) of Nonceba's traumatic narrative, then, not only compels us to 'convict' Sibaso and condemn his attempts to stifle the witness's memory and voice to 'testify' against his dehumanising acts, but more importantly (and as Zoë Norridge's study of pain in *The Stone Virgins* reveals), the pain in Nonceba's narrative "deepens our human understanding of what the facts and figures of this violent period really mean" (Norridge 160). Read in the context of the state's efforts to discourage debate over the *Gukurahundi*, Nonceba's resistance to Sibaso's violent determination to destroy her memory can be read on a symbolical plane as the novel's surreptitious destabilisation of the state's censure of alternative narratives of the massacres. Beyond reflecting the female victim and the male victimiser's war-torn psyches, Nonceba and Sibaso's testimonios situate their experiences in the broader early manifestations of signs of post-independence 'pitfalls of national consciousness' characterised by the post-independence state's politics of exclusivism.

In giving a voice to both Nonceba and Sibaso to talk about their experiences, Vera goes beyond focusing on what many scholars[80] read as the physiological and psychological impact of war on a female victim to explore the "bemonster[isation]" (Gagiano's word, "Katabolism" 72) of the male victimiser by state violence and political deception. The testimonio thus inscribes affect and authenticity to Nonceba and Sibaso's subjective narratives to claim agency and recognition as credible sources of knowledge about the *Gukurahundi* – a "record before the memory disappears forever" (Hawley 69). Read with a consciousness of hegemonic demands to forget the *Gukurahundi* or at least to remember its toned-down state-revised versions (and Vera's declared intention to re-script the *Gukurahundi*), the testimonio mode of narrativising torture creates an impression of Nonceba and Sibaso's stories as indispensable to any search for a fuller understanding of the violence. Nonceba and Sibaso's different victimhood, victimisation and victim/victimiser relationship establish them as alternative forms of victims of the *Gukurahundi,* thus extending our conceptions of Gukurahundi violence and its impacts on individuals.

The memory elision motif best manifests in the form of two contrasting images – Sibaso's attempts to annihilate Thenjiwe, the woman whom he decapitates, and on the other hand, the

[80] See, for instance Dorothy Driver and Meg Samuelson's article "History's Intimate Invasions: Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*"; Sofia's Kostelac's "The voices of drowned Men cannot be heard': Writing Subalternity in Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins*" and Maurice Vambe's book *African Oral Story-telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean novel in English.*

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survivor Nonceba's struggle to reclaim and retain her memory and voice to remember and speak about the gruesome murder of Thenjiwe and her own rape and torture. Nonceba is pushed by a passion "to tell them [and of course, us] everything [she] ha[s] seen […]" (104). An important dimension to the violence that Nonceba suffers at the hands of Sibaso is that it seems to affect the mind more than it affects any other part of her abused body. Sibaso's overwhelming physical domination, we are told, makes "the force of his presence swirl […] in her mind" (62). Overpowered and helpless, her "cry comes directly from her mind not from her mouth" [as] "[h]er mind is scalded with the presence of his arms" (63). In the hospital ward where Nonceba is convalescing, she is haunted by a mysterious voice of a woman she never sees. In a dream- like hallucination in which the story of the woman who is forced by a soldier to kill her husband appears, Nonceba finds out that her hands are tied to the bed and she cannot help the woman; "she has to watch and be silent. She cannot see. She cannot say a word. Not a word. She cannot speak. Not a word" (81). The relationship between Nonceba and Sibaso is based on the latter's intention to physically and spiritually silence the former who in turn escapes from the physical torture in order to protect her memory and voice. Nonceba's ability to retain her voice and memory (although in fragments) is therefore not only a subversive act of destabilising Sibaso's authority and plan, but an attempt to forge a vital subject position that enables her to remember (in order to forget) her experiences so that she can retain sanity and recuperate. At the end of her ordeal, Nonceba's violated body, mind and voice become indelible archives of a moment that defines her and indeed Kezi and Matabeleland. Nonceba's convalescence is therefore inextricably bound up with the rehabilitating presence of Cephas the National Archive employee, and her ability to remember and to speak about her trauma to him. Nonceba discovers this healing potential of memory, voice and speaking while recuperating in hospital:

> She will have to find the sources of sound inside her, pure and timeless. Then she will open her mouth and let the sound free. Words will flow. Only then would she discover a world in contrast to her predicament. She would restore her own mind, healing it in segments, in sound. She thinks of the language of animals which has no words but memory. (82)

Thus in the narrative of the *Gukurahundi*, violence is not merely an act of disciplining a dissident female body but also a means of annihilating memory as an act of self-protection. Vera's story of a *Gukurahundi*-violated woman's attempts to convalesce and exorcise the

'ghost' of past trauma can thus be viewed as symptomatic of various efforts to use re-memory (in the sense of Toni Morrison's use of the word in her novel *Beloved* — meaning remembering in order to transcend) to come to terms with contemporary gender-induced challenges to the national project. Raquel Baker has commented on the political dimension to the *Gukurahundi* victim's convalescence against the backdrop of continuing ethnic suspicions in contemporary Zimbabwean social and political spheres. She argues:

> The liberated subject grows out of the process of healing the wounds inflicted by the violent practices of colonial and postcolonial nationalism [...] As a healing process, convalescence, or critical re-membering, shifts the economy of national subjectivities to investments in community and memory and away from the structures of forgetting embedded in the disavowals of both political repression and cultural heterogeneity that undergird the violence of Zimbabwean national discourse. (131)

In a commentary that apparently contradicts Marlene De la Cruz's argument that Vera (in *The Stone Virgins)* "take[s] back all the support she had given nationalism in writing *Nehanda*" (qtd. in Hawley 68), Raquel Baker argues that Vera actually "does not suggest the illegitimacy of Zimbabwe as an independent nation; instead, through the authority of her narrative voice, she invites opposition in order to better align Zimbabwe as a nation with the lived experience of liberation for *all* of its citizens" (125). Toivanen also hints at Vera's optimism in *The Stone Virgins*, arguing that the novel "adopts a more hopeful tone" ("Remembering" 1). However, if (according to Baker and Toivanen above) the narrative of the ethnically wounded nation in *The Stone Virgins* proffers a lifeline for the nation's convalescence (as signified by the experiences of the novel's female protagonist), such a lifeline can be seen to be disputed and even denied in Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters" (in *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe*).

The girl-child resisting *Gukurahundi* closure, re-discoursing ethnicity and nationality in Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters"

My reading of Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters" as a female-centred re-inscription of the *Gukurahundi* which (unlike *The Stone Virgins' "*healing tone" – Toivanen, "The Nation's Aching Spots" 1) radically unveils the concealed yet profoundly irreconcilable political fault-lines in what Ian Phiminster has called "Zimbabwe's new old history" (210). My analysis is

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informed by (and relates to) Vera's novel *The Stone Virgins* and empirical contemporary political currencies. Such ethnic and political discourses, shaped by the post-2000 realities, are epitomised by the formation in 2010 of the Matabeleland-based secessionist movement Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF) [81] and the pull-out from the Unity Accord[82] of some of the luminary members of ZAPU in 2010.

"Torn Posters" uniquely steers away from the ethnically reconciliatory rhetoric of Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, by presenting a girl victim-narrator whose ethnic pride (reflected in her name, Gugu)[83] and hyper-sensitivity to the *Gukurahundi* violence make her too acrimonious to give in to her oppressor's demand for a political 'checkmate', validating an image of Matabeleland as (according to Phimister) a "sulphurous" (210) region. Appearing a year after the publication of Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and *Opening Up Spaces* (an anthology of short stories by African women edited by Vera, in which Gugu Ndlovu through her short story "From the Barrel of a Pen" announces her intention to use creative literature as a medium of subversive political expression), Ndlovu's short story "Torn Posters" recreates and re-presents the Gukurahundi by inscribing into its narrative of violence, a deeper ethnic dimension and irreconcilable anger at the appalling victimisation of Ndebele people in what the narrator believes are (and elicits our empathy to consider) apparent acts of genocide. Read in the context of the state's discernibly reductive grand narrative of the *Gukurahundi*, the short story can easily be read as a covert re-evaluation of official accounts of the massacres, which radically attacks the state's promotion of a smokescreen peace and national unity based on burying unreconciled ethnic differences. "Torn Posters" tells the story of anger in a young victimised Ndebele girl and her family within the Gukurahundi context – reflecting the way that anger is ingrained in her family and passed on from one generation to another. The intimacy of the personal and the family story affects our perspective, compelling us to conceptualise Gugu's (the main narrator's) victimised family as microcosmic of the entire Ndebele ethnic group and, of course, the anger as symbolic of the larger ethnic tensions in the region and beyond. The importance of the (symbolic) family trope to the short story's subversive impact (upon hegemonic discourses of national unity in the post-2000 period) can

[81] Mthwakazi is the former name for the present-day Matabeleland region in Zimbabwe. The name was revived in the post-2000 period by the secessionist group Mthwakazi Liberation Front.
[82] The merger of two previously antagonistic parties the Zimbabwe African National Union and the Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front which ended the Gukurahundi atrocities in the late eighties.
[83] From 'Gugulethu', which means 'our pride' (in Northern isiNdebele language spoken in the Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe).

be fruitfully understood in the context of the extensive scale of the actual state-sponsored violence.[84] "Torn Posters" vividly tells the story of a family's encounter with the *Gukurahundi* as a moving and intimate narrative of female and child victims which makes their story an archive of gender and political oppression which is embedded in group memory as an indelible mark of its identity.

In both Vera's novel and Ndlovu's short story, the (victim) female-perspective narrative style reflects what Norridge has called the "pain of violent causation" (2) which emotionally guides us to partake in the victims' pain in their efforts to relate their traumatised past to their present efforts to identify themselves in terms of their relationship with other (especially Shona) ethnicities making up the nation. In his study of memory and metaphor in stories of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Njabulo Ndebele argues that "narratives of memory, in which real events are recalled, stand to guarantee us occasions for some serious moments of reflection" (20). Ndebele further identifies the victims' narrative as indispensable to any attempts at reconciling past injustices. He says:

> Where in the past the state attempted to compel the oppressed to deny the testimony of their own experience, today that experience is one of the essential conditions for the emergence of a new national consciousness. These stories may very well be some of the first steps in the rewriting of South African history on the basis of validated mass experience. (20)

"Torn Posters" demonstrates this potential in narratives of memory to re-inscribe a particular past by disrupting the prevailing state-cultured silence over the Gukurahundi and replacing it with an affective narrative of the massacres authenticated not only by the group (or familial) perspective of the narrative (which carries compelling symbolic significance as an ethnic Ndebele perspective), but perhaps more importantly, by the symbolically vulnerable female and child-centred nature of the narrative, a particularly poignant account of victimisation. Steeped in the *Gukurahundi* chronotope, "Torn Posters" is characterised by the narrator's constant outrage at the massacres of her people and the incarceration of her father, a politician of Ndebele ethnic origin in a prison in Mashonaland. In the story, anger is evoked

[84] In the article "Gukurahundi: The need for truth and reconciliation," Shari Eppel's contends that "[s]carcely a family in Matabeleland escaped the violence of those years" (46).

as something 'contagious' among family members (and of course the Ndebele ethnic group), whose experiences and memory of the *Gukurahundi* fan their fanaticism to sustain the legacy set by George (the symbolically[85] incarcerated father of the family) to repel ZANU (PF)'s coercive nationalist politics. The omnipresent sense of loss and injustice creates in the narrator an overwhelming desire for retribution and a passionate resistance to political (and ethnic) acquiescence which invites us to read the short story (unlike *The Stone Virgins*) as foregrounding the potential in unresolved ethnic antagonisms to degenerate into tribal conflicts which can persist over generations and threaten the nationalist unity project. Unlike Vera's *The Stone Virgins* which (according to Baker) employs the metaphor of convalescence to depict the nation's capacity to transcend ethnic differences and heal past wounds, Ndlovu's short story creates an overpowering impression that the *Gukurahundi* was genocidal project and that, as long as the memory of undeserved victimisation still runs in the Ndebele ethnic group (as it does in George's microcosmic family), the nation will remain irreparably ethnically divided.

We first encounter ethnic-induced anger embedded in the girl-child narrator's attitude to the ZANU (PF) party manifested in the act of tearing ZANU (PF) posters written in Shona language which is, of course, alien to Matabeleland. More than simply 'defamiliarising' the *Gukurahundi* narrative (traditionally a political and 'therefore' an older man's discourse), the first person school-girl perspective generates a sense of her (political) innocence and vulnerability which enlists our sympathy and compels us to enter her "circle of concern" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 319) from where we begin to share her feelings and insights. Such insights (informed by Gugu, Butho and Mummy's caustic anger at their victimisation) generate anger at what now appears to be an unfolding genocide. The short story's opening paragraph best illustrates the ethnic revulsion that is made increasingly intense by the construction of the narrator as a school girl and the symbolic status of the ZANU (PF) posters as representing the Shona leadership and ethnic group:

> In 1984 I was too young to vote, yet that didn't stop me from performing my patriotic duty with razor-like precision […] my small but fierce guerrilla squad would trudge through Sanki's Lucerne field, the dew dampening our brogans as we closed in on our

[85] The arrest and incarceration of ZAPU leaders was one of the characteristics of the actual Gukurahundi. Prominent ZAPU leaders who were arrested during this period include Joshua Nkomo (who later went into exile), Dumiso Dabengwa and Cain Nkala.

> unsuspecting targets […] just seeing "PAMBERI NEZANU PF'[86] emblazoned on their blood posters, we were engulfed by a bitter rage. It rose like bile on our throats erupting as earsplitting war-cries roused us into action, and we ran screaming across the field with weapons raised to encounter the enemy. (179)

What is most striking about this paragraph is not the mere fact that the narrator (a school-going girl) imagines herself as the leader of a band of child 'soldiers' who commit themselves to resist ZANU (PF) (and by implication Shona) influence in Matabeleland, but the disclosure of her extraordinarily ethnocentric "patriotism" (179). That statement of "patriotic duty" (179) to the Ndebele people is relayed in an emotional tone that reflects an ingrained sense of ethnic phobia against (and detestation of) ZANU (PF) which (later on in the story) clearly becomes a euphemism for Shona people whose Mashonaland region is described by the narrator as an "enemy territory" (185). The acrimonious quality of Gugu's description of her and her friends' feelings dissuades us from conceiving of the poster-tearing act as a mere childish prank. Read in the context of long-time actual ethnic hostilities manifest in political polarisation along ethnic lines between ZANU (PF) and ZAPU before and after the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987, the tearing of ZANU (PF) party posters (widely held to be a Shona people's party) with a political message written in Shona in Matabeleland, amounts not only to an act of political self-preservation (the narrator's father George is an opposition politician, implicitly a ZAPU cadre), but also of ethnic protection. Ethnic anger at what Gugu believes to be a form of genocide perpetrated upon the people of Matabeleland manifests in her strong sense of vengeance and drive for just punishment and restitution which drive her and her group of child 'liberation' fighters against ZANU (PF) (and Shona hegemony) to ethnically-induced extremism and fanaticism that would usually be considered well beyond their tender age. This is how the act of poster vandalism (sarcastically described by Gugu as a treasonous offence) is described:

> We ripped into their flesh, stabbing and tearing it, slashing their principles, punching holes in their policy. Each blow killing HIM and his fat greedy ministers. We surveyed the scene with arrogance. Damage report: for me and my comrades, a few scratches, a splinter; scraped knees, an undone ribbon and some grass stains […] the enemy was another matter – they lay indifferent, confettied at our feet. (179)

[86] A ZANU (PF) slogan. It literally translates into "forward with ZANU (PF).

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Not only are the decimated posters animated as flesh which is “ripped into” (179) but they are also personified as “HIM and his fat greedy ministers” (179) – (a clear allusion to the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe who is of Shona ethnic origin). The ZANU (PF) posters are further described as worthless victims deserving of violent destruction – the reason why their remains are stuffed in an anthill, “a place where anything from aborted babies to bewitched panties … disappeared forever. Swallowed whole by the earth” (179-80). Later on in the story, when Gugu and the rest of George’s family visit him in Chikurubi Prison in Harare (in Mashonaland), a newspaper headline “GOVT CLAMPS DOWN ON MATABELE DISSIDENTS” (185) makes Gugu (who like her father, believes that the dissidents are the government’s scapegoat to justify decimating the Ndebele ethnic group) “feel the thorns rising inside [her] chest” (185) – compelling her to identify Mashonaland as “enemy territory” (185). These encounters demonstrate deep-seated ethnic anger against the Shona-led government embedded in a family psyche, which pervades the story until it ends with Gugu’s passionate vow to keep alive her incarcerated father’s oppositional politics of resisting what he calls a political (and ethnic) “checkmate” (181) rather than yielding to Shona domination.

The narrator’s pejorative correlation of ZANU (PF) to grossly condemned sites such as the anthill where “bewitched panties” (180) are cast also foregrounds a subtle Manichean binarist trope that weaves through the narrative, indicating antagonistic (and evidently irreconcilable) ZAPU (Ndebele) subaltern ‘selves’ and ZANU (PF) (Shona) victimising ‘others’. Besides the metaphorical killing of HIM in the children’s vandalisation of the poster, the construction of a subversive otherness manifests, for instance, in Gugu’s (and other narrators’) constant use of the third-person plural pronouns “they” and “them” to refer to the (Shona) soldiers who are terrorising the Ndebele people. This point is buttressed in Gugu’s mother’s response to Gugu’s enquiry about the whereabouts of her father, George: “he’s outside talking to *them*” (emphasis as in the original) (182) in reference to the soldiers who have come to arrest George. In this example, the narrative is intertextual, cohering, for instance, with Ndlovu Gatsheni’s commentary on the mission of the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland. He says: “its operations turned out to involve hunting down of PF-ZAPU leaders, indiscriminate attacks on Ndebele-speaking civilians, and killing of ex-ZIPRA combatants” (“Fatherhood and Nationhood” 77). However, the “hunting down” of George (an opposition politician) by the soldiers in “Torn Posters” is given a unique intimacy by the personal and experiential point of

view of the girl child from which it is narrated. In this light, the constant 'othering' of ZANU (PF), soldiers and Mashonaland province in "Torn Posters" does not merely distinguish between family and alien. In fact, Mummy's reference to the soldiers as "*them*" in the example above carries undertones of difference which (when read in the context of the soldiers' mission both at the family's homestead and in Matebeleland in general) distinguishes between allies (family members and by implication the Ndebele ethnic group) and the foes who are the soldiers presumed to be of Shona ethnic origin.

In his critique of Bakhtin's distinction between life and art, David Carr argues that art (unlike 'life') exudes its maker's imprint. He avers:

> […] the real difference between "art" and "life" is not organization vs. chaos, but rather the absence in life of that point of view which transforms events into a story by telling them. Telling is not just a verbal activity and not just a recounting of events but one informed by a certain kind of superior knowledge. ("Narrative & the Real World" 124)

In "Torn Posters" and *The Stone Virgins*, the "points of view" (Carr, "Narrative & The Real World" 124) transforming life (the *Gukurahundi*) into art are informed by contemporary political discourse on ethnicity and nationalism. Through their use of female narrators, Vera and Ndlovu create and sustain the argument that state agency in archiving events and processes of national significance cannot be unproblematic or absolute. The same can be said about Christopher Mlalazi's school-girl account of the *Gukurahundi* in his latest novel *Running with Mother*. Mlalazi (like Gugu Ndlovu in "Torn posters") uses a school-girl narrator (this time a slightly older secondary school pupil) to re-visit the Gukurahundi, exploring its physical and psychological impact on Rudo Jamela and her mother. However, in *Running with Mother*, Mlalazi tactically constructs Rudo as an ethnic and cultural hybrid (being born to a Ndebele father and a Shona mother and being conversant in both Chishona and isiNdebele languages), to foreground a complex account of the atrocities that (unlike Gugu's ethnic-induced narrative in "Torn Posters") transcend ethnic biases. Paraded amputated limps, decapitated and floating bodies in rivers that mother and Rudo cross to escape the soldiers' menace not only remind us of the callous nature of the Gukurahundi, but reflects what was previously less topical; the adverse impact of the Gukurahundi on Shona people. The next section further explores the centering of girl-children in narratives of the

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crisis, particularly focusing on how this enhances the narratives' "illocutionary force" (Lara 5).

Girl children in Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Broken Wings"

Like the majority of black women, children are (for obvious reasons) generally ranked among society's most vulnerable members of Zimbabwean society. Children are (as so often) among the worst affected in times of crisis. The Zimbabwean crisis of the past decade has impacted on children's lives in many ways. In a patriarchal society (such as Zimbabwe's) where there is a strong preference for boy children, girl children are likely to be more vulnerable in times of crisis. According to December Green, girl-children in Africa are "recognised by the international community as especially vulnerable" (2). Valerie Tagwira's short story "Mainini Grace's Promise" demonstrates this gender and age-induced vulnerability. Tagwira's short story zooms in on a day in the life of a girl-headed family in an affective way which moves us to perceive not only the injustice of prevailing gender, class and power configurations (which curtail most women's attempts to survive without male support), but the justice of imagining alternative forms of gender relations and roles which can enhance such women's emancipation. This section follows on the previous one, exploring some of the ways in which fictional evocations of girl-children in an economic, social and political crisis situation can lead us to comprehend the nature of the Zimbabwean crisis post-2000 in new ways. The obvious distinctive feature of this section (in a chapter that is dominated by female-authored texts) is that here the focus is placed on a text written by a man from Mlalazi's collection *Dancing with Life: Tales from The Township*. This decision is partly informed by the growing interest in and acceptance of men's contributions to feminist discourses. In the chapter entitled "Male feminism" in the book *Men in Feminism*, Stephen Heath justifies the male presence in the feminist struggle by pointing to the fallacy of gendering feminism. For Heath, "[w]omen are not feminists by virtue of the fact alone of being women: feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, a commitment, women *become* feminists" (emphasis as in the original) (1). Women, then, '*become'* feminists just as men can also '*become'* feminists. While this section does not set out to claim a feminist identity for Mlalazi (a male writer), it buttresses the commitment of Zimbabwean male writers to the socio-politics of gender issues in the post-2000 period.

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Some scholarly works, such as *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, edited by Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde, are among the early attempts to grapple with the impact of the political, economic and social cataclysm of the past decade on children. In the same volume, Muchemwa's and Muponde's articles enquire into the politics of the father/child relationship, highlighting a commonly identified problematic regarding the masculinisation of power in Zimbabwean politics. While I focus on "Broken Wings" (mainly because it explores girl-childhood experiences in a social, cultural and political context indicative of post-2000 Zimbabwe), I also invoke other Zimbabwean texts published in the past decade. The aim is to highlight the similarities and or differences in their representations of the girl-child figure in a crisis situation. The "Broken Wings" narrative demonstrates how the focalisation of girl-children's experiences alerts us to some of the 'hidden' dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis in new and captivating ways.

My focus on the victimisation and victimhood of the girl-child in the short story compels me to re-invoke Lara's conception of illocutionary force and the related views on empathy, as put forward by Martha Nussbaum and Suzanne Keen, in an attempt to read the evocative representations of children and demonstrate the subtle foregrounding of a discourse of moral justice. Although it focuses on different contexts, Robert Pattison's book *The Child Figure in English Literature* offers a useful approach to my analysis of the representation of the girl-child figure in Mlalazi's short story. Particularly important for my analysis of "Broken Wings" is Pattison's theorisation of the inherent qualities of children – qualities which make them appropriate characters in stories dealing with states of crisis. Pattison identifies "delicacy and sentiment [as the] hallmark of children depicted after the seventeeth century" (1). In his chapter on "the sentimental aspects of the child figure" (47), Pattison highlights the importance of sentiment in stimulating emotional reactions to children's experiences. Pattison's notion of "conservative sentimentality" (49) can be related to Mlalazi's deployment of the girl-child figure to explore wider social, economic and political pressures impacting on vulnerable members of the society. In his study of "conservative sentimentality" in Shakespeare's portrayal of child characters, Pattison argues that sentimentality in child-centred fiction follows on the Christian belief in the fall of man. Children caught up in such social 'falls' from the "golden age" of social justice, however, not only remind us of the "the golden age [that] mankind is continually moving further away from" (Pattison 49), but perhaps more importantly, reflect the social benefits that result from restoring children's (and society's) sense of morality.

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In his chapter, "Innocent Prate: King John and Shakespeare's children", in the book *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*, Mark Heberle demonstrates the importance of children in literature's engagement with deeper social phenomena. He says:

> The significance of child characters in Shakespeare does not primarily depend upon how closely they adhere to our conceptions of realistic, individualised children's behaviour and speech, in any case. Their importance derives from an Elizabethan audience's sense of the special nature of children: their innocence – which demands protection by and insulation from the harsher aspects of adult society – and their ignorance […] the plays posit a direct relationship between social health and the welfare of children […] (31).

"Broken Wings" foregrounds what Mark Heberle describes as the "terrible fate of children […which] constitut[es] an implicit indictment of the aggressive pursuit of power [which is] variously and ironically undercut by its effects upon children" (32). "Broken Wings" is a gripping narrative of the victimisation of a girl's childhood. It can easily be read as an allegory that tactically focuses on a girl child's experiences to explore the nation-wide (especially political and economic) victimisation of vulnerable members of society as a result of the Zimbabwean crisis. The short story narrates the victimisation of the girl-child (Nozitha) in a way that critically illuminates the deeper social, economic and political problems of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. The precariousness of the girl-child figure in Zimbabwean literature (and her capacity to reflect social ills) can be located in early Zimbabwean feminist writings. Texts by Zimbabwean writers, such as Tsitsi Dangarembga's ground-breaking feminist work *Nervous Conditions,* censure gender biased configurations of power (inherent in patriarchy, that dominated both traditional and colonial dispensations).[87] These configurations place boys above girls in the familial, social and national power hierarchies. In Yvonne Vera's short story "Crossing Boundaries" (in her first short story anthology, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992)), MaMoyo blames her father's patriarchal beliefs for her lack of education: she tells her friend Nora that her father could not see the rationale for "wast[ing] money on a girl" (5). It is, however, Chenjerai Hove's

[87] Many critics have criticised Dangarembga's sequel novel *The Book of Not* for presenting a timid Tambu who (despite her academic prowess and excellent job skills) allows the colonial racist and patriarchal system to marginalise her.

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character Johana's father (in the novel *Shadows* 1991) whose infamous debasement of girls best reveals the nature of the society's prejudice against girl children. He says:

> The girls did not have to go to school for more than was enough to open their eyes to the letters of their young lovers who courted them in the forests. The little money there was would be spent on the boys, not the girls. Did the white man not rule it, when he said only boys would pay taxes. (21)

In "Broken Wings", Mlalazi deploys the metaphor of "broken wings" to highlight the precariousness and vulnerability of girl children in the context of devastating social, economic and political upheavals characteristic of post-2000 Zimbabwe. The imagery in the title phrase "broken wings" implies limits to achievement – a thwarting of the child's potential to flourish. The title is vaguely allusive perhaps to Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* – another text that depicts the thwarting of female aspiration in a colonial context. This troubling imagery is developed in the first paragraph of the short story as Nozitha (a girl-child on her way to get some medication for her bed-ridden mother and grandparents) envies a flying butterfly. The scene is described in a gloomy and melancholic tone that prepares readers to encounter the broader social, economic and political constraints affecting her life. The following quotation from the first paragraph demonstrates this point:

> […] her eyes fixed on the butterfly, chanting in a voice so low and so sad that the sky sighed a gust of wind across her gaunt face: Lend me your wings O Butterfly/Mother and Grandmother are waiting for me/And home is near if only I could sky/High with them over the trees. (1)

This song foreshadows the story's main thematic and stylistic strands – its attempts to explore the girl-child's deprivation and political and sexual abuse, along with a subtle condemnation of the underlying forces responsible for her problems. In the song, Nozitha's wish to borrow the butterfly's wings to fly can also be read symbolically as reflecting not only Nozitha's age-induced failure to assume responsibilities that are plainly far beyond her capacity, but perhaps more significantly, her implicit appeal for help and escape. In his study of the "golden lads of Wordsworth as well as the chimney sweeps of Blake" in nineteenth-century England, Robert Pattison observes a connection with the sentiment of innocence as a "felt response to the brutal conditions of fallen man" (48). This commentary can be connected to the social and

political impact of "Broken Wings" in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis of the last decade. The child's song indicates her vulnerability, induced not only by the inversion of responsibilities within the family set-up (which make Nozitha a carer for her dying mother and ailing grandparents), but even more significantly, by the political and economic crisis suggested by the symbolic drought affecting the villagers. Sentimentality in "Broken Wings" is intricately bound up with the way the story powerfully elicits the reader's affection and sympathy for Nozitha. This sympathy is stirred in the reader by an awareness of the striking discrepancy between Nozitha's age and sex and the familial responsibilities she has to carry. The description of Nozitha's sick mother and grandparents not only highlights their poverty and the responsibilities she is burdened by, which prevent her from 'flying' like the butterfly, but also reflects the domestic constraints that prevent her from flourishing as a child – her "broken wings". This is how Nozitha's home and parents are described:

> Old Siziba sits statue-still on the edge of the bed, his hands clasped on his lap […] the cuffs of his khaki trousers are frayed, and his feet, dirty, the skin cracking, are swollen. On the bed lies his wife MaDewa, covered in a grey blanket. His eyes are fixed on her face, which is an ashy green-black. The fetid smell of human waste pervades the circular room. It comes from the floor where his daughter Sihle lies, also covered in a threadbare blanket, this one brown in colour. The blanket is almost flat, as if there is no one underneath. His granddaughter, poor little Nozitha, will see to her when she comes back from the clinic, because, well, he is also not in such good health. (2)

This description with its vivid imagery evokes the family members' helplessness and movingly alerts us to the child's victimisation, caused by the inversion of familial roles. The wretched situation of the family, signified by its affliction by diseases, affectively stirs us to become part of what Martha Nussbaum would call Nozitha's "circle of concern" (*Upheavals* 319). This compels us to recognise and condemn the injustice of the forces and circumstances informing the ironic situation in which a girl-child (a dependant) is in fact depended upon.

The sentiment evoked by the disproportionate relationship between Nozitha's responsibilities and her limited strength and capacity (informed by age, as well as by economic and political factors) draws the reader into what Nussbaum calls "bonds of identification and sympathy" (*Poetic Justice* 7). These "bonds" are further cemented by the construction of Nozitha as a 'recognisable' victim – that is, a typical victim whose precarious situation can be understood

in the context of the realities of post-2000 Zimbabwe. According to Suzanne Keen's theory of narrative empathy, "[r]readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances […]" (xii). In this light, Nozitha's dilemma can be read as symbolically reflective of the socially, economically and politically victimised in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Mlalazi deploys the girl-child figure (with its associated idealised innocence and vulnerability) to powerfully comment on the corruption of the wider society. Predictably, Nozitha is also seen as a political victim (not just a victim of socio-economic pressures).

The powerfully subversive political impact of "Broken Wings'" is enhanced by Mlalazi's foregrounding of the "sentimentality and delicacy" (Pattison 1) of the girl-child figure to evoke a sense of moral outrage at the injustice of the ruling party's politics of patronage and retribution. The connection that the story makes between poverty, girlhood, sexual abuse and political manipulation makes it a complex and powerful critique of social, economic and political processes in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Our knowledge of the dire situation at Nozitha's home (and the fact that she is the only member of that family who is 'able' to carry that burden) makes her the most deserving candidate for food aid. We are, however, stunned and moved to sympathise with her when we discover that Nozitha misses out on the food rations because her grandfather Old Siziba has misplaced the ruling party card that confirms his allegiance to the party. When political survival takes precedence over human life, especially that of the most vulnerable members of society – such as the old (Siziba), the sick (Nozitha's mother) and the young (Nozitha) – as is the case with the ruling party's abuse of food aid – then the implicit political critique is unmistakeable. This powerfully affective condemnation of the ruling party's 'food for votes' tactic is connected to the pathos evoked by the depiction of Nozitha's poverty and politically-induced vulnerability to sexual abuse. Such a situation is indicated by the following exchange between Nozitha and Sibiya, one of the ruling party's food allocation officers:

> 'Where is it [the party card]?' He had held his hand to her. 'Some people are defecting, and they are going to pay for it.' His lips had curled in a sneer. 'The dogs. This country will never be a colony again. Not as long as I live.' Nozitha had shrugged her thin shoulders. 'Grandfather can't find it, but he said I must tell you he is still a supporter, and will never change […] he said *viva*,' she had added, punching the air with a little fist. And grandfather had also made her wear his old party t-shirt, which hung to her

> ankles, for effect. The T-shirt had the picture of the local MP on its front, a fat faced man, jowls hanging, as if he was capable of barking. (5)

In this passage, the dark humour generated by the grandfather's and Nozitha's desperate efforts to show patriotic support for the party creates what Keen has called "opportunities for strong character identification" (ix). Not only are readers stirred to feel "empathy with and sympathy for" Nozitha as she falls victim to political machinations (Keen ix), but in doing so, they are likely to condemn the system of political patronage that denies her food aid – even after her desperate attempts to show loyalty to the ruling party. Implicit in Sibiya's reaction to defections from the party (which reveals the ruling party's awareness of its waning support) is an elaborate vote-buying strategy predicated on the punishment of 'miscreant' villagers.

The grotesque imagery of the ruling party, evoked by the image of the MP (emblazoned on the party T-shirt that Old Siziba gives Nozitha), is symptomatic of the unjust political and economic regime maintained by the ruling party. This injustice is not only reflected by the ironic mutual coexistence of the poor (Nozitha) and the rich (the MP on the T-shirt), but more importantly, by Abisha's rape of Nozitha. Although in her theory of narrative empathy Keen warns that "[e]mpathy for a fictional character does not invariably correspond with what the author appears to set up or invite" (xii), I would like to argue that the "situational empathy"[88] (Keen xi) generated by our strong identification with Nozitha as the plot unfolds, compels us to read the narrative of "Broken Wings" as an extension of Mlalazi's other politically subversive texts, such as "Election Day" and "Idi", and the anthology, *Dancing With Life: Tales From The Township*. The image of flying recurs towards the end of "Broken Wings", buttressing the short story's representation of a violated (girl's) childhood, with the aim of condemning the government's campaign of political retribution. Like the ruling party (which uses food aid to manipulate the electorate), Abisha (one of the ruling party's food distributors) takes advantage of Nozitha's desperation to lure her into sexual intimacy. Abisha and the ruling party are two faces of the same manipulative 'authority' that abuses Nozitha. Her contemptuous reaction to Abisha's abuse, then, can be easily read as also signifying her reaction to the ruling party. This is how Nozitha reacts to Abisha's rape: "[…] it had been so painful … but she had gritted her teeth, and held her breath, wishing away the pain by thinking of the runny waste of her mother's stomach that she threw into the bushes

[88] Described by Keen as "respond[ing] primarily to aspects of plot and circumstance" (xii).

every day. She imagined hurling it at Abisha's face" (7). The connection between Abisha and the ruling party's cynical exploitation is made in the song that Nozitha sings after her rape: "Dove O Dove/Fly fast to Grandfather/help him in the search/And find the card quickly […] For today is the day of the food again/That is given by snakes that bite […]" (7-8). The song not only evokes sympathy for Nozitha, but also hints at the lack of humanity in Abisha, and his effect on society (particularly on vulnerable girl children) is poisonous, even fatal. Abisha, then, (and the ruling party) emerges as an enemy of a humane order.

A fascinating variation in representations of girl-children in post-2000 Zimbabwean literature can be found in one of the earliest edited anthologies of short stories at the turn of the century, *No More Plastic Balls: New Voices in the Zimbabwean Short Story* (2000) (edited by Clement Chihota and Robert Muponde). In this anthology, Memory Chirere's short stories are unique in the way that they grapple with children's loss of innocence, in the Blakean sense of abused children (what Pattison calls "innocents" 48) as symptomatic of the nation's economic and social degeneration. The absence of "plastic balls" – a symbol for an idyllic or normal childhood (play) – signifies the corruption of innocence as the children are thrust into unfamiliar survivalist roles. Unlike Sekai Nzenza's short story "The Donor's Visit" (in the short story collection *Writing Free*) which presents a bitter traditionalist grandmother who laments her loss of her grandchild Chiyevo to the modernising culture, Memory Chirere's short story "Plastics and Cardboard" demonstrates a tragic turn as childhood innocence leads to the emergence of a militantly subversive generation of children who dominate their own parents. In the context of the familial allegory (consisting of revered revolutionary fathers of the Chimurenga wars and their subjects/children (see Chapter 2 of this study), deployed to configure political power, especially in Zimbabwe's last decade, Chirere's short story can easily be read as an allegory representing the post-2000 antagonism between the political 'fathers' and their children – the subjects.

Read as a political allegory, one of the story's main character Eliza, the girl-child in "Plastics and Cardboard", can be viewed as an extension of Gugu in Gugu Ndlovu's "Torn Posters"; violently venting her anger on what is supposed to be a revered authority – in this case, her mother. Teaming up with her brother Luka, Eliza menacingly reigns over her only parent (a crippled mother); beating her up as a way of controlling what they (Eliza and Luka) perceive to be her excessive egocentrism and shamelessly libidinous behaviour. Implicit in this is the stimulation of militant dissent in the children by their parent's proclivity for excess. In

Chirere's other short story, "Keresenzia", the girl is depicted as dictatorially reigning over her carer, Ambuya Matambudziko, whom she later kills. Underlying the girls' 'deviant' behaviour is what Pattison refers to as "the bestial condition of childhood" (3) – a clear break from stereotypical conceptions of childhood steeped in the general belief that "childhood is both good in itself and, properly tended, the seed from which useful, fulfilled man is necessarily grown" (Pattison 62). From the foregoing discussion, one can conclude that the foregrounding of girl-children in narratives of the post-2000 crisis endows them with a unique affective appeal which is informed by the idiosyncrasies of their vulnerability and victimhood. The resultant "illocutionary power" (Lara 5) of such narratives forcefully persuades the reader to comprehend the girls' problems from their vantage points. In the next section, I focus on how Virginia Phiri's novel *Highway Queen* and Gugu Ndlovu's short story "Bare Bones" foreground female victims of an imploding national economy to re-inscribe dominant perceptions of the crisis.

Re-framing the prostitute identity in Virginia Phiri's novel *Highway Queen* (2010)

During the preceding decade in Zimbabwe – which has been characterised by the burgeoning and increasingly thriving opposition and civic society culture (even against a backdrop of legislated discouragement of dissident expression and assembly)[89] – fiction offers an interesting space for women to express their subjectivities in the relatively safe confines of literary narratives. In her introduction to the collection of short stories by African women entitled *Opening Up Spaces*, Yvonne Vera comments on the window of opportunity presented by the cultural sphere, for women to influence public opinion vis-à-vis their unjust domination by patriarchy and individual male oppressive figures. Vera argues: "If speaking is still difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women – much freer than speech [...] The book is bound, circulated, read. It retains its autonomy much more than a woman is allowed in the oral situation" (3).

While the preceding sections analysing Yvonne Vera and Gugu Ndlovu's texts have grappled with the 'political' dimensions to the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis – demonstrating how female authored texts (which focalise around female experience) participate in what Terence

[89] I am referring to the Public Order and Security Act of 2002 which prohibits unauthorised assembly and demonstrations, while the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2003 forbids certain types of access and publication of certain information.

Ranger has called "the struggle over the past" to challenge the monologic state-authored narrative of national (*Gukurahundi*) history, the present section explores the 'social' facets to the crisis. Notwithstanding the oftentimes blurry line between the 'political' and the 'social', I invoke Lara's theorisation on the disclosive potential of language to discuss Phiri's representation of women (especially prostitutes) in the context of economic crisis, paying particular attention to the various ways through which the (evoked) prevailing economic crisis impacts on the social and individual construction and re-construction of female identities. Lara understands language to be a potentially performative means of contesting one's oppression: "I conceive of language as an internal mediation of action, and more precisely, as an intervention by means of which agents take the initiative to introduce new meanings into the public sphere" (68). In this sense, language is considered to be endowed with a disclosive potential that can influence and change prior perceptions. On the importance of this 'disclosive' effect, Lara argues that "the aesthetic effect of 'disclosure' can provide a new way of understanding justice. Once a story is retold, it is possible to grasp the narrowness of previous conceptions of justice, debts to the past that takes the form of moral responsibilities in the present are thereby incurred" (5-6). Lara's theoretical delineation of feminist narratives in the public sphere as 'morally textured' asseverates the socially transformative potential of expression.

Besides debates on whether or not female sex-for-money practices in African contexts fit North American and European definitions of prostitution,[90] one of the many controversies associated with modern discourses on female prostitution in Africa is the debate on whether or not prostitution can be categorised as labour and prostitutes as labourers in any conventional sense. The World Health Organisation has been at the forefront of advocating for prostitution's inclusion among other conventional job choices, as can be inferred in its definition of prostitution as "a dynamic and adaptive process that involves a transaction between seller and buyer of a sexual service" (qtd. in Melissa Farley 1089). In her study of the language of prostitution Johanna Niemi emotionally charges that the modern "market discourse" (160) on prostitution shifts focus from the material aspects of prostitution: "When and how did we start to speak about "the purchase of sexual services" when we really mean the sexual abuse of someone who has been forced or pressured into prostitution by economic or other problems?" (160). For Niemi, the market discourse "neutralises the activity of […]

[90] Citing Michel Foucault, Janet Maia Wojcicki argues that "the emergence of certain deviant sexual identities, including the prostitute and the homosexual, are particular to the history of sexuality in the West" (339).

the buyers of sex to such a degree that obvious sexual exploitation can go unrecognised" (169). However, Melissa Farley cites social scientists (Ahmad; Fisher; Masters and Johnson) to argue that prostitution is normal and "simply part of human nature" (1089). In this 'social science' logic, Farley argues, prostitution is considered as "a form of labour (sex work) […] an unpleasant job but not different from other kinds of unpleasant jobs, such as factory work" (1089). A more incisive and (in my reading of *Highway Queen*) relevant conception of prostitution is proffered by Janet Maia Wojcicki who (in her study of prostitution in Johannesburg's Hillbrow area) presents the concept of "*ukuphanda*, a Zulu verb loosely meaning "to try to get money" (340). As in its Northern Ndebele[91] form, the word '*ukuphanda*' carries positive connotations which describe desperate survivalist strategies (as we see with the prostitute in *Highway Queen*) which people would not take in normal circumstances.

My approach to *Highway Queen's* critique of (and attempts to change) dominant patriarchal codes guiding identity formation is focused on the novel's unique prostitute-centred narrative style. I view the prostitute's perspective employed in the narrative as enhancing the novel's aesthetic and cognitive impact; that is, the narrative's power of affect which enables it (the novel) to influence the reading public toward awareness or knowledge of the fatality of patriarchally constructed sexual identities to women (especially) in times of crisis. Invoking Shannon Bell's 'radical' feminist concept of 'disidentification', and Lara's argument that language is inherently disclosive (4), I read *Highway Queen*'s style in using a first-person (prostitute) narrative as not only well placed to foreground a demythologising consciousness of patriarchal codes guiding individual and public identity constructions, but (perhaps more importantly) as adding affect to the narrative's impact – its discursive counter-discourse against socially-produced identity constructs which limit women's chances to earning a living 'conventionally' and 'morally'. Phiri's depiction of the female prostitute figure as the chronicler of her own life not only gives the prostitute figure voice and agency to theorise about the nature of her subalternity, but can be read on a symbolic plane as foregrounding the prostitute's (and indeed the oppressed woman's) capacity to control her own life. The prostitute figure can therefore be viewed as utilising the aesthetic force of self-representation to seek "recognition and solidarity" (Lara 2) about the injustice of female-constraining, socially-produced gender and sexual identities – her attempts to erase the line between her

[91] A Nguni language spoken in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe.

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acquired circumstantial personal identity and social notions of the moral. However, while *Highway Queen* does bring in the theme of moralising a practice that is socially and culturally held to be 'immoral' (which would appear to prop up current political discourses on the legalisation of prostitution both as a form of female emancipation and a strategy of empowering women to reduce their levels of contracting HIV and sexual attacks),[92] my analysis focuses rather on the evocation of prostitution that proffers new perspectives on prostitutes and prostitution, especially in the context of the broader political, social and economic crisis that inhibit the development and flourishing of female subjectivities. In *Highway Queen*, Phiri not only portrays a woman's struggle to re-negotiate hegemonic forms of social identity amid a debilitating economic crisis which leaves prostitution as the only escape route, but powerfully attempts to challenge denigrating perceptions of prostitution and female prostitutes inscribed in hegemonic cultural, social and religious discourses. The novel invokes the extraordinary circumstances caused by the crisis (which expose the dangerous limits of socially produced and regulated female identities) to advance a re-conceptualisation of prostitution and prostitute identity formation, especially under conditions of economic crisis.

As hinted above, my reading of Phiri's engagement with the politics of identity formation in *Highway Queen* is informed by Shannon Bell's theorisation concerning the politics of prostitute identity. In her book *Reading, Writing, and Re-writing The Prostitute's Body* (1994), Bell stresses the postmodern idea of prostitutes being "like other others of modernity" (2), whose lived experience reflects (and validates) their subjectivity, formed outside the boundaries of normative social and cultural codes. However, in *Highway Queen* the rejection of dominant identities and discourses shaped by non-prostitute 'selves' not only creates what Bell calls "prostitute discourse" (3) or "reverse discourse" (14), but more importantly, becomes an opportunity for the reading public to experience what Lara calls "universalistic moral claims" (3) grounded in the prostitute's experientially subjective and discursive arguments. Bell avers that "prostitute discourse" is a creature of social marginalisation of prostitutes which transcends the counter-hegemonic impact of traditional feminism. For Bell:

[92] I am referring to recent suggestions by Thabitha Khumalo (a Member of Parliament) that prostitution be legalised in Zimbabwe. Her comments have attracted social and political controversy and her subsequent demotion from a deputy spokesperson of the MDC-T post is widely viewed not only as a punitive move to silence her, but also the party's attempts to disengage itself from her 'unZimbabwean' position in view of its potential damage to the party's image as a home-grown party.

> Power operates through the construction of particular knowledges which become accepted as truth and reality. At the same time power produces resistance. A discourse deploys a hegemonic form of subjectivity; its very existence and organisation, however, posit other subject positions and the possibility of reversal. Reverse discourse is the discourse of the subjugated subject of the hegemonic discourse, in it, the meaning and power of the dominant discourses are to some extent challenged. Prostitute discourse is the reverse discourse of both the hegemonic (phallocentric) and counter-hegemonic (gynocentric) discourses; it responds to, challenges and transgresses these. (14)

Bell further insinuates that dominant discourses of the day create frameworks for social, cultural and moral conduct that are inherently exclusionary and which the marginalised must not only challenge but reverse in "unexpected" ways (14). Bell views such marginalised people as having two basic options; either to "identify" (defined by Bell as consenting to the absolutism of identity constructions shaped by dominant discourses) or to 'disidentify' – to disrupt such identity constructions and chart different, appropriate ones. While it can be argued that (as narratives centring women's experiences of the crisis period generally indicate) the crisis decade impinged with especial harshness on women, it also provided an interval within which traditional roles (including gender roles) and stereotypes could be questioned and alternative 'identities' proposed. Bell's definitions of the processes of "identification" and "disidentification" reflect (in theory) the options available to Phiri's prostitute heroine – both the one she rejects and the one that circumstances beyond her control force her to embrace:

> Identification is the discursive process through which subjects assume the identities set up in the dominant discourses […] disidentification is the process in which the identities set up in the dominant ideology, rather than being merely countered, are perverted and displaced through the inscription of unexpected new meanings. (14)

Highway Queen (it can be argued) focuses on the aesthetic dimensions to the female prostitute's identity shift from 'identification' to 'disidentification'. The novel is one of Phiri's texts – in her unique and sizable oeuvre of literature in English – which engages with social, economic and cultural issues from a feminist (particularly prostitute's) point of view. Although her works have suffered critical neglect (compared to her contemporaries such as Petina Gappah, Valerie Tagwira, etc.), Phiri has managed to catch some literary limelight

with her distinctive and constant fascination with prostitute protagonists who (when viewed in the context of the hostile economic conditions) easily pass for heroines. Phiri's other texts such as *Desperate* (a collection of interconnected short stories to which *Highway Queen* is a sequel) grapple with the economic, moral and health dimensions of prostitution, albeit mostly in evidently colonial and pre-2000 settings. According to Phiri, *Highway Queen* was conceived to address some "unfinished business in [her] first book *Desperate*" (Author's note). A cursory comparative reading of *Highway Queen* and *Desperate* reveals their thematic unity and establishes *Highway Queen* as almost the same story related in *Desperate*, but this time unfolding in a crisis setting reminiscent of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe.

Highway Queen's discursive potential to transform the reading public's prior conceptions of prostitutes and prostitution is enhanced by its styling as "prostitute discourse" – a prostitute-centred narrative that creates in readers the impression that they are experiencing, first hand, a prostitute's discursive story of self-redemption culled from her personal experiences. As a novel with direct and indirect links to specific historical events of the post-2000 period, *Highway Queen* aesthetically engenders a reinterpretation and subsequent transformation of epoch-specific normative conceptions of the moral, thereby marking the "extension of boundaries" (Lara 56) of prior norms of the moral. The potential in previously suppressed women's experiential narratives to usher into the public sphere uniquely feminist issues, is much akin to what Walter Benjamin calls "a concept of knowledge to which a concept of experience corresponds" (qtd. in Lewis et al. 2). It is this unique, experiential dimension of women's narratives that heightens their cognitive and moral appeal. For Irene Kacandes, this cognitive effect (which can lead to solidarity) can be explained in terms of the reader/narrative relationship. Kacandes views the reader as the "enabler" (135) of the narrative, whose level of interest or readiness to participate in the process of "narrative witnessing" (Kacandes 135) either heightens or distracts from the narrative's therapeutic intentions:

> This reader, as enabler of the text, bears witness to the crimes, though her completion of the process cannot be said to aid the original victims […] despite the lack of any psychotherapeutic healing, I follow Herman, Caruth, Minow, and others in believing that there is societal benefit to such narrative witnessing. (135)

Kacandes's notion of "narrative witnessing" is important to my present reading of *Highway Queen* as inherently emancipatory and in league with other empirical social and political movements fighting for social justice. As in Currie's notion of "guided attention" (98) discussed in Chapter 2, "narrative witnessing" (Kacandes 135) in feminist literary narratives involves the deep psychological immersion of the reader into the narrative's life-world of women's gender-induced suffering. The reader's absorption into the fictional life-world of these carefully designed plots, depicted characters and action – where the effects of women's marginalisation are affectively rendered – can stir the reader to new perceptions of the social consequences of women's oppression. The reader is thus emotionally aroused to share the women's pain and this can cognitively force him or her to expand his or her "own circle of concern" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 319) to empathise with the victims. The aesthetic impact of the prostitute narrative point of view can be linked to Phiri's other texts, especially the short story "*Ndangariro Dzepfambi*" (literally translating into "prostitutes' memoirs") in the short story anthology *Masimba* (2004) edited by Chiedza Musengezi, who has served as the director of the Zimbabwe Women Writers Association. In "*Ndangariro Dzepfambi*" (as in *Desperate* and *Highway Queen*") Phiri creates female prostitute protagonists whose internal thoughts open us to their 'true' feelings and perspectives about their identities and their attempts to 'disidentify' with dangerous orthodox gender stereotypes and identity constructions to claim agency to chart their destinies outside socially 'acceptable' modes of survival.

In *Highway Queen* as in Valerie Tagwira's short story "The Journey" (in the short story anthology *Writing Still,* 2003), prostitute identity formation is portrayed as a consequence (and means) of rejecting limitations placed on female subjectivity by social and cultural norms. In *Highway Queen,* we not only read a story – as in an anecdote or a report –about a prostitute caught up in an economic crisis moment. The narrative style favours (through focalisation) the prostitute angle and immerses us in the life-world of the prostitute's ego (in the Freudian sense of her conscious, rational mind), from where our knowledge and conceptions of prostitution and prostitutes – as shaped by hegemonic cultural and social discourses (or what Freud would call the "superego" or social conscience) – are exposed, challenged and possibly replaced. The "prostitute discourse" (Bell 3) becomes the prostitute's discourse – a dialogic yet discursive exchange between the reader and the prostitute which assumes a complex epistemological dimension. Culling from her experience as a prostitute, Sophie (the prostitute narrator and protagonist in *Highway Queen*) is able to appeal to our

sense of the moral with what Lara calls "powerfully imaginative speech [that] open[s] up possibilities for creating different kinds of recognition and solidarity between the parties […] to transform preceding views of 'alter' and 'ego' such that after the action is performed neither party remains the same" (2). I would like to pursue this socially transformative impact of the novel by means of a close analysis of the novel's use of the first person narrative voice to articulate the prostitute's evolving subjectivity and struggle to acquire agency in order to redefine the moral in her own terms.

The experiential quality of Sophie's narrative endows her arguments with a sense of discursive subjectivity and authority concerning prostitutes and sex work which is more personal and affective. Sophie's "prostitute discourse" unfolds in the form of narrated lived experience in which the personal – in the sense of Patricia Waugh's notion of "the realm of feeling" – becomes a teleological expression of the political which is – according to Waugh's definition – "the realm of reason and action" (36). From the beginning of the novel, Sophie is portrayed as demonstrating an unwavering sense of sexual and social morality. The events and circumstances that she narrates, then, are not only carefully selected to reveal her inner sense of morality, but more importantly, to expose the incompatibility of her chastity with the prevailing economic demands. Construed in the context of ingrained social and cultural censure of prostitution,[93] this paradoxical conflict between Sophie's 'true' (personal) self and her prostitute (public) self creates (in the reader) a fascination with the forces behind her inevitably fractured identity. Sustaining that captivation of the readers is the prostitute's narrative – in Maureen Whitebrook's sense of narrative as "involv[ing] both the organisation of events, story, and the process of organisation, narration" (11) – which reflects her daily struggles as a reluctant prostitute, allowing her to reflect on circumstances that force her to commodify her body. According to Lara, the identity of the speaking subject is critical not only to the story's semantic effect, but to its illocutionary impact as well. The nature of Sophie's "narrative identity" (to use Whitebrook's phrase – 10) is such that her "inside story that she convey[s] to [us]" (Whitebrook 10) makes her evolving subjectivity an inside out story of lived experience which leads us (at the end of the novel) to an "outside-in" (Whitebrook 10) understanding and evaluation of her acquired prostitute identity as informed 'judges'. As Lara asserts: "storytelling [is] an identity project" (35). Being the author of the

[93] See Anna Chitando's book *Fictions of Gender and the Dangers of Fiction in Zimbabwean Women's Writings on HIV and AIDS* which deals with literary representations of female identities against the backdrop of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis.

story of her life, Sophie's narrative carefully selects moments in her life that advance her overarching objective to 'sanitise' her acquired prostitute identity. Through her interior monologues, we (as readers) encounter her 'true' conscience, which clarifies the discrepancy between her personal and public identities. To this effect, the timing of Steven's retrenchment (and his consequent 'resignation' from his role as the family's breadwinner) and Sophie's resultant desperation are intricately bound up with her identity shift. In contrast with her husband's depiction (from the moment he loses his job) as an irrationally irresponsible and egocentric man, Sophie strikes us as practical, selfless and long-suffering woman who (unlike Steven) is prepared to compromise on a critical aspect of her being – her sexual identity – both for her own livelihood and for the sake of her endangered family.

Sophie's descriptions of her first (and subsequent) acts of sex selling do not only reflect the tensions inhabiting her unstable identity manifesting in the conflict between her inner, socially 'correct' sense of sexual morality and her outer, crisis-conditioned prostitute identity. In fact, the descriptions subtly 'explain' (in an affective style) the complexity of her emergent identity as it is shaped by social and economic forces whose pressing and conflicting demands result in her split identity. The disclosive or 'explanatory' facet to Sophie's descriptions of her sexual encounters as a prostitute demonstrates what Seyla Benhabib calls "the redemptive power of narrative" (qtd. in Lara 37) which is heightened throughout the novel by the autobiographically-styled self-narration, illuminating Sophie's personal struggle to reconcile herself with socially 'deviant' yet economically imperative prostitute identity. In her first sex sale, Sophie is portrayed as embroiled in a 'do or die' (essentially, a 'be a prostitute or die') situation in which her very livelihood and that of her family is predicated on her sexual 'immoralisation'. When Dhuri (the cross-border truck driver who sells scarce basic commodities) announces his desire to be paid by sex for the rice that Sophie wants to repackage for resale, she is "shattered" and the impromptu answer she gives is that she is a married woman. Implicit in Sophie's response to Dhuri is the danger of the socially ascribed "married woman" identity in so far as it limits Sophie's options to take up the available (but socially discredited) means of livelihood such as prostitution. The difficult options that Dhuri and all of Sophie's subsequent male clients give her (either to protect her social identity and die of hunger or to lose her socially acceptable 'morality' and survive) demonstrate the extent of her entrapment and validates her decision to jettison the normative "married woman" identity in order to survive. When read in the context of her precarious financial position, Sophie's decision to become a prostitute effectively dissolves the 'morality' line between her

newly acquired prostitute identity (the only available option for survival) and her "married woman" identity. Sophie's moral sense of marriage (demonstrated by her violent repelling of Dhuri's sex-for-rice advances) can therefore be read as reflecting the initial harmony between her inner (personal) and outer (social) identities as a "married woman" in good times, which prepares us for her inevitable identity crisis in bad ones. Her eventual decision to give in to Dhuri's sexual demands (apparently as an act of desperation rather than self-will) thus 'moralises' her otherwise 'immoral' conduct. A quotation from the text where Sophie describes her feelings about the sex-for-rice sexual encounter with Dhuri illuminates the paradox of 'moralised' immorality:

> I was in a very difficult situation. Losing both the money and the commodities would drive me crazy. I had to make up my mind quickly […] I was very angry with myself for giving in. I thought of my husband and children. What I was about to do was a shameful thing, I was betraying my family. I was angry with Dhuri for taking advantage of me […] he [Dhuri] was so sarcastic I would have kicked him […] we spent most of the time arguing about protection. Dhuri had said he did not believe in condoms and that AIDS did not exist. I said totally the opposite. In the end we carried on without protection […] I felt rotten and dirty about what we had done. (19)

In this description, the context in which Sophie loses her (socially defined) sexual morality forces us to understand her new public (prostitute) identity outside dominant socio-cultural constructions of moral behaviour – to perceive Sophie's 'immoralisation' paradoxically as an act of self-sacrifice on behalf of her family. The risk that Sophie takes (by engaging in unprotected sex) is portrayed as further proof of the extremity of her desperation and its self-sacrificial (rather than indulgent) dimension. The all too common male demand for unprotected sex, in the context of the AIDS pandemic and the socio-economic crisis, is another illustration of how much harsher women's position is at such times.

Invoking the traditionally ingrained identification of prostitutes as homewreckers, Anna Chitando argues that dominant images of prostitutes are inherently negative. Chitando further contends that Virginia Phiri in *Desperate* "give[s] a voice to sex workers" (53) to challenge this prejudice founded on narrow conceptions of the forces behind prostitution. Chitando argues: "the Shona terms for sex workers, *pfambi* (prostitute) and *hure* (whore) are totally negative" (53). According to this logic, the prostitute is a deviant woman undeserving of

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respect or classification along with the celebrated orthodox womanhood best defined by the Shona proverb "*musha mukadzi*" (literally translating into "a home is a woman"). Chitando concludes that *Desperate* proffers a platform for female (prostitute) subjectivities that "subvert[s] patriarchy and create[s] new and positive identities as expressing positive agency" (53). *Highway Queen* (like *Desperate*) manages to de-stigmatise prostitution by (as Chitando observes in relation to *Desperate*) inversely identifying society as the danger to prostitutes against orthodox conceptions of prostitutes as a danger to society. In *Highway Queen*, the 'prostitute discourse' creates a dialectic of prostitute identification whereby the female prostitute acquires agency to redefine the moral. Thus the dominant image of prostitution reflected in the character of Sophie is not only anti-essentialist, but more importantly, is 'tailored' to evoke prostitution (in Sophie's extraordinary context) as just a normal type of work and Sophie as just another ordinary worker struggling to survive the harsh economic conditions. Sophie's consciousness of the stigma attached to prostitution – her awareness that she is earning "dirty money" (89) – is constantly dispelled by our sympathetic appreciation of her desperation, which is buttressed by her declaration that her body is "the only commodity that no one had control over except [her]self" (88). Each time Sophie "sells sex" her sense of regret and "ang[er] with [her]self" (86) is outweighed by her sense of achievement. This is revealed, for instance, in Sophie's reaction to a constantly nagging fear that some of her male clients could have infected her with HIV. She says:

> No one suspected how I earned money […] the money that I earned gave me security and hope. I was able to resume payment of stand instalments. My family was never short of food. School fees were paid in time. As things got harder, most families struggled. I was lucky that I was managing, even though the money was not clean. (89)

Although Sophie (throughout the novel) manages to conceal her prostitute self from her family and close friends by 'practising' away from home, her constantly guilty conscience (informed by her awareness of the 'uncleanliness' of the money) mars her sense of achievement. However, the 'dirt' in the money that she earns through sex work is 'sanitised' through her story's affective impact, which nudges us to recognise sympathetically the pressing circumstances behind her desperate tenacity in 'disindentifying'. Sophie's prostitute identity is in this way, 'disclosive' – that is, in the sense of Lara's notion of "envision[ing] in a critical way, better ways of being in a world of equality and distinction" (6). Although Sophie's 'disidentification' is apparently incomplete (because she never reaches a stage

where she successfully sheds her guilty conscience and publicly displays her prostitute identity), she bravely explodes phallogocentric notions of the moral in order to chart a subject position that allows her to use the only available survival route – sex work.

Highway Queeen's styling as an autobiographical prostitute narrative can be linked to Lara's theorisation on "the role of experience in morality in the construction of a moral identity" (26). Lara contends that when women's personal experiences come to the public domain, they not only represent the experiencing subject's desire for recognition, but more importantly, seek to re-negotiate and re-inscribe their identity, basing their arguments on reasons informed by their unique personal experience. As hinted earlier in the discussion, Phiri seems less interested in the politics of the decriminalisation of prostitution than she is keen to de-mythologise the blanket condemnation of prostitution in dominant social, cultural and religious spheres made without due regard for the underlying patriarchal forces informing its practice. Beyond the novel's 'counter-identification' effect – its problematisation and rejection of narrow and exclusionary perceptions of prostitutes and prostitution in dominant socio-cultural discourses – the text (through its prostitute narrative style) lends the prostitute narrator authenticity and agency to articulate her experiences convincingly and even appealingly. One way in which this subjectivity presents a discursive space for the revision of prior, socially inscribed identities is through Sophie's constant exposure of the inadequacies of her husband (Steven) who is made the evident embodiment of undeserved patriarchal privilege.

Highway Queen can thus be perceived as a story of female 'disidentification' whose styling as a prostitute narrative not only makes the story more personal, subjective and iconoclastic, but enables the novel to powerfully fufil the feminist quest for recognition and solidarity to claim agency for the prostitute heroine as a capable 'author' of her own and her family's lives. Although the fear of stigma haunts Sophie's conscience throughout the novel, compelling her to hide her prostitute identity, prostitution as described and explained through its practitioner (epitomised by her particular practice) acquires a 'cleaner' and even moral image that is akin to what Anna Chitando calls "commercial sex work" (36). Sophie's convictions about prostitution do not totally fit Bell's notion of 'disidentification', but they at least allow her to reproduce socially 'acceptable' norms of moral conduct while she (at the same time) disguisedly explodes them through prostitution as a survivalist mechanism. Thus, besides the novel's overarching concern with demythologising patriarchal hegemonic notions

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of sexual behaviour, *Highway Queen* also reflects on the deeply rooted culture of social intolerance which inhibits the development of totally 'disidentifying' female subjectivities. However, from an intersectionalist point of view, not all women are equally affected by the economic crisis and similarly those affected (due to multifarious forces and circumstances) do not necessarily see or take up prostitution as the panacea. Vivienne Ndlovu's short story "Bare Bones" and Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, for instance, are two texts which penetratingly theorise on the vulnerability of women who (unlike Sophie in *Highway Queen*) are bereft of any viable option to negotiate the economic crisis.

The Uncertainty of Hope as gender activism

In Chapter 2, I analysed Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* as a complex archive from which (as an alternative to the government narrative) we can access invaluable knowledge about the social, economic and political dimensions of the actual urban slum clearances (Operation *Murambatsvina*) that occurred in 2005. However, *The Uncertainty of Hope* centres on the experiences of women caught up in a volatile economic and political situation, and this makes it a critical text for this section's focus on comprehending the crisis both from the perspective of a female author and also from the point of view of gendered experience. In this light, I attempt a reading of Tagwira's novel that explores the roots of women's problems and vulnerabilities (particularly with regard to domestic violence and HIV/AIDS) as well as the imagined routes available to women caught up in such entanglements in the context of Zimbabwe's decade-long crisis.

My conception of violence against women is shaped by Green's theorisation about the phenomenon in African contexts as "encompassing a range of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse including violence occurring within the family, within the general community, and when perpetuated or condoned by the state" (2). Notwithstanding positive legislative safety nets created by such laws as the Domestic Violence Act (2006), women's vulnerability to various forms of abuse remains topical in Zimbabwe. Chandra Talpade Mohanty avers that "[m]ale violence must be theorised and interpreted *within* specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organise to change it" (260). Tagwira's representation of women in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is deliberately iconoclastic towards patriarchy in the state, in traditional society and in marriage. This iconoclasm can be traced to her intention to use fiction to advance a feminist discourse

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uniquely informed by the vicissitudes of post-2000 Zimbabwe. Homing in on Tagwira's engagement with the theme of domestic violence, one realises that her evocation of gender-based violence locates this violence in the context of broader patriarchal practices which have become part of the dominant culture. Green in the study *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses* (1999) has theoretically commented on the topics that *The Uncertainty of Hope* engages with in a more complex and profound way. For Green:

> According to Radical feminists, it is th[e] emphasis on group interests through which patriarchy simultaneously excludes women from political and economic power while it works to destroy women's consciousness of their potential power as women. Patriarchy produces and is reproduced by acts of gender-specific violence committed within the family and rationalised as being in the interest of the group. (17)

In her short stories "The Journey" and "Mainini Grace's Promise", Tagwira deploys female figures of pathos that affectively guide the reader into an empathetic solidarity with the victimised women that potentially condemns the system which produces them. *The Uncertainty of Hope,* on the other hand, depicts strong-willed female characters whose determination to challenge patriarchal notions of the 'woman's place' at the levels of the family, the economic system and nation gains our admiration and provides a compelling case for what Lara calls a "reformula[ion of] 'values', 'beliefs', 'self-images', 'boundaries' and 'frontiers'" (7). By presenting a successful feminist reordering of gender power in the family set-up, *The Uncertainty of Hope* signifies what Mary Modupe Kolawole (in her book *Womanism and African Consciousness*) calls the "emerge[nce] from 'silence', [which] transcends the many limiting borders imposed [on women] by patriarchal-traditional or post-colonial structures" (6).

Buttressing Green's intersectionalist perspective that "not all women are subordinated in the same way […]" (2), Chandra Talpade Mohanty warns against the tendency to categorise women as a singular and homogeneous category in any analysis of their social, economic and political existence and identities. In reference to Africa, Mohanty argues that:

> [w]hen 'women of Africa' as a group (versus 'men of Africa' as a group) are seen as a group precisely because they are generally dependent and oppressed, the analysis of specific historical differences becomes impossible, because reality is always apparently

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> structured by divisions – two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive groups, the victims and the oppressors. (24)

The Uncertainty of Hope focuses on the personal and social lives of two women (Onai and her friend Katy), exploring the multiple ways in which their femininity makes them different victims of patriarchy in a perceptibly post-2000 crisis period in Zimbabwe. The novel can therefore be read as what Gregory Currie calls a "character-focused narration" (123). Currie proffers useful pointers to 'character-focused narratives' that can help readers to comprehend the feminist thrust of Tagwira's portrayal of women characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. He suggests that:

> The behaviour of a character in narrative is represented by the narrative, and the narrative is an artefact, intentionally crafted to be the representation that it is. If we are persuaded, or suspect, that the narrative is one of Character, behaviours which are represented in it can often be taken as a rational basis for inference to Character, simply because they *are* represented within it. A narrative is rich in indications of the maker's intentions, and anything a character is represented as doing in the narrative can be assumed to be so represented for a reason. (Currie 190)

Central to Tagwira's reclamation of female agency in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is her evocation of patriarchy as a complex and constantly morphing system which must be understood in the context of the prevailing wider social and historical forces. Onai is evoked as the 'window' through which we are guided not only to perceive the dangers of women's identification with patriarchal forms of power hierarchies, but more importantly, also to recognise the resolute and conquering spirit of a woman endowed with natural talents and abilities. While this construction of Onai as the epitome of female struggle makes her the centre of the novel's feminist and ideological thrust, it most importantly makes her a foil to other, failed women. Besides the 'fairy-tale' element to Onai's eventual escape from squalor into prosperity, the juxtapositioning of Onai with these doomed women (especially Sheila who succumbs to AIDS and the effects of Operation Murambatsvina) leads readers to identify Onai's journey to self-actualisation as a model journey for the struggle of women against oppression. The fictional representation of female victims of AIDS, of mass displacements and of female-headed families allow the author to create possible life-worlds in which the readers can experience what Michel Foucault calls the "historical apriori" (qtd.

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in O'Farell 74). According to Clare O'Farell, the "historical apriori" foregrounds an "idea of beauty [that is unchanging and that] is eternal and [that]all works of art in some way refer back to" (74). The unchanging 'idea of beauty' foregrounded in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is a feminist and moral one. It is steeped in Tagwira's concern with women's vulnerability in the post-2000 period and in her intention to imagine curative solutions or exit routes for affected women.

Through the character of Onai, Tagwira demonstrates the importance of proactive responses by women to their disadvantaged situations. Onai is depicted as the prototypical female fighter who rises beyond her place (as defined by patriarchal codes of cultural conduct) and overcomes the familial problems caused by her abusive husband, Gari. Onai's importance as the epitome of women who transcend gender-based hurdles to succeed in life is given impetus by her problematic marriage. Our understanding of Onai's social and economic problems is informed by the connection between these problems and Gari's uncouth behaviour in the marriage. Gari's irresponsible sexual behaviour, for instance, is seen as endangering Onai, but her firm insistence on using protection prevents her from contracting AIDS. Onai's survival is thus a result of her defiance of the stereotypes of passivity and subservience that are part of the socialisation of a (supposedly) 'true' African wife; conforming to these stereotypes could have endangered her life. On a symbolic plane, Onai's escape from AIDS (by taking charge of the conjugal side of her marriage) can be read as emphasising the imperative of female agency and assertiveness to defy androcentric sexual, gender and power hierarchies in the family and beyond it. In this light, the demise of Sheila as a result of AIDS can be traced to her poverty-induced renunciation of her negotiating power. Unlike Onai, Sheila represents the archetype of the defeated woman whose unfortunate fate is a consequence of her fatalistic and resigned disposition. Sheila is, then, 'evidence' of the danger of not asserting agency or a determination to overcome circumstances. Her despondent character and pessimistic attitude to life is subtly criticised as calamitous to the struggle of women to lead independent lives and take control of their destinies. Apart from the symbolic significance attached to her painful death (and that of her child) due to AIDS and the harsh living conditions in the aftermath of the government's urban slum demolitions, the implicit denunciation of her resignation to defeat can be located in the subtly condemnatory tone used to describe her pessimistic response to her medical condition. This can be seen in the following extract:

> 'No. I've been put on a [AIDS drugs] waiting list. They said they're not taking on new patients at the moment. There is no money to buy the drugs. I was not surprised at all. *Chii chitsva*? Things never change. Except to get worse.' She gave a brittle, sarcastic laugh….They said I must try next year. *Hakusi kupenga* ikoko? It's madness! I'm sure to be dead by then. They don't care. So why should I care? She gave a humourless snort. Onai was at a loss of words. This flippant candour was just a mask. She could see right through it. Behind, lay a terrified, vulnerable, young woman whose health had deteriorated visibly in recent months. (Tagwira 61-62)

In Bakhtin's concept of metalinguistic analysis, the direct speech of characters constitutes what Pam Morris calls "objectified or represented discourse" (102) which she views as "also referentially oriented but stylistically […] subordinated to authorial discourse [and …] treated as the object of authorial understanding" (102). In the "character speech" (Morris 102) cited in the excerpt above, besides the allusion to the problem of the shortage of antiretroviral drugs (a common feature of the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe), the conversation between the two female characters allows us to glimpse the personal life and psychological state of an AIDS victim. When contrasted with Onai's steadfast fighting spirit (which saves her from the threat of HIV infection), Sheila's defeatist resignation to fate is tragically at odds with the affirmative feminist project. Sheila's defeatism is therefore made all the more tragic (in view of the novel's overarching feminist structure) by her construction as a foil to Onai. Apart from her unfortunate identification with patriarchal identity constructs in the initial stages of the novel, Onai embodies a strong will to negotiate patriarchy as it manifests through Gari. The symbolical significance attached to the two women's juxtaposed and contrasting reactions to their problems is unmistakable. In furtherance of her feminist agenda, Tagwira 'kills' the non-believer (Sheila), who dies as a result of AIDS, and 'saves' the believer (Onai) from the scourge, rewarding her positive approach to life and her empowered stance – if 'belief' can be construed as self-belief, or belief in women's right to agency.

Despite Onai's symbolic success in escaping HIV/AIDS infection (which emphasises the importance of her taking charge of her sexual relationship with Gari), her loss of control of other aspects of her marriage becomes a source of domestic strife. Through Onai's tumultuous marriage to Gari, Tagwira constructs a fictional life-world in which a marriage based on patriarchal forms of gender and power relations is contemptuously represented and seen as a justification for searching for something better. Tagwira deploys various stylistic

approaches in her narrative of an ordinary urban woman caught up in an economic and political crisis to alert us to some of the women-endangering dimensions of patriarchy in an urban space. What emerges as Onai's 'tragic flaw' in the early stages of the novel up to Gari's death (that is, her vulnerability to Gari's violence) is her orthodox, patriarchally imposed cultural concept of a 'good' wife which subordinates her to the patriarchal code supported by many women (including her mother) and by which she is indoctrinated and intimidated to believe that divorce is shameful. For Green, "the family is the institution most central to patriarchy because it indoctrinates males and females through psychosocial conditioning and socialisation into gender roles" (15). In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Tagwira critically evaluates the roots of Onai's cultural conservatism in the family system, alerting us to its dangers through the various life-threatening challenges encountered by Onai. Despite her near-fatal physical abuse by Gari and notwithstanding Katy's advice to leave Gari, Onai chooses to stay "for the sake of the children" (7). The 'traditional' roots of Onai's "staying for the sake of the children" logic can be connected to patriarchal sexism and power hierarchy in which women's lowly positioning make them (like the children) vulnerable to 'disciplining', both as a way of 'leading' them and reminding them of their 'place'. Citing Muthani Wanyeki's study of domestic violence as a form of human rights abuse in the Kenyan context, Green comments on the relationship between marriage, gender-based violence and patriarchally constructed female identities:

> It is marriage and their status as wives that render women the 'appropriate' victims of violence aimed at reinforcing gender roles and relations. Within the family, there exists a differential responsibility and authority that gives the husband both the perceived right and obligation to control his wife's behaviour and justify beating her […] it is often argued in Kenya that a woman's views are disregarded like those of a child and she has to be beaten like a child to be corrected. (23)

In Tagwira's novel, Onai's internalisation of women's inferior status in marriage and society as 'natural' (hence her tolerance of her abusive marriage with Gari) is informed by her mother's patriarchally compromised belief that a marriage should be preserved even at the expense of the woman's freedoms both for the sake of her children and to protect the image of the woman (in this case, Onai). Onai's dilemma has a precedent in her own mother's troubled polygamous marriage; Onai accepts that this is a 'tried and tested' solution to her own gender and domestic problems. In Onai's initial (patriarchally-informed) conception of

gender and power, the most basic sign of a true wife – what she calls "the essence of a true African woman" (Tagwira 7) – is the passive acceptance of the husband's abuse – so that she can remain in the marriage to watch over her children's upbringing. Onai's line of argument (which reveals Tagwira's counter-discourse) resonates with popular sentiment reflected, for instance, in Steve Makoni's hit song "*Handiende"* (I will never leave the family home). In this song, the rejected wife (also a victim of her husband's lascivious behaviour and domestic violence) is adamant that she will stay in the family home for the sake of her children, regardless of the consequences. However, unlike Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the woman in Makoni's song is militantly feministic, accusing her husband of physical and sexual abuse (for her deflowering). The victimised and rejected woman in Josphat Somanje's more recent 'radically' feminist song, "*Haulume*", agrees to leave the marriage and the family home on one impossible condition: that the husband transforms her into her original state before they met. Despite the fact that these songs were performed by men, they highlight the cultural context in which Onai's fatal identification with patriarchal notions of femaleness and maleness becomes understandable. As Nick Couldry argues, "it is mainly through contextual clues [ ] that we interpret a text: the text 'in itself' is a myth" (77). Our knowledge of the danger lurking in Onai's perseverance with Gari "for the sake of the children" (7) reflects the underlying differences between Onai's situation and that of her mother's generation, not least of which is the very real danger of AIDS infection. This irony is implicit in the mother's advice:

> MaMusara's own marriage to Onai's late father had been very troubled. But she had stayed for the sake of her children and because marriage was not something that one could just walk away from. 'Once you get in, you stay. *Kugomera uripo chaiko mwanangu* … no matter how hard it gets. Always remember that a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side,' MaMusara had declared, obviously keen to instil similar values in her daughter. (7)

The marriage between Gari and Onai is symbolic. The marriage not only reveals the inter-related forces of both traditional and the newer urban forms of patriarchy, but more importantly, it provides the justification for the author's radical subversion of Gari's dominance in their sexual and family power relationship. Tagwira's critique of the dangers of women's acceptance of patriarchal conceptions of 'a woman's place' is intricately bound up with her portrayal of men in the novel as a whole. In his theorisation on the role of character

in his book *Narratives and Narrators* Gregory Currie argues that "we invoke character most readily in contexts where praise or blame is likely […]" (189). In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, characterisation plays an important role in Tagwira's subversive critique of patriarchal configurations of power. Gari is clearly depicted as the face of patriarchy whose constant undermining of Onai's efforts to assert herself as a self-respecting and confident individual make him (and by implication patriarchy) repulsive. Tagwira's subversion of patriarchy's absolutism and its use of systematic violence as a gender, familial and societal hegemonic tool is highlighted by the depiction of Gari as posing a health threat – not only to himself but even more to Onai and the children's lives. He is an irresponsible father figure who abrogates his breadwinning role and yet ironically demands respect, as if he is doing his best under the prevailing circumstances. As in Virginia Phiri's novel, *Highway Queen*, the woman (Onai) is at the mercy of a husband whose egoistic attempts to escape the crisis through alcoholism, effectively thrust his wife into the breadwinner role. In a difficult urban situation, characterised by a damaged economy and the scarcity of jobs, Gari's abandonment of his family is abhorrent. This leads the reader not only to sympathise with his wife, but perhaps more importantly, also to comprehend the urgency of transforming the existing patriarchal gender and power constructs. This unfavourable representation of Gari (and of patriarchy) is further buttressed by his illogical priorities, particularly his spendthrift, lascivious and unhealthy indulgence in alcohol and illicit sexual relationships as his family teeters on the verge of starvation and destitution.

Borrowing David Punter's conception of "the literary […as] that which resists pinning down, that which will always squirm away and produce 'other', 'unauthorised' meanings" (5-6), one can easily read Gari (and his patriarchally-informed masculinity) as an indication of a more extensive and more sophisticated form of patriarchy – that represented by the political system (the government) which, like Gari, is failing to provide for the needs of the national family. In her misery, Onai thinks back to better yesteryears when men (and the government) had been true to their breadwinning and familial roles as protector and provider. Implicit in Onai's nostalgic visions of the better past is her subtle critique of the more recent distortion of fatherhood at both the familial and the national levels (the overarching theme in the book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* edited by Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde). This can be inferred from the descriptions of Onai's objections to Gari's irresponsible behaviour and her worry about the losses she has incurred in her vending business following the government's ban on unlicensed vending:

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> Her day passed in a blur of a severe headache and neck pain. All the while, she fretted about her lost earnings at the market […] In four months' time, she would have to pay school fees for her children again […] she summoned up nostalgic memories of days when schools had provided all the textbooks required by their pupils; a time when a school fees' invoice meant nominal charges for people in difficult circumstances like her, and a time when the words 'social welfare' had held meaning of sorts […] Of course, Gari would not lose sleep over the situation […] And as he had often pointed out, she should be grateful that they could live in the house that had belonged to his parents. The reasonably good salary which he earned as a section manager at the Cola Drinks plant was reserved for his bingeing, and only God knew what else. (33)

Gari and the government emerge in Onai's reminiscences as two faces of the same oppressive and self-centred authority that, in constantly reneging on its responsibilities to provide for the family (at both the domestic and the national levels), compels its subjects to improvise in the roles. Onai's nostalgic memory subtly hints at the idyllic father-figure at both the domestic and national levels. If one compares Gari's egomaniacal and dangerous priorities (booze and philandering) with Onai's commitment to the family (revealed by her concern over her children's school fees), the implicit feminist statement is unmistakable. Tagwira extends what strikes us as a perverse connection between patriarchy at the familial and national levels by demonstrating how their avoidance of their familial and national obligations demands the transformation of, or the replacement of, the underlying patriarchal systems. Despite her commitment to be a 'persevering' (7) and 'respectably' married and loving wife to Gari, Onai is constantly frustrated by his indifference towards and distaste for her as he philanders with the prostitutes, Gloria and Sheila. As Gari refuses Onai all forms of marital love and prepares for a new life with his new 'wife' Gloria, Onai finds herself hating him and (ironically) discovers an attraction for Mawaya, the homeless outcast who begs her for food.

The *Uncertainty of Hope* can be read as a fictional demonstration of the feminist concept of sisterhood.[94] In the context of an undying patriarchal culture (embodied by Gari and his brother Toro), one of the novel's 'visions' is the establishment of bonds between women in their quest to resist their marginalisation and oppression. In the novel, the friendship between

[94] I am using the word in its most basic sense as connoting women's shared visions and bonds in their resistance to male domination.

Onai and Katy reflects the possibilities for female emancipation when women realise the strength in female solidarity and unity of purpose. The two friends' different levels of victimisation reveal how differently various types and levels of female difference affect the construction of female identity, but more importantly highlight the significance of women's ties and networks in the construction and solidification of a new and assertive female identity that claims agency and self-determination. Onai and Katy's personalities and marriages are constructed as "[…] different, and their upbringing even more so" (7), which makes them foils to each other. Through the ironically contrasting identities of the two friends, Tagwira is able to reflect on what Onai lacks (and needs) in order to achieve self-actualisation. Although her own family and financial condition are not entirely stable, Katy is portrayed as an embodiment of the qualities that Onai needs to acquire if she is to extricate herself from the patriarchal oppression epitomised by her physical and emotional abuse at the hands of Gari. Katy is therefore portrayed throughout the novel as not only Onai's 'knight in shining armour' who intervenes at the right moments to avert Onai's annihilation by Gari's violent patriarchy, but she also serves as a symbolic reservoir of strength for Onai, helping her (Onai) eventually successfully to extricate herself from ruin.

The importance of female solidarity to disempowered women such as Onai in their quest to reclaim power and agency is emphasised through the various instances where Katy emerges as Onai's last line of defence against gender-induced challenges. One of these instances (involving Onai's eviction by Gari's brother from the family home in the wake of Gari's death) stands out as particularly revealing of the kind of implicit social commentary communicated by the novel concerning the importance of women's camaraderie in resisting patriarchal oppression. Faced with the grim reality of homelessness as Toro evicts her and her children from the house (for being a "[d]isrespectful, stupid woman" – 246), Onai cannot count on Shungu (Toro's wife) for help because Shungu, we are told, wants to take advantage of Onai's misfortunes to relocate to the city to escape the poverty of her rural home. Onai's appeal to Gari's sister Chipo for redress is equally futile as Chipo unfairly accuses Onai of bewitching Gari. Shungu and Chipo are not evoked here as mere ancillary characters created to propel the plot forward. In fact, their presence helps us to understand some of the dynamics of some women's conscious and unconscious complicity in the perpetuation of patriarchal tyranny. Unified resistance to female oppression is impossible in this family, given the selfish decisions taken by Chipo and Shungu (who both side with Toro). Their conduct indicates two types of obstacles to the essential 'sisterhood' notion of female esprit de corps – the

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egocentrism and opportunism of Shungu and the more subtle patriarchal entrenchment of the female inferiority complex which renders Chipo incapable of realising the justice of Onai's attempt to reclaim the family home and the money inherited by Toro at the expense of Onai and her children. More significantly, Onai and her children's eviction and the culturally validated expectation that she should serenely submit to Toro's takeover of her life and home indicates the extreme gender bias in the local (as in many other) traditional culture(s). The disregard of the widow's and the fatherless children's welfare underscores the injustice and inhumanity of this traditionally entrenched practice.

The depicted friendship between Onai and Katy is indicative of the potential in women's solidarity to change their social, economic and political fortunes and has a deeper significance for the novel's engagement with the social structures and forces shaping women's gender-induced vulnerability and their capacity to negotiate it. The female agency enjoyed by Katy (and lacking in Onai's life) is related to the binary portrayal of their marriages, particularly the diametrically opposite conceptions and practices of patriarchy and masculinity by their respective husbands, John and Gari. Characterisation plays a major role in this framing of 'beneficent' and 'malignant' patterns of masculinity embodied respectively by John and Gari, and manifesting in the contrasting levels of female self-actualisation of their wives.

The major difference in these two men's conceptions of their roles in the familial power hierarchy manifests in attitudes to (and relationships with) their wives. Unlike John (a responsible father who makes important decisions with his wife), Gari is the embodiment of crude, predatory and authoritarian patriarchy whose masculinist commandement (to transpose Mbembe's word) harms and thwarts his wife and children. Founded on the pretext of 'inherent' male supremacy, this power configuration at the familial level legitimates a gender-biased familial tyranny, epitomised by Gari's constant physical and verbal abuse of Onai. In comparison with John (whose mild, considerate, hardworking and tolerant character endears him to his wife and daughter but also to the readers), Gari's repulsively self-indulgent promiscuity, extreme irresponsibility and trail of domestic violence show up with especial vividness:

> Ruva (Onai's eldest daughter) rushed into the bedroom and took in the scene. Her mother lay on the floor, a stream of blood-stained tears ran between her fingers as she

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> held them protectively over her face. Ruva's alarmed gaze shifted to her father. He was lying at an angle across the bed, already blissfully lost in a drunken slumber. His mouth open, he was discharging thunderous snores and his feet were dangling carelessly over her mother's curled form. Her eyes filled with bitterness. Her heart ached, and a hopeless pain filled her chest. (10)

As highlighted in my earlier analysis of *The Uncertainty of Hope* as a complex contributor to the public debate concerning the 2005 urban slum demolitions in Zimbabwe, Tagwira's arresting descriptions effectively evoke affective responses (in the reader) to actual social phenomena such as near fatal 'wife-beating'. The description in the excerpt cited above is endowed with implicit moral appeal which guides the reader to perceive the narrative's denunciation of domestic violence and its covert envisioning of an alternative and more equal gender dispensation. Tagwira's vivid evocation of Onai and Ruva's violated innocence delineates their undeserved (both physical and emotional) pain. The moving description of anguish (both physical and emotional) inflicted on the mother and her daughter by Gari – their husband and father – arouses empathy as well as moral outrage, drawing the reader into the two female victims' "circle of concern" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 319). This empathetic 'relationship' with female victims of domestic violence in the novel is intensified by the depiction of Gari's contemptuous nonchalance and the portrayal of his victims as entrapped and incapable of extricating themselves from such violence and squalor. However, Tagwira balances her portrayals of symbolically admirable and despicable men in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Thus Gari (a representative of a grotesquely unjust patriarchal system) is 'strategically' killed by the author, allowing Onai to convalesce and redefine herself on her own terms. He is also countered by the presence of other, kindly and morally upright men (particularly Tapiwa Jongwe/Mawaya), who help Onai to recover her sense of self-worth and achieve her career goal of becoming a clothing designer in a joint business venture. The novel thus exhibits both "hope" for abused women and caution concerning its "uncertainty" in the context of a severely gender-skewed dispensation.

In the next section, I focus on Vivienne Ndlovu's short story "Bare Bones" exploring how its affective dimensions produced by the economic and gender victimisation of the female protagonist can be read as creating what Lara (in another context) has called a "mediating space where justice and solidarity meet [... in order to] aim at the redefinition of justice" (5).

The protesting, diseased female body in Vivienne Ndlovu's "Bare Bones"

The title of the short story anthology in which "Bare Bones" appears (*Women Writing Zimbabwe*)[95] implies that *women* are "writing" a specific historical time-space from a specifically female vantage point. The majority of female authored literary texts that sprouted in the post-2000 period is concerned with what was previously only tenebrously perceived – the representation of Zimbabwean women (in the advent of the 'crisis') as constituting a disadvantaged class in ways which make them more prone to the vicissitudes of the crisis than males. Such women are evoked as embroiled in a double-tiered struggle against emergent political and economic forces which deepen their patriarchal oppression – demonstrating Kwinjeh's notion of a "struggle within a struggle" (i). However, Zimbabwean women in general and as represented in contemporary Zimbabwean literature demonstrate multiple, intersectionally-constructed identities. Catherine Buckle's short story "The Ambulance" in the short story anthology *Short Stories from Bulawayo III* and Petina Gappah's "At the Sound of the Last Post" and "In the Heart of the Golden Triangle" in her anthology *An Elegy for Easterly*, for example, evoke powerful (often politically connected), feisty women shrugging off the 'crisis' amid great suffering. Some of the texts such as Ethel Kabwato's short story "The Breadwinner" actually depart from the typical evocation of women as victims by radically inverting traditional gender roles in order to depict the domineering (and even oppressive) tendencies of a woman in employment whose husband has just been retrenched (like Steven in *Highway Queen*) and is suffering the agony of an emasculating retrenchment from his job. In John Eppel's novel *Absent: The English Teacher* and some of the short stories in Petina Gappah's *An Elegy For Easterly*, female subjectivities are potential sites for subtle criticisms of the sullied nature of women's power acquired through male patronage. The gendering of the political space is contemptuously represented in Eppel's novel, not only through the evocation of a decadent form of empowerment of a woman (Beauticious) by Gonzo, a male Minister, but perhaps more importantly, through the 'empowered' woman's ridiculously excessive exercising of her power on her inept white servant, the former English teacher, George.

However, in this current section, I focus on the short story "Bare Bones" by Vivienne Ndlovu, exploring the subtlety with which it deploys the motifs of a diseased female body,

[95] The title is derived from the 'Women Writing Africa' Project that produced four anthologies of women's writings from the four regions of Africa.

pain and blood in order vividly and cognitively to consider and depict the complex 'place' of marginalised rural women caught up in ensnaring and intersecting gender-induced challenges amidst the implosion of the nation's economy. My interest here (as in my commentary on *Highway Queen*) is in the various ways that the short story's evocative qualities engender an affective appeal which emotionally influences us to acquire knowledge of the impact of crises on oppressed women. "Bare Bones" grapples with the consequences of the collapse of social services (particularly the health and economic delivery system reminiscent of Zimbabwe's post-2000 period) on women with chronic illnesses.

In this story, the female body degenerating into "bare bones" is evoked as a site for the re-inscription of the effects of the broader national economic downturn. The imagery evoked by the title of the short story indicates a vague and ironic, inverted echo of Nehanda's famous prophecy.[96] Sibo's bones can thus be conceived of as either signifying the futility of independence or indicating an untenable socio-economic reality that can cause another political shake-up. Sibo and her husband's contrasting fates carry a subtly symbolic significance. Patriarchy is portrayed as empowering Sibo's husband to use her as an 'accessory', a subordinate being that can be jettisoned and replaced upon her failure to perform patriarchally-designated duties to his satisfaction. Sibo is perceived as expendable in the narrative's indication of her husband's perspective, fatally trapped by class and gender-induced restrictions which (unlike her husband, who has readily available exit options) condemn her to death. However, while her husband is healthy (ironically because his anatomy insulates him from the cervical cancer afflicting Sibo) and utilises his gender advantage, as a character (and indeed as the face of patriarchy) he strikes the reader as a coldly arrogant, inconsiderate and callous man. The injustice of the patriarchal system implied in Sibo's husband's repulsive character is reflected by her construction as an 'incurable' female patient who is juxtaposed (throughout the short story) to Sifiso, her educationally empowered medical nurse, confidante and friend. The contrasting fortunes of the patient and her nurse make them foils, each at the extreme end of what the other could be. Sifiso is portrayed as all that Sibo is not – but more importantly, as all that she (Sibo) could be if she were able to extricate herself from the entangling forces of an extraordinary economic crisis and a constraining gender system. As the short story progresses and the

[96] Before her execution by the colonial government for inciting people to revolt, Nehanda predicted the rise of her bones to suggest political resurgence by black people in the Second Chimurenga that would win the country's independence.

patient and her nurse interact, the former's points of weakness are heightened and affectively intensified by juxtaposition with the latter's points of strength.

The reader first encounters Sibo's precarious state of health as inscribed on her medical card that is displayed just before the beginning of the short story's narrative proper. With pictographic vividness the card indicates the appalling state of Sibo's body, immediately rendering it an object for empathy. The card is in fact a compaction of the patient's story of gender-specific pain which foreshadows her hopelessness and eventual death. The metaphor of "bare bones" traverses the short story, ushering in a sense of calamity and an equally intense arousal of both blame for the androcentric social system and compassion for Sibo. Aligned to the pathos enlisted by Sibo's sick body are the interlocking and recurring motifs of her bleeding body and an awareness of the ineffectual, derelict health service system. The sick body is not only bound up with the crippled health system, but more importantly, with Sibo's sex, gender, class and rural location. Sibo's victimhood in the context of a faltering economy becomes more glaring as she interacts with Sifiso who (unlike Sibo) uses her education to break the oppressive patriarchal codes underpinning women's curtailed opportunities for economic independence. Sifiso's education and employment guarantee her independence and flexibility, as demonstrated by her ability to outmanoeuvre the economic challenges of the time. Two women (though in dilemmas of different proportions) are juxtaposed to demonstrate the disempowering consequences of lack of education and inversely, the empowering effect of education for women. And so, as Sifiso prepares to practise nursing overseas where she would be able to keep her son in school, Sibo prepares to die – bereft of alternatives to get money to seek effective medical treatment. While the contrasting fates of the patient and her nurse do not necessarily hold up education as the sole liberator of women, it certainly projects education as creating considerable options and greater flexibility for women.

The reader is drawn to empathise with Sibo – not merely because her victimhood is "through no fault of [her] own" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 314), but more importantly, because her condition cannot (although it potentially should) be contained. As Nussbaum further intimates, "[o]ne way in which the situation of the poor or oppressed is especially bad is that it might have been otherwise" (*Poetic Justice* 91). In the same way, the juxtaposition of Sibo with Sifiso throughout the short story stirs the awareness that there are possible alternative exit options (represented by Sifiso's flexibility, allowing her to go seek work in Britain), but

that these are nevertheless closed to Sibo because she lacks education. The agonistic dimension of "Bare Bones" can, then, be pinpointed in its facilitation of a recognition of Sibo's pain as a product of the intersection of hostile gender and class forces. The writer (Vivienne Ndlovu) can, in turn, be conceived of as creating "judicious spectators" (*Poetic Justice* 90) in the form of affected readers.

Nussbaum's argument, that "compassion seems more intense and suggests a greater degree of suffering, both on the part of the afflicted person and on the part of the person having the emotion" (*Upheavals* 302), can help to identify the transformative potential of the "illocutionary force" embedded in such a poignant narrative of pain. Sibo's pain becomes metaphysically contagious as the reader shares it through his or her empathetic relationship with the victimised character. This shareability/communication of the pain to the reader potentially leads to an acknowledgment (in readers) of Sibo's particular vulnerability and a consequent empathetic solidarity with her and actual women in similar plights – a sign that the reader has been alerted to the gendered injustice of her circumstances and can (in consequence) apprehend the urgency of women's emancipation as a just social cause. Adding to the reader's compassion for Sibo is the realisation that her prolonged suffering actually provides an opportunity to save her, but one that cannot be utilised because of her financial incapacity and the nation-wide collapse of the health service system induced by the economic crisis. The desperation implicit in attempts by the nurse and her patient to stop the pain and the ultimate option that Sibo chooses make of her body (when she dies) what Margaret Higonnet has called a "speaking silence" (68). Sibo's silent, dead body indicts gender inequality as the catalyst of her prolonged suffering and eventual demise.

A sense of solidarity with Sibo, made possible by the affective description of her pain and desperation, is intensified by the narrative's implicit appeal for the reader to "consider[…] what he [or she] would feel if he [or she] was reduced to the same unhappy situation" (Nussbaum, *Upheavals* 310). The distance between the witnessing reader and the suffering character is narrowed, prompting a sense of bondedness. In the context of Sibo's desperation – caused by excruciating but not 'unmitigatable' pain – Sifiso's 'technically' professionally unethical conduct in facilitating Sibo's suicide is validated; not only as a 'merciful' act of killing, but more importantly, as an expression of female solidarity functioning to disrupt the worst extremes of female victimhood charted by patriarchy. Sibo is, therefore, full of praise for Sifiso for taking the risk: "'No one will see you. No one will wonder what happened. I'm

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dying. Everyone knows that. Everyone will be glad. Especially me. Thank you my sister. Few are able to love enough to risk like this […] I bless your loving heart"' (109). Despite the irony of love manifesting in Sifiso's illegal and unprofessional conduct, the gender victim is at least allowed to chart her own subject position, albeit only in her demise. In facilitating the euthanasia, Sifiso ironically emerges as Sibo's heroine – enacting 'sisterhood' in risking her job to alleviate Sibo's pain. It is in the context of Sifiso's determination to help another woman that she feels she has reached the zenith of her career, despite the glaringly illegal aspect of her conduct – as can be inferred from her hallucinations after carrying out the euthanasia on Sibo: "The sky melted in a last burst of gold. She saw again the smile on Sibo's face and heard her soft voice saying, 'My sister. You will be blessed […]' [and] she was overflowing with a sense of calm and harmony. For once, in what seemed a long time, she had been able to do exactly what was needed" (109). "Bare Bones" can therefore be read as evocatively illuminating the tragedies that result from vulnerabilities faced by women who are caught in the web of class and gender inequality, educational deprivation and culturally as well as geographically disadvantaged location – especially during times of economic crisis. As in Edgar Allan Poe's notion of "good poetry" where death "allies itself to *Beauty*" (emphasis as in the original) ("The Philosophy" Par. 21), the impending death of Sibo as described in "Bare Bones" transforms readers into "sympathetic participants" (Nussbaum 90) who are moved to recognise the feminist protest 'beauty' embedded in Sibo's death.

Conclusion

What emerges out of this chapter is that alongside the thriving oppositional politics and a largely male-authored literary canon that overtly and covertly challenges hegemonic representations of the crisis, female (and some male) authors have produced texts that focus on women's and girls' experiences to grapple effectively with the political and socio-economic dimensions of the crisis. The writings of Yvonne Vera and Gugu Ndlovu have been shown to ascribe female agency to both the *Gukurahundi* experience and its narrative to explode the state-nurtured culture of silence over ethnic friction. Assigning historical agency to the traditionally subaltern (women) not only "shift[s] attention from the [state-circumscribed] heroic narrative of the liberation struggles" (Musila, "Beyond the Frame of History" 5), but is symptomatic of the wider political counter-discursive overtures used by the oppressed to challenge their oppression. In the same vein, Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Broken Wings" employs the sentimentality evoked by the political and sexual abuse of

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a girl minor to censure unscrupulous mechanisms of political power retention and abuse. The texts by Virginia Phiri and Vivienne Ndlovu, on the other hand, evoke female experience as the “locus of subjective liberation” (to use Baker’s phrase, 128) to spotlight the dangers of ‘identifying’ with patriarchal forms of female identity in aesthetically moving ways. In the next chapter, I analyse the ‘oppositional’ character of selected post-2000 Zimbabwean literature, focusing on the extent to which they reflect the widespread spirit of public contestation of the political system during the period in question.

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CHAPTER 5: HOLDING THE STATE TO ACCOUNT IN POST-2000 ZIMBABWEAN FICTION

Introduction

The previous chapter revealed that the post-2000 Zimbabwean literary/cultural sphere is marked by a literary contestation of androcentric constructions of knowledge and perceptions of the Zimbabwean crisis. The chapter demonstrated how post-2000 Zimbabwean literature centering female perspectives create subtle, alternative, transformative and more inclusive archives of the situation. The present chapter follows on this gender-cum-political thematic thread, albeit with especial emphasis on the participation of creative literature in the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction[97] of dominant perceptions of the post-2000 Zimbabwean political situation. As revealed in previous chapters, being the major political actor, the state uses its powers to promote certain appraisals of the state of democracy in Zimbabwe and to discourage others.[98] However, the discourse on human rights in post-2000 Zimbabwe has been controversial, polarised and politicised. This polarisation can also be detected in literary representations of post-2000 Zimbabwean politics, hence my inclusion of focal texts which both endorse and critically engage with the state's grand narrative of the political situation. This chapter attempts to situate the selected literary texts at the centre of such polarised political discourses and debates, examining their critique of what I call 'Zimbabwean democracy' and their contribution to the creation of an alternative discourse on democracy and human rights – in spite of the political discouragement to doing so (see Chapter 1 of this study).

While acknowledging the emergence of pro-state writers of fiction who consciously use fiction as a political medium and space to counter protests against the government's human rights record (I use Mashingaidze Gomo's novel *A Fine Madness* to demonstrate this point), the chapter mainly focuses on literary texts that critically engage with the post-2000

[97] I am using this word in its basic sense to denote a literary text's potential to subtly question normative constructions of perceptions of the post-2000 political system in Zimbabwe.

[98] For a detailed discussion of this topic see Amin Kamete's article "In defence of national sovereignty? Urban governance and democracy in Zimbabwe" and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's article "Nationalist-military aliiance and the fate of democracy in Zimbabwe".

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Zimbabwean political situation (these are in the majority). Beyond dealing with literary evocations of the violations of basic constitutional, human and civil rights, the chapter stresses how some of the texts re-affirm and validate these rights. Given the polarisation of political and scholarly perspectives regarding the Zimbabwean crisis (alluded to above), I do not intend in this chapter to pursue on-going debates about whether or not the Zimbabwean regime is authoritarian. Rather, I set out to explore the various ways in which the focal literary texts not only subtly critique and evaluate the Zimbabwean government's political conduct in the last decade, but also how (in the process of such criticism and evaluation) the texts imagine possible alternative models of political conduct. This focus follows on revelations in previous chapters that the post-2000 political sphere in Zimbabwe is shaped by a plethora of often opposing intellectual discourses that can be easily grouped into two opposing categories – hegemonic and civilian discourses, broadly speaking.

Before analysing the focal texts, it is imperative to contextualise such an analysis in the wider discourse of contested democracy in Zimbabwe. I therefore briefly highlight the nature of state-approved notions of 'Zimbabwean democracy', outlining their major tenets and the points of controversy or weakness that fiction writers and other independent political commentators have critiqued. The chief architects and defenders of 'Zimbabwean democracy' were state-aligned intellectuals. The instrumental use of academics and writers by the state to prop up its 'democratic' image in post-2000 Zimbabwe is well documented and discussed.[99] David Moore, for instance, speaks about "Zimbabwe's hegemonic interlocutors in the state's ideological apparatuses fashioning the propaganda of 'moral and intellectual' leadership that supplements their military comrades' coercion" ("Century old" 122). Tafataona Mahoso (a media studies lecturer who was widely known in independent Zimbabwean media circles as the "Media Hangman" during his tenure as the chairman of the media licensing and regulatory body, the Zimbabwe Media Commission) epitomises a clique of scholars and academics who defined and intellectually defended the state's concept of 'Zimbabwean democracy'.

Mahoso's intellectual and political influence is enhanced by the state's investments in and monopoly over the media. Mahoso, for instance, regularly features as a panellist on state-

[99] The role of what Blessing-Miles Tendi calls "nationalist public intellectuals" (11) in the construction of "Zimbabwean democracy" in post-2000 Zimbabwe is the subject of his book *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media* and Terence Ranger's article "Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe."

owned Zimbabwe Television in programmes such as “Zvavanhu” and “African Pride” and writes a weekly column entitled “African Focus” in the state-owned newspaper, *The Sunday Mail*. In these fora, Mahoso’s typical anti-imperialist discourse and the stereotyping of all western notions of democracy and human rights as neo-colonial echoes the state’s eccentric ‘Afrocentric’/Africanist/Pan-African conceptions of democracy. In Mahoso’s ‘Zimbabwean democracy’ discourse, Europe and America are projected as politically homogenous and unchanging in their hypocritical notions of democracy, premised on self-serving, capitalist and neo-imperialist attitudes. Basing his arguments on historic examples of western tyranny (slavery and colonialism) and contemporary aggression against Muslim countries (such as Iraq and Afghanistan in the so-called ‘War on Terror’), Mahoso challenges not only Europe’s and America’s claims to be paragons of democracy and human rights but also the claims of local opposition political parties, such as the MDC and other independent civil society organisations, which campaign for western-style ‘democratic’ reforms. Most of the texts analysed in this chapter (Chenjerai Hove’s *Blind Moon*, Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North*, Julius Chingono’s short story “Are We Together?”, Christopher Mlalazi’ short story entitled “Election Day” and the autobiographies *The Story of My Life* and *A Lifetime of Struggle* by Joshua Nkomo and Edgar Tekere respectively can be read as entering the political debate about democracy and human rights in post-2000 Zimbabwe with a critique of ‘Zimbabwean democracy’, particularly its hegemonic tendencies. However, as I demonstrate in the following section, though clearly in the minority, pro-state literary texts, exemplified by Mashingaidze Gomo’s novel *A Fine Madness*, support the state’s idea and practice of “Zimbabwean democracy”.

“Writing back to the West, again!”: ‘Post-post-modern’ re-conceptions of ‘Zimbabwean democracy’ in Mashingaidze Gomo’s novel *A Fine Madness* (2010)

In an interview with Mai Palmberg, the Zimbabwean writer Charles Mungoshi gives an overview of the post-Third Chimurenga epoch which hints at the complexity of the concept of democracy in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Mungoshi says:

> I'm still confused about it [the Third Chimurenga], I don't know who is right or who is wrong. I don't even know whether we talk of right or wrong. I think they are all what they've always been, trying to cheat each other. It's intrigue, and I'm better than you are and it is survival of the fittest. It is the old story, isn't it? It is lies (sic) you can do this

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> thing it as long as you don't get caught. I think (sic) it's the same old - I need to sit down and write a story to illustrate. As the father who gives his children a snake when they ask for bread. ("It is the old story, isn't it?")

My reading of Mashingaidze Gomo's novel *A Fine Madness* centres on how representations of Zimbabwe's post-2000 political system relates to the kind of "oppositionary thinking"[100] (Chielozona ix) underlying the philosophy and practice of the reactionary, Afrocentric notion of 'Zimbabwean democracy'. The narrative of *A Fine Madness* (like most other texts considered in this chapter) is clearly intertextual. It allows us to infer in its narrative the playing out of other (especially political) texts circulating in the same epoch. My analysis therefore relates the novel's political discourse to such other texts, connecting it to state-approved notions of 'Zimbabwean democracy' uniquely shaped by the political upheavals of the past decade. The relevance of *A Fine Madness* to this chapter's focus, then, lies in the novel's subtle (and sometimes explicit) utilisation of the (ZANU-PF) government's ideological and political texts to attempt a dismantling, not only of (Western) traditional notions of democracy but also 'traditional' Western notions of narrative form and epistemology. In a preface to the novel Ngugi wa Thiongo praises the novel as a Pan-African engagement with neo-colonialism. The novel's international (pan-African) profile (partly deriving from its publication by the London-based Pan-African publisher Ayebia Clarke)[101] and the critical acclamation it has received from such eminent African literary critics as Ngugi and Gikandi points to its ideological importance for current discourses on the interface of African and western philosophies of democracy. My aim in this section is to demonstrate the ideological and methodological ways in which *A Fine Madness* (against most of the literary texts emerging out of the last decade) validates state-promoted versions of 'Zimbabwean democracy' and the political status quo.

Gomo experiments with form and language in a way that buttresses his radical Ngugi-style 'moving of the centre' in discourses on democracy in Africa and Zimbabwe. While Gomo has described his book as a novel, the book clearly departs from the 'traditional' novelistic

[100] Chielozona describes "oppositionary thinking" as "the idea that borrowing from other cultures, especially from that of one's historical enemy, meant accepting defeat or proving the enemy right" (x).
[101] According to their website, Ayebia Clarke's major goal is to publish "books that open new spaces and bring fresh insights into African and Caribbean life."

genre as we know it: it presents instead, a blend of poetic and prosaic narrative[102] flowing in a captivating stream of consciousness that reminds us of Aimé Césaire's Negritude poetry in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. This style erases the distance between the narrator and the narrative (while simultaneously widening the gap between Zimbabwean/African and Western/European political aesthetics), and endows the narrative with a certain 'out-of-the-box' feel that marks the eccentric nature of the novel's stylistic and ideological orientations. An essentialist and at times racial form of Africanism, steeped in anti-West and anti-White rhetoric (typical of that found in state political discourses in Zimbabwe's past decade) runs through *A Fine Madness*, conjuring up a deep sense of aversion to Whites and the West. Narrated from the perspective of a former (Zimbabwe) liberation and DRC war combatant, a strong refutation of western notions of democracy is expressed in the narrator's bitter, often enraged and self-righteous tone. Without reading the novel "as simply a refraction of reality [and so] simplistically reducing the complexity and creative relationship of literature to social meaning – to the ideological horizon" (Morris 123), it is necessary to provide a context for Mashingaidze Gomo's understanding of the social and political impact of creative literature in order to comprehend his support for 'Zimbabwean democracy' in his novel. In an interview with the pro-ZANU (PF) newspaper, *The Herald*, Gomo exposes the 'raw materials' feeding into the thematic and stylistic texture of *A Fine Madness*. In an interview, Gomo claims that:

> I had never been taught to be inferior to whites when I was growing up and one of my instructors named Godwin always felt offended by my attitude and he would threaten me a lot […] My army experiences shaped my novel, *A Fine Madness*. A brother of mine had advised me to put my thoughts in writing again as they might help youths understand where we come from as Africans. ("Know your author")

The preface to Gomo's novel (written by Ngugi wa Thiongo) clearly connects the novel's thematic/ideological strand to Ngugi's Marxist 'writers in politics' philosophy. It is therefore appropriate to enquire into Gomo's political discourse in *A Fine Madness,* conscious of his 'Ngugian' ideological persuasion; that is, Gomo's projection of Zimbabwe's fight against perceived neo-colonial forces as epitomising the broader African continent's struggle. The core of Ngugi's 'writers in politics' philosophy that has a palpable bearing in the creation and

[102] In this sense, the novel comes close to Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1988). The lyrical prose narrative style of *Bones* enhances its deep ideological reflection on the reality of living estranged from one's indigeneous land.

styling (and therefore the reading) of *A Fine Madness* is that the literary creative process almost always (overtly or covertly, consciously or unconsciously) reflects the artist's class position and political affiliation (see Ngugi's chapter entitled "Literature and Society" in his book *Writers in Politics*). In this Marxist logic, the material realities impacting on the writer's space informs his creative consciousness and influences his choice to align himself either with 'the people' or with their oppressors. The focus here is on the ways in which Gomo foregrounds the state's idiosyncratic notions of 'Zimbabwean democracy' to attack both European standards of democracy (in terms of which Zimbabwe's political system is judged as deviant and therefore in need of reformation) and local oppositional political and civil society organisations, perceived by the state as Europe's 'Trojan horses'. The polarisation characterising the post-2000 Zimbabwean political sphere renders attempts to delineate and define "the side of the people" (according to Ngugi's essentialist framework) problematic. This is because in the post-2000 period, antagonistic state and oppositional or 'civil society' discourses circulate in the public sphere, each claiming to be on "the side of the people" and seeking to influence the nation's democratic agenda. The Mugabe administration claims to be on the "side of the people" and views itself as championing the people's fight against neo-colonial forces 'masked' in the local opposition political parties and civil society groups – just as the opposition parties (especially the MDC) claim to be on "the side of the people" struggling to dismantle an authoritarian postcolonial regime. The gist of the argument here, then, is that while (as Ngugi suggests) the writer can (consciously or unconsciously) take either side (that of the people or that of the oppressors), the post-2000 political and cultural sphere resists such simplistic categorisations and complicates post-2000 discourses of free expression and democracy in Zimbabwe.

Gomo's novel evocatively reflects on the paradox of the state (labelled as the oppressor of the people in oppositional circles and by the international community, particularly Europe and the USA) claiming victimisation by western neo-colonial forces. In its construction as a personal narrative of a 'patriotic' Zimbabwean soldier who is fighting in the DRC war, the novel sets the tone for its Pan-African and Afrocentric ideological character. The narrator summons his pan-African experiences participating in 'people's struggles' against western neo-colonialism in both countries in order to theorise authoritatively on the forces behind the DRC war and the Zimbabwean crisis. The narrator's pan-African philosophy is revealed in his ardent Zimbabwean patriotism (he considers Zimbabwe to be the iconic African country in the struggle against western neo-imperialism) and in his being a liberator fighting what he

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perceives to be western-sponsored rebels in the DRC. This informs his eccentrically Afrocentric comprehension of both the Zimbabwean political situation and the war in DRC. The persuasively authoritative tone of the narrative powerfully creates in the reader the impression that the narrator's account and opinions are credible and reliable. In the process, the African leadership (both in the DRC and Zimbabwe) are absolved from any responsibility for the political chaos engulfing their countries and the 'despotism' tag often attached to such regimes by the West is shown to be inappropriate.

The narrator's DRC war experiences and his 'patriotic' service in Zimbabwe's Pan-African cause in the DRC shapes the narrative's acerbic anti-Western tone, which is aesthetically aligned on the "side of the people" (Ngugi wa Thiongo's phrase). This conception of the "side of the people" is "Afro-radical" – to use Mbembe's phrase ("African Modes" 240) – in its attempts to redefine 'Zimbabwean democracy' as exclusively shaped by Zimbabwean and African experiences. A strong resonance with the nativist and often retributive critique of western democracy championed by Mugabe and his ZANU (PF) party is unmistakeable in the narrator's clearly embellished invocation of the Zimbabwe/Africa-as-victim topos. We first encounter this victim motif in the author's personal reflections just before the start of the narrative proper. In this section, the author outlines his ideological position, affirming a radical Afrocentric endorsement of the state's antagonistic attitude to the West. Gomo says: "It [the novel] is a refusal to have my experience interpreted for me by Europeans whose kith and kin dispossessed my ancestors. The man on the spot must tell his story in order to prevent the tragedy from being repeated" (iv). Notwithstanding the fact that *A Fine Madness* (like any other novel) is a self-contained entity whose semantic effect may not be defined by authorial intention, I attempt to link the novel's fictionality to authorial intention, demonstrating the complex ways through which the novel impacts as not only furthering but also in contradicting the author's expressed political intentions. In this light, Gomo's authorial comment (that the novel re-inscribes African experiences from an African perspective) becomes problematic, not least because it is premised on a reductive conception of fictionality.

'Refusal' – Gomo's key word – is in fact the hallmark of the Zimbabwean regime's 'Afro-radical' discourse, which attacks the universality and imposition of global (read 'western') models of democracy. In this schema, the Zimbabwean political crisis (and the DRC war) is regarded rather simplistically as an artificial hegemonic creation of western neo-colonial

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forces under the guise of democratisation. In Gomo's (and his narrator's) anti-western politics, the indigenous perspective must always take precedence over western perspectives as a way of reasserting African independence and sovereignty. In state discourses, the African proverb, "[U]ntil the lion learns to speak, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter", is often cited to justify the urgent need for ('authentic') Zimbabweans to own and tell the Zimbabwean story as a counter to prejudiced Eurocentric perspectives. Gomo views his being "the man on the spot" (iv) as privileging his voice and qualifying him to be the authentic author and commentator of the Zimbabwean political situation – not only over and above 'imperialist' Western commentaries, but also in contrast to local oppositional voices (which stand accused of furthering European agendas in the country).

In the chapter entitled "Tinyarei (Give us a break)", Gomo deploys a vivid symbolic allegory of courtship which (when read in the context of the frosty bilateral relationship between Zimbabwe and Western countries in the past decade) not only buttresses the importance of an African formulation of the democratic principles governing its politics, but perhaps more importantly (and contrary to the author's intention), subtly reveals what Eze Chielozona calls "the delusion of racial innocence" (ix). In this chapter (as in the whole novel), the theme of violated innocence takes centre stage. Through the symbolic allegory of Zimbabwe as a victimised female beauty queen whose *only* crime is her rejection of Europe's love, a passionate appeal is made for us to identify the West as solely responsible for the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis. The narrator imagines his homeland as a female lover (Tinyarei) whose beauty is the envy of many, especially Europe, which in its megalomaniac prejudice, wonders why she rejects 'him' in favour of the narrator, an African. Europe's superiority complex – what the narrator considers to be Europe's inclination to prescribe 'good' systems of political governance – is subverted and exposed as a hegemonic hoax. The following excerpt demonstrates this:

> And then, there are many who have reasoned again and again that beauty so superlative should be scattered around or shared… globalised if you like, […]. And there are also some, surprisingly black too, who have argued that beauty so superlative is too good for an African. They have accused Tinyarei of sitting on money and [argued] instead that she should invest herself in European fashion magazines. (4)

Clearly, the designation of Zimbabwe as a beautiful woman who chooses the narrator (despite his financial wretchedness), turning down more affluent potential suitors like Europe, has far deeper ideological implications: it is part of the novel's political grand plan to "refuse" Western meddling in internal African political processes. Tinyarei's choice of the narrator is seen as her exercising her democratic right of choice (the hallmark of western democracy), while Europe's criticism of that choice is portrayed as both a mere case of the proverbial 'sour grapes' and a manifestation of Europe's hypocrisy. Read in the context of persistent criticisms of the Zimbabwean regime's politics of violence by western countries (especially by the former colonial master, Britain) and the author's declared intention to "refuse" perceived western dictations, the name Tinyarei – translated in the text as "give us a break" – can be read as an appeal to the rejected 'lover' (Britain) to respect Tinyarei's decision, that is, to respect Zimbabwe's sovereignty. To our soldier-narrator, Tinyarei's (Zimbabwe's) beauty and perfection before the rape (a symbolic allusion to sovereignty) result from her rejection of Europe, which is seen as a rapist and exploiter. On the other hand, the unattractive, war-torn Boende (DRC) seems to have lost its allure because it has fallen prey to Europe's treachery. The narrator values Tinyarei's independence and bemoans Boende's entanglement with the West through naming. Apart from the name Tinyarei, which (as shown above) is a politically loaded statement intended to counter the West's political interference in Zimbabwean politics, the narrator's own name (Muchineripi Takawira) is an expression of the will to achieve unfettered self-determination. The narrator's reminiscence of his rejection of imposed colonial names is evoked as an act of re-asserting the authentic self, thus buttressing Tinyarei's rebuffing of Europe's advances. Treading on the discursive lines drawn by early African (and also African-American) scholars and writers protesting at the racial nature of Western modernism,[103] the narrator immerses us in his past anti-colonial struggle in a way that persuades us to see his current anti-Western stance as a teleological culmination of his exposure to Western victimisation. He says:

> And yet the [European] priest had said my name [Muchineripi] was pagan/as if Greek mythology from which they had taken his own name [Dion] was Christian/And in my

[103] A strong echo of Chinua Achebe's essay "Named for Victoria, Queen of England" (in *Hopes and Impediments*) comes to mind; and so does Ngugi wa Thiongo's case for prioritising indigenous languages in literature (in *Decolonising the Mind*). In the Zimbabwean context, one is reminded of the re-naming debacle initiated by the historian and former Minister of Education and Culture, Aeneas Chigwedere, in the late nineties. Chigwedere's project never took off and major public institutions like the tourist attraction, the Victoria Falls, the National Army Headquarters, King George 6 (KG6), and affluent government schools like Allan Wilson, Prince Edward, Churchill and Queen Elizabeth, still carry British names.

> heart I had said, 'Are you God?' […] because Muchineripi, like most African and for that matter Jewish names was a social statement. I know that Jacob whose name meant 'supplanter' was renamed 'Israel' which meant 'I have fought with God' after he had wrestled an angel of God. (9)

The narrator's name Muchineripi Takawira is portrayed as an archive of his (and Zimbabwe's) struggle for independence and to reclaim the agency to chart his (and of course, Zimbabwe's) future. The narrator's name metaphorically expresses resistance, as the footnote to the name reveals: "the name Takawira Muchineripi is an allegory. Takawira (meaning 'we got trapped') defines colonial bondage. Muchineripi is a verbal challenge to a beaten enemy if he still has anything else to say" (8). The narrator is here expressing what (in the context of the post-2000 nativist turn of nationalism in Zimbabwe) is not an incomprehensible political disposition for a serving soldier whose world view is apparently shaped by the state commandement (to use Mbembe's term – *Postcolony* 24). Kizito Muchemwa has commented incisively (albeit with reference to Zimbabwe's liberation struggle) on the potential of military experience to condition one's ideological and political worldview, and we see this in the soldier-narrator in *A Fine Madness*:

> Totalitarian tendencies in the current Zimbabwean political culture, though predating the war in the form of indigenous patriarchy and traditional chieftaincy, were reinvigorated during the struggle when the accent fell on the military in the formation of national consciousness and the nation-state. Joining the ranks of the guerrilla fighters entailed ceding of one's right to question and think. A recruit relinquished control, ownership, and privacy of bodily and mental processes in the pursuit of efficient and brutal execution of the war. (Muchemwa "Why Don't You Tell" 11)

However, in *A Fine Madness*, not only does the ideological import of the names Muchineripi, Takawira and Tinyarei echo the Zimbabwean regime's anti-western political philosophy and its discourses on national sovereignty:[104] in fact, the anguish of war and the nostalgic longing for Tinyarei (home), coalesce into extreme hatred of Europe in a way that reminds us (for instance) of Mugabe's emotional protests against Western interference in Zimbabwean

[104] See Mugabe's book, *Inside the Third Chimurenga* (2001). Chapter 5 of the book, entitled "Zimbabwe: A Sovereign State Defending Africa's territorial Integrity", thematically resonates with the narrator's projection of Tinyarei (Zimbabwe) as the paragon of untainted beauty (or sovereignty) that Boende (the DRC) 'should' emulate in *A Fine Madness*.

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politics.[105] This anger manifests in the narrator's derogatory and often racist attacks on whites in Africa and (especially) in the West, whose perceived neo-colonial interests in the DRC lead to his deployment for combat and exposure to some life-threatening situations. The anger runs through most of the chapters, reinforcing the novel's anti-western-democracy theme. In the chapter, "The Rape", the metaphor of rape is deftly used to justify both the anger against the West and the corrective Look East policy[106] adopted by the government to spite the West. Chielozona proffers a critique of this 'accuse and condemn' strategy which can be linked to the instability of the 'Zimbabwean democracy' discourse championed by *A Fine Madness*. In another context, Chielozona argues that the kind of innocence attributed to Zimbabwe and Africa, culled from colonial history, "encourages a Manichean oppositionary thinking that on the one hand, arranges the world into good, us, and evil, our oppressors and those who fail to see how evil they are" (ix). Mbembe attacks the privileging of what he calls "narratives of loss" ("African Modes" 239), indicating their failure to construct self-sustaining discourses on democracy. For Mbembe, "narratives of loss" do not in themselves produce any working alternatives and mostly succeed in occluding self-introspection, as he argues: "[a]s a result Africa is said not to be responsible for the catastrophes that are befalling it. The present destiny of the continent is supposed to proceed not from free and autonomous choices but from the legacy of history imposed upon Africans – burned into their flesh by rape, brutality and all sorts of economic conditionalities ("African Modes" 243).

In its 'Afro-radicalist' indictment of the West as the major (if not the only) cause for Africa's stunted 'democracies' and economies, *A Fine Madness* easily falls into the trap of essentialising the political antagonism between African and Western countries. Such

[105] Mugabe's 2002 diplomatic tirade against the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit is a good example. What Mugabe (in *Inside The Third Chimurenga*) calls "Blair's latter-day imperialism" (79) should be understood in the context of historical processes eventually leading to the post-2000 diplomatic stand-off between the Zimbabwean government and the Tony Blair administration. In Zimbabwean state discourses, Britain 'always' emerges as the bitter, colonial dinosaur bent on sabotaging the progress made by a sovereign and independent Zimbabwe by playing the democracy card. Mugabe emotionally presents Zimbabwe's case against British interference in a way that strongly echoes Muchineripi's passionate appeal to the west to give Tinyarei (Zimbabwe) a break. Mugabe says: "We (Zimbabwe) are not neighbours of the British, whether by geography, cultural affinity or temperament. We were neighbours by history and a history of violent colonial conquest, occupation and subjugation […] this is why a good many of us […] are not with us. They have had to die simply to overcome a supposedly civilised nation which for the greater part of the closing millennium, has chosen to indulge towards us racial hate, animosity, and systematic violence as well as organised economic war as a strategy for its latter-day imperialist control and domination of our country" (78).

[106] This was an international trade and cooperation policy adopted by the ZANU (PF) regime to promote trade with Eastern countries (especially China) instead of the west (particularly USA and Europe) which imposed sanctions on Zimbabwean businesses and government officials.

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essentialism, which (sometimes) borders on 'anti-racist racism',[107] homogenises Europeans (and whites in general) as suspected (actual or potential) imperialists and neo-colonialists. Through a metaphorical recourse to Europe's past colonial sins (captured vividly in the symbolism and the imagery of Tinyarei's rape), the narrator subversively reconstructs Europe as inherently tyrannical, hypocritical and therefore unfit to be the model for democracy in Africa. A boomerang effect with regard to the West's allegations of authoritarianism and the human rights violations against the Zimbabwean government is created, and Europe ironically becomes the rogue democracy that it accuses the Zimbabwean regime of being. The image of Africa as a female virgin is deftly appropriated to launch a compelling accusation against western hypocrisy with regard to the theory and practice of democracy. Vulnerability – the major transcultural stereotypical quality of femaleness – is foregrounded to persuade us (as Chielozona argues in reference to Mugabe's perpetual victim politics) to "adopt a moral disposition that sympathises with Africa as the world victim, and Zimbabwe, [as] the originary-victim" (Chielozona 81). Unlike some of the early Eurocentric writings (such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*) which deploy images of a sexualised Africa that can be read as justification for its exploitation by Europe,[108] Gomo tactically sketches a raped female virginal Africa in a way that movingly underscores her violated innocence and exposes the hypocrisy of her rapists. The West's blameworthiness is unmistakable in Europe's construction as the brutal rapist of the vulnerable and innocent Africa. The description of the violence of the rape demonstrates this outrageous and barbaric image of the West:

And virgin Africa had unintentionally defied Europe and
America to love her
And now she lay sprawled on her back … raped by
Exploiters from the West
And they took turns on her
Germans, Americans, British, French, Portuguese,
Belgians
……………………………………………………

[107] In the sense of what Jeanpierre (in his study of Sartre's response to the Negritude movement) has called "a moment of negativity in counter response to the thesis of white supremacy" (870).
[108] In her article "The Dark Continent: Africa as Female Body in Haggard's Adventure Fiction", Scott contends that effeminising Africa was part of what she calls a "growing market: the genre of colonial and imperialist fiction" (69) that was male-dominated.

A union and a treaty of economic rapists
And now, she lay hurting and grieving, with no one to
Console her (89)

Through the evocative and symbolic imagery of rape, Europe's history of violent conquest not only becomes patently repulsive, but more importantly, permanent and constantly metamorphosing. This manifests in various objects, symbols and ideas produced by Africa as 'reproductive' products of the rape – the 'coloured' child which symbolically reflects the mark of Europe's brutalising presence in Africa. "The Rape" can thus be read as foregrounding an 'Afro-radical' discourse on democracy steeped in what Mbembe has called the "cult of victimisation" ("African Modes" 244). In the following section, I explore Chenjerai Hove's problematisation of the concept of 'Zimbabwean democracy' (affirmed by Gomo's *A Fine Madness* above) through his poetry, laying particular emphasis on the significance of the exile motif in his writing.

Chenjerai Hove's 'cosmopolitical'[109] critique of the Zimbabwean political regime in *Blind Moon* (2003)

Like Mashingaidze Gomo, Chenjerai Hove typifies the 'writer in politics' brand of 'committed' writing outlined in Ngugi wa Thiongo's book, *Writers in Politics*. However, unlike Gomo, who reconstructs the Zimbabwean regime's Afro-radical 'Zimbabwean democracy' as "a fine madness", Hove in *Blind Moon* attacks it as a hegemonic fraud. Evidently, the post-2000 public sphere has not been totally dominated by what Ranka Primorac calls "master fictions [...which] aspire to generate and underlie all socially produced meanings" (*Tears* 9). The rise (and to some extent success) of opposition politics and civil society organisations in this period (which culminated in the defeat of ZANU (PF) by the MDC in the March 2008 poll) is symptomatic of the flourishing of alternative political thinking. This section sets up a dialogue with the preceding one, and reads Chenjerai Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon* (with passing references to his other literary works) as creating a discursive counter-discourse to that of the state (and also to that of *A Fine Madness*). Both Hove and Gomo seek to establish a defence against allegations of human rights abuses. However, my current preoccupation is with the literary strategies foregrounded by Hove in

[109] In the sense of Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins's conception of the word as signifying "thinking and feeling beyond the nation" (1).

making 'knowledge' about the post-2000 political situation in Zimbabwe publicly available and how this can be interpreted as oppositional to official narratives of the state of democracy in the country.

Hove's literary oeuvre spans (and relates to the vicissitudes of) the anti-colonial liberation war and post-independence periods in Zimbabwe. It is necessary to take these into account in explaining the evolution of the contemporary political crisis. Given the glaring political polarisation of Zimbabwean society in the post-2000 period, it is easy to understand how the concept of democracy often takes on different meanings, depending on the political alignment (and in Hove's case, the geographical space) of the speaking subject. For the state, democracy is the totality of all privileges made possible by the defeat of the minority colonial regime, something akin to 'self-rule'. This notion of democracy makes a deliberate but controversial assumption that the ZANU (PF) government and President Mugabe represent all black Zimbabweans who constitute the ruling anti-colonial 'self'. By this logic, the Zimbabwean political crisis is instigated by foreign influences – this being the major trope running through Mashingaidze Gomo's novel (discussed above). Contrary to Gomo's pro-government stance in *A Fine Madness*, Hove's literary texts of the late nineties and turn of the century reconstruct the Zimbabwean political crisis as a local problem rooted in local political challenges. The major aim of this section, then, is to analyse Hove's self-reflexive engagement with the political dystopia – and to examine his localisation of the root causes of Zimbabwe's contemporary political problems.

Since Hove is not (unlike most of the budding writers grappling with political themes related to the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis) a newcomer to the literary arena, a holistic analysis of his poetry in *Blind Moon* can be fruitfully conducted in the context of his earlier writings and his ideological perspectives as reflected *inter alia* in his recent interviews and opinion pieces in newspapers, the electronic media and non-fiction writings. Hove's poetry in *Blind Moon* demonstrates an overtly political, overarching concern with state brutality and violation of basic human rights, particularly the right to political choice and free expression. This may be interpreted as a seismic shift from Hove's previous nativist politics reflected, for instance, in such texts as *Bones*[110] and *Ancestors*. However, the intertextual connections between Hove's

[110] The novel has been read by some scholars (see Muponde's article "Land as Text") as the literary torch-bearer of the Third Chimurenga land reform ideology because of its reverberation with ZANU (PF) political rhetoric leading to the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme in 2001.

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literary works and the political currents of the time-space they occupy explain this seeming shift. Rino Zhuwarara comments on the ambivalent 'side of the people' stance of Hove's literary texts: "In almost all these writings, he [Hove] seems to be haunted by the plight of the weak and vulnerable members of society, those who find themselves pitted against more dominant historical and social forces but [who are] are powerless to define and defend their own interests" (2). Zhuwarara further cites Hove, explaining his fascination with the politics of power and class – his concern for the politically oppressed – which compels him to "seek to write books that remind us of what it is to be powerless, or indeed, to be powerful" (Hove, qtd. in Zhuwarara 3). However, besides this constant encroachment of Hove's declared 'commitment' (to locate his fictional works within the broader struggle for social and political justice) on his creative imagination, *Blind Moon*, in particular, bears the marks of Hove's exilic experiences in its critique of the contemporary Zimbabwean political situation and its subtle imagining of alternative political dispensations.

Flight when the moon is dark: politics and exile in *Blind Moon*

Theories and debates on exile and its relationship to the politics of the exile's home (that is, the place of his or her origins) abound in postcolonial discourse. My attempt to analyse and connect the trope of flight or exile in *Blind Moon* with the anthology's engagement with post-2000 Zimbabwean politics is informed by the much discussed unique relationship between exile and the politics of home. Edward Said, one of the most important postcolonial scholars, links exile to intellectualism in a way that helps to explain the political impact of exile on Hove's *Blind Moon.* In his book *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said defines intellectuals as those who "tore the line [… they are] the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles in so far as privileges, power, and honour are concerned" (39). In Hove's case, exile is not merely a form of spatial disconnection, but more importantly, a form of reconnection with a previously stifled space for the creative imagination.[111] Hove buttresses this point in his more recent collection of essays, poetry and drama entitled *Homeless Sweet Home: A Memoir of Miami* where he argues that:

[111] The post-2000 period in Zimbabwe is marked by an unprecedentedly large number of authors writing from the diaspora. Such writers include Valerie Tagwira, NoViolet Bulawayo, Brian Chikwava, Tendai Huchu, Petina Gappah, Nyaradzo Mtizira among others.

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> Some people think Zimbabweans are on the cowardly side when they employ what I call survival strategies. Faced with extreme danger to their person, Zimbabweans use two major approaches: run away or fall silent. So the diasporans took the first option, to escape in order "to live to fight another day," as Bob Marley says. It is pointless to be a dead hero. (57)

Exile becomes a manifestation and an opportunity for articulation of the political problems of home. The political discourse in poems in *Blind Moon* demonstrates that exile for Hove is not escapism. It does not mean giving up one's dissident political critique as a result of the threat of censorship or punishment for displaying an oppositional political mindset. Hove's defence of exile resonates with his portrayal of home as a confining and dangerous space in *Blind Moon*. Hove says: "in this new exile, I have learnt to cherish hearing voices of my country more intensely […] physical exile has nourished me with new literary and artistic voices" ("Journey" 3). In *Blind Moon*, the representation of home (which makes exile an inevitable option) is intimately connected to Hove's contemporary 'writing back to the self' stance – to use Mwangi Evan Maina's phrase (2).

Hove's earlier anthology *Rainbows in the Dust* published in 1998 best illustrates not only the phenomenon that Hove terms "internal exile" (existence outside the boundaries of state-defined codes of political conduct, "Journey" 8), but also the incompatibility of his politically hard-hitting temperament and the Zimbabwean context characterised by the government's demand for declarations of loyalty and its discouragement (and at times suppression) of criticism. This demand for 'patriotic' representations (which Hove was not prepared to champion), in turn, leads him into what he calls "external exile" (the escape from the physical site of political intimidation, "Journey" 9). Besides the symbolic reflection of the early signs of the Zimbabwean crisis in the title "Rainbows in the Dust", the poem "On being asked for a party card" epitomises Hove's (then emerging) antagonistic relationship with the political regime. In this poem, an enraged speaker sarcastically dialogues with an imaginary ruling party official who demands a party card from the speaker – as a sign of the speaker's support for the ruling party. The political charge in the poem's sarcasm can best be understood in the context of the card's real and symbolic significance (loyalty), hinted at in Chapter 4 of this study.

The ruling party is evoked as coercive, as forcing people to join. The following lines demonstrate this: “you asked me party cadre/for a membership card/of the ruining party/what an insult/to the flowers and the birds/of my country/in my heart” (ll. 1-7). The speaker’s contemptuous rejection of the membership card (evoked here as the symbol of consent to the political status quo) not only reflects his rejection of the ruling party’s coercive campaign strategies, but also resonates with Hove’s claim that his flight into exile was a result of state intimidation after his refusal to be co-opted by the ZANU (PF) campaign machinery (see Primorac, “Dictators are Transient” 137). Hove is even blunter about his contempt for ZANU (PF) in his essay “Collapse of Law, collapse of conscience” in *Palaver Finish*, where he says: “As for me I know I live in a country run by liars […] They conceive of nothing but their fear of losing power” (8). The rulers’ “fear of losing power” precipitates violence and intolerance which in turn informs Hove’s fear of self-censorship and his choice of exile. Home becomes “the place of tears” – Hove’s phrase – presided over by a political system that thrives on inhibiting civil liberties. This point is powerfully made in the poem “To a dictator” (in *Blind Moon*) which foregrounds the imagery and symbolism of violated nature to construct an image of the ruling elite as heartlessly oppressive. This can be inferred from the following lines: “In your time/you took away/the flowers of our freedom/in your time/the weak defended/your weaknesses/and the land cried; the moon too/was dark/in your time” (ll. 1-10). The poem deftly manipulates nature-related metaphors (the flower and the moon) to illuminate the beauty of freedom in its natural state; that is, before its corruption by hegemonic instruments of coercion. The addressee (the dictator) is the agent of the chaos engulfing the ‘crying’ land and rendering it uninhabitable after the revocation of the moon’s light and the “flowers of freedom” (l. 3).

The symbolic and allegorical significance of nature invoked to qualify the ruinous nature of the government can be connected to Hove’s contemporary fascination with the figure of the dictator. In his other allegorical poem, “My Lord”,[112] Hove portrays the ruler as a “lord”, invoking the major negative associations of lordship (fearsomeness, invincibility, a tyrannical and capricious nature) to underline the trepidation felt by the subjects under his rule. The speaker in the poem is one of these oppressed and fear-struck subjects whose insecurity, dread and deprivation can be discerned from his/her bitter, sarcastic address to the ‘lord’: “Allow us to step onto your land/my lord/you, who farts/and the poor lick their dry lips/allow

[112] The poem was originally published online in Shona as “Changamire”, a respectful title for a fearsome ruler.

us, my lord/into your lands/where drums of freedom deafen the ear/and the poor's arms are tied/with invisible ropes" (ll. 1-9). The speaker is evoked here as not only materially exiled from the land and its riches (which the lord apparently monopolizes), but also as separated from the political power that the possession of such land entails.

The "land" in the poem "My Lord", is symbolic of a nation that is divided along power and class lines in the essentialist Marxist sense of oppressive capitalists and oppressed proletariats – an opposition which makes the desirable alternative unmistakable. The Shona version of the poem is more effective in its portrayal of the subjects' desire for the space in which to express their protest. In the Shona version of the poem, the phrase "*ngoma dzerusununguko*" (l. 11) is ambiguous. "*Ngoma dzerusununguko*" (which literally translates into "the drum of independence") on the face of it represents celebration. However, the solemnisation of independence is exclusive to a small elite as the ruled – whose "arms are tied/with invisible ropes" (ll. 14-15) – cannot participate in the celebration. The hyperbolic and grotesque metaphor of the subjects 'feeding' from the ruler's fart not only reinforces the leitmotif of distorted democracy that runs through Hove's literary oeuvre; it also leads us to recognise the social and political immorality of the political status quo in a way that helps us imagine alternative, more inclusive political dispensations. In exposing the faulty foundations of the ruler's narratives of democracy, symbolised by the playing of drums that the bound subjects cannot dance to, the poem portrays a disruption of the all-important connection and consensus between the ruler and his subjects, creating a deep sense of antagonism between them that borders on class conflict. The poem's sympathetic portrayal of the oppressed subjects leaves readers in no doubt as to where their allegiances and support should lie.

There is a strong intertextual link between Hove's dissident critique (in his recent poetry) of the Zimbabwean political system under ZANU (PF) and political (especially MDC) oppositional rhetoric. The major, recurring themes of human rights violations and political repression in Hove's poetry as well as the poetry's compelling imagining of alternative forms of governance, resonate both with the ideological foundations underpinning the opposition parties' regime-change politics and with the alternative models of democratic governance which they advocate. This is, however, not to reduce Hove's poetry to the status of oppositional campaign tracts. In fact, while acknowledging the anti-state impact of Hove's poetry, I argue that it is the literary qualities of his poetry which characterise the uniqueness of his participation in the political discourse about democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe

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during the past decade. This ideological strand can also be located in Dambudzo Marechera's writings, particularly in his poem "Oracle of the Povo" in the collection *Cemetery of Mind*. In this allegorical poem, Marechera vividly contrasts the leadership (the Oracle) and the Povo (the masses), penetratingly evoking the emerging class differences in post-independent Zimbabwe. An important dimension of Hove's dissident engagement with Zimbabwean politics post-2000 is his proclivity to internationalise the crisis. This stance (especially when compared to Mashingaidze Gomo's 'Africanist' critique, explicated above) indicates the influence of Hove's cosmopolitan location on his writing. The poem "What are you doing?" in *Blind Moon* demonstrates this point. In this poem, the Zimbabwean political problem is 'globalised': it is represented as a crisis beyond mitigation by local forces. The kaleidoscopic and passionate evocation of human rights violations and state repression creates a strong impression that the regime is too powerful to be affected by the protests of oppressed citizens or their efforts to bring about change. Given the backdrop of the state's invincibility and the citizens' vulnerability and inability to effect political change, the speaker in "What are you doing?" presents international intervention not only as the victimised citizens' last hope for redemption, but also as a moral obligation on the part of the international community. This can be inferred from the following lines:

> what are you doing
> when the teacher's bare buttocks
> are exposed in front of the school parade
> when lady teacher is raped
> in front of the children she teaches?
> ……………………………………………
> when the sun rises only for the rulers
> and the earth trembles in front of children's
> small feet?
> what are you doing
> when tyranny eats at the skin of defenceless people
> when tyranny devours its own people
> and drenches its mouth
> with the blood of the citizens? (ll.31-48).

The intensity of the suffering of ordinary people is heightened in these lines by the metaphorical portrayal of the state as a predator that kills its (dissident) subjects with impunity. This highlights the regime's brutality which, when juxtaposed with the defencelessness of the ordinary people (typified by the raped female teacher and the terrified children), not only produces a deep sense of aversion to the state, but also supports the idea of foreign intervention. This proposed solution to the political crisis – foreign intervention – radically opposes the discourse of national sovereignty which is notoriously invoked by ZANU (PF) in its attempts to forge a 'home-grown' democratic agenda. The poem's accusatory tone (which is intensified by the repetitive title line-cum-rhetorical question "what are you doing?") reveals the speaker's faith that the global community will intervene in the local political crisis, notwithstanding the annoying protocol and predilection for procedures involved in such political interventions. This can be felt in the following lines: "when streams of children's blood/creep on your desks, mournfully;/….procedure/you shout/in eloquent French/and immaculate suits" (ll.11-15). The foreign (French)[113] identity of the potential intervener is exposed. In another poem, titled "Sunk", Hove deploys the powerful symbolic effect of the recurring imagery of a "blind moon" to portray a dystopian image of the Zimbabwean political situation that is not only incompatible with that constructed by the state's grand narratives, but also indicates Hove's cosmopolitan conception of the political crisis as demanding global intervention. Like "What are you doing?", "Sunk" foregrounds a picture of a helpless nation to influence the reader to support the plea for intervention. This can be inferred from the following lines:

> Our moon was sunk
> Our sun was sunk
> Both red with planetary tears
> Of blood from our own veins
> ………………………………..
> Help us cry for our moon
> Help us cry for our sun
> Help us demand our smiles back (35)

[113] France was Hove's receiving country in 2003.

Although (unlike in "What are you doing?") the target audience – the potential redeemer – is not specified, one can infer from the general mood of despondency (revealed by the repetition of "help us" and symbolised by the imagery of darkness) the urgent need for foreign intervention. The dearth of democracy is symbolised here (as in most of the poems in *Blind Moon*) by the darkness resulting from the sunken sun and moon. The ghastly imagery of the bloodied moon and sun frighten us – we not only perceive the brutal nature of the force responsible for their sinking (a subtle allusion to state violence), but also imagine a moon and sun shining in a tolerant political system. This gory atmosphere creates a desperate political context which justifies the plea for foreign help. The extended symbolism of a "blind moon" and "sunken sun" not only penetratingly reflects the absence of democracy; it also reflects the irony and ambivalence of the 'postcolonial darkness' that was supposed to be removed by European 'light' in the colonial period. In the following section, my analysis looks closely at the use of satire in literary engagements with the dystopia of post-2000 electoral politics.

Satire, humour and imagined alternative electoral democracies in Zimbabwean literature

The complex nature and controversies surrounding the concept of "Zimbabwean democracy" in post-2000 Zimbabwe cannot be fully comprehended without an enquiry into oppositional appraisals of the country's electoral system during this period.[114] Besides the actual voting process, it is important to comprehend the processes leading up to the elections in order to determine the legitimacy of the 'winner'. The controversy regarding political legitimacy permeates the post-2000 Zimbabwean literary and political spheres, fuelled by a string of contested elections since the entrance of the MDC into the political fraternity. This section continues the discussion of alternative literary representations of the post-2000 Zimbabwean political system, and focuses on how the selected literary texts foreground language in a humorous way critically to engage with the markedly waning political legitimacy of ZANU (PF) and Mugabe caused by fraudulent electoral processes.

[114] A number of books have been written about the flaws of post-2000 electoral democracy in Zimbabwe. These include: *Defying the Winds of Change: Zimbabwe's 2008 elections* (edited by Eldred Masunungure, 2009), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the pre-colonial period to 2008* (edited by Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo, 2009) and Lloyd Sachikonye's *When a State Turns on its Citizens: 60 years of institutionalized violence in Zimbabwe* (2012).

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Mary Douglas asserts that: “laughter and jokes, since they attack classification and hierarchy, are obviously apt symbols for expressing community in this sense of unhierarchised, undifferentiated social relations” (qtd. in Susanne Pichler 207). With reference to the post-2000 political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, Chenjerai Hove has made an interesting comment: “In Africa, we laugh in order not to cry” (35). For Annie Gagiano, “a comic vision occurring within the ambit of, or recognisably in response to, what can be considered tragic, is not unprecedented” (“Comic Vision and Tragedy” 258). Invoking Leo Salingar’s study of Shakespeare and comic traditions, Gagiano highlights a major characteristic of comedy that resonates with my focus on the political function of humour. Gagiano cites “Salingar’s distinction between tragedy – as having mythos, ‘plot’ or ‘history’ – and comedy – as having *logos*, *hypothesis* or ‘argument’” (italics as in the original) (258). From its classical origins through to its post-modern theorisation, the socio-political function of humour (especially in its satirical form) has been connected, not only to its potential to radically challenge existing social, cultural and political codes governing social and political processes, but also to the potential for the creation of better human relations. My analysis of the subversive potential of (especially satirical) humour in Brian Chikwava’s novel *Harare North* and in short stories by Christopher Mlalazi and Julius Chingono follows on (and reacts to) theorisations and critical perspectives regarding the use of satirical humour. The aim is to examine the contribution of these works to the creation of an alternative discourse on democracy in contemporary Zimbabwe. I focus on the texts’ evocations of the violations of basic constitutional, human and civil rights, stressing how through satire and humour the texts (re-)affirm and validate these rights. In his aptly titled book, *Taking Humour Seriously*, Jerry Palmer hints at the social function of humour. He comments, rhetorically:

> It has often been commented, from Aristotle onwards, that the human species is the only species that laughs. One implication of this observation is the question: why should it be that we have this privilege? What purpose is there in humour and laughter? What function does it fulfil in the scheme of things of which we are a part? (57)

In another context, Henk Driessen answers the questions asked by Palmer, arguing that: “humour often mirrors deeper cultural perceptions and offers us a powerful device to understand culturally shaped ways of thinking and feeling” (222). Citing Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais and “forbidden laughter”, Nehama Aschkenasy observes how humour as a form of

folk culture in medieval Europe offered oppressed people an opportunity to safely contest their oppression. Aschkenasy argues that humour:

> offered the oppressed lower classes relief from the rigidity of the feudal system and the church and an opportunity for expressing nonconformist, even rebellious views. The carnivalesque spirit, therefore, is a form of popular, "low" humour which celebrates the anarchic and grotesque elements of authority and of humanity in general and encourages the temporary "crossing of boundaries" where the town fool is crowned, the higher classes are mocked, and the differences between people are flattened as their shared humanity, the body, becomes subject of crude humour. (440)

For Bakhtin therefore, carnivalesque humour was a social and political force that allowed the lower classes to censure the politically powerful within the relatively safe confines of carnivalesque humour. In her book *Language of Humour*, Ross Alison underlines the importance of understanding the workings of humour by interpreting it in its context. For Alison, humour "occurs in surprisingly serious contexts" (2). In his relevantly titled book, *Humour and Humanity*, Gerald Lynch claims that "humorous literature does not occupy a position at the lower level of literature, but lies around the summits of its highest range" (24). Lynch further argues that in its most effective form, humour ceases to be funny – it becomes "no longer necessarily funny; no longer a laughing matter" (25). Citing Steven Leacock, Lynch links humour to the inherently human instinct to escape problematic situations. He says: "It [literary humour] provides temporary, illusory respite from a life that is fundamentally disillusioning. By providing temporary escape from disillusionment, humour functions as a kind of enchanting spell to charm hard reality" (25). As Lynch argues, humour (especially in satire) is incomplete if its impact does not profoundly alert us to serious human foibles or weaknesses in ways that compel us to imagine corrective measures. In the African context, Achille Mbembe hints at the social and political role of humour when he ponders whether "humour in the post-colony is an expression of 'resistance' or not, whether it is, a priori, oppositional or simply a manifestation of hostility towards authority" (*Postcolony 103*). My analysis of the function of humour therefore focuses on its corrective/reformist potential; that is, on the literary works' imagining of alternative political dispensations.

Chenjerai Hove's statement that Zimbabweans in the crisis decade "laugh[ed] in order not to cry" (35) frames my critical perspective and analysis of what Jerry Palmer has called "the

paradox of taking humour seriously" (1). Zooming in on "the processes by which [...] 'funniness' occurs" (Palmer 3) in the focal texts, one realises, not only the subtlety with which (especially political) seriousness is embedded in humorous depictions of familiar plots, characters and symbols; but perhaps more importantly, one recognises a sense of the world (its political system and processes) as it should be. Christopher Mlalazi's short story "Election Day" (in his short story anthology *Dancing with Life: Tales from the Township* 2008) demonstrates the political seriousness and reformist potential of satirical humour. The intertextual nature of the plot is responsible for the satirical humour of "Election Day", making it (the short story) a potential site for encountering a subtle social and political critique of the event that perhaps most clearly exposed the ZANU (PF) government's undemocratic tendencies – the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary elections.[115] The political dimension to ZANU (PF)'s retention of power (despite losing both the parliamentary and Presidential votes to the opposition MDC parties) has been thoroughly discussed.[116] As a literary satire, "Election Day" participates in such discussion by humorously re-enacting the events leading to ZANU (PF)'s eventual 'victory' in the elections with a critical tone. In its attack on the use of violence and the masculinisation of political power, it imagines an alternative 'idyllic' democratic political dispensation. After losing an election, the President – ironically referred to by the reverent salutation, "His Excellency" – finds his advisor's suggestion that he relinquish power to be feminine. The President accuses Twenty (his queerly named advisor who is constantly being emasculated by His Excellency throughout the story) as being out of touch with the basic political 'fundamentals' – meaning the masculine demands of the political 'game'. His Excellency's ironic 'advice' to his advisor can be interpreted as a sarcastic allegorical allusion to Mugabe's disregard of the people's electoral 'advice' for him to leave office in the 2008 election. The President tells Twenty: "Let me tell you something for nothing my dear personal advisor. This is not a children's

[115] The 2008 election has been the subject of many artistic productions, particularly literary art, theatre and film. Daniel Mandishona's short story "Smoke and Ashes" in his short story collection *White Gods Black Demons* (2009) traces a friend's journey from USA to vote for change in the 2008 election in Zimbabwe. Narrated by a ruling party sympathiser, the short story grapples with the paradox of winning an election without winning power. Disillusioned after the reversal of the opposition's victory in the run-off election, the narrator's unnamed friend returns to America while the narrator cherishes Anastasio Somoza's statement that "You [his opponent believed to have won the elections] won the elections, but I won the count" (1). In 2001, *Rituals*, a popular play written by acclaimed playwright Stephen Chifunyise and based on the violence of the June 2008 run-off election in Zimbabwe, was banned from embarking on a nation-wide tour and its crew arrested and charged with "beating drums".

[116] See the articles: "Voting for Change – the 29 March Harmonised Elections" by Eldred Masunungure and "Theft by numbers – ZEC's role in the 2008 elections" by John Makumbe in the book *Defying the Winds of Change: Zimbabwe's 2008 elections.*

game we are playing here. This is not *ara-wuru-wuru-shoko*. It is a game of true men. Men who are larger than life" (10-11). To demonstrate both his ability to defy the election verdict and retain the machismo required in the political arena, the President displays his aggressive virility by assaulting Twenty, who (according to protocol) is powerless to defend himself:

> His Excellency's teeth flashed in a grim smile. "I am the new Incredible Hulk of this continent." He roared like Hulk, grabbed a startled Twenty and threw him to the ground. Twenty immediately rose up, fear on his face. His Excellency roared again, and threw him down for the second time. This time Twenty did not try to rise up. (10)

We are reminded here of Mugabe's dubbing of his 2002 so-called "war cabinet" as comprising "amadoda sibili"[117] – who drew inspiration from their participation in the Second Chimurenga to fight the Third Chimurenga. The "Rabelaisian laughter"[118] evoked by this display of 'palace' violence is intentionally iconoclastic and can be comprehended in the context of the 2008 election in Zimbabwe as subtly instigating a discursive counter discourse to ZANU (PF)'s claims that the 2008 election was democratic. Although presented with dark humour, the President's propensity for using gender profiling and violence as political tactics (especially when read in the context of ZANU (PF)'s violent reversal of its defeat in a bloody Presidential run-off election), not only reflects the influence of the socio-political pressures on the creative imagination, but (perhaps more importantly) reveals the story's critical perspective on the political processes in Zimbabwe by alluding to and condemning the politics of coercion anchored in masculinist reconstructions of the post-colonial nation. "His Excellency" successfully reverses his electoral defeat and suppresses the 'feminine' electoral demand for his removal. However, his political survival comes with an authoritarian abuse of power which moves the reader, not only to disavow coercive politics, but more importantly, to sympathise with Twenty, the symbolically effeminised advisor, with his appealing rational and democratic advice that His Excellency vacate the seat of power.

[117] A Ndebele phrase which means "real man". In their article "The Zimbabwean liberation war novel in Shona", Itai Muwati and Dave Mutasa view the masculinisation of state power revealed by this phrase as not only hegemonic in its exclusion of political parties and personalities without liberation war credentials but also in its distortion of women's role in the liberation war.

[118] Laughter which reduces the intimidatory effects of power and authority through humorous mimicry and mockery.

The key pointer to understanding humour's broader aesthetic function, then, is to focus on the "the situation in which [certain stories] are funny" (Alison 2). As in "Election Day", Julius Chingono's short stories are set in the politically charged election period reminiscent of post-2000 Zimbabwe. For the conscious reader who is abreast of the problems of electoral processes in post-2000 Zimbabwe, the setting of "Are We Together?" creates certain expectations. Chief among these are the short story's treatment of the theme of coercive political campaigning – a major feature of Zimbabwean elections from the turn of the century. Predictably, "Are We Together?" satirically engages with the socially destabilising effects of coercive politics, and focuses in particular on the multifarious ways in which victims of political violence react to their subjugation. In this way, Chingono's short story foregrounds a political dystopia in a subtle way that reflects a possible (idyllic) democratic dispensation. In "Are We Together?" humour is not merely a sarcastic device that vividly highlights the absurdity of the politics of political intolerance. In fact "the processes by which […] 'funniness' occurs" (Palmer 3) in Chingono's short story involve the readers' recognition of the incongruity of the methods of political mobilisation used by the ruling party. The humour engendered by the defects of the fictional political system in the short story indirectly hints at the possibility of a genuinely democratic system. The title of the short story (which is also the name of the ruling party's chief commissar), "Are we together?" is the major site of humour, and reflects the short story's complex counter-discursive participation in the discourse on Zimbabwe's post-2000 democratic processes, particularly the electoral system. "Are We Together?" (as a question) leads us to comprehend the unfolding story in the political context of the state's essentialist 'democratic' discourses. Such discourses (as the preceding chapters have shown) are premised on the fetishisation of the liberation war as 'endowing' its major actors with the right eternally to monopolise political leadership while everyone else (especially those who did not participate in this liberation struggle) is expected to be a perpetual supporter. Read in this context the name, "Are We Together?", functions in the short story as a rhetorical question asked by the leader to measure the level of his subjects' submissiveness.

The unusual and humorous name of the leader (Are-we-together) sarcastically suggests his determination to be supported at all costs in a way that penetratingly highlights the pitfalls of political coercion. We first encounter "Are-we-together", with subordinate ruling party militia, violently rounding up people to attend their political rally. The hints at the story's subtle censure of coercive politics and its covert imagining of an alternative democracy are

located in the story's sardonic portrayal of the personalities of the ruling party activists. As the leader of a ruling party militia terrorising innocent community members, Are-we-together (the character) easily becomes the story's satirical butt. Mambara – the name of Are-we-together's colleague[119] is also loaded with symbolic suggestiveness that further reflects the uncouth nature of his political conduct. Mambara is humorously portrayed as intensely motivated by a dehumanising political self-interest, to the extent that he asks God to eliminate his political opponents. Giving the opening prayer to a crowd that has been forcibly marched to attend his party's political rally, Mambara says: "Lord God of men who created the world. We pray that with your kindness you hear us when we pray. We beseech thee to kill the leader of the opposition for us" (26-27). The humour created by the irony inherent in Mambara's plea to God not only reflects his (Mambara's) political desperation and paranoia but (in alluding to God) also hints at a possible corrective strategy for his inhumane political culture – the love of all humanity. In another of Chingono's short stories, "An early supper", the electorate lives at the mercy of ruling party thugs whose political intolerance is signified by the tools they use to force people to support their political party and ideologies: "sticks, iron bars, sjamboks and bicycle chains" (87). In this short story, the use of these instruments of violence exposes their campaign as a despicable policy of violent coercion, consequently hinting at the peace and tranquillity possible in the party's absence or in the discontinuance of its violent politics. This intimation of a possible better 'flip side' of politics (in the absence of the ruling party's violence) is buttressed by the people's reaction to their victimisation. At the closing remarks of the rally, we are told, the "thunderous response was of a people happy that at last they could go home and because they knew they were under the watchful eye of the party youth on the look-out for anyone who remained silent" (87). Upon their dismissal at the end of the rally, the people show their relief at escaping from the coercive atmosphere by humorously "jumping and scuttling away to freedom" (88). In the next section, I examine how the humorous evocation of state institutions (particularly the National Youth Service Programme) enables the novel *Harare North* (written by Brian Chikwava) to participate in discourses on state-sponsored human rights violations in post-2000 Zimbabwe.

Harare from Harare North: The novel *Harare North* (2009) as a migrant's account of post-2000 Zimbabwean politics

[119] A derogative Shona word which means trouble-maker who constantly makes an idiot of himself. In South African usage a mampara is primarily a fool who causes embarrassment through inappropriate behaviour.

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Harare North has been analysed as an instance of what Muchemwa calls "exilic writing" in his article "Old and New Fictions" (135).[120] However, while the novel centres its plot in the diaspora (London) and does offer interesting perspectives on the post-2000 Zimbabwean diaspora, I argue that the narrative of *Harare North* happens in Harare North (London) as much as it does in the original Harare (in Zimbabwe) and that the social, political and cultural diasporic experiences described as happening in Harare North (London)[121] aptly reflect on the political situation in Zimbabwe. This approach is premised on the argument that the plot structure in *Harare North* is non-linear; shifting and alternating as it does between the original Harare and Harare North (London). Although the story is told from the perspective of an economic migrant (in London) who disguises himself as a political refugee, the novel is frequently punctuated by flashbacks (mostly) to the original Harare (in Zimbabwe). These memories not only reflect the narrator's "melancholia of exile" – to use Muchemwa's phrase ("Old and New Fictions" 141) – but also reveal (in a more passionate and involved way) the Zimbabwean political crisis as it informs the lives and experiences of Zimbabweans both in Harare and in 'Harare North'. Cognisant of the intricate relationship between home and exile (which informs the narrator's ambivalent identification with ZANU (PF) as his home and the source of his political identity), my analysis of the narrative's portrayal of the political situation in Zimbabwe focuses on the glimpses of home (Harare, and by implication, Zimbabwe) made possible by narrative flashbacks to the narrator's Harare past. My analysis is in part influenced by Stanley Makuwe's invocation of the Shona idiom "*usafukure hapwa pane vanhu*"[122] to read *Harare North* as subtly foregrounding the mindset of a fanatical member of the ZANU (PF) militia (the narrator) in order to proffer a fascinating, confession-like narrative which lays bare all of ZANU (PF)'s 'secret' intimidatory tactics. The humour mainly results from narrative ambiguity caused by the narrator's unawareness of the political damage he is causing his party (in the very act of 'praising' it). Makuwe asserts that:

> In Shona we say do not expose your armpits to the public because people will not be happy with the smell coming from under there, meaning you can't let your secrets [be?]

[120] See also Sydoine Moudouma Moudouma's PhD study entitled "Intra- and Inter-continental migrations and Diaspora in contemporary African Fiction" and Kociejowski Marius's article "A tree grows in Brixton: Brian Chikwava's dark adventure in *Harare North*."

[121] The nickname Harare North applied to London indicates the huge number of legal and illegal immigrants who have fled there from Zimbabwe in the hope of a better life. The same can be said of Johannesburg, which is nick-named Harare South.

[122] This translates literally as "Do not expose your armpits in public".

> known to every Jack and Jill, but while reading *Harare North* I felt like Chikwava had exposed many armpits for the whole world to smell. ("Review")

In *Harare North*, the satirically 'dissident' aspects of the humour are best understood in the political and cultural context in which the novel was produced and circulated. This helps us to "locate the extent to which the social identity of occasions and participants determines the existence of humour" (Palmer 12). In this light, one of the major aspects of the novel, which helps us to interpret the subversive nature of its humour, is the political and cosmopolitan identities of the narrator. The author (Brian Chikwava) deftly 'marries' the two identities in a way that not only connects the paradoxically ambivalent geographical spaces (Harare and Harare North) but, more importantly, also alerts us to the underlying political forces (shaped by Harare and, by implication, Zimbabwean politics) which impact on the narrator's cosmopolitanism. The humour (and satire) in Chikwava's novel should be understood in the context of the broader antagonistic bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and Britain in the wake of Zimbabwe's post-2000 'Fast-Track' Land Reform Programme. In state discourses, Mugabe always outwits Blair (then British Prime Minister), demonstrating a political and ideological superiority that climaxes with Mugabe famously telling Blair to "keep his England [while he] keeps [his] Zimbabwe".[123]

Our knowledge of the historical belittlement of Blair (and Britain) and the acclaim of Mugabe (and Zimbabwe) in state discourses[124] helps us to locate the irony and politically subversive humour generated by the narrator's parodic reproduction of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls "Mugabeism" ("Making sense of Mugabeism" 1139). In his article entitled "The uses and abuses of history in Zimbabwe" Terence Ranger traces the term "Mugabeism" back to the early days of the Third Chimurenga. He links "Mugabeism" to what he calls "the self-confidence of the Zimbabwe regime" (2) – something akin to what the narrator in *Harare North* sarcastically parodies through his constant reliance on ZANU (PF) philosophies to negotiate the vagaries of a life as a migrant in London. The ironic tone with which the

[123] After this chiding of Blair at the Johannesburg World Summit in 2002, Mugabe endorsed the derogatory song "agirimende" (with its popular line "the Blair that I know is a toilet") played by the ZANU (PF)-aligned musician Tambaoga to counter Britain's criticism of his government.

[124] While the ZANU (PF) government claimed political victimisation by the West (particularly Britain and USA) as a scapegoat for the crisis (see my next section focusing on Mashingaidze Gomo's text *A Fine Madness*), it also strategically projected itself as the vanquisher of western neo-imperialism (see for example, the song "Zimbabwe ishumba" by a pro-state musician, Cde. Chinx, which deploys jungle imagery to create and circulate an image of Mugabe as the lion and Britain as his prey).

narrator describes his experiences as a migrant in London subtly reveals his 'subconscious' guidance of the reader not only to distrust his 'wit' (as it is partly informed by his ZANU (PF) ideological and political consciousness), but also to suspect the ZANU (PF) political system that has shaped his worldview. Irony and humour are subtly used to scare us away from the narrator's political philosophy and notions of democracy. This creation of the anti-hero can be inferred early in the novel when the narrator boasts about his ability to outfox the British immigration officials to get an asylum permit – disguised as a victim of political violence in Zimbabwe (when he is actually a ZANU (PF) perpetrator of that same violence):

> The story that I tell the immigration people is tighter than thief's anus. Me I tell them I have been harass by them boys in dark glasses because I am youth member of the opposition party. This is not trying to shame our government in any way, but if you don't spin them smooth jazz numbers then immigration people is never going to give you chance to even sniff first step into Queen's land. (4)

The narrator's mention of the anus reminds us of the Bakhtinian 'grotesque' equalisation of the human body parts in his theorisation of the comic in *Rabelais and his World*. For Bakhtin, the lower body parts (including the anus) and the processes they facilitate are equally important for the proper functioning of the body. In terms of this logic, humour (the hitherto ordinary part of human interaction) is perceived as a serious act of culture that has the capacity to reconfigure political power. When read in the light of the narrator's self-construction as a product of ZANU (PF)'s anti-British politics, the humour in his description of his entrance into (and life in) London acquires a sarcastic undertone which alerts us to the novel's underlying subversive political themes. While we laugh at the narrator's cunning outmanoeuvring of the British immigration system, we are (at the same time) exposed to his hubris – the unsavoury dimensions of his pride in serving ZANU (PF) in the violent ruling party militia. Several issues connected to the novel's satirical and counter-discursive relationship to state projections of Zimbabwe as a democracy can be gleaned from the narrator's humorous attitude to the British. Besides exposing Britain's politicised asylum-vetting system, the humour in the narrator's description of his cunning passage into Britain 'seriously' reflects on the causes of the diplomatic standoff between Zimbabwe and Britain. An implied sarcastic commentary on Zimbabwe's accusations of Britain's meddling in

Zimbabwe's political affairs[125] can be detected in the narrator's ironic tone as his ideological perspectives parody the anti-British world views of ZANU (PF) and Mugabe.

In view of the narrator's revelation of his true ZANU (PF) militia identity, the narrative's intertextuality – its use of ZANU (PF)'s defensive rhetoric against Britain and the party's vindication of the National Youth Service[126] – not only flags the irony of the mistaken identity (whereby the perpetrator of political violence is 'rewarded' with asylum); we laugh at the same time as perceive how the narrator's true (militia) identity could have cost him the asylum permit. Viewed in the context of the narrator's testimony about his Green Bomber past (including the coldblooded murder of an opposition party supporter) and actual election-time violence, which has been widely attributed to the so-called Green Bombers,[127] the narrator's claim that his 'false' indictment of the Zimbabwean government (for political violence) is "not trying to shame our government in any way" (Chikwava 4) becomes hilariously incredible. The Green Bomber thread unveils the elaborate ways in which Chikwava's use of humour illuminates (in a critical way) the injustices of political repression, often attributed to the ZANU (PF)-aligned Green Bombers in the post-2000 period. As stated above, irony is the dominant strategy used by Chikwava to foreground the ugly dimensions of post-2000 politics in Zimbabwe in order to illuminate the possible alternatives.

The major irony used to make us question the narrator's apologetic versions of 'truth' can be seen in the disingenuousness of his narrative tone. Linking the narrator's reflections of his exilic experience and home is his extreme 'Mugabeism'– that is, his essentialist anti-western rhetoric. Unlike the seriously assertive tone used by Gomo's soldier narrator in his defence of Mugabe's conceptions of 'Zimbabwean democracy', the sarcastically ironic tone in the

[125] In 2007, the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair revealed that his government was working with the MDC to remove Mugabe from power. The narrator's judgement of the British asylum vetting system has strong resonance with the history of Zimbabweans' exodus to Britain in the early 2000s. Affiliation to the MDC was generally used as a pass-code to acquire asylum as a "political victim" and this is reflected by the large number of MDC activists in its so-called "UK constituency".

[126] Although authorised by the National Service Act of 1979, the programme was only established in 2001 amid heavy criticism that it was Mugabe and ZANU (PF)'s ploy to politically manipulate youths and set them up as a paramilitary force to intimidate people into supporting the status quo. The enrolled or graduated youths were derogatorily referred to as 'Green Bombers'. The name 'Green Bomber' entered Zimbabwe's political discourse at the turn of the century when the ZANU (PF) party instituted the National Youth Service (mostly referred to as 'Border Gezi' Training – named after a late former militant youth minister), ostensibly to 're-educate' and to 're-orient' youths to be 'patriotic' (in a military sense).

[127] See Lloyd Sachikonye's book *When a State Turns on Its Citizens: 60 Years of Institutionalised Violence in Zimbabwe.*

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narrator's "Mugabeism" in *Harare North* compels the reader to suspect the narrator's intensely self-righteous attitude (even as he attempts to justify the unjustifiable political violence he was part of) and is best reflected in his descriptions of his past as a member of a ZANU (PF) terror group he calls "the boys of the jackal breed" (17). While the narrator's criminal record precedes his first contact with his ZANU (PF) 'work' as a Green Bomber (having been earlier jailed for an undisclosed crime), his humorous description of his incorporation into the Green Bombers' fold surreptitiously reveals his moral corruption. The author deftly manipulates the idiosyncrasies of the first-person narrative to reveal the inherent bias in the narrator's self-centred justifications for his decision to quit his shoe-repair business to join the Green Bombers. This discernible bias not only makes his versions of 'truth' about the Green Bombers subjectively suspect, but creates the impression that the opposite of what he says is in fact true. Again, this reading is facilitated by the reader's awareness of the novel's historical context: a prior knowledge of the violent actions of the actual 'Green Bombers' produces a sceptical response to the narrator's political views. The fictive life-world enters into a zone of contact with the real (political) world, compelling the reader to read the former in the context of the latter. The following excerpt from the novel highlights the irony resulting from what Graham Allen calls "moving between texts" (1):

> Me I know sweet change; I have the same feeling before I join them boys of the jackal breed, the Green Bombers. Those days, nothing is moving in my life because I have just come out of prison and being shoe doctor outside the community hall is not bringing anything no more […] if you is back home leading rubbish life and ZANU (PF) party offer you job in they youth movement to give you chance to change your life and put big purpose into your life, you don't just sniff at it and walk away when no one else want to give you graft in the country even if you is prepared to become tea boy. (17)

In this quotation, humour is not only stirred by the narrator's desperation for a lucrative job – one of the major distinctive features of the actual post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe. Perhaps more importantly, this description of the narrator's political and economic 'Damascus moment' reflects the major 'push factor' for his participation in the political terror campaign in Zimbabwe. In laughing at the narrator's description of his economic desperation and the purportedly idealistic zeal with which he accepts the ZANU (PF) 'job' – hence the narrator's references to "new beginnings" and "big purpose in life" (17) – we are simultaneously alerted

to ZANU (PF)'s unscrupulous and exploitative politics, evinced by its manipulation and brainwashing of the economically vulnerable youth (represented by the narrator).

When read in the context of negative conceptions of actual "Green Bombers" in the post-2000 period, the laughable way in which the narrator's past and its innocent means of earning a livelihood (his "shoe-doctoring business" (*Harare North* 7)) is collapsed is loaded with subversive implications against the system that transforms him: in its place he builds a career as a ruthless agent of political violence. This can be inferred from the following:

> Me I know what I have to do when the boys come to take me in they van: the people's shoes, broken belts and all that kind of stuff, I toss them out into the pavement, give my stall one kick and it fall over easy. That's it! Me I jump onto the van as it speed off. I'm free. That's how new beginnings start [...] new life booming inside your head. You love the life, you like Tom the driver and you love the van because Tom call it the jackal. Chenhamo 'Original Sufferhead' is hanging and swinging from the van's door waving ZANU-PF party flag and defying the whole township as you speed away into another life. And the jackal – it is full with them new boy recruits heading for training camp; they is lugging football-size eyes because they don't know what everyone who remain behind is going to think of them now. (17-18)

This quotation epitomises the subtle manner in which Chikwava combines irony and humour in the novel to engage critically with the serious political issues of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. In the quotation above, the iconoclastic depiction of the narrator's humorous transformation can be located in the sarcasm of the tone and language used to describe his changes in lifestyle, personality and political affiliation. The change is depicted as inconceivably abrupt and ludicrous, even as the narrator ironically lauds it as his moment of entry into his "new life" (17). Here (and in most parts of the novel), our awareness of actual ZANU (PF)-linked election violence influences our reading, and exposes the irony in the narrator's over-enthusiastic praise of ZANU (PF) and his justification of violence as a 'necessary' evil for the protection of national sovereignty. In his spirited defence of ZANU (PF) and the Green Bombers' violence, the narrator unconsciously provides incriminating evidence which 'convicts' him (in the readers' eyes), allowing us to infer the good (peace) from the bad (the Green Bombers' violence). There is a subtle hint at the narrator's insincerity in his praise of the Green Bomber job. The narrator's description of his fellow

recruits who are "lugging football-size eyes because they don't know what everyone who remained behind is going to think of them now" (18) demonstrates the narrator's (and his fellow recruits') guilty awareness of the way their new occupation deviates from social norms and expectations. Satirical humour, generated by the irony of (ZANU (PF)'s ugly-rendered-beautiful violent 'work' becoming a "big and *proper* purpose" (emphasis added) (17) weaves through the whole narrative. The narrator becomes a caricature, compelling us to suspect his every move, his expressed worldview and his political affiliation. In his description of the Green Bombers' recruitment exercise (cited above), for instance, one can discern from the narrator's excitement at his changing economic fortunes, his unintended exposure of moral corruption of the Green Bombers.

In the constant flashbacks to his 'Green Bomber' days which punctuate the narrator's account, the reader can infer from the dark humour, a sense of tragedy in the comedy. Generally, flashback functions in the novel to reconnect the original Harare with Harare North (London) in a way that roots the narrator's personality and social and political worldviews in his former experiences and his indoctrination as a member of the ZANU (PF) youth militia. While this constant encroachment of the home (Harare) past into the lives of the exiles is not exclusive to the narrator,[128] it certainly shapes his personal, social and political identity more than anything else in the novel. The violent, paramilitary, fascist Harare self constantly resurfaces, influencing the narrator's bullish, egocentric, and megalomaniac disposition in London. The narrator's inclination to define himself in militaristic and violent terms in London demonstrates the extent to which home and exile are ambivalently interrelated. The intimidating tactics of his Green Bomber days are transposed to the London squat, establishing him as a dominant and dreaded squat-mate. This is how he explains dominance over his squat-mates:

> Me I am not civilian person; so I don't go paparapapara panicking. The past always give you the tools to handle the present. Add small bit of crooked touch to what you do

[128] I am referring to characters such as Tsitsi, the young mother of the child who is sometimes hired out to earn government-sponsored social benefits for the vulnerable members of society. The Shona lullabies that Tsitsi sings to her baby, for instance, not only demonstrate a nostalgic attempt to reconnect with her Zimbabwean roots, but reveal the ambivalence of transposed Zimbabwean identities in London. Mai Masunda (another London-based Zimbabwean exile and spirit medium) experiences seizures in which she spiritually reconnects with her dead ancestors, who are obviously in Zimbabwe.

> and everyone soon get startled into silence and start paying proper attention and respect to you. Every jackal boy know that style. (69)

The key to identifying the covertly subversive statement embedded in this quotation is the narrator's reference to force – the "crooked touch" (69) – as the "tools" obtained from his militia days in Zimbabwe that enable him to survive the vagaries of life in London. The narrator's revelation of the nickname of his former militia group ("boys of the jackal breed" 17), hints at the corrupt nature of their political conduct. Like "Green Bombers" (named after green flies that transmit the cholera pathogen), the appellation "Boys of the Jackal Breed" carries negative connotations that echo the narrator's reliance on the "crooked touch" in his dealings with people.[129] The next section explores the emergent and firming canon of political autobiographies by prominent political players grappling with the origins and evolution of the political problems of the past decade in Zimbabwe.

"We know this road": Democratic discourse in post-2000 Zimbabwean political autobiography

The turn of the century witnessed the burgeoning of political autobiographies and biographies that were mostly written by (or about) veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war and other politically active individuals. The republication in 2001 (a year before the 2002 Presidential election) of the hard-hitting, unabridged autobiography of the late Vice President Joshua Nkomo, entitled *The Story of My Life*, set the tone for the proliferation of a series of politically dissident life narratives. This growing autobiographical corpus is unique in its methods of engaging with contemporary political (especially democratic) discourses. Ironically, although they are mainly produced by veterans of the Zimbabwean liberation war, most of these autobiographies do not necessarily affirm the political system created and presided over by their former comrades in the liberation war. In fact, many of these life writings create a counter-discourse to the state's claims regarding democratic rule: their imagined alternative democracies are rooted in a subjective remembering of the same past that is invoked by the ruling elite. It can thus be argued that these autobiographies (like the state's defensive master narratives of the past) 'strategically' or subjectively remember past

[129] The jackal (in the Zimbabwean context) is called a 'wild dog' because it shares many features with the dog. Community health officers often warn people (especially in the rural areas) to avoid their poisonous bites. By associating himself and his militia group with the "jackal breed", the narrator 'unconsciously' exposes his (and ZANU-PF's) 'smelly armpits' to the reader.

events in order to advance a preconceived political agenda. Most of the political autobiographies – which Tasiyana Javangwe calls "nationalist autobiographies" (188) – published in the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe reveal a common political strand: an overt preoccupation with rupturing the state's narrative of the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis, particularly as it (the state's grand narrative) uses the past to mystify its political and cultural essentialism. The autobiographies[130] feature former high-ranking officials of the liberation parties (ZANU and ZAPU). These former officials (some, like Tekere, Nkomo and Chung, have worked in the post-independence government) narrate their lives from the 'privileged' perspective of former insiders in both the liberation movements and the post-independence government. This makes their assessment of and commentary on contemporary politics more captivating and persuasive.

The autobiographies are important for this study's enquiry into literary responses to the state's discouragement of criticism of its rule. This is not only because the genre of autobiography gives the autobiographer (who is the narrator) prominence in the construction of 'truth', but because the texts (autobiographies) provide a platform for a subjective appraisal of the current political system through a personalised historical narrative that challenges state-circumscribed notions of national history. William Edward Burghardt DuBois has argued that "[a]utobiographies do not form indisputable authorities", adding that "[t]hey are always incomplete, and often unreliable" (13). The most important element of autobiographies, then, is that they are highly subjective and cannot be treated as the absolute truth. However, the value of these political autobiographies for current (literary) appraisals of state politics in Zimbabwe and the search for a genuinely democratic political dispensation cannot be overstated, since they transgress against or subtly defy the state's curtailment of criticism.

Perhaps the most distinctive property of autobiographies is that they are self-referential. This facet of autobiography makes it overtly subjective, and a fruitful site to encounter what Lara calls "narratives performing simultaneously identity claims and institutional transformations" (23). In the context of the post-2000 dominance of the state narrative in constructions of the nation, the element of subjectivity in these political autobiographies may be easily read as

[130] The most visible of these autobiographies include Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* (2001); Vesta Sithole's *My Life with an Unsung Hero* (2006); Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007); Fay Chung's *Re-living the Second Chimurenga* and Wilfred Mhanda's *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter* (2011).

signalling their independence of official narratives and their imagining of alternative forms of 'genuine' democracy. However, as a literary genre, the autobiography is particularly complex: one cannot expect it to provide objective knowledge and commentary, especially about politically charged phenomena such as the post-2000 Zimbabwean economic and political crisis. It is, then, not really surprising that while these 'oppositional' political autobiographies proffer important 'independent' perspectives on the state of democracy in the country, their inherent subjectivity can complicate (and sometimes compromise) their usefulness or reliability in the search for alternative, more authentic models of democracy in Zimbabwe. It is a truism that autobiographies (let alone political autobiographies) have as their focus the subjective narrating self, and this increases the chances of biased representations of non-narrating others. The problem with subjective bias is to be expected in political autobiographies, especially when their writers (such as Tekere; Nkomo; Mhanda; Chung and even Tsvangirai) are writing from outside the political system to which they once belonged. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, we must first understand "the historical notion of personhood and the meaning of lives at the time of writing – that is, the ideological notion of the 'I' affecting the self-narrator" (168). With reference to Edgar Tekere and his *A Lifetime of Struggle*, the historical post-2000 political situation not only informs the subject matter of the narrative, but also determines the autobiography's political engagement with wider post-2000 discourses about democracy in Zimbabwe.

Straddling the liberation war and post-independence epochs, these political autobiographies are likely to proffer an alternative view of "where the rain began to beat us" – to borrow Achebe's postcolonial phrase (*Morning Yet* 44). The autobiographies invoke the same historical events (the second Chimurenga – used by the state to legitimate its concept of 'Zimbabwean democracy') to create a different, politically subversive, effect. This facet of the autobiographies is to be expected, given the autobiographers' manifest political antagonism towards their former comrades still active within the ruling establishment.[131] The

[131] Tekere was expelled from government in 1981 and from ZANU (PF) in 1988.He was admitted back into the party fold after an appeal in 2006, but only as an ordinary party member and was barred from contesting for any party position. Fay Chung – whose revealingly titled autobiography, *Re-living The Second Chimurenga*, was published in 2006 – now belongs to the Mavambo Kusile Dawn party, which is led by Simba Makoni – himself a former ZANU (PF) Politburo member who broke away from ZANU (PF) to challenge Mugabe in the 2008 presidential election. Wilfred Mhanda, (a former high-ranking ZANU (PF) official who wrote *Dzino*), now writes newspaper columns in privately owned newspapers criticising his former party, its leadership and government. Although Joshua Nkomo died a ZANU (PF) member (in 2001) under the 1986 Unity Accord, most of his senior colleagues disowned the unity pact and revived ZAPU in protest against the same grievances (especially the marginalisation of Matabeleland) passionately raised by Nkomo in *The Story of My Life.*

autobiographers' detachment from ZANU (PF), it would seem, allows them the space to reflect independently on the political present in view of the remembered past. Nkomo's autobiography is arguably the most politically far-reaching: it revisits the most important phases and processes in the making of the nation (particularly the second Chimurenga and the *Gukurahundi*) to launch a scathing attack on Mugabe and on the government's authoritarian tendencies. The major highlights include Nkomo's construction of himself (and his ZAPU party) as excluded and victimised political 'saints' in order to cast doubt on ZANU (PF)'s script of the second Chimurenga. That script puts ZANU (PF) and its fighting wing ZANLA[132] at the centre of the national liberation war. This not only relegated Nkomo's ZAPU and its liberation army (the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, or ZIPRA) to the periphery, but (especially just before and during the *Gukurahundi*) denounced it as "the enemy" of the post-independent nation.[133] As Tasiyana Javangwe notes, "Nkomo's narrative speaks of victimhood at the hands of erstwhile fellow liberators to the point where it becomes the story of his life as well as the story of the lives of his opponents" (26). Nkomo, in particular, invokes his political victimhood to expose what he perceives to be the political downgrading of his and ZAPU's role in the second Chimurenga and his and his party's relevance to the post-independent state. In fact, Nkomo's construction and reconstruction of himself and ZAPU as political victims of ZANU (PF)'s politics of exclusion and authoritarianism is sentimental. It affectively moves the reader to side with his privileged autobiographical position as the story's narrator and main actor, in an attempt to reconfigure the political centre.

Read in the context of Nkomo's and ZAPU's political marginalisation, Nkomo's sentimental reconstruction of his political victimisation makes his narrative a speech-act that, as Lara claims, involves the "'alter' and 'ego' understand[ing] one another solely on the basis of well-argued reasons" (2). In *The Story of My Life*, the presentation of what Lara would call "evidence of injustice or past injury" (10) recreates and reconfigures our knowledge of history, and provides Nkomo with a powerful case for revising ZANU (PF)'s essentialist interpretations of the past. In the process, the narrative becomes personal, yet it is also what Lara calls a "new public narrative which retell[s] the stor[ies of Nkomo and ZAPU],

[132] Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army.

[133] The unabridged version of his autobiography *The Story of My Life* revolves around Nkomo's attempts to recapture his nationalist identity which was distorted by his alleged involvement in sponsoring dissidents. In this book Mugabe (and ZANU (PF)) hegemony is evoked as premised on his liberation war credentials and Nkomo's (and ZAPU's) denial of the same.

interrelating the aesthetic and the moral spheres and redefining the relationship between justice and the good" (Lara 18). The "self-fashioned moral model" (Lara 23) that results from the narrative's affective manipulation of the reader to make one notice (and even vicariously 'experience') Nkomo's political persecution persuasively encourages a revision of exclusivist narratives of the past. *The Story of My Life* is therefore not only influenced by a palpable partisan urge to 'set the record straight', especially in view of Nkomo's claim that "national unity was not [Mugabe's] top priority" (209), but also by Nkomo's (and indeed most of the post-2000 autobiographers') general feeling that the country under Mugabe and the ruling ZANU (PF) elite had departed from the democratic ethos that inspired (and was inspired by) the liberation war.

The republication of Nkomo's politically dissident autobiography in 2001 can be read as being in keeping with the emergence and firming of a new oppositional culture which started with the trade union-led stay-aways and food riots of the late nineties and climaxed with the formation of the MDC in 1999 and its near defeat of ZANU (PF) in the 2000 general election. It would appear (in view of the discussion above) that Nkomo's autobiography was strategically re-published so that it could (along with other voices of contestation) expose ZANU (PF)'s political treachery and increase the pressure on the government to reform. This point is reinforced by what Javangwe calls the "political economy of autobiographical production" (132) in Zimbabwe. Javangwe argues that:

> Understanding the political economy of auto/biographical production is critical to grasping the agenda(s) that these life narratives seek to set from the very onset. The emplotment of a life at the centre of the nation is not a disinterested act, and as such involves both the subject of the text and others involved in the narrative project. (132)

In view of Javangwe's advice (above), the major extra-textual force that has a profound bearing on the political thrust of Nkomo's (and Tekere's) autobiographies is the identity of the publisher/ publishing house. Like Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle*, Nkomo's unabridged (2001) edition of *The Story of My Life* was published by SAPES Books, a publishing house in Zimbabwe that is fronted by an academic and former ZANU (PF) cadre who (like the autobiographers he has published to date) has broken ranks with the party. Other post-2000 political autobiographies noted above are published by independent publishers such as

Weaver Press (which has published Fay Chung and Wilfred Mhanda's autobiographies). Morgan Tsvangirai's *At the Deep End* is published by the international publisher Penguin.

Nkomo and Tekere's autobiographies, then, not only reflect their publisher's political persuasion, but also participate in the burgeoning, at the turn of the century, of a significant corpus of political autobiographies (and other literary genres) which recall the democratic ideals of the first and second Chimurenga wars in order to illuminate with a strong sense of precision and plausibility, "where the rain begin to beat" post-independence Zimbabwe – to borrow (again) Chinua Achebe's famous postcolonial phrase (*Morning Yet* 44). As mentioned above, in the wider context of the growing anti-state sentiment characterising the post-2000 period, the autobiographies can be read as shaped by an underlying political intention: the common aim is to invoke insider knowledge acquired during the autobiographers' participation in the system to authoritatively undermine the prevailing hegemonic culture and construct alternative forms of democracy. The intersecting themes of corrupted democracy and exclusion permeate the narratives of the autobiographers. They foreground the 'deviation' of the current political system from the democratic legacy of the Chimurenga wars (which the autobiographers claim to remember and respect) and use this as justification for their compulsion to overhaul the now 'rogue' political establishment. My analysis of Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* in the next section focuses on the distinctive ways in which it appropriates the idiosyncrasies of the genre (autobiography) to create a counter-discourse to the 'Zimbabwean democracy' master narrative since independence (but more particularly in the post-2000 period).

An ex-insider looking back in: Edgar Tekere and ZANU (PF) politics in *A Lifetime of Struggle*

A better way to comprehend Tekere's selective remembering in *A Lifetime of Struggle* is to situate the text in the context of the political discourses informing the time-space of its publication. Tekere's political career and philosophy outside the autobiographical text takes centre stage in the framing of his politics inside the text. The most important facts about Tekere's life, which have a profound influence on the ideological and stylistic construction of *A Lifetime of Struggle*, are his birth (as he claims) to a royal clan; his participation in the liberation war as a senior commander; his role in the formation of ZANU (PF) (and his expulsion from the party); his subsequent formation of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement Party

(ZUM); his re-admission into ZANU (PF) and his eventual endorsement of the then opposition MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai in the 2008 presidential election. In *A Lifetime of Struggle*, every aspect of the personal self is connected to the political self in a way that projects Tekere as the proponent and custodian of both the indigenous knowledge systems of political leadership and the original democratic ideals of the second Chimurenga war.

The structure of Tekere's autobiography demonstrates an underlying authorial keenness to construct the self as inextricably bound up with the nation's politics from as far back as his formative years during the liberation war. Tekere's flagging of his liberation war experience not only highlights his determination to anchor his relevance to contemporary political discourses in some convincing background, but also establishes him as a trustworthy and indispensable repository of national memory. Reinvoking Javangwe's comments on the need to consider the political economy of autobiographical production, one can easily locate *A Lifetime of Struggle* within the broader dissident discourse championed by Ibbo Mandaza and his SAPES Books publishing house. The autobiography begins with a lengthy (twenty-five page) "Introduction" by Mandaza, who is well known for his vitriolic attacks on the authoritarian tendencies of ZANU (PF). Most relevant to my enquiry into the autobiography's reflections on the democratic space in contemporary Zimbabwe is the way Mandaza's "Introduction" pre-empts Tekere's claims to authenticity in the introduction. The Introduction inaugurates and explains (in highly persuasive scholarly terms) Tekere's dovetailing of his political and personal selves in *A Lifetime of Struggle* in a way that is clearly meant to raise Tekere's voice above the rest. Despite his acknowledgment that as an autobiography, *A Lifetime of Struggle* is prone to "the pitfalls of subjectivity" (Tekere 2), Mandaza goes on to attack autobiographies and biographies (especially written by or on ZANU (PF) politicians) which are not critical of the status quo; in effect he vindicates Tekere's questioning stance in *A Lifetime of Struggle*. Mandaza argues:

> Not so long ago we warned against such commentaries and biographies that amount to no more than official type histories, presumptuous and self-indulgent accounts, or vain attempts at recording the "authentic" experiences of selected actors and would-be combatants. In the final analysis, there is the inherent danger that such commentaries will turn out not only to have been highly incomplete and partial in their biographies but also so pregnant with controversy as to cause more harm than good. (2)

Mandaza's praise for Tekere (especially in comparison with state-endorsing biographies) is premised on what Mandaza believes to be Tekere's "commendable degree of the kind of frankness and brutal honesty for which Edgar Tekere has been known by those associated long enough with the man" (3). This respectful construction of Tekere in Mandaza's "Introduction" not only foreshadows in a scholarly-critical way what Tekere will critique by way of his life's narrative, but also lends credence and endorsement to Tekere's otherwise subjective narrative. Throughout the autobiography, Tekere either overtly refers to his "frankness and brutal honesty" (Mandaza 3) or uses his memory selectively to construct the same personal and political temperament. To be "frank and brutal[ly] honest" (Mandaza 3) in a country that is dominated by a political system that thrives on passive loyalty to official historical narratives that, according to Mandaza, are "highly incomplete and partial" (2), is to be radically democratic. The construction of this radically democratic self in *A Lifetime of Struggle* is inextricably bound up with what Tasiyana Javangwe in his study of the evocations of the self and nation in black-authored Zimbabwean autobiographies calls "the historical continuum" (172). In this continuum, the 'personal' becomes politically historical as the narrative is craftily tailored to serve a political purpose in the present – that is, it is designed to enter contemporary discourses on democracy from a superior and 'informed' vantage point. The overarching thematic and ideological effect produced by Tekere's portrayal of the self is his emergence as a self-styled radical democrat who conscientiously distinguishes himself from the now 'sycophantic' 'others' – those ZANU (PF) members who remained in the party. These people are portrayed in *A Lifetime of Struggle* as at best cowards, hypocrites and unprincipled people who selfishly betray the founding legacy of the liberation war to remain on the 'gravy train'. Tekere, then pictures himself as the 'last man standing' – the hero; the 'true' and democratic patriot who is unlike the 'cowering' 'cowards' in ZANU (PF) who cannot speak out against Mugabe's excesses.

The narrative construction of the authorial self into a convincing political commentator on the current political crisis can be located earlier in the narrative where Tekere describes the "humble beginnings" (27) of his political career. Tekere's narrativisation of his evolving political self demonstrates his proclivity for uniqueness – a personal distinctiveness that morphs into a political brand bordering on exclusive excellence. This making of a unique political self (with constant emphasis on difference from the 'ordinary' political others, especially Mugabe) is foregrounded in the first chapter which is ironically titled "Humble Beginnings". In this chapter, Tekere's exceptionalism is shown early on in the

autobiography, where he portrays himself as 'naturally' distinct from his brothers and sister. Describing his siblings as born to "live conventional family lives" (27), Tekere describes himself as "destined for another type of life, full of hardship, marked by the pain that is Zimbabwe's continuing struggle" (27). His radical rebel identity takes initial shape: Tekere narrates how what he calls his "non-conformist" class "obtained a one hundred per cent pass rate" (32), and also how he passed examinations against the odds deliberately created by school authorities who wanted to fail him. This self-righteous trope weaves through the entire autobiography, anchoring Tekere's outspoken and at times firebrand personality, particularly as it relates to ZANU (PF) and Mugabe's rule in the post-independence period. In this period he (Tekere) is dismissed from Mugabe's government and expelled from ZANU (PF). Along with Tekere's conscious self-elevation as an unequivocally candid personality is his subtle (but sometimes overt) downgrading of Mugabe as not only opposed to basic democratic practices such as free expression and openness to criticism (the hallmarks of Tekere's democratic ideals), but also (unlike Tekere) as lacking royal blood. An excerpt from Chapter Seven "My Expulsion from ZANU (PF) and the Formation of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM)" best reveals the outcome of what Tekere's persuades us to believe is the incompatibility of his 'democratic' disposition and Mugabe's (and ZANU (PF))'s authoritarianism. Tekere says:

> As early as 1981, I stood up in Parliament and stated that I was disturbed because I could already see corrupt tendencies creeping in. I had often spoken out against the sloganeering that went on at rallies and Party meetings, and the elevation of Mugabe to a position where he was considered to be above criticism. So I was sacked for championing what the party ought to be. (159)

Predictably (and as is frequently the case with autobiographies), we are presented with one side of the story backed up by subjective 'first hand' knowledge carefully selected to convince us it is a matter of fact. This self-righteousness can be linked to Tekere's strategic construction of himself as the democratic political martyr whose political demise is a result of Mugabe's protracted efforts to pave the way for his unchallenged dictatorship in the party and in government. In his attempts to personalise his democratic identity, Tekere sets up almost every ZANU (PF) senior member in opposition to himself. In particular, Mugabe is depicted as constantly working to get rid of Tekere for fear of being deposed by him (Tekere) – as had been the case with Mugabe's predecessor as leader of ZANU (PF) – Ndabaningi Sithole.

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Tekere's narrative exaltation of himself creates the strong impression that his downfall was a strategic move by a now paranoid Mugabe to pave the way to dictatorial rule. Not only does Tekere remember how Mugabe sent his generals to Malawi "to see how that old despot [Kamuzo Banda] ruled" (133), but he also turns Tekere's political friends[134] against him, leading to his expulsion from government and the party. As what Tekere proudly calls "the threesome" (133), they had played a major role in the deposition of Ndabaningi Sithole.[135] Sketching himself as the ring-leader of the king-making/unmaking "threesome", Tekere brags that "[w]e had deposed one corrupt leader [Sithole],[136] and were perfectly capable of doing so again [in this case, to Mugabe]" (133). As in Nkomo's *The Story of My Life*, the victimhood/persecution topos pervades the narrative (especially in Chapter 7: "My Expulsion from ZANU (PF) and the Formation of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM"), buttressing Tekere's claim that he is the political 'sacrificial lamb' in Mugabe's acquisition of unchecked imperial powers. To reinforce this claim, Tekere strategically recalls memories of his political and personal conflicts with Mugabe, constantly falling back on his position as ZANU (PF)'s Secretary General not only to exonerate himself from accusations of insubordination (against Mugabe's authority), but also to claim democratic credentials that Mugabe (given his antagonistic attitude to Tekere) could not have. The following excerpt demonstrates this:

> As Secretary General of the Party, I had the constitutional custodianship of the founding aspirations and principles […] Thus, it was I who had the authority to remind, guide, rebuke and insist on adherence to the founding principles and the vision of the Party, and I took this responsibility extremely seriously. Already, Mugabe was working to consolidate his personal control and power over the Party, and I was obviously an obstacle to this. (135)

In this quotation, Tekere represents himself as the key restraint on what strikes us as Mugabe's 'inherent' dictatorship, effectively foregrounding his (Tekere's) dismissal from his

[134] Tekere specifically refers to Maurice Nyagumbo and Enos Nkala.
[135] Sithole was the founding President of ZANU. He was later replaced by Mugabe.
[136] Ndabaningi Sithole's wife Vesta disputes such allegations in her autobiography *My Life with an Unsung Hero* which was published in 2006. Vesta Sithole's autobiography participates in the heavily debated and politicised discourse on Ndabaningi Sithole's political legacy by re-constructing Ndabaningi Sithole as an "unsung hero" in protest against his being tagged a traitor by ZANU (PF). In 2012, a political storm was brewing for the MDC (partners in government) when it held a memorial service for Sithole and declared him a national hero; a status denied him by ZANU (PF).

'watchman' position in ZANU (PF) and government as the reason for Mugabe's and ZANU (PF)'s authoritarian turn. Tekere and Mugabe emerge as polar opposites in personalities and as politicians; their contrasting political attributes stem from their respective historical, personal and familial backgrounds. Tekere's final analysis (in the autobiography's "Postscript") that "90 per cent of the blame (for Zimbabwe's post-2000 political and economic crisis) should go to Mugabe, and ten per cent to those who have uncritically huddled around him over the years" (178) can thus be read as the teleological culmination of Tekere's longstanding suspicions regarding Mugabe's leadership. With ninety per cent of the blame, Mugabe emerges as Zimbabwe's chief political villain, while Tekere (whose outspokenness runs like a thread the whole narrative) 'justifiably' detaches himself from the ten per cent blame that he attributes to Mugabe's 'hangers on'.

As I have indicated above, the major casualty of Tekere's self-glorification strategies to positively re-construct the self by undermining others is Mugabe. Tekere's political clout is thus most visible when contrasted with Mugabe's presumed lack of it. As early as the first chapter, Tekere defines himself in positive terms that mark him as an extraordinary royal liberation hero who is always pitted against the likes of other more ordinary liberation war fighters (especially those loyal to Mugabe). This sense of political supremacy and advantage (especially over Mugabe) is foregrounded in Tekere's claim to royal birth and upbringing, attributes that we are persuaded to believe Mugabe clearly lacks; more importantly, their lack informs his (Mugabe's) 'uncultured' political behaviour.[137] The impression is created that Tekere's close proximity to Mugabe during and after the liberation war qualifies him to be an authentic appraiser of Mugabe's personal and political strengths and weaknesses. Mugabe is

[137] In Zimbabwe, the political and the supernatural are intimately bound up. In his narrative of the widely circulated account of his journey to organise the liberation war in Mozambique together with Mugabe and the spiritually revered Chief Chirau, Tekere creates the impression that, guided by the ancestral spirits of his departed First Chimurenga heroes, he and the chief operated on a much higher spiritual level that was incomprehensible to Mugabe. As if to confirm Tekere's claim to political superiority based on his claims to spiritually and physically "belong to the war […] in a way that Robert Mugabe (sic) never was" (*A Lifetime* 107), Kelvin Gwanangara (a character in Shimmer Chinodya's novel *Strife*2006) is possessed by (among other spirits demanding audience with him) Tekere's spirit from the Second Chimurenga war. In recent years, state discourses have created counter identities for Mugabe based on Christian spirituality. In this strategy, intensely spiritual and popular indigenous churches (known as Apostolic Churches, led by a well-known ZANU (PF) apologist Bishop Johannes Ndanga) project Mugabe as the incarnation of the biblical Gabriel, the angel of God. This God-sent political leader brand is attached to Mugabe and is buttressed by Vice President Joyce Mujuru, who was quoted in a newspaper article "President anointed at 10 – VP Mujuru" by Tinashe Farawo declaring Mugabe a sacrosanct political leader. In Mujuru's words: "[p]eople are wasting their time opposing President Mugabe. It was prophesied way back in 1934, when he was only ten years, that he was going to lead this country. How can a normal person challenge such a leader?" (Farawo, "President anointed at 10 – VP Mujuru").

constantly portrayed (in contrast to Tekere) as fundamentally opportunistic (while Tekere, inspired by his royal descent, is a principled political achiever); as cowardly and tyrannical (whereas Tekere is brave and democratic). This 'autobiographical' extolling of the self by debasing the rival manifests itself overtly (as in Tekere's self-glorifying claim that "[he] belonged to the war, [he] was part of it in a way that Robert Mugabe never was" (107). This also happens in more subtle ways that demand a high level of awareness on the part of the reader. When read in the context of post-2000 ZANU (PF) politics and the iconic and reverent construction of Mugabe as the nation's founding father figure,[138] one can see in Tekere's negative portrayal of Mugabe, a determination to strip him of the veneration bestowed on him. Tekere's narrative reconstructs Mugabe's character and role in and after the liberation war against the backdrop of carefully selected historical events and experiences that create a negative picture of Mugabe which questions and debunks his valorisation as the nation's founding 'father' and which renders him politically dispensable. The first time Mugabe is mentioned in any detail, he is described in disparaging terms as a vacillating character who (unlike Tekere, who claims to have participated in the formative years of the liberation struggle through the NDP and then ZANU) is a latter-day nationalist who joins the liberation movement to which Tekere has a prior claim. Mugabe is thus portrayed as a beneficiary of the 'philanthropism' of the NDP leaders who, of course, included Tekere. Tekere's inscription of himself as Mugabe's political godfather[139] who facilitates his (Mugabe's) entrance into national politics not only creates the impression that Mugabe's leap into the forefront of nationalist politics is opportunistic (and premised on Tekere's and the NDP's benevolence); it also lays the groundwork for Tekere's construction of Mugabe as a betrayer later in the autobiography.

Perhaps the most important and constant manifestation of the power of self-centred narrativisation of one's life in *A Lifetime of Struggle* is the evocation of Tekere as the ideal democratic political foil to Mugabe and, by implication, ZANU (PF). As Smith and Watson

[138] The reverent title "Baba Mugabe" (father Mugabe) used in informal party circles not only reflects Mugabe's advanced age but more importantly, his political significance as the independent nation's founding President. Shortly before the 2008 election, proposals were made by the Women's League of his ZANU (PF) party for him to be honoured with the rank of Life President, although the proposal could not be further pursued with the advent of the post-election Government of National Unity.

[139] Tekere constantly invokes his assumed political 'superiority' to undermine Mugabe's political clout. In an interview with the *NewsDay* newspaper Tekere mocked Mugabe thus: "President Mugabe talks, imagines and believes that he, and he alone, brought about the freedom of Zimbabwe. He believes that some of us were sleeping at home with our wives while he was fighting. This nonsense must come to an end. In terms of entry into politics, he is a baby, and I challenge him to deny this" ("Why Mugabe 'hated' Tekere", *NewDay Online*).

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advise, authorship and historical moment are important to a holistic understanding of an autobiography. One should read Tekere's evocations of Mugabe (especially in the liberation and post-independence eras) in the context of what Smith and Watson refer to as the "cultural meaning of 'authorship', that is, "[w]hat […] it means to be an author at *the historical moment* in which the narrative was *written, published and circulated*" (emphasis as in the original) (165-166). This will enable one to understand Tekere's selective use of memory in his construction of a superior, royal and democratic political self (Tekere) and an inferior, tyrannical and ordinary political 'other' (Mugabe) almost in the same way that the state grand narrative centres Mugabe and ZANU (PF) and parenthesises or degrades other political actors, including Tekere. This iconoclastic dimension to Tekere's autobiography is akin to what Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Wendy Willems call "new historicism" ("The past" 192),[140] generated by the author's privileged location in the historical continuum of the nation's (and ZANU (PF)'s) politics. As the pivot around which the story of the nation revolves, Tekere invokes his narrative authority to stake out for himself a superior role (with regard to Mugabe) in the liberation war in a way that jolts us into wondering whether Mugabe has the personal and political mettle to lead.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that (along with the many scholarly texts produced locally and internationally about the Zimbabwean political crisis), the literary texts published in the past decade are a critical site for comprehending the various dimensions of the post-2000 political crisis in Zimbabwe. The discussion has also revealed that in literary circles (as in political and scholarly spheres), notions of democracy vary. Besides the few texts (epitomised by *A Fine Madness*) which covertly and overtly defend state-inscribed ideologies and notions of 'Zimbabwean democracy', most of the literary texts published in this period in many ways critically engage with the political system. Chenjerai Hove's poetry has been read as reflecting a cosmopolitan conception of democracy in its foregrounding of the despondency of the oppressed people; the Zimbabwean political crisis is inscribed as a global problem and responsibility. While such literary texts do not necessarily present blue-prints for democracy and good governance, they do subtly hint at democratic dispensations by creating imaginative

[140] Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems argue that new historicism in the context of Zimbabwe's last decade "concentrated on rewriting and reinterpreting recorded histories as part of protest against hegemonic, unitary, and objective histories as offsprings of a small group of rich and powerful intellectuals who dominated political and socio-economic spheres of life" ("The past" 191).

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fictional life-worlds which not only move us to condemn autocracy, but also help us to imagine alternative political dispensations. Humour has been identified as the major leitmotif in these literary works' engagement with political themes. The novel *Harare North* and Julius Chingono and Christopher Mlalazi's short stories "Are we Together?" and "Election Day", were used to demonstrate how in post-2000 Zimbabwe, the political and social impact of satirical humour is as powerful and politically prescriptive as the satires of , say, Aristophanes, Chaucer, Swift, Orwell, Voltaire etc. Tekere's autobiography, *A Lifetime of Struggle*, and other political autobiographies such as Nkomo's *The Story of My Life*, on the other hand, were found to be what Lara (in another context) calls "narrative tools that offer a specific historical self-presentation – a performative action – in the quest for identity" (37). Tekere's book re-inscribes the political present by situating the narrating self at the centre of all significant political processes in the history of the nation leading up to the present political crisis. Thus he privileges his narrative of "where the rain began to beat us" in the post-independence epoch. In the next chapter, I wrap up the study, highlighting its major findings and input to an understanding of contemporary Zimbabwean literature as an 'alternative' archive of information about the post-2000 crisis.

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CONCLUSION: CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS

This study's overarching goal was to examine the contributions of creative literature to an alternative archive of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis that contests the de facto exclusion of non-hegemonic narratives of the event. However, as the foregoing chapters have revealed, the study does more than simply foreground the significance of artistic depictions of the crisis in its attempt to comprehend post-2000 Zimbabwean social and political discourses. Most of the focal texts (through their representational force and affective orientation) create their own literary discourses with social and political implications, resonances and ramifications which problematize (and sometimes affirm) dominant (especially state-circumscribed) representations, perceptions and interpretations of the crisis. As complex cultural archives of the post-2000 Zimbabwean time-space, the selected literary texts were analysed as possible sites for encountering non-hegemonic voices and perspectives concerning this period, balanced and qualified by the inclusion of a few texts in support of the state in order to delineate the interplay of imaginative narrative with both the historic narrative and hegemonic narratives of the crisis. The crux of the argument was that dominant perceptions and representations of the Zimbabwean crisis and its causes are partisan and show reductive tendencies that render them suspect as sources of information about the nature of the crisis and the forces behind it. While creative literature, on the other hand, cannot make universal claims regarding their truth value, it has been demonstrated during the course of this study that texts like those I tagged as "non-hegemonic" do create openings for expression, exposing some of the politically concealed truths – in the process extending the boundaries of what is known about the crisis.

Lara's theory concerning the inherently disclosive potential of narratives by marginalized groups enhanced my examination of the focal texts' mechanisms of critical engagement with dominant narratives of the crisis time-space. My critical analysis of selected texts was guided by Lara's emphasis (citing Gabriele Schwab) on the efficacy of literature to "allow for a cultural communication of 'tacit knowledge' […]" (59) about human experiences. In exploring further this intrinsic connectedness of the focal texts to the actual crisis, I invoked Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to read the texts as simultaneously reflecting and reflecting on the post-2000 crisis time-space. Over and above my appropriation of Lara's

theorization on the "moral texture" of narratives by oppressed groups, I have drawn from other scholars' conceptions of the processes by which creative literature can reach people's minds and manage persuasively to guide them to share a particular view created by their representations. Gregory Currie's notion of the "fictional author […as] the 'reliable source' from whom the reader learns about the events narrated in the story" (qtd. in David Davies 65) illuminates how the focal texts in this study can influence beliefs and perspectives of the crisis. Currie argues that:

> When we make believe the story, we make believe that the text is an account of events that have actually occurred. But for this to be our make-believe we have to see the text as related in a certain way to those events; we have to see it as the product of someone who has the knowledge of those events. Our make-believe is not merely that the events described in the text occurred, but that we are being told about those events by someone with knowledge of them […] to make-believe a fictional story is not merely to make-believe that the story *is true, but that it is told as a known fact*. [Emphasis in the original] (qtd. in Davies 64)

"The truth of [the] fiction" (to adapt Achebe's statement – *Hopes* 138) produced by the majority of the texts which challenge hegemonic 'truths' is generated by what I. A. Richards calls the "experimental submission" (qtd. in Achebe, *Hopes* 138) – the narrative's persuasion of readers to share states of being and ways of feeling created by the texts. As Achebe asserts, fiction involves a "different order of reality [which helps people in their] aspiration to provide [themselves] with a second handle on existence through [their] imagination" (Achebe, *Hopes* 139). In Achebe's logic, and indeed in most of the focal texts used in this study, the desire for a "second handle" implies the incompleteness or deficiencies of dominant narratives of human experiences. Thus in this study, I conceived writing in post-2000 Zimbabwe as an act of re-imagining and re-discoursing the crisis. Such an act aspires to create a more inclusive discourse of the nature of the crisis.

In his article entitled "On some functions of Literature", Umberto Eco argues that "[l]iterary texts explicitly provide us with much that we will never cast doubt on, but also unlike the real world, they flag with supreme authority what we are to take as important in them, and what we must *not* take as a point of departure for freewheeling interpretations" (5). In this light, the power to compel readers to question other (especially state) narratives of the crisis resides in the texts' capacity to represent the crisis in a highly imaginative account which can sway the

reader's emotions and perceptions. It is necessary that the literary discourse about the crisis engendered by the focal texts be conveyed in a language of especial vividness, affective intensity or immediacy in order to achieve agonistic force. The consequent "illocutionary force" (Lara 5) produced by such evocative rendering of human experience can simultaneously disclose the immorality of the marginalisation of other narratives and highlight the mutual benefits of inclusivity.

Underlying my enquiry into the capacity of literary narratives to challenge the state's authoritarian stranglehold on the crisis narrative was Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of "the word in language [as] half someone else's [, …and which] does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language" (*Dialogic* 293-294). Following on Bakhtin's view of the inherently subjective nature of language (in any form) is Yvonna Lincoln's assertion that "texts are necessarily partial" (38) and that "it is pretence to hope that any given text can tell the whole story" (38). However, in post-2000 Zimbabwe, not all voices, texts and narratives of the crisis found equal space to circulate in the public sphere.

By historically contextualising my analysis of focal texts, I established that power relations in the political, social and cultural spheres influence literary and cultural production. Political power was revealed as not only underpinning the epistemological presuppositions of the dominant crisis narrative, but also the social and political dynamics shaping what Joe Kincheloe calls the "literary constructs (fictional formulas) reflective of dominant ideologies and ways of seeing at work in the larger society" (58). In this light, I discovered that most of the focal texts were not simply counter-discursive by virtue of their ideological framing outside state-favoured ideas, perceptions and interpretations of the crisis; they also evoked a deeper sense of the importance of marginal narratives in providing a rich experiential and complex evaluative perspective on the crisis. Clearly in the minority (both in my list of primary texts and in the post-2000 Zimbabwean literary corpus in general), 'patriotic' literary texts such as Olley Maruma's *Coming Home* and Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* tacitly endorse the political regime and its policies, while others such as Nyaradzo Mtizira's *The Chimurenga Protocol* overtly set out to buttresses the state's narrative of the crisis. Though neither value free nor without their own ideological/political biases, the majority of my focal texts (short stories: "Hands"; "Idi"; "Broken Wings"; "Torn Posters"; "Bare Bones", "The Trek"; "Are we together?"; "Election Day; novels: *The Uncertainty of Hope*; *The Stone Virgins*; *Highway Queen*; *Harare North*; the autobiographies *The Story of My Life*,

A Lifetime of Struggle and poetry in *Blind Moon*), more subtly undermine the state's representation of the state of the nation under the ZANU (PF) regime. These 'non-hegemonic' texts re-inscribe the crisis time-space and hegemonic modes of epistemological inquiry about the crisis. The texts therefore demonstrate what Seyla Benhabib calls "the redemptive power of narrative" (qtd. in Lara 37) – their capacity not only to spotlight the injustice of exclusivist hegemonic narratives of the crisis, but also to reveal the social benefits of multiple perceptions of the situation.

One of the most important findings in this study is that the 'crisis literature' does more than simply reflect the crisis: it illuminates the political polarisation and the hegemonic forces underlying the marginalisation of narratives, perceptions and interpretations of the crisis that fall outside the trajectory of what is accepted as politically correct. What became clear during the course of the study is that the vivid evocations of personal and social experiences of the crisis found in the majority of the 'non-hegemonic' literary texts not only motivate readers to direct attention to previously hidden or erased aspects and dynamics of the crisis; they also engender a fresh and powerful political discourse which is inimical to hegemonic historiography and the perpetuation of partisan representations of the crisis. This uniquely (oppositional) political dimension to post-2000 Zimbabwean literature thrived despite what some anonymous Zimbabwean writers (responding to Patricia Alden's questionnaire about the state of writing in post-2000 Zimbabwe) felt was a covert state injunction against 'unpatriotic' literary representations of the unfolding crisis.[141]

However, beyond the fear of expression on the part of writers, the study demonstrated that the majority of post-2000 Zimbabwean literature transcends the clichéd 'mirror of society' function to foreground 'alternative metaphors of the crisis' steeped in individual and social experiences that indicate new ways of comprehending the crisis and implicitly engender an independent and oppositional political discourse. The literary deconstruction of dominant hegemonic narratives of the crisis and the perceptions of reality that they engender and valorise reflect these literary texts' participation in the wider struggles for redefining the state's theory and practice of what I called 'Zimbabwean democracy'. Writing the

[141] See Chenjerai Hove's interview with Primorac entitled "dictators are transient"; Brian Chikwava's personal reflections on state authoritarianism and the politics of writing the Zimbabwean crisis in an article entitled "Free speech in Zimbabwe: the story of the blue-stomached lizard"; Patricia Alden's article "Dies Irae: Days of Wrath, Days of Crisis: A Report on the Current Situation in Zimbabwean Creative Writing."

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Zimbabwean crisis from outside the spaces of power, then, becomes both an aesthetic and a political act in which the liberty to create a fictional life-world implicitly makes a bid for the freedom not only to imagine, but also to create alternative social and political realities.

In acknowledging the wide coverage of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis in local and global media, as in political commentaries and scholarly analyses by historians, sociologists or political scientists, one of my major objectives in undertaking this study was to explore the uniquely literary functions and effects of the artistic techniques used to portray the social effects of the crisis in literary texts. I wanted to identify the complex ways in which the portrayed fictional life-worlds can influence our perceptions and lead us to concur with or question dominant (especially state-defined) representations and interpretations of the crisis. In this regard, the study discovered the literature's power of affect as the major cognitive thread weaving (ironically) through both state-supportive and state-questioning narratives of the crisis, inducing them with an "illocutionary force" (Lara 5) which can influence the readers' previous perceptions of the actual crisis. The focus, then, was on exploring the various strategies that the texts use to arouse affective responses and create a unique aesthetic and discursive discourse which not only confirms the relevance of literary fiction in comprehending the crisis, but also opens up dialectical exchanges between the literary, the sociological and the political dimensions of the crisis.

Closely connected to these texts' strategic foregrounding of affect, another major aspect of their technique which was found to enhance their ability to convince readers that the society and experiences they portray accord with the reader's conceptions of the actual crisis life-world is the concept(s) of "recognition" as enunciated by Rita Felski and Maria Pia Lara. Felski views recognition as one of the "modes of textual engagement […] which denote multi-leveled interactions between texts and readers […]" (14). Felski's description of how the process of recognition happens illuminates the complex ways in which the focal texts in this study differ from other (especially state-circumscribed) narratives of the crisis:

> What does it mean to recognize oneself in a book? The experience seems at once utterly mundane yet singularly mysterious. While turning a page I am arrested by a compelling description, a constellation of events, a conversation between characters, an interior monologue. Suddenly and without warning, a flash of connection leaps across the gap between text and reader; an affinity or an attunement is brought to light. I may be looking for such a moment, or I may stumble on it haphazardly, startled by the

> prescience of a certain combination of words. In either case, I feel myself addressed, summoned, called to account: I cannot help seeing traces of myself in the pages I am reading. Indisputably, something has changed; my perspective has shifted; I see something that I did not see before. (Felski 23)

Felski's assertion above can be read in the context of the focal texts used in this study as describing what can be broadly termed 'immersion' into the life-world of the fictionally reconstructed post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis time-space. The emotional "atunement" (Felski 23) resulting from this immersion can produce attitudes to (and perceptions of) the depicted situations which can change the reader's prior views of the actual crisis.

On the other hand, Lara's concept of recognition is intricately linked to her theorization of the redemptive potential of narratives. Her concept of recognition was therefore useful to my major objective of exploring new insights, perspectives and knowledge about the crisis produced by 'alternative' narratives of the historical moment. For Lara, recognition entails appealing to the moral conscience of dominant groups in order to influence them to perceive the injustice and immorality of marginalisation and simultaneously, the justice and morality of inclusivity. According to Lara, such influence must be achieved through persuasion. Lara holds narratives by marginalised groups to be inherently endowed with a persuasive quality which can powerfully disclose the injustice of their exclusion, illuminate the mutual benefits of inclusivity and can engender social transformation. However, more connected to my study's focus on the importance of challenging dominant narratives of the crisis and the benefits of pluralising perspectives on the event was Lara's commentary that: "a project of recognition must enter public spaces as an arena to open up dialogue and to stimulate further democratic institutional transformations" (121).

Drawing from Lara's assertion that "when stories unfold in the public sphere they return to and reconfigure life itself" (93), one can conclude that in the same way that 'hegemonic' texts legitimate the master narrative and create literary and political discourses which support the status quo, the 'non-hegemonic' texts' democratise narratives of the Zimbabwean crisis. Such efforts to pluralise narratives of the crisis are inalienably connected with the post-2000 struggle to democratise the political sphere. The study has demonstrated how, despite the focal texts' grounding in familiar events and processes (such as Operation Murambatsvina, Gukurahundi, shortages of basic commodities and the violent and disputed national elections), their fictional life-worlds engender a "recognition" (in the sense of Felski's notion

of it indicated above) of the crisis which makes readers see and judge it anew. Texts like *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *Highway Queen* which grapple with the social and economic ramifications of the crisis in its effects on individuals and communities revealed how the narrative rendering of the characters' ordeals create alternative streams of comprehending the crisis. These texts foreground their unique representational qualities as literary artefacts, particularly their capacity to captivate and emotionally guide readers into an empathetic relationship with fictional characters in distress. The psychological and emotional states involved in the literary processes of "rediscovering" the crisis through such texts is akin to Felski's conception of "recognition" as "literally 'know[ing something] again'" (25). Thus, 'knowing again' the human consequences of the crisis through the fictional narrative of (for instance) *The Uncertainty of Hope* (and other 'non-hegemonic' texts in general) involves "mak[ing] sense of what is unfamiliar (the fictional) by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know" (Felski 25). It can be concluded, then, that in reading the focal texts' fictional evocations of particular instances of characters' experiences of the crisis, the process of recognition results in what Suzanne Keen calls "the aesthetic effect of narrative empathy" (ix). While acknowledging the difficulty of measuring the impact of reading on readers' perceptions of the real world, I find Keen's assertion that "internalised experiences of empathy […] promise later real-world responsiveness" (xiii-xiv) applicable to the focal texts' influence, not only on readers' prior perceptions of the crisis, but also on their evaluation of state narratives of the event.

The majority of the texts (the 'non-hegemonic' texts) not only pluralise the discourse, perspectives and knowledge of the crisis by challenging the dominant narrative of the crisis, perhaps more importantly, they expand the political, economic and sociological frameworks that are mostly used to study the crisis. While the texts may not necessarily be "uniquely powerful objects [that are] able to single-handedly impose coercive regimes of power or to unleash insurrectionary surges of resistance" (Felski 8), they do engender a unique attentiveness to the dominant aspects of the crisis and furnish new insights into how the crisis affected personal and social lives. They can also be thought of as 'confirming' or validating, for readers, their 'non-hegemonic' (or other) perceptions of the crisis period or open up notions of possible alternative futures. The unique contribution that the literary texts bring to the study of the crisis can best be understood in the context of Ato Quayson's suggestion that "the literary work is a form of aesthetic particularity that is also a threshold, opening out onto other levels of cultural and socio-political life" (xxi). In this light, the texts can be viewed as

engendering a complex and nuanced understanding of the crisis that extends knowledge about the crisis beyond what is politically safe or acceptable to the state and destabilises current, dominant or 'traditional' modes of epistemological enquiry about the crisis.

Not all texts relate subversively to the dominant Third Chimurenga grand narrative underlying political power relations and cultural production in post-2000 Zimbabwe. In fact, one of the major (previously unforeseen) aspects of this study has been its 'discovery' of an emerging canon of hegemonic texts whose defence of (and support for) state policies, ideologies and personalities is not only new to the Zimbabwean literary-scape, but also relate subversively to the majority of post-2000 Zimbabwean literary texts which challenge the state's 'patriotic' historiography. Besides local opposition, the anti-ZANU (PF) coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis in the mainstream global (especially Western) media provided an opportunity for ZANU (PF) to project its anti-west drive as essential in the on-going Third Chimurenga war against western interference.[142] The obvious British interests in Zimbabwean affairs (notwithstanding Britain's ill-standing in its human rights records across the world)[143] gave the Mugabe regime an alibi and even a sense of moral duty to step up the anti-Western democracy politics. Against the backdrop of such Western (especially British) involvement in Zimbabwean politics,[144] the 'hegemonic' texts re-invigorated the urgency of 'writing back' to the 'neo-colonial' empire as the newest form of protecting national sovereignty in the nativist Third Chimurenga style. These 'hegemonic' or 'pro-state' texts (*The Chimurenga Protocol*; *Coming Home* and *A Fine Madness*) revealed (with varying degrees of subtlety), the connections between the ZANU (PF) political narrative and their own fictional narratives. In their fictional life-worlds, the ambivalent aspects of actual

[142] See, for example, Wendy Willems's article entitled "Remnants of Empire? British media reporting on Zimbabwe", in which she avers that the British media's vilification of Mugabe in the post-Third Chimurenga period "has helped to create the conditions that allowed the Zimbabwean government to define the situation in Zimbabwe as a struggle against imperialism" (91).

[143] I have (in Chapter 3) used the example of Mugabe's outburst against Tony Blair at the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit (where he invoked Britain's past and present human rights violations to disqualify the West as champions of democracy that Zimbabwe can emulate) to demonstrate how the Western narrative of the crisis influenced the local ones. The study indicated how this political dynamic not only formed the bedrock of the reactionary Third Chimurenga (especially its nativist ideological framing), but also influenced themes and styles of pro-establishment writers. Resonances with Mugabe's anti-West stance cited above can be easily discerned, for instance, in the titles of the pro-state texts used in the study. The emphasis on owning land as a pre-requisite for 'feeling at home' in *Coming Home*; the apparent reference to the liberation war (Chimurenga) in the title *The Chimurenga Protocol* and the 'Afro-radical' branding of 'Zimbabwean democracy' as "a fine madness" in *A Fine Madness* are examples of the influence of ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 reactionary politics in literary art.

[144] I cited Tony Blair's claim to working with the MDC to effect regime change in Zimbabwe (when he was the British Prime Minister) as an example of the kind of Western influence in Zimbabwean politics which is used by ZANU (PF) as fodder for its anti-MDC and anti-West politics and discourse.

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colonial land and economic injustices are exposed as potentially mutating and threatening to the independent nation, thus surreptitiously (and sometimes bluntly) validating Third Chimurenga-like corrective measures informed by an awareness of past colonial imbalances. ZANU (PF)'s anti-West/white politics is thus not merely replicated in this kind of quasi-nationalist literature; it in fact plays out in fictional (yet possible) and familiar worlds in which we are emotionally immersed and which can generate what Nussbaum calls "compassionate response" (*Poetic Justice* 7). Thus one can conclude that the patriotic literary narrative also uses the illocutionary force to challenge discursively the domineering western narratives of the crisis. Such was the case with *Coming Home*, *The Chimurenga Protocol* and *A Fine Madness*, texts whose major characters (who are all men, as if to symbolise the masculinised Third Chimurenga ideology, fighting western neo-imperial onslaught)[145] are invested with solid political intellect which is steeped in the Third Chimurenga nationalist discourse. Markedly, the use of mature protagonists with intellectual stamina (such as Simon, Detective Magura and Muchineripi Takawira in *Coming Home*, *The Chimurenga Protocol* and *A Fine Madness* respectively) to embody a serious ZANU (PF) legitimating discourse contrasts, for instance, with Brian Chikwava's use in *Harare North* of a young and brainwashed ZANU (PF) narrator in a satirical way which renders his (the narrator's) parrotted 'Mugabeist' pan-Africanism a dubious and hegemonic political gimmick. Thus, whereas the 'pro-state' texts (especially *Coming Home* and *A Fine Madness*) use the Third Chimurenga's anti-West rhetoric in an aesthetically erudite manner which can influence us to sympathise (and side) with their political positions, the use of the same nationalist polemic by the barely literate young narrator in *Harare North* endows the novel's narrative with subversive humour which uncovers the hidden hegemonic intentions beneath his party's quasi-nationalist anti-opposition and anti-west campaign.

A contextual analysis of the focal texts was necessary in order to understand how form and style are harnessed to simultaneously reflect and comment (in an imaginative way) on particular aspects and manifestations of the crisis. The socio-political reality of the past decade in Zimbabwe impacts significantly on the literary structures of the texts, informing their usefulness as critical and complex archives of the crisis. Markedly, the focal texts depend (for their fictional and semantic effect) on specific temporal realities – social, economic and political processes that can be located in the post-2000 (Third Chimurenga)

[145] The topic is extensively dealt with by contributors in the book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, edited by Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde.

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historical moment. The study thus transcended reading the texts as simply "narrative[s] impos[ing] on the events of the past a form that in themselves they do not have" (Carr 11); rather it approached them as conscious blendings and renderings of carefully selective imagined references and recognisable empirical events, processes and ideas. What LaCapra calls the "socio-political import" (5) discernible in these texts' representations of the crisis not only helps us to relate the texts' semantic impact to the socio-political processes underlining the post-2000 time-space, but perhaps more importantly, indicates the Bakhtinian notion of "the author's accent" (*Dialogic* 293). I would like to re-invoke Bakhtin's commentary about the relationship between the author, reality and its fictional representation to demonstrate how the literary texts in this study not only "rediscover[ed…] the ordinary" – to adapt Ndebele's phrase – but also added an "accent" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 293) to their narration of the crisis. Bakhtin argues that:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his [or her] own intention, his [or her] own accent, when he [or she] appropriates the word, adopting it to his [or her] own semantic and expressive intention. (*Dialogic* 293)

In the context of overt and covert calls for 'patriotic' representations of the crisis (this was often a euphemism for state-supportive portrayals of the crisis), the 'non-hegemonic' writers' 'accents' reflects their critical evaluations of the crisis and enable us to recognise the distinct ways in which their writings differ from or contest the state's grand narrative.

Besides its apparent manifestations in economic and political hardships evoked in texts such as *The Uncertainty of Hope*, *Highway Queen*, *Harare North* etc., the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis was also an identity crisis. The focal texts revealed that part of the Zimbabwean crisis (at least its political dimension) stems from the question of who has the prerogative to define the nation and adjunct to it, the notions of democracy, patriotism, sovereignty and national interest. Simon During's assertion (in his article in the book *Nation and Narration*) that "[e]ach nation lays claim to its unique brand of freedom" (145) seems to inform ZANU (PF)'s attempts to frame what I called 'Zimbabwean democracy' around its self-legitimating 'patriotic history' of the making of the nation. The concept of 'Zimbabwean democracy' has clear political and hegemonic roots which not only illuminate the political talking points underlying the post-2000 political crisis, but perhaps more importantly (especially in view of my study's focus) spotlights what the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has called

"[t]he danger of a single story" (Video). As stated in the foregoing, the most manifest 'danger' (in the sense of Adichie's use of the word above) posed by the state's monologic narrative of the crisis is its hegemonic tendencies to distort, misrepresent, look past and erase politically inconvenient aspects of the crisis. While pro-state literary texts overtly and covertly draw from the Third Chimurenga grand narrative to affirm or at least create what I called (citing Foulkes) "a mystifying consciousness of the crisis", the majority of the texts are grounded in the uniquely post-2000 dissident socio-political culture which allows them to demystify the state's grand narrative and create what Adichie has called "a balance of stories" ("The Danger", Video). These non-hegemonic texts' attempt to avert "the danger of a single story" by claiming space to circulate as 'alternative' narratives which thrive on the "illocutionary power" (Lara 5) produced by their constructions as affective and experiential narratives by (or of) politically marginalised groups. In the process, normative models of 'patriotic' or state-supportive representations of the crisis are destabilised, even 'replaced' and interrogated as part of a search for authentic renderings and interpretations of the crisis.

Following on Achebe's argument that art is man's response to "the need to afford himself through his imagination an alternative handle on reality" (*Hopes* 58), the 'non-hegemonic' texts can be seen as a cultural yet political force which not only challenge versions of the crisis imposed by the state's grand narrative or hegemonic literary texts, but also utilise the discursive space offered by fiction to imagine alternative possible worlds and realities. The 'non-hegemonic' texts do not merely proffer alternative "[v]ersions of Zimbabwe" (Muponde and Primorac i) but in doing so, they highlight the intricate relationship between cultural production and politics in post-2000 Zimbabwe.[146] This political dimension to 'writing against blindness' plays out more clearly in Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands". The story parallels most of the focal ('non-hegemonic') texts that re-inscribe the crisis in a way which exposes the hegemonic tendencies in the ruling party's 'patriotic' historiography of the event. In an era in which ZANU (PF) suffered a legitimation crisis, the "dangerous single story" (to adapt Adichie's statement) was the patriarchal Third Chimurenga narrative which established the fathers of the nation (veterans of the liberation who are particularly in ZANU-PF) as the exclusive definers and guardians of the nation who have the perpetual prerogative to chart Zimbabwe's political future. In its subtle engagement with this problematic conception of

[146] See the articles "Making sense of cultural nationalism and the politics of commemoration under the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe" by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Wendy Willems and "The worm and the hoe: cultural politics and reconciliation after the Third Chimurenga" by Robert Muponde.

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hegemonic control, "Hands" not only constructs a fictional life-world in which the Third Chimurenga's partisan nationalism is deconstructed and exposed as an elaborate method of propping up ZANU (PF)'s power, but also creates space for a fictional'‘re-theorisation' of patriarchal hegemony at both the familial and the political levels. The exposure of the political gimmick behind ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 selective invocation and usage of history in "Hands" typifies the demystification of 'patriotic history' in 'non-hegemonic' texts. In Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle,* for instance, re-inscriptions of both the liberation war and post-independence history in his life narrative revise the trajectory of the political significance attached to the liberation war leading to its post-2000 'fetishisation' as 'the' king-maker.

If Tekere's autobiography engenders a counter-history of the nation which warns us about the dangers of partisan manipulation of the liberation struggle, then the consequences of failure to heed that warning can be seen unravelling in the fictional life-world of the novel *Harare North*. In *Harare North,* the caricature of ZANU (PF)'s essentialist veneration of its contributions to the liberation war and the fixation with preserving and protecting the liberation war legacy as 'the' urgent national interest allows us to see through the elaborate political scheme underlying ZANU (PF)'s post-2000 reconstructions of national identity. The textual world of *Harare North* shaped by the framing of the narrator as a zealous defender of ZANU (PF)'s coercive hegemony in the name of protecting the country's independence and sovereignty not only stirs us to "laugh in order not to cry" (to adapt Chenjerai Hove statement), but indicates an extreme case of abuse of history and the deficiency of democracy attendant on the failure or lack of will by the liberation movement to transform into a modern democratic party. Unconsciously, the narrator mirrors the complex ways in which political gimmicks are constructed and operationalized in the grand project of shifting blame for the crisis from the ruling elite.

Humour (stimulated by inflations and exaggerations of the narrator's 'Mugabeism' – Ndlovu-Gatsheni's term) enables us to perceive the political gimmick invested in a nationalist and pan-Africanist rhetoric of the Third Chimurenga ideology shaping the narrator's worldview. The same can be said about other texts which use humour as a satirical tool to subvert dominant notions of 'Zimbabwean democracy' and imagine alternative brands of statecraft. Julius Chingono's short story "Are we together?", for instance, presents ZANU (PF) campaign agents who are memorable – not only for their support of a coercive political

regime (as reflected in the title of the short story) or the irony in their invitations (to join the ruling party) which 'cannot' be turned down, but also in their penchant for alcohol abuse. The humorous evocation of the ruling party members' politics of coercion satirically illuminates the deep-seated culture of intolerance and violence a key political dimension of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis. In Chingono's short story (as in *Harare North*), the post-2000 Zimbabwean political context shapes the humour generated by the gang's social deviance and the story covertly hints at how different proper political conduct would be. A vision of a political democracy is implicitly created through the very act of humorously depicting an authoritarian and dystopian one. In this way, literary humour creates agency for subaltern groups to challenge the hegemonic foundations of their oppression, critique previously taken-for-granted 'truths' about state/subject power relations and imagine alternative dispensations and societies.

Humour and satire also underlie most of the 'non-hegemonic' literary texts' critical responses to the land reform programme – the flagship policy of the Third Chimurenga crusade. Lawrence Hoba's short stories in *The Trek and Other Stories* demonstrated this subversive strand in its engagement with the politically charged discourse on the post-2000 land reform programme in Zimbabwe. Being the bedrock informing ZANU (PF)'s struggle for legitimation, the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme was projected in state media in various superlatives as the banner of total independence. The clear oversights, deletions and misrepresentations attendant on the state's grand narrative of the land reforms which are challenged in *The Trek* remind us of Achille Mbembe's commentary about the proclivity by state actors to 'fetishise' convenient narratives about its politically usable activities, ideas and processes. Mbembe asserts that:

> In the postcolony, the *commandement* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony (*recherche hégémonique*), in the form of a *fetish.* The signs, vocabulary, and narratives that the *commandement* produces are meant not merely to be symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge. (*Postcolony* 103)

Hoba's short stories, on the other hand, demonstrated the subtlety with which 'non-hegemonic' texts critically engage with politically-motivated erasures, inflations or misrepresentations characterising the state's narrative of the land reforms and the crisis in general. The short stories foreground humour to depict the land reforms in a way which

uncovers the fine line between the hegemonic and social interests vis-à-vis the philosophy and praxis of the Third Chimurenga land reforms. Laughing at the Magudu family's resettlement, failure to transform into productive commercial farmers and the controversial circumstances in which they lose their allocated farm to a high-ranking political figure, subverts the 'success story' state narrative scripted by the government in two important ways. Firstly, the humour generated by descriptions of the 'tragedy' of the Magudu family's story highlights the political fallacy of a partisan approach to land reform. In laughing at the absurd excuses given by Baba for his failure as a commercial farmer (he accuses Sekuru of bewitching his crops) and the myopia of his misplaced priorities (he spends more time and energy on booze rather than on farming), the reader is simultaneously led to question the logic of his acquisition of the farm. Secondly, and linked to the above argument, the laughter evoked by the ending of *The Trek* trilogy (in which the Magudu family is forced to go back to their communal lands after being dispossessed by a politically better connected man) underlines the elitist and nepotistic nature of the land reform process. This critique undermines the very fabric and logic of the programme as a means of black empowerment.

Apparently, this critical perspective (above) resonates with social, economic and political analyses of the actual Fast-Track Land Reform Programme already circulating in the public sphere.[147] However, when encountered through the humorous textual life-world of *The Trek*, the social, economic and political impact of a flawed land reform process become vividly magnified and create a counter-discourse which (while not questioning the efficacy of land reform as a mode of black empowerment per se) can expose the underlying political interests which are veiled as the national interest in state-circumscribed narratives of the post-2000 Zimbabwean land reform. The text not only offers an alternative perspective on the land reforms or fictionally exposes its shortcomings, but it proffers a cultural critique by creating a fictional life-world in which characters (especially Baba and his son who is also the narrator of most of the stories) and events (particularly the "*jambanja*" mode of land appropriations) are humorously evoked in a way which subverts the sanitised versions of the land reform process circulated by the state. The nativist and partisan basis of thinking about and acting on racial land disparities is questioned. Predictably, this kind of counter-discursive exploration of the land reforms through fictional texts such as *The Trek* contrasts with the treatment of the

[147] See, for example Lloyd Sachikonye's article entitled "The Promised Land: From expropriation to reconciliation and *Jambanja*" in the book *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Reconciliation* which was edited by Brian Raftopoulos. In this article, Sachikonye explores the practice of "*Jambanja*" (the forceful land appropriations) in relation to the post-2000 degeneration of the spirit of racial reconciliation cultivated in the early eighties.

discourse in the three 'hegemonic' texts; that is, *The Chimurenga Protocol*, *Coming Home* and *A Fine Madness*. In their endorsement of the Third Chimurenga discourse (particularly the land reform dimension of it), the 'hegemonic' texts affirm the racial and nativist approach to the Third Chimurenga type of land reform by fictionally foregrounding a vivid, heinous history of colonial land grabs in order to project the return of land to natives ('by any means necessary' – to cite Malcolm X) as 'the' panacea to blacks' colonially-induced poverty. This is a sentiment encapsulated in such ZANU (PF) slogans as "the land is the economy and the economy is the land". *The Chimurenga Protocol*, for instance, presents a fictional trajectory of colonial capitalism where Mason (the head colonist and implicitly whites in general) is evoked in the first part of the novel as a ruthless schemer whose colonial treachery extends into the post-independence era (second and third parts of the novel) where the forceful appropriations of land from his white progeny is depicted as a justifiable act of correcting historical land imbalances created by Mason and his group of colonists in the first part of the novel.

Like the 'non-hegemonic' texts, the 'pro-state' texts are deliberately intertextual. The literary texts selectively utilise the Third Chimurenga text in their fictional reconstructions of the post-2000 Zimbabwean situation. This aesthetically creates a pro-state consciousness of the crisis. In the process, while the novels do generate their own literary discourses, they create what I called (in Chapter 3 of this study and citing Foulkes) "a mystifying consciousness" of the state's grand narrative of the crisis. The pro-state writers have been especially deliberate in their use of fiction as space for affirming the state's grand narrative and its partisan epistemological practices.[148] However, a post-structural reading of these hegemonic texts as self-contained and independent of their author's semantic dictations would expose the instability of their 'Zimbabwean democrcay' discourse. As Umberto Eco argues: "[l]iterary works encourage freedom of interpretation, because they offer us a discourse that has many layers of reading, and place before us the ambiguities of language and of real life" (4). This view can be connected to David Davies's concept of "the intentional fallacy" (70) – the assumption that the author can ascribe a fixed meaning to his or her literary artwork. In spite of their authors' attempts to dictate their meanings, the pro-state texts can be viewed as open

[148] I am referring to overt and covert extra-textual signs of authorial intentions such as Mtizira's pro-ZANU (PF) pronouncements in the Author's Foreword; the claim on Olley Maruma's novel's back cover blurb that it 'objectively' recuperates the positive image of the country distorted by Western demonisations and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's pan-Africanist 'endorsement' of Mashingaidze Gomo's novel *A Fine Madness* in the preface to the novel.

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to readings other than (and sometimes in conflict with) those probably intended and imposed by their authors. In *A Fine Madness*, for instance, the narrative focalises the war experiences and impressions of a Zimbabwean pro-regime soldier-narrator in a way which not only validates the Zimbabwean regime's interpretations of (and justifications for its involvement in) the war, but also obfuscates other versions of the DRC war narrative. To a reader who is au fait with alternative narratives of the DRC war (particularly about its causes, nature and the motivation behind Zimbabwe's involvement),[149] the novel's mono-perspectival evocation of the DRC war as entirely a product of western neo-colonialism becomes doubtful. Thus while the soldier narrator's pan-Africanist narrative of the war is in sync with the authorial intention to defend 'Zimbabwean democracy', it creates a clearly partisan consciousness of the war which alerts informed readers to the hegemonic preconceptions of the concept.

Examining post-2000 Zimbabwean literature's potential function as an 'alternative' cultural archive of the Zimbabwean crisis encompassed analysing evocations of the undercurrents of ordinary people's responses to the unprecedented social, economic and political pressures of everyday life. The focal texts in this study revealed that the discourse on victims and victimizers in the Zimbabwean crisis (like most discourses about the various dimensions and dynamics of the crisis) is political. The Third Chimurenga discourse underlying the state's grand narrative of the crisis is predicated on what Achille Mbembe has called the "cult of victimisation" ("African Modes 134"). The sustained fallback on western sanctions in state narratives of defence against responsibility for the crisis is indicative of the pervasiveness of the politicisation of victimhood during the crisis decade. This victimhood trope not only shapes the political themes and the politically divergent perspectives of the crisis in the literary texts, but also the texts' artistic methods of achieving this kind of impact.

Self-defensive narratives of political victimhood circulated by the state do not function merely as political subterfuge in the creation and entrenchment of a political alibi, but they also aim to influence the state's subjects to react passively to their political and economic victimisation. This is akin to creating in the subjects what Marxists call a "false consciousness" or what Foulkes calls "a mystifying consciousness" (59) of the crisis; an utopian illusion of the dystopia of the crisis which can inhibit the stimulation of dissent or

[149] See, for instance, Knox Chitiyo and Martin Rupiya's article entitled "Tracking Zimbabwe's political history: The Zimbabwe Defence Force from 1980–2005" and Ingrid Samset's article entitled "Conflict of interests or interests in conflict?: diamonds & war in the DRC" which uncovers some of the previously hidden interests (particularly mineral resources) which motivated Zimbabwe's intervention in the DRC war.

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activism (let alone militancy) against its causes and progenitors. The focal texts in this study presented multiple forms of victimisation and equally variant forms of victimhood. This dimension to victimisation and victimhood reflects the complexity of post-2000 Zimbabwean politics, whereby the line separating victims and victimisers was blurred by competing narratives of the crisis. Literary perspectives on the dynamics of (economic and political) victimisation in post-2000 Zimbabwe reproduced the empirical political constructions of the same. Notions of victimisation and victimhood engendered by state-endorsing texts, for instance, followed on the Third Chimurenga discourse, particularly its projection of the Zimbabwean crisis as a product of western backlash to its black empowerment policies such as the land reform. On the other hand, the 'non-hegemonic' texts subtly uncovered the underlying hegemonic faultlines in state-favoured/circumscribed notions and representations of victimisation and victimhood in post-2000 Zimbabwe. In such 'non-hegemonic' texts, the victims are mostly ordinary citizens whose material deprivations are evoked as symptomatic of the inadequacies of their political leadership. Unlike their 'counterparts' in pro-state texts cited above (whose victimhood is connected to colonialism and western neo-imperial forces), their condition places the blame for the crisis squarely on the shoulders of local political leadership. While pro-establishment texts such as *Coming Home* encourage a 'patriotic'[150] historical approach to the notions of victimisation and victimhood which hold up Zimbabwe as a victim of Western neo-colonial machinations, a contrasting perspective was observed in 'non-hegemonic' texts. Descriptions of physical and psychological wounds of characters in such texts as *Blind Moon*; *Harare North*; *The Uncertainty of Hope*; *A Lifetime of Struggle*; *The Stone Virgins*; "Torn Posters" and "Idi" unveil the intricate hegemonic intentions behind their victimisation. The major characters in these texts are depicted as victims of "the equivocation of a (political) fiend that lies like truth" (to adapt Macbeth's statement) – an elaborate gimmick to portray their victimisation as being in the national interest. The characters' victimhood is invested with subtle affective appeal which alerts the reader to the intricacies of a hegemonic plot in which the characters are sacrificed by the state in the name of restoring a slum-free Harare in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*; protecting the nation's sovereignty from western-sponsored opposition in Chikwava's *Harare North* and Hove's *Blind Moon*; averting dissident sabotage of a shared national unity in "Torn Posters" and preserving the legacy and ethos of the liberation struggle in Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands". However, it is perhaps in Mary Ndlovu's short story "Hands" where these unstable

[150] In the sense of Terence Ranger's conception of "patriotic history" as the politically convenient selection and interpretation of past events and processes by ZANU (PF) during the past decade.

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and conflicting notions of victimhood play out especially vividly. In this short story, both father and son claim victimhood and accuse each other for precipitating the crisis.

Yet another important strand of the discourse on victims and victimisers of the crisis which demonstrates the efficacy of creative literature as a way of critically spotlighting previously marginalised and politically 'inconvenient' aspects of the crisis was revealed by female-authored texts. This type of discourse engages with the gender dimensions to the crisis. The female-authored texts (and male-authored ones which centre female experiences) in this study demonstrated a unique type of victimisation involving (mostly) female writers who foreground female experiences of the crisis to challenge dominant representations and interpretations of this era. I found 'gender-blind' narratives of the crisis to have a particular kind of marginalizing effect which echoes the broader political marginalisation of alternative voices characteristic of Zimbabwe's crisis decade. Against the backdrop of such general narratives which assume that the crisis had a uniform effect on all social groups, the study found the female authored texts to foreground the idiosyncrasies of female experiences and produce highly affective and experientially focused narratives of the crisis which can destabilise normative (androcentric) epistemological practices. In an era in which the revival of the masculinist Chimurenga discourse has reaffirmed the phallic domination over the political and cultural sphere (see Muchemwa & Muponde's book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society,* a key text that drew attention to the problematic masculinisation of the post-2000 Zimbabwean nation), the female-authored texts weave a distinct layer of counter-narrative which intersects with the wider anti-hegemonic sentiment. These texts are mostly female-victim-centred and the resultant affective potential not only movingly spotlights the morbid limitations of androcentric perspectives of the crisis, but does so in a moving way which persuades the reader to perceive injustice and be motivated to change it. Thus such texts (which center female perspectives of the crisis) cannot be read only as conduits allowing readers to access information about the gender facets of the crisis; more importantly (and linked to the broader political struggle against exclusivist and masculinist imaginings of the nation), they also create a counter discourse as "symbolic resistance to the complex ways in which challenges to dominant or established discourse might be mounted from the periphery […]" (Ashcroft et al., 50). The texts function as performative "illocutionary acts" (Lara 2) which explode cultural and political conventions governing gender and power relations. In the process, the texts open up possibilities for alternative imaginings of an inclusive political and cultural aesthetic.

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One can thus conclude that the agonistic potential of a text such as *Highway Queen* resides in the author's ability to create a fictional (but familiar) crisis life-world where the story of a desperate woman's decision to 'disidentify' with conventional female identity constructs becomes a "powerful narrative that provides an account of the injustice created by situations of marginalization, oppression or exclusion" (Lara 3). In *Highway Queen*, we witness a radical personality transformation in which Sophie, the prostitute protagonist, breaks ranks with traditional notions of female identity and sexuality in order to enhance her chances of negotiating the crisis in a way that Onai (in Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*) fears. The fact that Onai and Sophie survive the crisis albeit in different circumstances and through different (and even contrasting) means draws our attention to the multiplicity of female identities, experiences and perspectives created by female-authored texts. *The Uncertainty of Hope* presents a different type of female/prostitute precarity informed by the crisis. Unlike the rather idealised conditions for prostitutes in *Highway Queen* which allow the prostitute protagonist to manoeuvre her way out of the confining spaces of gender and class-induced discrimination to achieve self-actualisation on her own terms, the prostitutes in Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* and her short story "Mainini Grace's Promise" (in the short story collection *Women Writing Zimbabwe*) are more reflective of the wretchedness and probable ill-fate of the majority of Zimbabwean prostitutes.[151] The prostitutes (Sheila in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Mainini Grace in "Mainini Grace's Promise") face cul-de-sac situations in which their only 'viable' survival strategy (prostitution) is the ultimate 'death sentence', in that they are persuaded to engage in unprotected sex and fall prey to AIDS infection. In the ensuing squalor, they are also unable to access anti-retroviral medication.

As Zimbabwe goes for elections to end the unstable coalition government on 31 July this year, one cannot but be aware that relatively little has been achieved in terms of necessary political reforms[152] and that prospects of another disputed poll are high. If Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is valid, the looming protraction of political volatility in Zimbabwe and the attendant polarisation of representations of interconnected kinds of social impact will continue to manifest themselves in literary art. My study (especially in Chapter 5) only partly

[151] See Anna Chitando's book *Fictions of Gender and the Dangers of Fiction in Zimbabwean Women's Writings*.
[152] These were agreed to by the political parties at the inception of the coalition government and etched in the constitution as part of the Global Political Agreement.

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explored the contibutions of creative literature to the contemporary discourse on democratisation. This looks set to be the next major focus of critical inquiry.

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