Precarious spaces: intersections of gendered identity and violence in Zimbabwean literature

by

Aaron Chando

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

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Supervisor: Prof. Robert Muponde
Co-supervisor: Dr Josiah Nyanda

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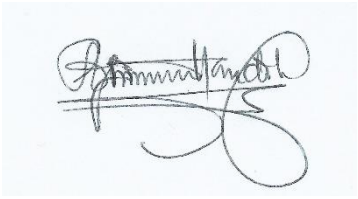
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that **"Precarious spaces: intersections of gendered identity and violence in Zimbabwean literature"** is my original work. I have duly acknowledged where I have paraphrased or quoted statements, phrases, sentences, and ideas from other people's published or unpublished work.

Signed:  **Date:** 22 July 2022

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines ways in which selected Zimbabwean literary works expand understandings of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity. It seeks to advance the claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers espouses a 'precarious aesthetic' to reimagine the nation by deconstructing cultural practices that produce and sustain precarity. I postulate that precarity is ideologically produced at the intersections of gendered identities and institutionalised forms of violence, such as ethnonationalism, heteropatriarchal policing, ableism, homophobia, and misogyny, where notional understandings of masculinity and femininity become central to the politics of (un)belonging. I draw on premises from precarity, gendered identities, and intersectionality studies to make a case for a space-bound understanding of precarity that recognises Zimbabwean textual nuances and environmental specificities. By deploying Western-based theorisations of precarity to address dynamics of disempowerment in a Zimbabwean context, I seek to demonstrate that precarity discourses are in a constant process of becoming and to expand discursive space on a subject that has been predominantly approached through tropes of drought and hunger. A cross-cutting premise in precarity studies is that the experience of marginalisation promotes radical thinking, which enables victims to weaponise their condition. This underwrites my assumption that all marginalising impulses leave spaces for pushback, strategic surrender, and self-affirmation. Therefore, throughout the five core chapters of the thesis, I adopt a close reading strategy to offer context-specific evaluations of refusal politics undertaken by precarious subjects in different sites of displacement. I propose that exploring overlaps among marginalising ideologies and pushback mechanisms can unravel new insights about the political function of vulnerability and bring forth a new grammar with which to talk about precarity. Overall, I argue that the literary front constitutes a site of reinvention where precarious subjects are radically written into existence and where diversity and difference are recast as indices of social hygiene.

Keywords: Precarity, gendered identity, difference, cultural disablement, violence, radical vulnerability, minoritization, intersections, refusal.

DEDICATION

For my parents (Davison Chando and Mai Aaron), my wife Tsvakai, my boys Micklem, McLarian, McDavies, and my little angel Mitchell. You would rather have had my time!

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

GALZ	Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
PWA	People with Albinism
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

CHAPTER 1
MAPPING PRECARIOUS SPACES

1.1 Preamble

This study is inspired by two isolated events that took place in Zimbabwe in 2018. The first was the fatal gunfire at protesters in Harare on the first of August following delays in the release of the presidential election results by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. In that incident, six civilians lost their lives. The second, coming a month later, was the forced resignation of St John's College deputy head Neal Hovelmeier after he had revealed his gay status. Both incidents drew criticism from the international media, but on the local scene only a few (mainly white) people, including members of the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), protested against Hovelmeier's forced dismissal. In contrast, the shooting incident triggered a public outcry that President Emmerson Mnangagwa had to silence through a commission of inquiry. Engaging the commission at that time made political sense for Mnangagwa whose image was at stake following his rise to the presidency in November 2017 amidst allegations of political malpractice.

While the shooting incident reflects the precariousness of the citizenry in the face of state aggression, Hovelmeier's case reveals a convergence of interest between the state and the common man on the street. This scenario invokes what Achille Mbembe describes as relations of "connivance" and "conviviality" between "the masters of power and of those they crush" (2001: 128–29), where the latter becomes complicit in its oppression. Forming the background to Hovelmeier's punishment is the fact that in 2013 the government drafted a national constitution with a homophobic clause, and 95% of the 3.3 million eligible voters endorsed it through a referendum.[1] Nevertheless, there have been cases of selective homophobia, such as when Mnangagwa's government blocked South African gay celebrity Somizi Mhlongo from entering Zimbabwe in November 2021, yet in 2018 the same government readmitted into its ranks former Chief Executive of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Alum Mpofu who

[1] Although the Constitution of Zimbabwe is silent on same-sex sexual relationships outside marriage, it states that "persons of the same sex are prohibited from marrying each other". See Constitution of Zimbabwe. 2013. (As amended up to 31st December 2018), Chapter 4, Part II, Subsection 78, Clause 3.

had resigned in 2002 on allegations of being gay. Such double standards reveal a precarious ambivalent relationship between the state and the common man.

The fact that Hovelmeier was victimised by a section of the citizenry (and not by the state) shows that the oppressed do not constitute a unified and unifying category. The behaviour of both the state and the civilians in the cases in question raise the following questions: Why should the same ordinary citizens who are often at the mercy of unrestrained state-sanctioned violence readily unite as homophobes? What counts as violence? Whose lives should be expendable? When the state gazettes anti-gay laws, is it acting out what the citizens want or is it merely exploiting civic sentiments for political expediency?

The shooting incident and Hovelmeier's case compel one to rethink the problematic question of (un)belonging, especially considering how in the broader national context political affiliation, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, race, and aspects of the body's materiality, such as pigmentation and able-bodiedness, are currently deployed in the construction of national identity and creation of differential patterns of power and privilege. The two events reveal that structures of oppression are significantly sustained by the failure of oppressed groups to tap into the power that lies in realising shared vulnerabilities. However, the power of the citizenry to compel the state to engage a commission of enquiry, like Hovelmeier's instant visibility following his forced resignation,[2] prompted me to reflect on the paradoxical power that people in different sites of displacement and dehumanisation can wield. This thesis is a product of these reflections.

1.2 Zimbabwe's literary tradition and the trope of precarity[3]

Judith Butler defines precarity as an ontological condition characterised by "maximised precariousness", a "heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection" (2010: 25–26). She contends that this induced differential exposure to harm, obtains in specific socio-political settings, is intertwined with the "hegemonic field of representation" (Butler, 2004: 150), where powerful states manipulate various media tools to regulate "affective and ethical dispositions through a selective and

[2] Following his forced resignation from St John's College in Harare, Hovelmeier got an invitation to become Radcliffe fellow at Harvard University. See https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/01/outed-educator-and-novelist-hovelmeier-flees-zimbabwe/

[3] My focus here is on Zimbabwean literature in English, though I also refer here and there to literary works written in Shona and Ndebele.

differential framing of violence" (Butler, 2010: 1). She notes that the 'frames' so produced institute a "derealization of loss", which is an imposed insensitivity to the suffering or deaths of persons whose lives are "not considered lives at all" (Butler, 2004: 148, 34). One notes that Zimbabwean literature is replete with frames in the form of discursive practices, nationalisms, and cultural fundamentalisms; all of which have been articulated and deployed at different historical junctures to serve hegemonic interests while consigning the weaker to zones of 'human disposability'.[4]

Without using the term precarity, Zimbabwean creative writers and literary critics have harnessed a wide range of motifs and politico-aesthetic means to articulate what Primorac (2006: 2) describes as the nation's "many historical traumas". Muponde (2018) avers that the most enduring literary motif in Zimbabwe has been that of drought, which inspired pioneering works in English such as Stanlake Samkange's *On Trial for My Country* (1966), Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* (1972) and Charles Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972). Articulating the fears, anxieties, and precarious lives of black people in the face of imperialist aggression, these literary works were written in a political context that was characterised by "never ending attritions of human dignity and the fear of the unknown" (Muchemwa, 1978: xxxiv, cited in Muponde, 2015a: 4). By 1980 the number of works that articulated discontent with colonial rule had risen significantly to include, among others, Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978). The displacement of indigenous people by the colonial encounter is also mirrored in poems such as "Red Hills of Home" and "Uninvited Guest" in Chenjerai Hove's anthology *Red Hills of Home* (1985). The underlying themes of these texts are identity crisis, "cultural drought" and "national malaise" (Zimunya, 1982: 3–4). Zhuwarara (2001: 14) also deploys the motifs of drought and hunger to explore how the colonial experience alienated Africans and made them suffer both spiritually and materially.

Departing from the topos of downright helplessness, Muponde (2005: 17) builds on the ambivalence of the trope of the waiting room in Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* (1998) to

[4] The phrase 'human disposability' is borrowed from Yates (2011), who uses it with reference to the way neo-liberal capitalism has reduced human beings to the level of waste. See Yates, M. 2011. The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism, p. 1679.

argue that the colonial experience induced both a sense of stagnation and the potential "to move, to seek destinations and horizons". Similarly, Musila (2007) demonstrates through a reading of Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* how women can radicalise their vulnerability. The way Vera's heroines exercise agency in the face of gendered oppression invokes the paradoxical power of precarity that Guy Standing advances in his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011).[5] More recently, Tine Jakarasi's semi-autobiographical narrative *Turning Pain into Power: the Journey of Endometriosis Warrior* (2020) dramatises the power of pain and gendered oppression as the writer-narrator is empowered by her experience with endometriosis (a gynaecological medical condition) to establish a foundation that helps underprivileged women.

As colonialism was a masculine political arrangement (Mbembe, 2001; Morrell & Swart, 2005: 91), its blend with the nation's heteropatriarchal establishment occasioned a double oppression system for women. The oppression of women in Zimbabwe is transhistorical (Gaidzanwa, 1985) and etches "victimhood as an indelible totemic mark" (Muponde, 2015a: 66). Against this background, Zimbabwean writers such as Freedom Nyamubaya, Yvonne Vera, Chenjerai Hove, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Collete Mutangadura have invariably deployed a feminist consciousness to counter the gendered frames that militate against women's quest for freedom and newness. These works bear resonance with other gynocentric literary works in the region, such as *And Wrote My Story Anyway: Black South African Women's Novels as Feminism* (2020) in which Barbara Boswell illustrates how black women writers such as Lauretta Ngcobo, Kagiso Lesego Molope, Sindiwe Magona, and Zukiswa Wanner deploy politico-aesthetic tools to negotiate strictures of race, gender, and patriarchy. In the process, the works gesture at the possibility of alternative worlds in which women have voice and agency.

The first decade of independent Zimbabwe saw the dissolution of the black nationalism of the sixties and the seventies into an ethnic nationalism characterised by socio-political ills and by

[5] Guy Standing theorizes precarity from a Euro-American perspective in the context of globalization and Neoliberal capitalism. For Standing, the precariat (the new class of precarious subjects created by casualization of labour and related insecurities) is a dangerous class because it has power to subvert oppressive labour relations. I appropriate the term precariat as a descriptor for the many marginalized social groups that populate this study whose danger lies in their capacity to challenge hegemonic ideologies. Outside the literary context, the July 2021 civil unrest in the Kwazulu-Natal and Gauteng regions and the 2022 'Operation Dudula' (an Afrophobic move meant to drive foreigners out of South Africa) not only exemplify how poverty, inequality and lack of service delivery can become political rallying points for the 'underclass' but also underscore the danger posed by disempowered social groups.

former President Robert Mugabe's Machiavellian ploys to consolidate power and enforce the supremacy of the Shona ethnic group (Mlambo, A.S., 2013). To eliminate his arch-political rival Joshua Nkomo, Mugabe sanctioned the state-sponsored *Gukurahundi* violence, ostensibly to forestall acts of insurgency.[6] This toxic ethnonationalism finds mediation in fictional works such as Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012), Novuyo Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018), as well as in autobiographical narratives such as *The Story of My Life* (2001) by Joshua Nkomo and *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (2007) by Judith Todd. The precaritisation of the Ndebele ethnic minority and the Matebeleland region is also reflected in the deliberate postcolonial 'unmaking' of Bulawayo, which used to be the nation's industrial hub (Ranger, 2010; Muchemwa, 2013). NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) graphically portrays this politically motivated urban dystopia.

The persistence of colonial structures in post-war Zimbabwe spawned a sense of betrayal of ordinary Zimbabweans by the post-independence leadership. This despair is aptly captured by Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Thomas Bvuma's poems "Years After", "The Snake Never Stirs", and "Petals of the Unknown" in his anthology *Every Stone that Turns* (1999). This invokes the notion of "imperial debris" (Stoler, 2008) or colonial patriarchal injustices that have persisted in post-independence Zimbabwe, with women bearing the brunt of economic hardship and the general lack of wellbeing bred by corruption and wrong economic policies of the early 1990s. Moyana's (2006) reading of Shona novels such as Pelda Hove's *Richave Dzerevende* (1998), Rudo Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), and Sharai Mukonoweshuro's *Akafuratidzwa Moyo* (1983) and *Ndakagara Ndazviona* (1995) reveals that women often become victims of sexual exploitation in times of economic hardship. As a subcategory of womanhood, motherhood has been invariably depicted as a site of disempowerment for black Zimbabwean women, as depicted in Chiedza Musengezi's *Masimba* (1996) and Barbara Nkala's *Vus' Inkophe* (1996), Shona and Ndebele short story anthologies, respectively.

[6] The *Gukurahundi* genocide, in which about 20 000 Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans are believed to have been killed between 1983 and 1987, was a state-sanctioned military operation meant to eliminate former members of ZAPU's military wing who were framed as dissidents bent on destabilizing the country's newfound independence. See Nkomo, J. 2001. *The Story of My Life*, p. 1. See also Todd, J. 2007. *Through the Darkness: A life in Zimbabwe*, p. 37.

The emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Party in 1999 and its sudden promise of multi-party democracy unsettled Mugabe, who intensified his draconian tactics (Mlambo, A.S., 2013). Mugabe's "left-nationalism" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: 1139), described by Muponde (2015a: 141) as "anticolonial antinationalism" and by Raftopoulos (2004) as "authoritarian nationalism", further entrenched political polarisation, economic decay, and collective despair. The resultant scenario, dubbed the Zimbabwean Crisis, gave birth to several literary works, including Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009), Tendai Huchu's *The Maestro, the Magistrate and the Mathematician* (2014), and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). Those with a diasporic setting also mirror the "psychic disorders of exile" (Muchemwa, 2010: 135), something that Dambudzo Marechera signalled in a different context in *The black Insider* (1990).

As literary texts continue to "ask what has happened to ideas of tolerance, reconciliation, inclusivity and human diversity in Zimbabwe" (Ndlovu, 2017: 140), the Zimbabwean nation dithers in an auto-destructive, defensive, nativist, and Gestapo mode. Among other works, Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007), Morgan Tsvangirai's *At the Deep End* (2011), and Arthur Mutambara's *In Search of the Elusive Zimbabwean Dream* (2017) lament how Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government systematically stifled multi-party democracy and an all-inclusive national identity. With the continual redefinition of terms of belonging, ethnic, racial, sexual, and political minorities have borne the brunt of the violence. Tendai Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) and Nevanji Madanhire's *If the Wind Blew* (1996), which mirror the precarious space of male-male sexual intimacy, are imaginative responses to the cultural and nationalist homophobia that Mugabe often deployed as political capital (Shaw, 2005).[7] Ironically, the victimisation of certain minorities has only served to exacerbate Zimbabwe's crisis. More recent works, such as Hovelmeier's novel *What Happened to Us* (2016), continue to lament Zimbabwe's free-fall into the politics of exclusion, which is quite contrary to one of the founding provisions of the Zimbabwean Constitution that sanctions the

[7] In Zimbabwe's homophobic space, same-sex sexuality is both criminalized and widely regarded as dehumanizing. This homophobia is synthesized in the late former President Robert Mugabe's infamous description of gays and lesbians as "worse than dogs and pigs". See Epprecht, M. 2004. *Hungochani: The history of a dissident sexuality in Southern Africa* (2nd ed.), p. 4.

"recognition of the equality of all human beings" (2013: 1.3(f)). It has become evident that minorities are an endangered species in Zimbabwe.

Hovelmeier's *What Happened to Us* (2016) and John Eppel's *Absent: the English Teacher* (2009) hint at the disastrous economic consequences of reverse aggression against the white Zimbabwean population. Similarly, Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018) shows how the spectre of *Gukurahundi* has held the nation to ransom by forestalling the prospect of national cohesion. Likewise, it is interesting to note that the genesis of Zimbabwe's economic and political woes in the late 1990s almost coincides with Mugabe's infamous decree against same-sex relationships in 1995. The way state aggression towards political, racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities appears to be causally related to the country's current dystopia seem to reinforce Standing's (2011) view of the precariat as "a dangerous class" that is endowed with (paradoxical) power to dismantle oppressive structures.That said, Zimbabwe's literary history ratifies the assertion that "all nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous" (McClintock, 1997: 89). Different nationalisms have at different times served to produce, replicate, and sustain knowledge systems, prejudices and cultural essentialisms that sought to naturalise the privileges of hegemonic groups. Bearing the brunt of this institutionalised violence have been those whose lives "cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone" (Butler, 2010: xix). In his memoir *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse* (2021), Robert Muponde has this to say about Zimbabwe's current state: "The country itself now reminds of old, unending beginnings; incessant violent rebirths in a maternity ward filled with midwives who loathe children" (10). The cluster of images here appositely captures the precariousness of both the state and the citizenry; the unending beginnings and the midwives' anti-natalism imply a state of stagnation stemming from the state's failure to guarantee the postcolonial nation's regeneration.

1.3 Aims

This thesis used the lens of precarity to explore how violence and gendered identity intersect in selected Zimbabwean literary works. I observed that a significant section of Zimbabwean fictional writing embodies what Lemke (2016: 163) calls "precarious aesthetics", a mode of writing that seeks "to relate or connect the viewer to precarious conditions, classes, and individuals". Writing in the context of economic marginality, Lemke argues that precarious aesthetics "use a formal, or aesthetic, strategy of precariousness to 'plead', implicitly or explicitly, for the eradication of economic precarity" (2016: 165). I adapted Lemke's idea to

my exploration of the cultural production of precarity, where the term 'precarious aesthetics' becomes a mode of artistic expression that aestheticizes vulnerability, emphasising its capacity for mobilisation into a creative force.[8] I analysed how the precarious aesthetic weaves through selected texts and thesis chapters, with particular focus on how precarity speaks through them in its permutations as a condition, cause, and effect of violence.

The thesis is premised on the claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to the task of reimagining the nation through exposing, contesting and de-gendering cultural practices that produce and sustain precarity. To that end, the literature attempts to expand an understanding of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity and gendered identity. The following questions drove this study:

1. How do selected texts demonstrate the emergence and sustenance of structures of marginalisation in minority identity categories?
2. To what extent do these marginalising impulses leave cracks within which marginal individuals and communities can project counter-narratives?
3. What commonalities exist at points of contact among differentially located fragilities? In addition, should such convergences exist, what implications do they hold either for a new discursive design or for the possibility of weaponizing precarity?

My overarching assumption is that even in the most brutal of contexts there are pockets of beauty and self-affirmation and that the lived experiences of characters in each marginal space leave spaces for pushback, refusal, and strategic surrender.

[8] I follow Jacques Ranciere's (2010) understanding of aesthetics as something to do with questions of beauty, its appreciation, and artistic taste. Lemke's (2016) notion of "precarious aesthetics" helped me to conceptualize the way the literary texts under study fuse the political and the aesthetic regimes of art to illuminate beauties and subjectivities that inhere in the margins and, by extension, to elevate vulnerability into a generative force. In this thesis, precarious aesthetics is a heterogeneous imaginative site as primary texts selected for each chapter tend to offer a distinctive "aesthetic experience," to borrow from Ranciere (2010: 116). The idea of "precarious aesthetics" has been deployed in different contexts (and using different grammars) by scholars and literary critics. For example, in her reading of Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013), Cheryl Stobie deploys the term "poverty porn" (borrowed from Helen Hester) to name a mode of writing that graphically presents precarity in an attempt to transform societal attitudes towards marginalized social groups. See Stobie, C. 2020. Precarity, poverty porn and vernacular cosmopolitanism in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, pp. 517–31. Susan Banki (2013) appositely describes such a mode of writing as "precariat literature".

This study, therefore, pursued the following objectives:

1. To evaluate ways in which precarious aesthetics can expand an understanding of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity and gendered identity;
2. To identify and interpret overlaps between precarious gendered identities and violence in selected texts; and
3. To examine how representations of precarity are deployed to the task of reimagining the nation.

That said, this thesis engaged an intersectional approach to explore ways in which precarious spaces emerge, thrive, and interact in selected literary contexts. This approach helped me to advance the proposition that a significant proportion of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to expand an understanding of the cultural practices that produce precarity and to deconstruct the system of gendered identity that sustains it.

1.4 Rationale

Current scholarship about precarity is predominantly Western and does not sufficiently address Zimbabwean textual nuances and environmental specificities. This study, therefore, makes a case for a context-based conception of precarity that incorporates a wider range of fragile spaces. These are spaces run down by toxic ethnonationalist and military masculinities (See Tshuma's *House of Stone,* 2018); spaces endangered by colonial and local heteropatriarchal traditions (Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, 1998); spaces marked by virulent ableism (Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, 2015); spaces undergirded by homophobia (Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*, 2010), and spaces punctuated by misogyny and "masculinised memory"[9] (Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again*, 2018).

Considering the above, this thesis demonstrates how literary contexts under study draw attention to the primacy of gendered identity in the way precarious spaces are produced and sustained. As dictated by the texts, precarity is a variegated social construct encompassing a wide range of human fragilities that are located at the confluence of gendered identity and

[9] See Encloe, C. 2000. Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics, p. 44.

violence, where mental and bodily integrity are held in constant threat of extermination by hegemonic identities. Gendered identity derives from misconceptions about the meanings of masculinity and femininity (Dunn, 2010). Selected texts problematise the conflation of femininity with weakness (Connell, 1995; Hooper, 2001) as central to the cultural production of precarity. Women-authored texts, such as Irene Staunton's *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990), Fay Chung's *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2007), Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter For My Daughter* (1996) and Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again*, contest a monolithic male-authored nation narration that eclipses women's nation-building efforts. The system of gendered identities not only inferiorises women but also accounts for the prejudicial framing of masculinities that do not conform to the hegemonic model. Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) depicts the suppression of gay masculinities through the way heterosexual society questions Dumisani's (the gay protagonist) manhood. Similarly, Takadini, the eponymous albino character of Han Benson's *Takadini* (1997) must sire a 'normal' baby boy to affirm his masculinity. The gendering of difference is part of the ideological repertoire deployed by mainstream society to inscribe a disabling identity onto the body marked by difference.

In focusing on marginalised and 'minoritised' identities, this study took its cue from Arjun Appadurai's observation in *Fear of Small Numbers* that minorities are social constructs and that there is a "worldwide genocidal impulse towards minorities, whether they are numerical, cultural, or political minorities" (2006: 40). Appadurai makes this claim in the context of post 9/11 'war on terror' and ethnic genocides in India, Eastern Europe, and Rwanda in the 1990s. He argues that majorities become "predatory and ethnocidal with regard to small numbers" because the latter "blur the boundaries between us and them, here and there, in and out, healthy and unhealthy, loyal and disloyal" (Appadurai, 2006: 40, 44). In Zimbabwe, women do not constitute a numerical minority but considering Appadurai's definition of a minority, they are minoritised by a socio-economic and political organisation that privileges masculinity. Therefore, this study identified as precarious the lives of women, ethnic and racial minorities, people with albinism (PWA) and those of non-normative sexualities and genders.

Given the above, literary texts explored in this study foreground human lives perched fragilely at the fringes of society's gendered socio-political and biophysical systems. For example, in *The Book of Memory* (2015) and Ben Hanson's *Takadini*, albino characters are subjected to culturally transmitted falsehoods that inscribe a disabling identity on their bodies. In

Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) and Vera's *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *Without a Name* (1994), women have their agency curtailed by male-authored essentialisms about femininity and motherhood. *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010), *If the Wind Blew* (1996) and Charles Mungoshi's short story "Of Lovers and Wives" (1997) demonstrate how sexuality and gender stereotypes transform heterosexuality and homosexuality[10] into a qualifying/disqualifying binary. In the texts, same-sex relationships are rendered precarious by homophobic culture. Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012) and Tshuma's *House of Stone* foreground the precariousness of ethnic minority status in the context of ethnonationalist *Gukurahundi* violence and its aftershocks. In all these texts human identities are expressed in terms of a majority-minority binary and majorities predate on minorities.

Douglas (1966) sheds light on this hostile dichotomisation by asserting that predatory tendencies toward minorities derive from society's 'primitive' obsession with order and purity, which is tied up with the trope of defilement and hygiene. In a bid to sanitise society, majorities exaggerate and punish difference, seeing it as "dirt" and an offence against order (Douglas, 1966: 1–4). This precaritising impulse is evident in all selected primary texts, especially those that foreground the lived experiences of numerical minorities. For example, in *If the Wind Blew* and *The Hairdresser of Harare*, gay characters become 'dirt' due to their nonconformity to the ideal of 'compulsory heterosexuality'.[11] As a metaphor for difference, the notion of 'dirt' illuminates the prescriptive ideals of right-genderedness, right-pigmentedness, ethnic purity and normalcy that are interrogated in this thesis.

Hall (1997: 235) further elaborates on how dominant social groups represent and react to "the spectacle of the other" and asserts that stereotyping plays an instrumental role in sustaining a vicious 'othering' impulse. Elsewhere, Muponde (2018: 70) observes how "fetishisation and enfreakment of marginalised characters and social groups" in folk narratives serve to perpetuate violent stereotypes. Stereotypes about PWA amount to symbolic violence and are

[10] I am aware that the term 'homosexuality' is potentially offensive as some scholars contend that it is pejorative and tends to emphasize the carnal dimension of same-sex relations at the expense of their social dimension (Picket, B.L. ed. 2009. *Historical Dictionary of Homosexuality*, p. 91). There are many alternatives to the term – including 'same-sex desire,' 'same-sex relations,' 'same-sex sexuality,' and 'homoerotic desire' that, however, do not seem to capture the sense conveyed by 'homosexuality' as the direct antithesis of 'heterosexuality'. The term 'homosexuality' has continued to be used even by prominent scholars in the field of sexuality. Whenever the term appears in this study, its usage is non-prejudicial.

[11] The phrase 'compulsory heterosexuality' is attributed to Adrienne Rich (1980) who uses it to refer to the stringent adherence to heterosexuality so much that nonconformity is punished.

repeatedly clad in pejorative stereotypical terms such as '*Murungudunhu*'[12] (Gappah, 2015:10), "the accursed *sope* stranger" (Hanson, 1997: 113), "peeled potato" (Vandermerwe, 2014: 14), and "white monkey" (Robson, 2002: 19). The derogatory terms are part of the rhetorical tools deployed in the cultural construction of 'otherness' and enfreakment by mainstream society.

However, it is of critical importance in this study how marginalised characters radicalise their vulnerability in ways that challenge Nnaemeka's assertion that "to see knowledge, power, and agency in the margins is to wrestle with contradictions" (1997: 2). The texts under study affirm the simultaneity of power and precariousness as a defining dialectic in the lived experiences of precarious subjects. In *This Mournable Body* (2018), the successful entrepreneurial ventures of Lucia and Mai Moetsabi unravel this defining paradox, demonstrating how the precarious institution of patriarchal motherhood can be recast, as Ruti (2009: 2) would say, "as a site of possibility and self-overcoming". Similarly, the albino protagonists in *The Book of Memory* (2015) and *Takadini* ultimately manage to transcend the force of stigma and social exclusion through conscious self-assertiveness. These textual testimonies underscore how a position of disempowerment can serve as a spur for self-actualisation, which answers the question: "Can the poor have politics?" (Han, 2018: 332).

Taleb's (2012) concept of 'antifragility' offers one insightful way of conceptualising indemnification against fragility. He argues that "some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty" (Taleb, 2012: 3). Thus, narratives that challenge patriarchal misogyny and masculinised memory such as *These Bones Will Rise Again* and Chung's *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2007) foreground the attempts of a section of Zimbabwean women to benefit from patriarchal disorder and stressors.

Ruti (2009: 4) reinforces Taleb's antifragility logic by suggesting that one may make "a virtue out of life's contingency" through defying what Berlant (2011) calls "cruel optimism". Cruel optimism is obtained in contexts where individuals remain trapped in unfulfilling situations in blind anticipation of ultimate salvation. Such a futile hope is propped by "the 'technologies of patience' that enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the cruelty of the *now*" (Berlant, 2011: 28, cited in Ruti, 2009: 17). In such a scenario the "defiant subject" can wilfully

[12] A Shona term of ridicule for a person with albinism. The term implies a counterfeit version of whiteness.

relinquish "optimistic attachments to wounding modalities of life" (Ruti, 2009: 17). In Dangarembga's novels, Lucia's decision to opt out of marriage and its promise of happiness and stability becomes a form of radical refusal and a survival strategy as she "was always able to do what others of her sex couldn't" (Dangarembga, 2018: 150). Similarly, Vera's female protagonists in *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *Without a Name* (1994) embrace the politics of 'opting out' of the patriarchal institutions of wifehood and motherhood to pursue their dreams (explored in Chapter 3).

By projecting characters who are constantly negotiating agency, the narratives under study defy the notion that "one cannot break out of the frame" (Butler, 2010: 11) of victimhood. This vision of a better world invokes two interrelated concepts: the fluidity of social spaces (Lefebvre, 1991), and the inherent instabilities of gendered identities (Butler, 1990, 1993). Lefebvre (1991: 26) contends that "*(Social) space is a (social) product"* and that spatial practices that produce and sustain hegemonies and their supporting systems of knowledge and signification can be contested. It is this fluidity of spatial borders that enables characters such as Tinawo in *Zenzele: A Letter for My Daughter* (hereafter shortened to *Zenzele*) and Thandi in *House of Stone* to transgress gender borders and carve out counter-spaces in which self-actualisation and exercising agency are possible.

To see precarious subjects such as Takadini (in *Takadini*) and Mai Tambu (in *This Mournable Body*) as vested with agency is to recast the concept of agency not "as a function of heroic feats of self-actualisation that are designed to enable us to overcome the constraints of our positionality in the world" (Ruti, 2009: 6–7), but as the zest for life and the ability to remain buoyant in the face of trying circumstances. Mai Tambu embodies this zest, and despite being labelled an outright failure by her daughter (Tambu), she is ironically the very power that propels the latter. Although Tambu expends her energies towards running away from what she regards as "a lifetime of being nothing, like Mai" (Dangarembga, 2006: 31), Mai Tambu is not nothing; nonetheless, the writer endows her with a deep anti-imperialist vision rooted in a sustained rejection of anything that bears the imprints of Englishness. Such a vision is intertwined with her daily maternal activism that is predicated on saving her children from the scourge of Englishness to which Tambudzai succumbs. In his review of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), Muponde describes Mai Tambu as the only character who "remains true to herself when others are floundering" and also as a pioneer in Zimbabwean literature who "consistently denounce[s] the self-importance of the educated elite" (2007: 169, 167).

Muponde not only upends the label of nothingness that Tambu places on her mother but also suggests that it is Tambu herself whose life is a 'not', considering how "*The Book of Not* ends with a confused, uncertain and disoriented Tambu, jobless and on the verge of being evicted from a hostel by an old white matron" (Muponde, 2007: 165). Considering Waghorn's (2014) contention that the meaning and essence of life are relative to individuals and societies, it may be argued that Mai Tambu's alleged nothingness and lack of agency are abstract ideological constructs that stem from Tambu's feelings of inadequacy (cf. Chigwedere, 2016). Rather, it is Tambu herself who epitomises "the indeterminacy of being" (Ranasinghe, 2020: 312) that defines nothingness.

A nuanced conception of agency, such as the one given above, enables one to see agency in many other seemingly defeatist behaviours such as Maiguru's silence in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) or Phephelaphi's self-immolation in *Butterfly Burning* (1998). Silence becomes a form of voicing against oppression if we see it as a matter of choice as, according to Nnaemeka, "one exercises agency when one *chooses* not to speak; the refusal to speak is also an act of resistance that signals the unwillingness to participate" (1997: 4). To read Phephelaphi's self-immolation as an exercise of agency requires a rethinking of the meaning of agency (Musila, 2007). It also calls for an ability to see greatness in smallness because, as Siphiwe Ndlovu shows us in her novel *The Theory of Flight* (2018), beauty lies in realising one's smallness "in the grander scheme of things" as that is "the kind of knowledge that allowed you to fly" (Ndlovu, 2018: 25). Hence, Ndlovu depicts characters that attain self-actualisation through seemingly absurd acts such as Baines Tikiti's walking into the Indian Ocean to satisfy his wanderlust, or Golide Gumede's crazy attempt to construct an aeroplane that would enable his wife (Elizabeth Nyoni) to realise her dream of flying to Nashville. Such flights of imagination conjure up new worlds and enable characters to make sense of otherwise unfulfilling lives.

By exploring how the precariat consolidates subjectivities in various sites of displacement and dispossession, this thesis calls for a productive rethinking of the meaning of vulnerability. To that end, it departs from the topos of drought, alienation, identity crisis, et cetera, that dominate Zimbabwe's literary criticism. The present study notes that existing scholarship has in different ways highlighted disconnections and discontinuities in Zimbabwean literary tropes and critical

tropisms.[13] However, no study known to me at the time of writing has yet deployed a precarity lens to highlight overlaps and (dis)connections in the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity in different sites of disprivilege and disempowerment. I argue that examining overlaps in pushback mechanisms adopted by the precariat in various literary worlds and/or cultural locations not only provides a new grammar with which to talk about violence but also significantly contributes to the global discourse of precarity.

1.5 Literature Review

This study is premised on the claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean literature adopts a precarious aesthetic to expand an understanding of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity and gendered identity. To that end, the selected literary texts seek to redefine the nation by exposing and subverting gendered social practices that produce and sustain both predatory and marginalised identities. Given this claim, a holistic understanding of the dynamics of violence in marginal spaces can only be guaranteed by an inquiry into the points of contact among differentially situated regimes of violence, namely ethnonationalism, patriarchal oppression of mothers, ableism, homophobia, and masculinised memory. Considering the thesis statement, this section demonstrates how my study draws on, departs from, and contributes to the existing literature on precarity. Although cognizance is taken of the fact that gendered identity and violence are cross-cutting themes, there is an attempt to review literature thematically and in step with the ordering of thesis chapters.

In my discussion of toxic ethnonationalism (Chapter 2), I derive conceptual inspiration from *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* (2007), co-edited by Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde. The book explores how masculinities and fatherhoods are performed in a wide range of literary, historical, social, and historical contexts. The editors define masculinities as "sets of ideas that can oppress, repress or liberate, depending on historical and political imperatives" (2007: xvi). In my reading of *House of Stone* and *Running with Mother*, I explore how masculinities lend themselves to deployment as toxic energy. Muchemwa's essay "Why don't you tell the children a story?" (2007) explores how hegemonic masculinities and ethnicities play out in three short stories by Charles Mungoshi,

[13] I borrow the phrase from Muponde, R. 2007 *Fototo:* a review of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), p. 169.

Nevanji Madanhire, and Freedom Nyamubaya. In his analysis of Mungoshi's "The Sins of Fathers", Muchemwa views Rwafa as a symbol of vitriolic ethnicity and an embodiment of "heterosexual masculinity with a sense of animal territoriality that resonates with current discourses of sovereignty and feminisation of the nation" (2007: 4). Rwafa's unrestrained military masculinity illuminates my exploration of ethnic tensions in *Running with Mother* and *House of Stone* wherein ethnicity and military masculinities are portrayed as injurious. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's essay in the same volume extends the theme of ethnic violence by highlighting the manipulation of the figure of Joshua Nkomo by Robert Mugabe in a way Muchemwa (2007: 2) describes as a conscious effort to 're-tribalise' the Zimbabwean society. The notion of re-tribalisation, referred to elsewhere as 'Shonaization' of Matebeleland (Mdlongwa, Moyo & Ncube, 2015: 234), constitutes a leading trope in *House of Stone*.

Also relevant to my study is Christiansen's essay "Mai Mujuru: Father of the Nation?" (2007), which evaluates the possibilities and limits tied to women's attempts to transcend male-defined gender prescriptions. Christiansen's question "Are there slippages and fissures in the gendered language of power and authority in Zimbabwe, through which a woman president might emerge?" (2007: 88) is pertinent to my reading of *These Bones Will Rise Again* and *Zenzele* (Chapter 6), which challenge Zimbabwe's phallocentric political culture. The essay underlines the nexus between misogyny and masculinisation of national memory, which informs my reading of how "gendered imaginaries of power" (Christiansen, 2007; 89) play out in Chigumadzi's and Maraire's texts. However, my greater focus is on how the two narratives attempt to de-gender national memory and radically reorient understandings of Zimbabweanness.

Mdlongwa, Moyo and Ncube (2015), Ncube and Siziba (2017), and Mangena (2017, 2019) read *Running with Mother* as an attempt to recast *Gukurahundi* violence in ways that transcend official restrictions on the subject. These scholars concur that memorialising the *Gukurahundi* atrocity is necessary for national healing. While I find these claims quite relevant for my second chapter, I focus more on how the system of gendered identity underwrites ethnonationalist violence in *Running with Mother* and *House of Stone*. I read *Gukurahundi* violence as a dramatisation of contending masculinities in which Robert Mugabe sought to unman his political rival, Joshua Nkomo. Throughout the thesis, I demonstrate the primacy of violent masculinities in the ideological construction of otherness.

The causal relationship between toxic masculinities and patriarchal motherhood is an area that has not received much critical attention in Zimbabwe. Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has attracted considerable attention, but discussion on the text has largely revolved around the young protagonists Tambudzai and Nyasha. The title of the last instalment of the trilogy *This Mournable Body* is seen by Cogbill-Seiders (2019) as a conscious inversion of Teju Cole's essay "Unmournable Bodies" (2015), which projects a war context in which the deaths of both civilians and soldiers are "not meaningful" to Westerners. Cogbill-Seiders contends that Dangarembga "turns the phrase on its head by drawing attention to a body's right to be mourned regardless of ideological convictions" (2019: 101). Interestingly, the idea of 'mournable' bodies invokes Butler's ungrievable lives, those that are "not considered lives at all" (2004: 34). This thesis is largely concerned with exploring conditions that create ungrievable bodies as well as the narrative strategies deployed by writers to give recognisability and greater social functioning to the precariat. Therefore, in my exploration of motherhood (Chapter 3), I consider ways in which *This Mournable Body*, *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name* humanise the maternal body by making it mournable.

Given the above, readings of *Nervous Conditions* (1988; though not a primary text in this study), offered in *Negotiating the Postcolonial: Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga*, edited by Willey and Treiber (2002), are critical to my exploration of the creative responses of precarious maternal subjects. Essays by Andrade, Geller, and Masemola in the volume highlight the dualistic view of patriarchal oppression as both destructive and creative. These critics' views on *Nervous Conditions* are pertinent to my reading of *This Mournable Body*, considering how Dangarembga carries through thematic and theoretical concerns from *Nervous Conditions*, through *The Book of Not* (2006), to *This Mournable Body* (2018). For instance, Mai Tambu's pan-Africanist vision (reflected in her aversion to 'Englishness') grows steadily throughout the trilogy.

Considering the interconnectedness of issues raised in Dangarembga's novels, this thesis also benefits from critical views on *The Book of Not*. I build on Muponde's view of Mai Tambu as the only character who "remains true to herself when others are floundering" (2007: 169) to argue for a reading of at-home mothers such as Mai Tambu, Mai Taka, and Mai Manyanga (in *This Mournable Body*) as active ingredients in the production of visions and knowledge that benefit society. In that way, I depart from daughter-centric readings of Dangarembga's works

that locate agency and hope of women's emancipation in Tambu and Nyasha (Selvick, 2013; Ndour, 2018).

This study also benefits from analyses of Vera's works in Muponde and Maodzwa-Taruvinga's co-edited book *Sign and Taboo* (2002), especially the essays that explore the theme of motherhood. The essays converge on the precarious nature of patriarchal motherhood but offer divergent views on the extent to which mothers in Vera's fiction can exercise agency. While Samuelson (2002) cites Phephelaphi (in *Butterfly Burning*) as an embodiment of maternal agency, Shaw (2002: 92, 91) quizzes the definitive powers of Vera's women by positing that "Vera is less than hopeful about […] possibilities of women's self-generation". These opposing claims underscore the complexity of the challenges that patriarchal mothers face, which is succinctly captured by the oxymoronic title of Primorac's essay "Iron Butterflies" (2002). Primorac argues that Vera's female characters embody both "vulnerability and strength", making them "butterflies made of iron" (2002: 101-102). Similarly, in her reading of *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Musila argues that the (female) body is "often the experiential site of both oppression and acts of resistance" (2007: 50). This study not only transposes this enriching debate to a discussion of the ambivalent nature of patriarchal motherhood in both Vera and Dangarembga's novels but also demonstrates how such ambivalence becomes a unifying frame for all the thesis chapters. Departing from existing scholarship, I deploy the lens of opting out (Ruti, 2017)[14] to explore ways in which women in selected texts reject patriarchal scripts of wifehood and motherhood in pursuit of self-actualisation.

Veit-Wild and Naguschewski's co-edited book *Body, Sexuality, and Gender* (2005) provides ground for conceptualising interconnections among different bodily fragilities. It brings together various discussions on 'writing the body' under the taxonomic designations gendered bodies, queered bodies, tainted bodies and violated bodies. Under tainted bodies, Alioune Sow explores the insecurities of the body with albinism, alongside discussions by Susan Arndt, Sarah Nuttall and Jessica Hemmings that explore the "unstable meanings that can be attached to skin colour" (Sow: 2005: xvi–xvii) in different other contexts. I draw on how these scholars link the notion of 'forbidden' bodies to the politics of social exclusion to explore the cultural precaritisation of persons regarded as wrongly pigmented. The idea of forbidden bodies also

[14] Ruti puts forward the idea of opting out in a queer theoretical context to explore the benefits of anti-normative behaviours. See Ruti, M. *The Ethics of Opting Out: queer theory's defiant subjects*, p.1.

serves as a uniting frame for all the thesis chapters as they focus on social groups that are marginalised on grounds of the body's materiality.

The notions of tainted and forbidden bodies, therefore, inform my reading of literary representations of the body with albinism in Chapter 4. Existing scholarship on albinism reflects two disparate attitudes towards literary attempts at mainstreaming the condition. Lipenga and Ngwira (2018), Baker and Lund (2017), and McCann (2016) extoll literary works that foreground albinism for raising awareness about the condition and, in the words of Lipenga and Ngwira (2018: 1472), for fostering an appreciation of "the person behind the skin condition". The three critics agree that the narratives confer agency to PWA, especially by making them the locus of narration. Similarly, concerning the albino protagonist in *The Book of Memory*, McCann posits that her act of narrating her ordeal is self-empowering, enabling her to face her condition with "renewed agency" (2016: 98). Baker and Lund (2017: 278) also contend that advocacy literature such as *Takadini* has helped to challenge wide-ranging cultural beliefs that fuel the isolation and stigmatisation of PWA. However, Tagwirei (2012) and Hove (2013) highlight the possible limitations of the precarious aesthetic by casting slurs on Hanson's representation of albinism in *Takadini*. On one hand, Tagwirei claims that the novel "fails to transcend the stigma and apprehension associated with the albino" and in an attempt to empower both the albino boy and his mother "Hanson marginalises both and reinforces their otherness" (88). On the other hand, Hove (2013: 7-8) states that despite the commendable effort "to desacralise the killing of albinos in traditional Zimbabwean society, the subtext of this novella stubbornly etches both Sekai and Takadini as inferior, silenced by the endless gossip of the village". I find the two contending perceptions pertinent to my evaluation of the attempts by *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* to reinscribe the albino image. I further draw on the paradoxical power of precarity (Standing, 2011, 2014) to explore the albinic[15] body's resilience properties that enable it to transcend cultural disablement as depicted in Hanson's and Gappah's novels.

The conceptual metaphor of forbidden bodies links Chapter 4 to my fifth chapter where I explore the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity in the space of non-normative sexuality. Scholarly attention on same-sex relationships has risen significantly in recent years in Zimbabwe, particularly on the subject of gay subcultures. This literary trend is in step with

[15] I borrow the term 'albinic' from Miller (2017), who uses it as a descriptor for the body with albinism.

a proliferation of literary works that depict homoerotic desire in Africa as a whole (Epprecht, 2013a; Munro, 2017: 186). In his pioneering critical work on same-sex sexuality, Shaw (2005) explores how heterosexuality is challenged in the works of Dambudzo Marechera, Nevanji Madanhire and Chenjerai Hove, among other Zimbabwean writers. However, while applauding Madanhire's *If the Wind Blew* for its forceful interrogation of the "rationale of sexual regulation", he lambastes Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives" for leaving "the edifice of heteronormativity and some disturbing homophobic assumptions intact" (Shaw, 2005: 98, 100). Shaw's analysis establishes a crucial critical template that is adopted by many later critics, including Ncube (2013), Mangena (2019) and Mtenje (2019) who read *The Hairdresser of Harare* as a text that breaches the boundaries of heteronormativity and exposes their brittleness. Chitando and Manyonganise (2016), however, problematise what they see as a disturbing intertwining of gay culture with politics and violence in Huchu's novel. They criticise the gay protagonist (Dumi Ncube) for cowardly fleeing the country at the end of the novel. Adopting a cultural nationalist stance in reading Mungoshi's story, Tirivangana (2015) views same-sex desire as "an aberration that threatens the extinction of the future of the human race" (cited in Leroux, 2019: 2), a stance that reinforces the myth that same-sex intimacies are un-African (Epprecht, 1998, 2004, 2013; Mangena, 2019: 13). While my study benefits from this burgeoning scholarship, as a point of departure, I deploy the lens of precarity, specifically Butler's (2010) concept of frames, to explore the violent framing of gay identities, as well as the politico-aesthetic tools deployed to deconstruct the heteronormative frame and affirm the humanity of gay characters. Such an affirmation is opposed to Tirivangana's fundamentalist reduction of human beings to the reproductive functions of their sexual organs.

For my last core chapter (Chapter 6), which explores the ethics of re-articulation and self-representation in *Zenzele* and *These Bones Will Rise Again*, I find Muponde and Primorac's *Versions of Zimbabwe* (2005) particularly useful. In the opening chapter, Kaarsholm traces the trajectory of the culture of violence in Zimbabwe and argues that Zimbabwean writers have consistently interrogated the official version of history "in spite of external pressures, intimidation, and circumstances conducive to self-censorship" (2005: 22). In the same volume, Muchemwa correspondingly avers that Zimbabwean fiction and autobiography have challenged official history in a bid "to open new spaces for the re-creation of cultural memory, revisions of the past and re-inscriptions of identity". He adds that memory is a site and instrument of violence that hegemonic groups manipulate to "exclude and expel the undeserving from the ancestral house" (Muchemwa, 2005: 195). In the essay "Rule by

Historiography", Ranger (2005: 217) supports Muchemwa's claims and goes further by employing the terms 'nationalist historiography' and 'patriotic history' to refer to "history in the service of nationalism". Correspondingly, Christiansen (2005: 205) reads Vera's novels *Nehanda* and *The Stone Virgins* (2002) as narratives that consciously subvert patriotic history to replace it with "a feminist nationalism". However, in his reading of *These Bones Will Rise Again*, Ncube (2020) suggests that Zimbabwe's political culture is so phallocentric that such a gynocentric nationalism is implausible in current settings. He further argues that the Zimbabwean society is modelled after a patriarchal family structure that makes it difficult for women to stray into traditionally male spaces such as national politics.

The contending views above are pertinent to my evaluation of Maraire's and Chigumadzi's attempts to re-articulate national history from a woman-centred perspective. Specifically, the views provide a vital background to my discussion of how the two authors deploy affective and aesthetic tools of herstory, women-centred historical narratives (Hitchcott, 1997), to contest misogyny by de-gendering national memory and understandings of Zimbabweanness. I, therefore, draw on the capacity of precarity to stimulate politics of refusal through women's writing back to '(his)story'.

Overall, while there is a rich scholarship on the interface between gendered identity and violence in Zimbabwean literature, there is an evident paucity of studies that focus holistically on the production, maintenance and contesting of precarity in minority and minoritized spaces to establish their points of contact. Hence, through engaging the lens of precarity within an intersectional research paradigm, this thesis seeks to bring a new perspective to the reading of Zimbabwean literature. To that end, the thesis demonstrates interconnections among various prejudices that create and sustain precarity as well (dis)connections in refusal strategies adopted by the precariat in different social spaces.

1.6 Thematic Framework

This thesis explores the cultural production of precarity to advance the proposition that a cross-section of Zimbabwean literary artists adopts a precarious aesthetic to reimagine the nation. In this section, I outline the following five intersecting thematics: ethnonationalism, patriarchal definition and oppression of mothers, social exclusion of PWA, homophobia, and masculinised memory. While each thematic denotes a seemingly standalone regime of violence, they are all

interconnected by the way each is underpinned by prejudice and culturally mediated conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Ideological construction of otherness underwrites the politics of domination and exclusion that characterise post-independence Zimbabwe. Within this 'man-nation' (Muponde, 2015b: 137), the production of knowledge and identities has been a prerogative of the powerful, especially the male-dominated ZANU-PF-controlled government, which, among other power-retention tactics, has consistently deployed violent military masculinities. In the postcolonial era, this violent political culture manifested itself, among other things, in the *Gukurahundi* atrocities that are foregrounded in fictional works such as Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* and Tshuma's *House of Stone*, as well as in nonfictional writings such as Joshua Nkomo's autobiography *The Story of My Life* (2001) and the Catholic Commission on Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe report *Breaking the Silence* (1997). In this conflictual space where contending masculinities manifest themselves in interethnic tension and political polarisation, history and memory take centre stage in identity formation while the act of remembering is both monopolised and masculinised (Muchemwa, 2005: 196).

Muponde's view of Zimbabwe as a man-nation (cited above) casts its shadow on literary representations of the institution of motherhood. Works by Zimbabwean women writers such as Valerie Tagwira, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Yvonne Vera invariably invoke Adrienne Rich's claim that women's capabilities are "literally massacred on the site of motherhood" (1976: 13). These works interrogate oppressive patriarchal conventions in a bid to "give a human face to motherhood" (Nnaemeka, 1997: 5). They also redefine maternal practice and identities by foregrounding maternal figures and potential mothers who defy heteropatriarchal control in sundry ways, including braving the male-dominated entrepreneurial space as 'mamapreneurs' (Wilson & Yochim, 2015). As Vera shows, women also have the option to vacate or eschew the institution of motherhood in pursuit of self-actualisation. This study draws on the view that motherhood is a site of ambivalence that "cannot be summed up as either oppression or power" (Porter, Short & O'Reilly, 2005: 4) and argues that women can carve out self-enabling spaces within the institution of motherhood.

The inferiorisation of mothers is predicated on the corporeality of the body. The female body is prejudicially framed as lacking as encapsulated in Aristotle's famous misogynistic declaration "female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (cited in de Beauvoir, 1956: 1). This prejudicial framing of femininity as 'lack' often extends to marginalised

masculinities such as those of gays and men with albinism. As reflected in *Takadini*, the manhood of the male body with albinism is questioned by an ableist society. Like the female body, the male albinic body is inferiorised by a discourse of masculinity that "privileges mobility, conquest and perfectionism" (Chinyowa & Chivandikwa, 2017: 57). The close link between motherhood and albinism is also seen in the way the fate of children with albinism is inseparable from that of their mothers in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory*. Besides, the fact that children are used to mediate the experience of albinism in both texts makes the experiences of the two identity groups intertwined. In the African patriarchal philosophy children and women are often treated the same as minors who are only to be seen and not to be heard. The mother is often held accountable for the birth of a baby with albinism and sometimes allegations of her infidelity are raised (Lund, 2016: 3).

The study maintains that apart from the usual medical challenges caused by the lack of melanin that protects the skin from the sun's ultraviolet radiation, PWA are not fundamentally different from people who are deemed 'correctly' pigmented. Cruz-Inigo, Barry and Sethi (2011) note that in Africa PWA are often subjected to social exclusion, infanticide, amputations, kidnapping, and ritualistic murders. That, coupled with the perpetuation of myths and superstitions about PWA (Palmer, 2007; Baker, Lund, Nyathi, & Taylor, 2010), makes albinism a precarious identity. Ironically, the anathematisation of albinic 'whiteness' takes place against the backdrop of enduring 'colourism' that privileges the light-skinned body as a standard of bodily perfection (Gabriel, 2007; Phoenix, 2014; Mitchell, 2020).

Interestingly, this study explores the issue of albinism against the backdrop of increasing worldwide worry over pigmentation. Montoliu, Grønskov, Wei, Martínez-García, Fernández, Arveiler, Morice-Picard, Riazuddin, Suzuki, Ahmed, and Rosenberg (2014) note that new genes causing the Oculocutaneous albinism type have been recently identified, which makes albinism a more complex challenge. Besides, medical research in the West has revealed another increasingly worrisome and psychologically damaging dermatological challenge marked by loss of pigmentation, called vitiligo (Agarwal, 1997). Thus, matters of human pigmentation need to be made more visible to neutralise their potency for psychological harm. Hence, primary texts selected for the discussion of albinism (Chapter 4) demonstrate that PWA can weaponise their condition and transcend cultural disablement.

People of non-normative sexualities, like those with albinism, belong to a space that is ostracised in Zimbabwe. Unlike albinism, gay and lesbian subcultures are criminalised and

dubbed un-African (Epprecht, 1998, 2004, 2008, 2013; Shaw, 2005). The imposition of gender on same-sex relations emanates from the intricate connection between sexuality and gender (Jaunait, Le Renard, & Marteu, 2013: 14), while in patriarchal society gay relationships are inescapably gendered because "homoerotic desire is cast as feminine desire" (Kimmel, 2001: 276). According to Connell, heteronormative society has "a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity" (1995: 143). As already noted, this presumed lack of masculinity is a precaritising factor that interlinks gays, women, and PWA. This study not only explores what happens when same-sex desire is gendered, pathologised, and criminalised but also examines pushback strategies at the disposal of characters of same-sex sexual orientation.

Considering how misconceptions around definitions of masculinity and femininity underwrite the marginalisation of ethnic minorities, mothers in a patriarchal society, PWA and gays, the thesis ultimately suggests that misogyny is the uniting frame for all the regimes of violence under study. Misogyny is defined by Stalker (2001: 291) as "men's hatred of women and men's day-to-day practices of malevolence against women." Manne avers that "misogyny primarily targets women because they are women in a *man's world*" (2017: 33). This thesis advances the argument that misogyny is a cross-cutting prejudice that not only affects women but also emasculated males. A major manifestation of misogyny is the exclusion of women from spaces of nation narration and knowledge production. This transhistorical gendered exclusion has birthed radical refusal in the form of women-centred historical accounts (herstory), such as Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again* and Maraire's *Zenzele* (explored in Chapter 6).

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on premises from the following three interrelated theoretical perspectives: precarity, gendered identity and intersectionality. In this section, I explore various premises that informed my reading of ways in which the precarious aesthetic has been deployed in Zimbabwean literature to expand an understanding of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity and gendered identity. The imbrication of theories has been necessitated by the complex ways in which precarious spaces are produced, maintained, and contested, as well as by the need to exploit the synergy that "intellectual intersectionality" (Ratti, 2019) may give forth.

1.7.1 Precarity

Theories of precarity explain the causes and effects of precarity and prescribe intervention strategies. Contemporary deployments of the theory are largely informed by two distinct schools of thought: One that understands precarity as a condition of insecurity and unpredictability following the casualisation of labour and collapse of the welfare state in the neoliberal era (Bourdieu, 1998; Standing, 2011), and another that conceives of precarity in ontological terms as an existential condition of life, characterised by differential exposure to insecurity in certain socio-political settings (Butler, 2004, 2010, 2012).

Butler's work on ontological precarity enabled me to analyse the complex role played by different signification and representational systems in institutionalising oppressive structures. Butler proposes that life is inherently precarious as everyone faces "the risk of life's end" (2004: 110) but maintains that precarity is a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (2009: 25). Butler attributes this differential exposure to risk or vulnerability to the work of norms or frames, which is derived from Susan Sontag's (1973) theorisation of the political use of photography to regulate people's perception of reality, that hegemonic groups deploy to dictate which lives are "grievable" and which ones are expendable.[16] I built on the idea of differential vulnerability to read disparities in patterns of privilege and disprivilege in texts under study. The marginalisation of mothers, the victimisation of ethnic minorities, and the social exclusion of PWA and gay characters can all be read as the consequence of wilful refusal by majoritarian identities to recognise the humanity of those in marginalised social locations. The idea of frames not only sheds light on how precaritising ideologies are constructed but also helped me evaluate the possibilities and limits of precarious aesthetics and conceptualise ways in which the precariat radicalises its condition. According to Butler, in some contexts "one cannot break out of the frame", while other contexts allow breaking out or breaking from the frame. She aptly captures the latter scenario through the imagery of a 'prison break' (Butler, 2010: 10), which helped me conceptualise ways in which authors and characters under study challenge violent hegemonic

[16] Pierre Clastres, in *Archeology of Violence* (1980 [1994: 45]) provides an apt instantiation of the concept of recognizability in his reference to the systematic decimation of a "savage Indian" population by Brazilian whites. In that case, the killing of a "savage Indian" was barely seen as a crime; the Indian was not recognized as a human being but "a mere animal".

orders. Likewise, the idea that in some socio-political contexts one cannot break from the frame helped me explain how some writers appear to be writing within the oppressive frames, exemplified by Mungoshi's representation of same-sex sexuality in "Of Lovers and Wives" (Chapter 5).

In recent times, precarity theory has been deployed in diverse contexts, including the marginalisation of the Sikh population in the United States and India (Ratti, 2019), refugeeism, statelessness and illegality of people in diasporic spaces (Sandten, 2012), and the fragility of academic humanities in the era of neoliberal capitalism (During, 2015). In whatever context, precarity denotes a site of abandonment and insecurity. The term's wide epistemic reach makes it transposable to the Zimbabwean scene. It also allowed me to appropriate the term 'precariat' (Standing, 2011) as a conceptual tag for all marginalised social groups under study.

Standing's (2011) description of the precariat as a "dangerous class" hints at the paradoxical capacity of the precariat to engage in politics of refusal, which became a defining trope for the thesis. Standing's faith in the capacity of the precariat to forge politics of resistance, which makes it a danger to those in hegemonic positions, is further developed in his book *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (2014), where he formulates a manifesto for the precariat in the fashion of Karl Marx's manifesto for the proletariat. Many other scholars underline the paradoxical power of precarity, including Waite who sees it as "a possible rallying point for resistance" (2009: 412) and Botha who views it as both liberatory and apocalyptic, "promising and threatening" (2014:1). Accordingly, this thesis discusses precarity as a site of ambivalence to demonstrate that the experience of marginalisation can inform refusal politics.

Precarity theory's flexibility also enabled it to evolve in very productive ways. For instance, Lorey (2015), who sees precarity as an aspect of biopolitical control, enunciates the idea of socio-ontological precarity in a bid to circumvent a perceived failure of Butler's ontological precarity to "differentiate the ways in which vulnerability and precarity manifest in the political" (cited in Moore, 2016: 20). Similarly, Millar proposes a middle way between the two dominant poles of precarity theories, precarious labour and precarious life, so that the theory "retains both its analytical and political value" (2017: 7). In step with Miller's proposition, this thesis draws eclectically from both poles of the theory to ensure a robust inquiry into the ideological construction and deconstruction of precarious spaces in the literary contexts under study.

1.7.2 Gendered identity

This study was driven by the assumption that the production and sustenance of precarious spaces are underwritten by the system of gendered identity. I, therefore, drew on several theoretical insights on the construction, maintenance, and impact of gendered identities. Of primary importance was Butler's (1990) notion of "gender performativity", which states that gendered identities are cultural constructs that derive from repeated speech-acts that in turn actively reinforce images of masculinity and femininity. Braun and Wilkinson (2005) attribute the existence of gendered identities to the dichotomisation of bodies as male and female and the according of salience to genitalia as a principal determinant of gender. The inferiorisation of femininity results from culturally constructed frames that engender and uphold stereotypical images of women, and which are largely shored up by the media (Ross, 2010: 42). These insights illuminate the existence and workings of gendered identities in narratives under study.

Connell (1995) suggests that a deep understanding of gendered identities demands that one considers masculinities alongside femininities because of their relationality. This is particularly important as this study devotes much attention to the part played by gender polarisation in the cultural construction of precarity. For example, in my reading of *The Hairdresser of Harare, If the Wind Blew,* and "Of Lovers and Wives", I consider how same-sex relationships are both sexualised and gendered by the hegemonic order of compulsory heterosexuality that, as observed by Matebeni, Monro and Reddy (2018: 1), suppresses gay masculinities.

Narratives under study project characters who are constantly challenging restrictions imposed on them by their gender. I read these acts of renegotiation in light of the view that gender identities are constituted through "bodily performance" and are, therefore, "vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained" (Connell, 1995: 54). Butler (1993: 62) reinforces this claim by arguing that gendered identities are unstable and subject to 'rematerialization' and 'rearticulations'. Also crucial to this study is Halberstam's (2010) concept of 'female masculinity', which implies that women can also perform masculinity, which underscores the fluidity and social constructedness of gendered identities. The notion of female masculinity informs my reading of how women characters transgress gender borders as an existential strategy in texts such as *Running with Mother, House of Stone, This Mournable Body,* and *Zenzele*. In Maraire's text, for example, characters such as Linda and Tinawo attain female masculinity through joining the traditionally male military space as freedom fighters.

Foucault's (1978) conception of identity as historically and culturally constituted was also key to understanding the instabilities of gendered identities, especially from a queer theoretical perspective. Queer theory is a broad and ever-shifting discipline (Jagose, 1996; Watson, 2005) that encompasses a multiplicity of "subcultures opposed to heteronormativity" (Stobie, 2005: 66). The queer perspective is important to my reading of *If the Wind Blew, The Hairdresser of Harare* and "Of Lovers and Wives"; literary works that foreground same-sex sexual relationships "in the context of macho Zimbabwean culture" (Shaw, 2005: 100). I propose that queer theory shares the interventionary thrust of precarity theory since, as Boehmer (2005: 117) suggests, queer sexuality spells "a widening of possibility, especially of creative possibility". This study reads queerness as something that goes beyond sexual or gender transgression, that is, as flux, transformation, flight and, to borrow from Edelman (1994:114), "a zone of possibilities". That is, queerness is "an outcome of strange temporalities" (Halberstam, 2005: 1) and a multiplicity of positions that "encompass anyone with a troubled, wounding, or antagonistic relationship to social processes of normativization" (Ruti, 2017: 33). This stance informed my reading of anti-normative behaviours such as Sekai's gender-transgressing defiance of tradition in a bid to save the life of her albino son in *Takadini* and the cultural dissidence of Vera's aborting, baby-killing, and self-immolating heroines in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*.

In texts under study, gendered identities are contested on many fronts, often bringing together the interrelated fronts of postcolonial feminism, masculinities, minorities, and queer studies. In *These Bones Will Rise Again* and *Zenzele*, the authors deploy herstory politico-aesthetic tools to challenge what, elsewhere JanMohamed and Lloyd (1987: 80) call "institutional forgetting" of minoritized voices.

1.7.3 Intersectionality

Popularised by the American legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989, 1991), the concept of intersectionality is vital to the understanding of multiply constituted oppression and inequality. As a theoretical framework, intersectionality served to underscore the multidimensionality of marginalised subjects' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Like precarity theory, intersectionality is interventionary as it "seeks equality of respect, acceptance, and institutional recognition for peoples who would, otherwise remain invisible, neglected, and disadvantaged" (Ratti, 2019: 20–21).

The present study deploys intersectionality both as a heuristic and observation tower to explore the mutative interaction of gendered identity and sundry other variables in spaces marked by violent masculinities, heteropatriarchal control, social exclusion, and misogyny. As a paradigm, intersectionality "examines how power relations are intertwined and mutually constructing" (Collins & Bilge, 2016: 7). In the texts under study, disempowerment and marginalisation are diversely constituted within a dynamic mélange of spatial practices and factors such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, bodily configuration, and geopolitical location. Crenshaw (1989: 149) clarifies the logic of intersectionality by evoking the image of road traffic. This imagery illuminates the multi-constituted nature of precarity in *Running with Mother* (2012) and *House of Stone* (2018) where Ndebeleness and femininity become precaritising identities, or in *The Book of Memory* (2015) where Memory is caught up at the intersection of intra-racial dermatological difference, femininity, poverty, and carceral injustice. Equally useful is Crenshaw's concept of 'intragroup' and 'intergroup' coalitions (1991: 1299), which explains how oppressive social structures can be negotiated through the forging of solidarity networks, such as when Rudo, Mamvura, and Auntie Jamela forge an ethic of togetherness that enables them to survive *Gukurahundi* in *Running with Mother* (2012).

Intersectionality's capacity for integration within precarity and gendered identity studies made it indispensable to this study, especially considering its preoccupation with deconstruction and de-normalisation of privilege (Crenshaw, 1989: 151). Indeed, Ratti (2019: 18) maintains that there is a unity of purpose between precarity and intersectionality as the latter "broadens the frame of recognizability" of multiply oppressed groups. Therefore, whereas precarity theory sheds light on how marginal spaces are produced, maintained, and contested, studies on gendered identity reflect that all genders and identities are subject to contestation and reconstitution, while intersectional scholars contend that oppression and discrimination can be effectively countered through coalition politics.

1.8 Methodology

This study is qualitative, guided by a close reading of selected primary texts. The lens of precarity was deployed within an intersectional framework to establish commonalities between differentially situated forms of institutionalised violence and the notion of gendered identity. Because of the study's focus on how violence is embedded in epistemological foundations and means of cultural production, which may not be readily visible, content analysis was a convenient methodology. According to Krippendorff (1989: 403), content analysis is best

suited for qualitative research because it "goes outside the immediately observable physical vehicles of communication and lies on their symbolic qualities". Content analysis also enables one to establish the context for investigation and extracting new meanings from studied texts (ibid.: 404).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1278) reinforce Krippendorff's claim by arguing that research that deploys qualitative content analysis focuses on modes of signification and contextual meanings of texts. In this thesis, I was interested in examining ways in which symbolic and systemic violence find mediation in seemingly benign communicative acts.

However, the success of content analysis was guaranteed by access to requisite resources that included primary texts and secondary material in the form of library books, academic journals, dissertations, YouTube videos and a wide range of other e-material. By engaging these methods, I sought to expand upon existing understandings of precarity in Zimbabwean literature.

In selecting primary texts, I considered each text's conformity to the precarious aesthetic (as defined in section 1.3) and to its capacity to espouse symbolic economies founded on an appreciation of difference as a way of being. I also considered that prevailing reality has different implications for writers in step with their respective ideological, gender, racial, cultural, temporal, and geopolitical locations. Therefore, as each artist writes from a different spectroscopic band, each text represents a significant stratum in the polyglot of Zimbabwe's counter-hegemonic discourse. I evenly distributed the primary texts across the five precarious spaces under study, namely ethnic minorities, patriarchal motherhood, albinism, non-normative sexualities, and masculinised memory and national identity. *Zenzele* and *These Bones Will Rise Again* were conscientiously selected in the hope that being autobiographical they may derive power from the "authority of presence"[17] to interrogate ways in which "nationalist politics depoliticises women's politics, forcing the repoliticisation of women's politics back on the national agenda only as an aftermath of nationalist struggles" (Nnaemeka, 1997: 2). I also considered that despite thematic and stylistic convergences among selected

[17] See Chennells, A. 2009. The authority of presence: Reading Judith Todd's Through the Darkness as Diary. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 25(1): 98–114.

texts, some texts have a richer representational value on certain thematics. For instance, while Tshuma's *House of Stone* touches on maternal insecurities, it treats the issue of *Gukurahundi* with a stylistic and thematic freshness that one does not find in other primary texts.

Lastly, I selected texts set in different periods to underline the transhistorical nature of precarity. For example, I studied *Butterfly Burning,* set in colonial Rhodesia in the late 1940s, alongside *This Mournable Body*, set in post-independence Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, to show (dis)continuities in maternal insecurities and subjectivities. Overall, all the primary texts for this study buttress the contention that literature is "one site where precarious life is being evoked and staged, where the sources of precarity are being contested, and where global coalitions are being reimagined through this struggle" (Darda, 2014: 121). Considering my focus on the role of gendered identities in the production of precarity, most of the selected texts denaturalise masculinism by highlighting what Aronowitz (1995: 320) calls "the material and spiritual costs of maleness" that include having to live with the daily burden of trying to live up to masculinist ideals. Finally, the texts converge on their conscious rejection of dominant discourses of normativity and on their deployment of emotive and affective functions of language to write the precariat into existence.

1.9 Chapter Delineation

The study proposes that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to deconstruct gendered images and prejudices that sustain differential patterns of power and privilege. All the primary texts speak to this claim and have been grouped thematically to enable a comparative and intersectional approach. In grouping primary texts in this way, I noted that most of them are so thematically broad that they could fit in more than one category, while some themes such as patriarchal motherhood are cross-cutting. For example, while Mlalazi and Tshuma's texts foreground *Gukurahundi*, they also depict other precaritising impulses such as misogyny, ethnonationalism, and patriotic history.

Although this thesis is thematically structured, with each core chapter focusing on a different thematic, the themes do not develop teleologically from the time of *Gukurahundi,* which is explored in the first core chapter. Rather, I pinpointed thematic highlights or landmarks that enabled me to establish unifying frames and draw broad conclusions on the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity. However, though misogyny operates as an undercurrent in all the marginalising impulses under examination, I explore it in greater depth in the last core

chapter to underline its cross-roads positionality in relation to other prejudices. Below is a detailed outline of the chapters.

Chapter 1—Mapping Precarious spaces. The introductory chapter spells out the context, aims, objectives, rationale, and thematic and theoretical frameworks of the study. It defines the overriding concept of precarity in the context of Zimbabwean literature and offers a review of existing literature related to the study.

Chapter 2—Radical vulnerability in Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* and Tshuma's *House of Stone*. This chapter deploys the lens of 'radical vulnerability' (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019) to examine existential strategies adopted by the precariat to survive *Gukurahundi* and its aftermaths. Radical vulnerability denotes how insecurity promotes radical thinking and coalition politics (Bury, 2019; Nagar & Shirazi, 2019; Schwartz, 2020). In this chapter, I explore radical vulnerability through its constituent aspects of 'hungry translations', 'situated solidarity' and 'co-journeying'. Nagar and Shirazi define co-journeying as the collective fight for justice and survival by individuals or social groups who share a particular ethic of emancipation. They define situated solidarity as the act of setting aside individual differences for translating their collective hunger for justice into liberation praxis. The chapter argues that the experience of displacement and dehumanisation promotes the radicalisation of vulnerability through the forging of intra- and intercategorical solidarity alliances. This speaks to the thesis's guiding assumption that even in the most brutal contexts there are spaces for beauty, self-affirmation, and pushback.

Chapter 3—Motherhood and the ethics, politics, and aesthetics of opting out. This chapter explores women's radical refusal of the male-defined experience, institution, and concept of motherhood in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* and Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name*. While the focus of the previous chapter is partly on women's self-preservation strategies in the context of *Gukurahundi* and its aftermaths, Chapter 3 zooms in on the self-constituting efforts of women as mothers and potential mothers in a rigidly patriarchal setup. The chapter adapts Mari Ruti's "ethics of opting out", put forward from a queer theoretical perspective, to explain how people of non-normative genders and sexualities can pursue self-actualisation by rejecting heteronormativity and "living by an alternative set of rules" (2017: 1). I transpose the notion of opting out both to my discussion of the unorthodox behaviours adopted by Vera's women characters and to my exploration of ways in which maternal figures in *This Mournable Body* (2018) queer maternal practice to mother from an empowered

position. The chapter argues that opting out of normative thinking and traditional motherhood roles enables women to actively participate in the production of knowledge that betters humanity. Thus, the chapter responds to the question of the extent to which selected texts demonstrate the production and deconstruction of structures of marginalisation.

Chapter 4—Undoing the albino trope in Ben Hanson's *Takadini* and Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. This chapter examines the adaptational mechanisms of PWA in the face of social exclusion and cultural disablement. While the previous chapter focuses on the politics and ethics of opting out by an otherwise numerical majority, Chapter 4 focuses on a numerical minority that is endangered by what mainstream society sees as 'wrong' pigmentedness. To conceptualise how characters with albinism transcend cultural disablement, I draw on Nassim Taleb's (2012) notion of antifragility, which explains how exposure to suffering promotes the robustification of the victim. The chapter also draws on Ato Quayson's (2007) notion of aesthetic nervousness to problematise the representation of albinism from an outsider positionality. The chapter argues that PWA have a regenerative potential that compels us to rethink the function of vulnerability and the meaning of (intra-racial dermatological) difference.

Chapter 5—Negotiating heteronormativity: towards a liberating ethic of sexuality. This chapter deploys Butler's (2010) concept of frames to examine the construction and deconstruction of precarious gay identities in Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew*, Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives", and Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*. This chapter focuses on the terrain of sexual difference that, though less conspicuous, is more viciously framed than dermatological difference. I apply the concept of frames to explore how heteronormativity pathologises, criminalises, sexualises, and genders the gay subculture in Madanhire's novel. Then, I demonstrate, through a reading of Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives" how creative writers may perpetuate the homophobic culture by writing within the heteronormative frame. Lastly, I discuss how Huchu humanises same-sex desire by adopting an outside-the-frame positionality. The chapter argues that while the narration of same-sex desire takes place in a strictly controlled imaginative space, mainstreaming it helps to develop an all-inclusive ethic of sexuality that ultimately humanises persons of non-normative sexual orientation. This, in turn, validates my guiding assumption that all marginalising impulses leave spaces for pushback and strategic surrender.

Chapter 6—Subverting misogyny: the politics of re-articulation in Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again* and Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter For My Daughter*. This chapter evaluates the efficacy of herstory in de-gendering national memory and terms of belonging. I draw on Adichie's concept of "the dangers of a single story" (2009) to explore how Maraire's and Chigumadzi's works problematise monolithic understandings of Zimbabweanness and to critique and complicate what I see as herstory's single-eyed perspective that tends to perpetuate the single-story discursive tradition. Finally, the chapter argues that while herstory offers opportunities for destabilising the privileging of masculinity, its reliance on and reactive approach to (his)tory sometimes makes it a monolithic, toxic, and precarious discourse. Thus, the chapter demonstrates both the paradoxical power of gendered oppression and the messiness of the politics of radical refusal.

Chapter 7—Possibilities and limits of precarious aesthetics. This chapter serves as the thesis's conclusion. It sums up key findings, including offering a distilled context-specific evaluation of the possibilities and limits of a precarious aesthetic. The chapter also gestures at possible future interventions on the representation of precarity in Zimbabwean literature.

CHAPTER 2
RADICAL VULNERABILITY IN MLALAZI'S *RUNNING WITH MOTHER* AND TSHUMA'S *HOUSE OF STONE*

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deploys the lens of radical vulnerability to explore the existential strategies adopted by *Gukurahundi* victims in Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012) and Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018). Radical vulnerability denotes a liberation praxis that mobilises a shared sense of insecurity into a creative force (McLaughlin, 2017; Bury, 2019; Schwartz, 2020). While the term radical vulnerability has been deployed in various contexts,[18] I largely draw conceptual inspiration from Nagar and Shirazi (2019) who theorise it in the context of the collective search for gender freedom by Indian transgender farmers and labourers. They define radical vulnerability as the collective formulation (co-authoring) and advancement towards (co-journeying) a dream of emancipation by a marginalised social group. They see this collective quest as a product of a shared hunger for justice (hungry translations), which is "a politically aware submission to one another to become a 'we' that also struggles to overcome intense mistrust, bitterness, hatred, or suspicion at times". This implies that co-journeying does not necessarily erase individual differences but demands that the participants subordinate their differences to an ideal of oneness (situated solidarity), aptly described as a "blended but fractured we". However, Nagar and Shirazi note that while there is always something positive to come out of co-journeying, there is no guarantee of arrival as there is no prior experience ('field manual') to guide co-travellers (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 236–39).

The notions of hungry translations and situated solidarity inform my reading of ways in which realisations of shared vulnerability promote radical thinking among *Gukurahundi* victims, enabling them to forge intra- and intergroup solidarity networks. In Mlalazi's novel, Mamvura (Shona) and Auntie Jamela (Ndebele) realise that they must set aside ethnic differences to build an intersubjective space as they flee from their besieged village. In *House of Stone*, the idea of

[18] The concept of radical vulnerability has been deployed in various contexts. For example, Schwartz (2020) applies it to a reparative reading of ways in which camera 'selfies' (self-portraits) posted by individuals on social media platforms such as Instagram can be read as metaphors of feminine resistance capable of reorienting understandings of femininity and femme identities. Bury (2019) writes about radical vulnerability in the context of disability studies and contends that social media kinships established by persons with disability can radically open new horizons of possibility and positively transform perceptions about disability. In these works, vulnerability has been invariably understood as a generative force.

co-journeying is evoked, among other things, by the Mthwakazi Secessionist Movement's pursuit of a dream of a peaceful Mthwakazi Republic. The term 'secessionist' mobilises confrontation that forms the essence of radical refusal. Taking my cue from Nagar and Shirazi's claim that co-journeying is fraught with uncertainties, the chapter also evaluates the possibilities and limits of intergroup coalition politics in both novels. Overall, the lens of radical vulnerability enabled me to conceptualise how the protagonists in Mlalazi's and Tshuma's novels subvert conventional understandings of vulnerability as "weakness, softness, permeability, a sense of being affected, imprinted upon or entered and shattered" (Dahl, 2017: 41). Thus, the texts aestheticize and reorient the meaning of vulnerability.

Co-journeying is a complex praxis that occurs across sundry discursive platforms, "disrupting such categories as writer, educator, activist, artist, farmer, and labourer" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 240). I draw on this premise to classify Mlalazi and Tshuma as co-authors of a transgenerational ethnic sensibility that demands justice for *Gukurahundi* victims. That is, they engage the literary front to subvert institutionalised restrictions on the *Gukurahundi* subject[19] and to illuminate the victims' undying spirits in the face of dehumanisation. I propose that *Running with Mother* and *House of Stone* celebrate radical vulnerability as something that creates "possibility in the space of enclosure", to borrow from Hartman (2019: 33). In this chapter, radical vulnerability becomes a key aspect of precarious aesthetics.

This chapter builds on existing literature on *Gukurahundi* and the weaponisation of vulnerability[20] to explore text-specific ways in which the precariat in studied texts cultivates a culture of survival and being. As a point of departure, I examine the regenerative potential of *Gukurahundi* victims through the lens of radical vulnerability as theorised by Nagar and Shirazi (2019). This is to support my claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to expand an understanding of the cultural practices that produce and sustain precarity.

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[19] The state has systematically silenced the *Gukurahundi* issue. Besides former Minister Moven Mahachi who acknowledged state responsibility for the genocide (*The Sunday Mail*, 6 September 1992), the government has generally maintained a position of denialism. Out of self-censorship, Zimbabwean writers have generally skirted the subject.

[20] This literature includes studies that explore the literary memorialisation of *Gukurahundi* as a vital step towards national healing (Mdlongwa, Moyo & Ncube, 2015; Ncube & Siziba, 2017; Mangena, 2019); studies that examine the nexus between ethnicity and military masculinities (Muchemwa, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007); and those that analyse the regenerative potential of marginalized social groups (Musila, 2007).

Structurally, this chapter has three subsections. The first (Section 2.2) is informed by Nagar and Shirazi's (2019) claim that writing is a form of co-travelling. It singles out two aspects of Mlalazi's and Tshuma's writing strategies – repackaging of history and use of melodramatic elements – to illustrate how the two authors situate themselves as co-authors and co-performers in an ongoing anti-*Gukurahundi* narrative. The section argues that the literary front can serve as a potent solidarity tool for advancing existential struggles in the margins. The second section (Section 2.3) explores how precarity necessitates the dissolution of categories to create intersubjective spaces where individuals get subsumed under collective identities. The focus is on how the flight from the site of harm by Mlalazi's protagonists becomes a metaphorical journeying to a sublime existential philosophy. The section lays the foundation for my discussion (in Section 2.4) of modes of co-journeying that emerge in the aftermath of *Gukurahundi*. The third section (Section 2.4) offers a context-specific evaluation of radical vulnerability as liberation praxis in *House of Stone*. Drawing on Nagar and Shirazi's claim that "there will never be a field manual to 'correctly' undertake this journey" (2019: 242), I examine the possibilities and limits of co-journeying through the prisms of Zamani and Mthwakazi Secession Movement's reinvention ethics. The section argues that despite its promises, co-journeying is messy and offers no guarantee of arrival.

2.2 Writing as co-journeying

Running with Mother and *House of Stone* problematise the official grain by retrieving the suppressed *Gukurahundi* narrative and de-gendering nation narration. The *Gukurahundi* narrative has forerunners in prose fiction, such as Chenjerai Hove's *Shadows* (1991) and Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002); autobiographies, such as Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* (2001); documentary films, such as Zenzele Ndebele's *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness* (2008); and nonfictional reports such as the Catholic Commission on Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe report on *Gukurahundi, Breaking the Silence* (1997). All these texts resist what Muchemwa (2005: 196) calls "the slipping into oblivion of unacknowledged unspoken and unwritten traumas of history" and, therefore, reinforce the view that writers are strategically positioned to co-travel with marginalised social groups "as co-critics and co-performers who co-own authority, insights, and courage" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 241). Here, I explore how Mlalazi and Tshuma repackage history and deploy melodramatic elements towards co-authoring and co-editing a counter-hegemonic narrative in which generations of *Gukurahundi* victims continue to participate.

Running with Mother chronicles the experiences of the fourteen-year-old narrator (Rudo Jamela), her mother (Mamvura) and Auntie (Auntie Jamela) as they flee from Mbongolo Village in the Saphela area of Kezi District of Matebeleland. State soldiers have ostensibly come to hunt down Ndebele 'dissidents' but end up indiscriminately targeting all Ndebele people. Among the atrocities are the burning of homes and the torture and killing of innocent and defenceless civilians. The novel ends with the protagonists going to seek refuge in the city of Bulawayo. *House of Stone*, written close to four decades after the *Gukurahundi* operation, foregrounds the story of Zamani, a twenty-four-year-old tenant at Abednego Mlambo's house. The narrative revolves around Zamani's efforts to resolve an identity crisis that stems from not knowing his parents. His strategy entails appropriating the personal histories of his landlords (the Mlambos) in order to integrate himself into a stable family. The novel's subplot recounts *Gukurahundi* atrocities and the survivors' adaptational mechanisms that include the pursuit of a secessionist agenda aimed at establishing an autonomous Ndebele republic called Mthwakazi.

Both Mlalazi and Tshuma narrate *Gukurahundi* from an ethnic positionality (as Ndebele authors). By participating in a collectively owned ethnic narrative from the literary front, they validate Nagar and Shirazi's (2019: 240) assertion that co-journeying is a complex praxis that occurs across sundry discursive sites, social groups, and professions that are all united by a shared hungering for justice. In that intersubjective space, the place of the intellectually privileged is described as follows:

> For those of us located in the academy, a desire to partake in, and contribute to, such hungry translations requires that we do not merely travel to the Othered worlds that form the basis of our knowledge claims. Rather this desire comes with the responsibility to embed ourselves in the relationships and hopes that form our entwined worlds, so that that which has been Othered in dominant imaginaries may emerge differently in our consciousness and conscience and in our ways of being. By enabling a continuous and deeply difficult process of unlearning and relearning, such a process can become a politics without guarantees that is dedicated to continuous becoming. This openness to continuous unfolding of politics is key in disrupting pre-formed proposals about "the social" as well as formulations that compartmentalise research, writing, art, engagement, and activism. (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 241)

Here, Nagar and Shirazi highlight the unity of purpose that binds the common man and those in academia (including the literary artist) in pursuing a co-owned dream of emancipation. This frames my discussion below.

For Mlalazi and Tshuma, participating in the anti-*Gukurahundi* narrative entails challenging state-sponsored silence on the *Gukurahundi* issue, especially in the nation's monolithic if not ethnic partisan history.[21] The two authors tap into existing historical archives to project counter-narratives that not only seek to defiantly dream *Gukurahundi* victims into existence but also to keep their transgenerational spirit of refusal alive. Both texts are unique in fictional prose in their degree of historical specificity. *Running with Mother* simulates a real-time narration of *Gukurahundi* atrocities that include the rape of Rudo's friends, the torture of teachers and nurses, the burning of homes, and the indiscriminate killing of people. Similar episodes are narrated elsewhere in local oral discourses, on social media platforms, in filmic texts, such as Ndebele's *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness* (2003), and in written texts, such as Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* and the Catholic Commission on Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe's report *Breaking the Silence* (1997). The intertextual connections signal the co-authoring of a counter-hegemonic *Gukurahundi* narrative across genres, which underlines what Lara (1999) describes as the "illocutionary power" of combined voices in challenging oppressive ideologies.

In an interview with Fungai Machirori, Mlalazi claims that *Running with Mother* is driven by an urgent moral responsibility "to lance a boil that is suppurating in the national psyche" as there are "people out there still searching for answers to what happened to their wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, and children" (cited in Machirori, 2013 np.). Here, Mlalazi suggests that he is not only fictionalising *Gukurahundi* history to address an ongoing national problem but also to assert his co-participation in the collective search for answers. His commitment to the shared dream dovetails with the view that co-journeying demands "an intense relationality and co-ownership of dreams among those who occupy different locations in predominant epistemic and sociopolitical hierarchies" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 239). Thus, in agitating for justice on the *Gukurahundi* issue, Mlalazi joins hands with a heterogeneous group of co-fighters.

House of Stone is also rich in historical content. Its title invokes the ancient polity of Great Zimbabwe, which has retained a special place in the narrative of the nation, as attested by

[21] In Zimbabwe's strictly controlled nation narration space, one must write patriotic history in order to be accepted as a historian. See, Ranger, T. O. 2005. Rule by Historiography: The Struggle over the Past in Contemporary Zimbabwe. In: Muponde, R. and Primorac, R. eds. 2005. *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture*, pp. 217–243.

poems such as “Zimbabwe” and “The stone speaks” in Musaemura Zimunya’s anthology *Thought-Tracks* (1982). In her counter-narrative, Tshuma redeploys the stone imagery to signify what has gone wrong in the nation so that the overall impression is that this stone is weatherable and has become a ruin in the literal sense of the term; this is in sharp contrast to the image of sturdiness conjured up by the dry-stack masonry of Great Zimbabwe. Muponde reinforces this negative sense of ‘house of stone’ when he defines the phrase in the context of contemporary Zimbabwe:

> There are two enduring images of the postcolonial nation: one, of *a house of stone* built on shifting foundations; two, of *the house of stone* in flames being fanned into a conflagration by the aged founding father of the house. (Muponde, 2015a: 145. Emphasis mine)

Although Muponde makes this analogy in the context of the “destruction of childhoods” (2015a: 147), his observation parallels the stark human ‘disposability’ foregrounded in *House of Stone*. Tshuma consciously redeploys the house of stone imagery to show how ethnonationalism has driven the Ndebele ethnic group from the “ancestral house”, to borrow from Muchemwa (2005: 195). For Tshuma, the ancestral house needs rebranding (an issue that I explore at length in Section 2.4 where I discuss the idea of secession).

House of Stone has numerous references to events and names that evoke memories of *Gukurahundi*. For example, the name Bhalagwe refers to a camp in the Matobo District of Matebeleland South where, according to Eppel (2004: 45), thousands of Ndebele people were tortured and killed. The name Black Jesus (the name of the Fifth Brigade commander in the novel) is linked to the late Perrance Shiri who led the military operation. The novel refers to the historical fact of Black Jesus’ knighting by the Royal College of Defence Studies in Britain in 1987 (Tshuma, 2018: 161). Mugabe was also knighted by the Queen at a time when genocidal violence was ravaging parts of Matebeleland and the Midlands. Tshuma highlights this ironic gesture to expose the complicit collaboration between the British Government and the Robert Mugabe-run ZANU-PF government. Emphasising such a historical fact serves to sustain the victims’ collective bitterness against state brutality, which is necessary for the process of hungry translations. Tshuma achieves the same effect by drawing a sharp contrast between Black Jesus’s stark ruthlessness and the saviour identity that his Christian name suggests. Therefore, despite his declaration that “I am Jesus Christ. He who followeth me drinketh from the well of Life” (Tshuma, 2018: 150), the novel foregrounds the most irrational aspects of Black Jesus’s behaviour, including raping and killing innocent women such as

Zamani's mother. Like *Running with Mother*, *House of Stone* does not refer to any dissident activity, which reduces *Gukurahundi* to senseless aggression, quite contrary to the official version that projects it as an operation meant to eliminate political dissidents bent on destabilising the country's newfound independence. This deliberate repackaging of history, while creating another grand narrative, is necessary for boosting the collective hungering for justice, which is a precondition for co-journeying.

Considering the above, I argue that Mlalazi's and Tshuma's reliance on historical archives enables their novels to etch the fact of *Gukurahundi* into the minds of denialists and, by extension, to remind them that silence is not an option (Cf. Ngwenya, 2014; Murambadoro, 2015; Alexander, 2021). The technique also lends a mimetic, documentary outlook to the two novels, evoking what Baker (2018: 6) describes as "factographic" fiction. That mode of writing has the (de)merit of creating the impression that everything in the texts is real, and this enables Mlalazi and Tshuma to fuse verifiable historical events with fictional ones. This is evident in the way both novels privilege a contested ethnic dimension that reduces *Gukurahundi* to an almost Shona versus Ndebele issue (Cf. Mangena, 2015).[22] For example, Captain Finish (the commander of the Fifth Brigade soldiers in *Running with Mother*) categorically states that "this is a matter for the Ndebele people only" (Mlalazi, 2012: 9). What we see is, therefore, the creation of another version of historical truth that, though occluding insights on the aboutness and whyness of the genocide, serves as a necessary ingredient for the co-authoring of a vision of emancipation that is founded on a shared sense of having been unjustifiably wronged. Thus, Mlalazi's and Tshuma's narratives must necessarily depict *Gukurahundi* as senseless violence while at the same time unequivocally fingering the culprits to create a rallying point for the victims.[23] In light of that, the two narratives evoke what the postmodernist French social theorist Jean Baudrillard (1995) describes as the "hyperreal", which is a piece of art that is not

[22] Many scholars contested the position that *Gukurahundi* was an ethnic conflict. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012: 7) observes that *Gukurahundi* was deployed as a political tool meant to destroy Joshua Nkomo and his ZAPU party. He adds that *Gukurahundi* is still being deployed as "a strategy of annihilating all those opposed to the *Chimurenga* ideology and to ZANU-PF hegemony".

[23] When the *Gukurahundi* operation officially ended with the signing of a Unity Accord in December 1987, the government conferred a blanket amnesty to all Gukurahundists in 1988. The government treated *Gukurahundi* atrocities as war crimes perpetrated by armed combatants on either side. See, Eppel, 2004. Gukurahundi: The need for truth and reparation. In: B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage (eds). *Zimbabwe Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, pp. 43–62.

a copy of the real but one that is truth in its own right and inhabiting the virtual space between historical truth and resemblance to truth.

Running with Mother and *House of Stone* also deploy melodramatic elements to accentuate their protagonists' radical vulnerability. The term 'melodrama' usually refers to a play in which events, actions, emotions, and behaviours are luridly expressed or blown out of proportion. Here, I use the adjectival form, melodramatic, to describe what I see as leanings toward extravagant theatricality in both novels. In *House of Stone*, such extravagance is evident in Zamani's reinvention strategy that entails violently extracting the personal histories of his landlords, Abednego and Mama Agnes, sometimes torturing them into submission when they fail to comply. Driven by the motto "*show no mercy*" (Tshuma, 2018: 343. Emphasis in original), Zamani sells out his landlords' only son (Bukhosi) to state agents so that he can supplant the boy's position in the family. In Zamani's sadistic mentality, the end justifies the means. In an interview with Brian Chikwava, Tshuma draws parallels between Zamani and the "delightfully provocative anti-hero" in Stanley Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980) as well as the "bizarre, nihilistic" narrator in Dambudzo Marechera's *House of Hunger* (1978; Tshuma, cited in Chikwava, 2018: 47). The point of convergence for the three protagonists is their disregard for codes of formal behaviour as a strategy for reclaiming freedom in inhospitable contexts. This buttresses the view that norms and etiquette are likely to be broken as characters pursue livelihoods in hostile situations (Mlambo, N., 2013). Zamani's eccentric and bohemian lifestyle demonstrates that the politics of refusal does not always proceed along ethical or normative lines. Tshuma deploys such a character to enhance refusal politics in a context where normative behaviour would fail.

Zamani's enigmatic leanings invoke 'fabulation' ethics that Scholes (1967) develops from the magical realist genre in which the real and the fantastic and the probable and improbable are fused in ways that blur their margins. One of the features of magical realism is that "the reader may experience some unsettling doubts" (Faris, 2004: 7) as the boundaries between reality and fiction are ruptured. Faris further associates magical realism with protest literature, which underscores intricate connections between magical realism and politics of refusal. I am neither reading *House of Stone* as a magical realist text, nor am I placing Tshuma in the same category as prototypical magical realist writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Alejo Carpentier, Frantz Kafka, Ben Okri and Salman Rushdie. Rather, I am interested in the kinship between magical realism's radical displacement of impossibility and the way Zamani deploys his

outlandish character to reinvent himself in the face of a crippling identity crisis. Through Zamani's ability to co-opt his landlords as co-travellers in his self-reconstitution journey, Tshuma shows that sometimes radical vulnerability operates on a "turbulent terrain" characterised by "critical convergences and divergences in the positions and aspirations of those who commit to walking together" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 237). In a way, Tshuma reminds other participants in the intra-ethnic co-journey that constructing an ethic of togetherness sometimes requires participants to dispense with etiquette.

In *Running with Mother*, Mlalazi deploys melodramatic elements to aid human agency. Such elements include the mysterious escape of the baby (Gift) from the inferno that kills his parents and siblings, as well as from the raging torrents of the flooded Ngwizi River. Similarly, Auntie Jamela providentially escapes the gunfire that destroys Uncle Ndoro (Siyahamba Bus Service driver) and the teachers from Godlwayo Secondary School. She also miraculously survives a mortal fall down a precipice in the Phezulu Mountains. These melodramatic episodes are reminiscent of the incredible escapes of Macandal in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* (1957) or of the preternatural flights of Kamiti in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2007). Both novels have often been categorised as magical realist texts. It turns out that Auntie Jamela's fatal fall serves as a *Deus ex machine* because she loses the faculty of speech in a context where it is dangerous to speak her language (Ndebele) and where the Fifth Brigade soldiers have turned the Shona language, which she could not speak, into a shibboleth. Therefore, Mlalazi uses Auntie Jamela's melodramatic mishaps and the subsequent support she receives from Mamvura to send a message to other co-travellers about the need to dispense with "the notion of a self-reliant subjectivity" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 239) and cultivate interdependency with those who might be seen as outsiders (as represented by Mamvura).

It can be argued, therefore, that Mlalazi and Tshuma deploy their texts as discursive platforms for advancing an ethnic-based co-journeying towards a vision of emancipation. The focus has been on how the two authors repackage history and deploy melodramatic elements to assert their solidarity with *Gukurahundi victims*. Their narratives have been read as imaginative sites where vulnerability is celebrated and where the protagonists participate in co-critiquing and co-owning visions of emancipation. The next section explores radical vulnerability in *Running with Mother* through the prisms of hungry translations and situated solidarities.

2.3 Hungry translations and situated solidarities in *Running with Mother*

Running with Mother is an imaginative expression of the liberatory power of the human capacity to forge support networks, collapse identity borders, and maintain positivity in the face of adversity. The story of Rudo, Mamvura, Auntie and Gift's escape offers a context-specific performance of radical vulnerability that allows us to see the flourishing of humanity within a hostile context. Among other gestures, the protagonists surrender themselves to one another in ways that invoke the notion of situated solidarity, conceptualised by Nagar and Shirazi as "an ontology of togetherness" that enables people to embark on an exercise of shared refusal without necessarily reducing their differences to "sameness" (2019: 238).

That Mlalazi emphasises the ethnic dimension of *Gukurahundi* is evident from the outset. Besides Captain Finish's statement that they are only targeting Ndebele people, Mamvura reports that "The soldiers said they're just killing all the Ndebele people" (Mlalazi, 2012: 9, 17). Although Mamvura is Shona, she immediately learns that she and Rudo (who has a Ndebele father and a Shona mother) are also susceptible to harm as they inhabit a zone that is earmarked for punishment, what Butler would describe as a zone of "derealization of loss" (2004: 148). It becomes clear that although the soldiers purport to be after 'dissidents', their broad definition of dissidents includes innocent villagers. Given such a scenario, Mamvura and the surviving members of the Jamela family (to which she is married) must rely on togetherness and ingenuity for survival. This realisation of shared vulnerability translates to hungry translations that enable Mamvura, Rudo and Auntie Jamela to commit themselves to an ethic of togetherness.

Mlalazi shows us that the displacement of the novel's protagonists from their village calls forth survival instincts that could not have surfaced under stable circumstances. This scenario bolsters the view that a fragile existence causes "a shift in causal thinking from necessity to contingency, from certainty and probability to uncertainty and possibility" (Botha, 2014: 3). Their collective sense of insecurity creates a strong bond among them, especially between Mamvura and Auntie whose relationship has been characterised by a mild tension. Rudo tells us,

> Mother and Auntie are always arguing, especially when Auntie is drunk. I think, sometimes, that they don't like each other. When Auntie is drunk she often assumes a superior attitude and says mother and I are rat-eating people. (Mlalazi, 2012: 25)

The previous domestic quarrels between Mamvura and Auntie symbolise ethnic polarisation at the national level, especially between the Ndebeles and the Shonas whose conflicts date back to precolonial times when the Shonas were raided by the Ndebeles. Auntie Jamela's reference to Shonas as 'rat-eating people' has overtones of prejudice and supremacism that are often associated with the "in-group" (Nnoli, 2007: 75). The pejorative tag "rat-eating people" is a misnomer since in the Shona tradition rats ("*makonzo*") are not edible. This prejudicial use of language is a case of "symbolic violence" in which language is used to undermine the other by "reducing it to a single feature" (Žižek, 2008: 61). Although the Shonas constitute an ethnic majority in Zimbabwe, in the besieged Mbongolo Village they constitute a minority. Auntie's assumption of a superior attitude towards Mamvura can also be read as a performance of female patriarchy, a common tendency in patriarchal societies whereby aunties adopt the position of honorary husbands towards their brothers' wives.

Following the sudden change of circumstances in Mbongolo Village, being Shona becomes a passport to survival. It is that realisation that suddenly transforms Auntie's attitude towards Mamvura. Considering Auntie Jamela's previous prejudices against Shona people, her sudden change of attitude towards Mamvura invokes Nagar and Shirazi's definition of situated solidarity as "a politically aware submission to one another to become a 'we' that also struggles to overcome intense mistrust, bitterness, hatred, or suspicion at times" (2019: 238). Thus, at one moment, we are told: "Auntie was pressing her face in mother's skirt, seeking comfort, and mother had her hands on Auntie's shoulder, giving it" (Mlalazi, 2012: 25). What is evident here is how a moment of desperation brings about mutual understanding between the two women. Auntie's attitudinal change is confirmed by her confession to Mamvura towards the end of the novel: "I realise that I've never fully accepted you" (Mlalazi, 2012: 108), after which Auntie goes on to eat a mouse that she has personally hunted. Whether eating a mouse signals genuine transformation in her or reaffirms the stereotype that Shona people are rat eaters, the situational context renders it a gesture of reconciliation. It might be argued that Auntie Jamela's transformation is merely a situational gesture that, to borrow from Nagar and Shirazi, only "dares to imagine past these divides, without ever dismissing them" (2019: 238).

However, the newfound alliance between Mamvura and Auntie Jamela, set against conflictual ethnic backgrounds, bolsters Fenton's (2003) contention that ethnic relations are fluid social constructs, subject to reconstitution. This new pact symbolically spells the possibility of viable interethnic alliances in Zimbabwe. It also buttresses the claim that co-journeying "emanate[s]

from an intense relationality and co-ownership of dreams among those who occupy different locations in predominant epistemic and sociopolitical hierarchies" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 239). Such relationality and co-ownership of dreams are represented here by Mamvura and Auntie Jamela whose situated solidarity also demonstrates the power of forging intersubjective spaces and of surrendering the self to the collective. According to Nagar and Shirazi, to 'surrender' is "to put faith in something or someone [which] does not mean loss of power, or acquiescence to being dominated" but "an affirmation of the generative political possibilities of vulnerability" (2019: 239). The novel makes it clear that the protagonists' survival is not only contingent on their journeying together but also on their preparedness to unlearn the narratives that had previously divided them.

Among other symbolic gestures, Mamvura calls for interethnic solidarity by accommodating teachers from Godlwayo Secondary School in the Phezulu Mountains, besides offering them her dresses to cover their nakedness. Contrary to Mamvura's kindness, Mkandla, the Ndebele history teacher, turns violent against her and forces her out of the cave. Mkandla holds a stereotypical view of all Shonas as responsible for *Gukurahundi* atrocities and that blinds him from realising opportunities for productive interaction with them. More importantly, through Mkandla's reaction, Mlalazi presents ethnocentrism as a negative force that scuttles efforts at forging coalition politics and, by extension, national cohesion.

The symbolic behaviours of Mamvura, Auntie, and Mkandla demonstrate both the possibilities and limits of radical vulnerability in the broader national context. Through Mkandla's senseless rage, Mlalazi demonstrates the odds that are stacked against the formation of intergroup alliances, which Nagar and Shirazi refer to as "[t]he rips and fissures that we live and embody [that] emerge from our inherited histories and geographies. Rather than being forgotten or vanquished, it is these fractures that ground the work of building" (2019: 237). Thus, the history of conflict between the Shonas and the Ndebeles continues to undermine opportunities for interethnic solidarities. Mkandla also embodies the tendency of violence to turn the victim into an agent for its replication, sometimes resulting in what Riches (1986) describes as the blurring of the perpetrator-victim divide. By contrast, Mamvura's calculated calm in the face of crisis and provocation beckons us towards an alternative gynocentric philosophy of life that is suggested by the titular words 'running with mother'. That is, Mlalazi seems to be suggesting that it is by journeying with mother (and not with father) that we can be assured of safe arrival. This resonates with what, elsewhere, Musila (2013) views as failed fatherhood at national,

local, familial, and religious levels. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Mlalazi chooses Mamvura to be his mouthpiece.

The spate of mishaps that happen within the space of a week leads Mamvura into a transitory soul-reaching reflection in which she laments how the country has descended into moral blindness:

> This country is for everybody: the Shona, the Ndebele, Kalanga, Venda, Tonga, Suthu and all the other tribes that live within our borders, even the whites, the Indians, the Chinese, coloureds, everybody. Isn't this why we went to war?" (Mlalazi, 2012: 108)

Here, Mamvura laments what Kaulemu sees as the Zimbabwean government's flawed "moral vision" that fails to "take moral responsibility for people with different backgrounds, history and orientation" (2011: 5). It is against this background of this politics of exclusion that Mamvura articulates the novel's ethical vision which is premised on the view that instead of promoting interethnic conflict, Zimbabwe's multi-ethnic character should inspire ethnic groups to work in harmony towards national development (cf. Msindo, 2007). Such a vision resonates with Bassey and Oshita's (2007: 75) contention that although ethnic consciousness is often expressed through "political domination, economic exploitation, psychological expression and class manipulation", it does not have to automatically lead to ethnic rivalry. Eriksen (1993: 118) conceptualises an ideal scenario of a "polyethnic or supra-ethnic ideology" characterised by the subordination of shared cultural origins to "shared civil rights". This is the ideology that former President Mugabe had promised to uphold in independent Zimbabwe (Mlambo, A.S., 2013).

Viewed against Mkandla's ethnocentrism, Mamvura's integrative vision points to superior moral wisdom hinged on the need to transcend ethnic borders. Her name, which means 'water', symbolises the fluidity of identities which should make interethnic alliances possible. According to Mangena, water stands for "the foundation and basis of life" (2017: 97).[24] This symbolically underscores her moral purity which contrasts sharply with the wickedness of the Shona soldiers manning the *Gukurahundi* operation.

[24] This positive sense of the name 'Mamvura' is contradicted in the writings of Paul Mwazha, the leader and founder of the Vapostora VeAfrika sect. He was named Mamvura at birth because the children before him died at birth and, in step with traditional practice concerning people who die at that age, were buried without public ceremony on the riverbank.

Situated solidarity cannot be discussed in isolation from the idea of border transgression which entails the act of moving out of an inhibitive or hostile identity location. Nagar and Shirazi (2019) observe that border crossing has always been an inherent aspect of human life. *Running with Mother* depicts ethnic and gender borders as conflictual sites and suggests that ethnic polarisation can be neutralised through hybrid identities. Rudo, who has a Ndebele father and a Shona mother, provides an immediate case study in that regard when she escapes the fate that befalls her friends in chapter three due to her Shona name and ability to speak Shona that give the soldiers the impression that she is Shona.

Given the above, Rudo inhabits a safe in-between space that invokes Bhabha's (1994) conception of hybridity as a site of power. Arguing in the context of postcolonial and postmodern nation-spaces, Bhabha contends that one way of transcending crippling cultural legacies is to move from the poles of identity locations and inhabit "in-between" spaces, which he also calls "interstices" or "liminal" spaces. He further argues that it is in such spaces that new, hybrid identities can be negotiated, and new selfhoods constructed. Bhabha invokes the liberating potential of border transgression through his epigraph (from Martin Heidegger): "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing"* (1994: 1). The implication here is that borders are totalising and need to be transgressed. Therefore, through Rudo's hybrid identity, Mlalazi projects a moral vision that locates freedom in the space beyond present ethnic demarcations. The novel suggests that hybridity disrupts the 'Us' and 'Them' "dichotomous thinking" (Hooper, 2001) that promotes othering tendencies.

In *Running with Mother*, Mlalazi blurs ethnic borders in ways that underscore their fluidity. Examples include the exogamous marriage of Uncle Genesis Jamela to a Xhosa woman (Madube) and that of Mamvura (who is Shona) to Innocent Jamela who is Ndebele. Uncle Ndoro, who is also Shona, further demonstrates the porousness of ethnic borders by driving a Siyahamba Bus that plies the Bulawayo-Kezi route. Equally significant is the case of Miss Grant, an expatriate from Scotland who teaches at Godlwayo Secondary School. The presence of outsiders in a Ndebele territory[25] symbolically translates to the possibility of mutually

[25] In Zimbabwe, ethnic borders are both social and territorial demarcations. Zimbabwean ethnic identities are largely space-bound, with Ndebele speaking people mainly located in Matebeleland Province.

beneficial interethnic and interracial alliances (Cf. Mangena, 2015: 89). It also bolsters the claim that ethnic boundaries "do not isolate groups entirely from each other" (Eriksen, 1993: 39). Outside the text, the case of Enos Nkala, a Ndebele former Minister of Defence in the mid-1980s, also complicates the issue of ethnic borders as he was partly responsible for *Gukurahundi* atrocities. Mlalazi exploits these complexities to reject ethnocentrism and demonstrate the collapsibility of ethnic borders.

By emphasising the fluidity of ethnic identities, Mlalazi shows that identities are not carapaces that should detain people from forging solidarity alliances. That is, culturally constructed identities should be discarded when they are no longer tenable. In his examination of the politics of Ndebele ethnicity, Lindgren (2002) notes that at one time, in the middle of the *Gukurahundi* massacres, Joshua Nkomo renounced his Ndebeleness in favour of a Kalanga identity when it was no longer safe to identify as Ndebele. This illustrates how ethnic identities can be embraced or exited in step with the exigencies of the moment.

As intimated earlier, the idea of co-journeying in *Running with Mother* is largely realised at a metaphorical level, where hungry translations speak through the protagonists' shared sense of vulnerability and their collective hungering for escape. Their ability to transcend a history of distrust to create an intersubjective space exemplifies situated solidarities. However, we do not see a premeditated co-journeying towards a perceived destination or a vision of emancipation such as the one undertaken by the Indian transgender farmers (*dalit kisans*) and labourers (*mazdoors*) in Nagar and Shirazi's (2019) account. Nevertheless, *Running with Mother* offers an aesthetic experience that leaves one with pertinent questions: "What possibilities might we unlock by travelling together to forge a shared vision of justice and what kind of sacrifices might such co-travelling entail?" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 237). Answers to these questions are found in the protagonists' metaphorical journey towards an alternative, all-inclusive Zimbabwe.

The events of the last scenes of *Running with Mother* evoke what Nagar and Shirazi (2019) see as the tendency of co-journeying to sustain the co-travellers' dream of arrival without particularly guaranteeing an arrival. Optimism plays a central role in sustaining Mamvura's dream of a violence-free Zimbabwe. That optimism is evident, first, in her naïve belief that the soldiers' atrocious acts are an act of indiscipline and that stiff penalties will be meted out against them when the Prime Minister is back from his overseas trip. She remarks confidently: "Government soldiers are trained and disciplined, and wouldn't go around burning up people

and children in their homes" (Mlalazi, 2012: 32–33). Here, Mamvura invokes the myth of integrity that was associated with freedom fighters during the war, as articulated by the liberation song "Nzira Dzemasoja". This fallacy is, however, exposed in many works that include Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997), Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), and Nhongo-Simbanegavi's *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (2000). These works expose the unwarranted tortures, killings and rape that were committed by (especially male) freedom fighters but omitted from the mainstream liberation narrative. Mamvura is disillusioned when Mkandla reports that the soldiers are committing the crimes with the blessing of the Prime Minister (Robert Mugabe). Nevertheless, she continues to dream about a peaceful Zimbabwe. Interestingly, however, Rudo's doubt-ridden questions, "What did the future hold for us? Would things ever be normal again?" (Mlalazi, 2012: 98), are still relevant today as Mamvura's dream continues to be deferred.[26]

The elusiveness of Mamvura's dream is also symbolically suggested by the fact that the story ends before the protagonists reach a place of safety. The incompleteness of the journey symbolises the uncertainties of co-journeying as a liberation praxis. The fascinating paradox, however, is that Mamvura and her remaining family members finally get assistance from their tormentors (the soldiers) who give them a ride to Bulawayo City. This gesture symbolises the possibility of arriving at a post-ethnic moment where ethnicity ceases to be a cardinal differential in the construction of national identity, especially considering that Mamvura, Auntie Jamela and Rudo represent different ethnic identities. Therefore, despite the aura of uncertainty that surrounds the protagonists' journey, they manage to keep afloat, buoyed by the prospect of a bright future. This is evident in Rudo's hope that she will one day be able to meet her father, "if not in this life, then maybe in another" (Mlalazi, 2012: 140). It is through such positivity that people can live, as Sharpe (2016: 127) would say, "in the immanence of death". According to the psychotherapists Skynner and Cleese (1996), anticipation or imaginative speculation about the future is a motivating force that helps one to transcend

[26] Writing in 2009, three years before the publication of *Running with Mother* (2012), Kizito Muchemwa describes Zimbabwe as "a country characterized by absence of beauty, hatred, lack of moderation, insanity, and a surprising capacity for the tragically absurd". (Muchemwa, cited in Eppel, 2009: xiii). This description is as valid today as it was in 2009.

adversity. The ending of the novel on a positive note is reminiscent of the formulaic folktale ending where the promise is made that the protagonists will live happily ever after.

This subsection has explored the representation of radical vulnerability in *Running with Mother* through Nagar and Shirazi's notions of hungry translations and situated solidarity. The behaviour of Mlalazi's protagonists in the face of adversity buttresses the view that literature provides an aperture for envisioning hope and enables us not only "to imagine a future, but also to engage proactively with an imagined future" (Botha, 2014: 10). However, because the novel only focuses on the onset of *Gukurahundi*, it denies us an opportunity to see politics of refusal in the aftermath of the genocide. Such politics is explored in the next section that examines radical vulnerability in the afterlife of the genocide as depicted in *House of Stone*.

2.4 Co-journeying without a field manual

House of Stone offers an intricate transhistorical perspective on precarity. Unlike *Running with Mother* which simulates a real-time narration of *Gukurahundi*, *House of Stone* retrospectively narrates the experience and foregrounds its enduring effects. This enables us to see the performance of radical vulnerability in the genocide's afterlife. In the novel, Zamani personifies the identity crisis that haunts many *Gukurahundi* orphans.[27] His self-constitution efforts provide a basis for conceptualising the politics of co-journeying at family, community, and national levels. In this subsection, I explore the possibilities and limits of co-journeying, with particular focus on Mthwakazi Secession Movement and Zamani's search for co-travellers as he seeks to reconstitute himself.

According to Nagar and Shirazi, "vulnerability becomes radical only when it becomes a collectively embraced mode in search of the shared creative power it has the potential to enable" (2019: 238). Zamani's quest for reinvention is seemingly a solo journey meant to advance individual interests, and it may well be argued that it lacks the co-authoring component that, as Nagar and Shirazi claim, is a necessary condition for both situated solidarity and co-journeying. Nevertheless, Zamani's attempts to construct his history around Abednego and Agnes's personal histories, like his desire to become a member of the Mlambo family, are premised on the realisation that the success of his reinvention mission is contingent on his

[27] According to Ngwenya (2014), the state did not issue out death certificates for people who were killed during *Gukurahundi*. As a result, their surviving children failed to secure birth certificates. That continues to be a thorny issue in Zimbabwe.

ability to rally together with other *Gukurahundi* victims. His actions throughout the novel are driven by the need to find co-travellers and to resolve what turns out to be the "resistance to collectivity" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 239) by those he has chosen to journey with. Zamani's situation, therefore, provides a fascinating case study for exploring the messiness of co-journeying.

Nagar and Shirazi (2019) deploy the metaphor of people travelling without a field manual map to conceptualise the blind alleys of co-journeying. They contend that while the benefits of co-walking are enticing, there is no guarantee that the shared dream will materialise as the journey is undertaken without prior knowledge of the route. They argue the following:

> There will never be a field manual to "correctly" undertake this journey, but only an invitation to step into a realm of ontological and epistemological possibilities and risks. One always must be prepared for the impossibility of achieving radical vulnerability as well as hungry translation. After all, the labour and poetics of forging togetherness across difference through radical vulnerability, situated solidarities, and hungry translation can only realise their transformative potential as politics without guarantees. (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 242)

A field manual may be understood as a set of instructions that helps us to navigate our way through a (difficult) task, research, programme, or situation. It tells us what challenges to anticipate as well as how to overcome them. The metaphor of co-travelling in the absence of a field manual aptly captures the uncertainties that radical vulnerability is fraught with, including the possibility of the co-journey failing to take off in the first place, as I demonstrate next.

House of Stone foregrounds Zamani's struggle to resolve an identity crisis that stems from not knowing his parentage. The novel reveals the dangers associated with an identity crisis through Zamani's uncle, Uncle Fani, who "like many of *Gukurahundi*'s victims" fails to secure a new birth certificate after he leaves Bhalagwe concentration camp (Tshuma, 2018: 325). A cunning Old Edward sells Uncle Fani's house in the latter's absence, knowing that Uncle Fani neither had identity documentation nor title deeds for the house. This reflects how *Gukurahundi* rendered certain people de facto non-citizens, or in Guy Standing's terms, "denizens", people with "a more limited range of rights than citizens do" (2011: 14). In other words, *Gukurahundi* reduced a whole ethnic minority to denizens in a country they call their own.

It is against this shared identity crisis background that one can understand Zamani's quest for being rooted in a "robust family lineage", as well as his excitement when he thinks he has finally attained a stable identity: "What delight to know your roots! To be firmly rooted"

(Tshuma, 2018: 11, 357). Although he believes that he is "a man on a mission […] to remake the past" (ibid.: 1), Zamani understands that the process of reinventing himself demands that he situates his 'hi-story' within other people's narratives. He metaphorically captures this idea when he says, "A man of consciousness, gifted with a mind and a blank screen and a keyboard such as I have, makes his own hi-story proper" (ibid.: 11). In this analogy, the mind, the blank screen, and the keyboard are all integral to the construction of hi-story in the same way that the success of co-journeying requires collaboration from different participants who are united by "an intense relationality and co-ownership of dreams" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 239). In the novel, such relationality becomes a prerequisite for co-journeying.

The metaphor of the blank screen and a keyboard also sums up Zamani's reinvention ethics. In computer terminology, a keyboard is an input device that enables the user to feed data into the computer's central processing unit. Read metaphorically, the keyboard is an input apparatus for the procreative mechanisms at Zamani's disposal as well as for other people's input(s) into his hi-story. The imagery can be further understood in terms of John Locke's concept of the *tabula rasa*, where *tabula rasa* denotes a newly born mind that is not yet affected by sensory experience, and which can be imagined as a clean slate. The imagery, therefore, speaks to the way Zamani must go back to the drawing board of his life to create a new self-identity and that entails finding people who share his dreams to co-journey with.

Zamani's quest for reinvention is rooted in the Kantian belief that fate can be controlled, and that man can take charge of his life through practical reason (Kant, 1784, cited in Koselleck, 2004). In his elaboration of Kant's existential philosophy, Koselleck contends that history is both "makeable" and "disposable" (2004: 199). This provides a conceptual framework for understanding Zamani's attempt to defeat fate through forcible self-assertiveness. Throughout the novel, he is neither apologetic nor helpless as he pursues the belief that "it is through hi-story's shadow that we conquer the past" (Tshuma, 2018: 317). In a way that ratifies Sharpe's (2016) assertion that a dark history can be transformed into a political resource, Zamani courageously responds to the grisly murder of his mother at Bhalagwe: "They washed her away, my mama, threw her body in one of the many mass graves. She was the chaff and I am the spring shoots" (Tshuma, 2018: 319). The word 'chaff' evokes the images of expendability and "bare life" (Agamben, 2017) to which Ndebele people were exposed during the *Gukurahundi* period, while his defiance of bare life is evident in his description of himself as spring shoots.

Driven by his existentialist philosophy, Zamani aggressively infiltrates and appropriates the personal histories of Abednego and Agnes, his landlords whom he calls his surrogate parents. In so doing, Zamani demonstrates that one's identity is intricately connected to and shaped by the stories that one is surrounded by. Gare (2001) contends that the process of learning one's identity takes place in the process of living through others' stories and recognising the identities of others within one's social milieu. Thus, Zamani's ability to construct his hi-story cannot be conceived outside the stories of Abednego and Mama Agnes. By the end of the narrative, Zamani has acquired a sense of completeness. Besides having been able to extract his landlords' life narratives, he has discovered his parentage: He is the son of black Jesus, the captain of the Fifth Brigade soldiers, the same man who raped and killed his mother Zodwa at Bhalagwe camp.

However, the flipside of Koselleck's (2004) notion of the 'makeability' and disposability of history is that there are always factors that pose a limit to man's history-making capacity. This resonates with Karl Marx's famous statement: "Men make their own history, but they do not do so freely, not under conditions of their own choosing, but rather under circumstances which directly confront them, and which are historically given and transmitted" (cited in Koselleck, 2004: 202). Koselleck argues that the makeability of history is contingent on a host of factors, including the prevailing material and sociopolitical reality. This sheds light on the inherent limitations of the doctrine of free will. The reader sees that by the end of Tshuma's novel Zamani has not successfully integrated himself as a member of Abednego's family, having failed to synchronise his anxieties, insecurities, and dreams with those of his landlords. Therefore, while Zamani, Abednego and Agnes share a history of displacement, there is no clear-cut relationality to tie their sensibilities into a co-journeying project in the sense proposed by Nagar and Shirazi:

> This kind of hunger in a translation cannot be demanded or achieved through mechanical protocols. It can only emanate from an intense relationality and co-ownership of dreams among those who occupy different locations in predominant epistemic and sociopolitical hierarchies. (2019: 239)

Considering the above contention, Zamani's use of coercion to conscript Abednego and Agnes as co-travellers exemplifies what Nagar and Shirazi (2019) describe as using "mechanical protocols". This is evident in the way Zamani sadistically creates conflicts between Abednego and Agnes so that he can get access to their personal histories under the guise of offering

consolation. Sometimes, he stupefies Abednego with a drug called *ubuvimbo* to make him harp on about his past.

Abednego's loss of his first wife (Thandi) and two sons in *Gukurahundi* violence constitutes a necessary condition for situated solidarity and co-journeying with other victims such as Zamani. However, Abednego pursues an individualised coping strategy that entails resorting to alcoholism. Such a strategy may be described as suppression, an adaptational mechanism that entails "a conscious intention to not allow some thought or event to create psychological disturbance" (Cramer, 1998: 925). The limitation of Abednego's strategy is that it defers direct confrontation with the truth, which might have devastating consequences on the psyche of the victim (Billow, 2006). Abednego's resignation constitutes an interesting counterexample of the ethics of co-journeying. Thus, both Zamani and Abednego relate tangentially to the larger narrative of displacement of the Ndebele people.

Mama Agnes' case also opens a window through which we can see the challenges of co-journeying. She represents the politics of reinvention from the perspective of a marginalised mother in a patriarchal setup. Subjected to frequent and arbitrary beatings, and having to contend with confinement to domestic space, Mama Agnes gradually transforms into a defiant woman. She attributes her transformation to her reading of Alice Walker's literary works (Tshuma, 2018: 245), which corroborates Lara's (1998) assertion that successful women's narratives have the power to transform lives. Although Mama Agnes needs Zamani's support, she does not see him as indispensable to her struggle for emancipation. This is because her struggles are different from his; while Zamani is mainly concerned with reconstructing his identity and getting integrated into the Mlambo family, she must grapple both with the continuing effects of *Gukurahundi* (such as the disappearance of her son Bukhosi at the hands of state agents) and challenges that are specific to her gender. Arguably, Zamani does not understand how her precarious position at the intersections of ethnicity and gender impacts her psychology in ways that make co-travelling with him difficult.

I argue that Zamani's search for co-travellers largely fails on two grounds. Firstly, he fails to synchronise his aspirations with those of his intended co-travellers. To borrow from Lawn (20217: 1026), there is a want of congruency "between the apprehension of co-vulnerability and the ability to channel this sensibility into political awareness". Secondly, Zamani's sadistic obsession with individual subjectivity goes against the ethics of co-journeying that require that individual members work towards the creation of intersubjective spaces in which each co-

traveller displays "the willingness to reimagine subjectivity as/with/through collectivity" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 240). Sangtin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan reinforces this view by suggesting that co-journeying dispenses with the "corporeal or moral protection of one individual from another [but] recognises that each of us is limited by our locations and languages, by our pasts and presents, by our desires and complicities" (2018, cited in Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 240). Contrary to this, Zamani seeks an exploitative alliance in which he uses and reduces the Mlambos to fodder in his reinvention mission.

Tshuma juxtaposes Zamani's reconstitution project with that of the Mthwakazi Secessionist Movement, which also exemplifies the messiness of the ethics and politics of radical vulnerability. The term 'Mthwakazi' refers to the precolonial Ndebele Kingdom, so it spells the need for rebranding. 'Secession' denotes a formal withdrawal from an organisation and has associations with withdrawal, split, defection, apostasy, and disaffiliation.[28] The Mthwakazi outfit is therefore an opposition political outfit that agitates for the withdrawal of the Ndebele ethnic group from the Republic of Zimbabwe to form an autonomous Mthwakazi Republic. It is important, therefore, that in the novel the Mthwakazi group calls itself a movement rather than a political party; whereas a political party is often primarily concerned with winning elections and retaining power, the term 'movement' denotes organized collective effort aimed at effecting social change. As I demonstrate next, the secessionist movement typifies Nagar and Shirazi's model of co-journeying in which hungry translations ideally lead to situated solidarities and then to co-travelling. Next, I start by shedding light on the socio-political context behind the secession agenda.

The secessionist movement in *House of Stone* is fuelled by an ethnic-based sensibility that stems from an enduring feeling of having been collectively wronged since the *Gukurahundi* period. It is an attempt to reinvent the *Gukurahundi* narrative in a bid to challenge its silencing at local, regional, and international levels. At the local level, the government has continued to stifle the narrative on many fronts, including by excluding it from the official history and distorting facts in state-controlled newspapers such as *The Chronicle*.[29] Within the African continent, no country attempted to intervene in what was going on in Zimbabwe during the

[28] See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secession

[29] Santos (2011) demonstrates how the reportage of *Gukurahundi* atrocities between 1983 and 1986 by the state-owned newspaper *The Chronicle* was designed to distort issues around the genocide.

Gukurahundi period, including the then regional bodies, the Southern African Development Coordination Conference, and the Organisation of African Unity. Likewise, Europe, the United States of America, and the United Nations remained aloof. This silence on *Gukurahundi* has curiously persisted to date, even when Zimbabwe has alienated Western nations through the Land Reform Programme and other international relations issues. This background of systematic silencing sustains the hungry translations that bring different members of the Mthwakazi Secessionist Movement into intra-ethnic coalition politics. Against the same background, Tshuma resuscitates the subject of *Gukurahundi* to ridicule the hollowness of both the local concept of *Ubuntu*/*Unhu* and of the international camaraderie that, as Butler (2012) says, should see nations responding ethically to suffering that takes place beyond their borders.

Also constituting the background to the Mthwakazi secession agenda is the Zimbabwean government's lack of commitment to addressing the issue of *Gukurahundi*. Besides, the effects of the genocide continue to manifest themselves through differential patterns of power, privilege, and development along ethnic lines, which is aptly captured by the statement "together we live, together we suffer, together some live better than others and others suffer more than some" (Tshuma, 2018: 62–63). These words paint an *Animal Farm*[30] scenario – a simulacrum of togetherness designed to mask grim social inequalities. This injustice fuels the hungry translations that unite members of the Mthwakazi movement.

Also sharpening the secessionist movement's hunger for justice is the way the state seems to have closed avenues for negotiation with *Gukurahundi* victims, tending rather to respond aggressively to any overt expression of dissent. Towards the end of the novel, the state deploys its security agents to violently disperse members of the Mthwakazi movement who had gathered for a rally. As noted by Ngwenya (2014), the state's systematic silencing of protesting voices has not only thwarted prospects of reconciliation, reparation, and healing but also spawned fear among the victims who fear a repeat of *Gukurahundi*. This collective fear has served as a constant reminder of the distinctness of the Ndebele people's cultural identity and of the need to cherish pride in that identity. That pride, which has served as a unifying force, has been described by Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007) as "Ndebele particularism". It is a shared sense of insecurity that creates a strong intra-ethnic bond in the form of a "radical

[30] George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1984) dramatises a differential pattern of power and privilege where the pigs enjoy good life at the expense of other animals. Through cunning and propaganda, the pigs manage to keep the exploited animals in ignorance until the very end.

Ndebele cultural nationalism" (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: 280). The result has been the formation of several radical Ndebele pressure groups such as *Vukani Mahlabezulu*, *Imbovane Yamahlabezulu*, *Mthwakazi Action Group on Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in Matabeleland and Midlands* and *Mthwakazi People's Congress* (ibid.) Many other Matebeleland pressure groups have emerged in recent times, including *Ibetshu Likazulu*, *Matabeleland Forum*, and *Matabeleland Collective*. These pressure groups, born out of contingency, bolster Standing's (2011) view that precarity can be transformed into a political rallying point.

House of Stone, therefore, demonstrates how a collective sense of persistent marginalisation sustains the co-authored vision of a "peaceful Mthwakazian Republic". According to Dumo, the leader of the Mthwakazi outfit, the movement is a platform for the reaffirmation of Ndebele pride and offers the genocide victims the vital opportunity to say, "Look I'm a human being, and what happens to me matters!" (Tshuma, 2018: 337, 68). As a form of co-journeying, the movement allows co-travellers to reclaim their humanity, while its capacity to accommodate young participants such as Bukhosi underlines how co-journeying offers a conduit for intergenerational transmission of sensibilities and agendas at family, community, and national levels.

As a form of co-journeying, the secessionist movement demands constant narration of the shared story of displacement. In *House of Stone*, Dumo, the principal custodian of this story, never gets tired of holding out the "loud megaphone" (Tshuma, 2018: 68) to whoever would listen. As Nagar and Shirazi say, such constant narration creates a space in which "the singular relearns to breathe and grow differently in the plural" (2019: 240). Gare (2001) conceptualises this collective activity as an act of living out a shared story. He contends that the success of any shared narrative demands a shift "from reference to 'I' to 'we'", which in turn enables group members to situate both themselves and their narratives within the broader project. This is true of the Mthwakazi Secessionist Movement, which holds frequent rallies to keep the shared narrative alive. Gare adds that shared stories act as cohesive devices that shape the socio-political fibre of societies because while they are being lived out, the narratives are recurrently "being told and retold, written and rewritten in the political transactions of its members, uniting the present with the past in relation to projected futures of greater or lesser determinateness" (2001: 2). Accordingly, the secessionist movement seeks to immortalise a shared story of resistance for posterity to participate in it.

One could say that the Mthwakazi secessionist agenda not only underlines the makeability of history from a marginal perspective but also suggests the fragility of hegemonic narratives. As Koselleck (2004) argues, the process of history-making is subject to manipulation by the makers of history as well as by those who transcribe it. In the novel, Dumo deploys the language of hijacking, appropriation, rewriting and editing to suggest how the transcription of the official version of Zimbabwean history has been manipulated by Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party (Tshuma, 2018: 67). Zamani also believes that the transcription of Zimbabwean nationalist history is flawed, patronising and arbitrary and says it as follows:

> What the hell is history? Things that didn't belong to anyone and belonged to everybody being claimed by someone, demarcations, lineages and histories being created abracadabra and made real in the mind, and then consolidated through tales told and then revised to suit not only the mood of the day but also the vision of the future, memory aided and ab*ated*, yes, by delusion, constantly recreating and justifying, and thus no truth ever mattered except that which was believed to be true. (Tshuma, 2018: 90, italics in original)

By saying that there are things that "belonged to everybody" but ended up "being claimed by someone", Zamani reveals two sets of accusations against the official version of Zimbabwe's history. The first is that it glorifies ZANU-PF and its military wing as the superheroes of the liberation struggle (Nkomo, 2001).[31] The second is that the mainstream liberation narrative is silent on the role played by women, both at the battlefront and in the villages where they gave support to guerrilla fighters (Staunton, 1990). Patriotic history has therefore been viewed as a product of "selective memory" on the part of those who transcribed it (Ranger, 2005; Muchemwa, 2005). Memory has been a site and instrument of violence deployed by ZANU-PF to "exclude and expel the undeserving from the ancestral house" (Muchemwa, 2005: 195).

[31] The selective canonization of histories has led to the mushrooming of autobiographies, memoirs and biographies that offer competing narratives. For example, in *The Story of My Life* (2001), Joshua Nkomo challenges his "political ruination" (Nyanda, 2016) by his rival Robert Mugabe. Nkomo projects himself as the cornerstone of the 1970s nationalist struggle, claiming, for instance, that it was him who smuggled into the country the first twenty-four guns to be used in the armed struggle. He also counters ZANU PF's supremacist claims, accusing Mugabe and his cronies in ZANU PF of having ethnicized Zimbabwean politics (Nkomo, 2001: 105, 117). Commenting on the autobiographies of Nkomo and Wilfred Mhanda, Nyanda (2016: 175) contends that "the texts serve as spectres and phantoms that will continue to haunt and trouble Zimbabwe's political history." The same can be said of Morgan Tsvangirai's *At the Deep End* (2011), which the author deploys "as a strategy to document, archive and claim his place in the political history of Zimbabwe" (Nyanda, 2017: 119). Other political autobiographies that serve a similar purpose include Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007) and Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (2007).

Nyambi (2014) avers that the process of nation narration has invariably been masculinised (I explore this subject at length in Chapter 6).

However, *House of Stone* also highlights the loopholes of secession as liberation praxis, reinforcing the claim that the absence of a field manual means that co-journeying is "politics without guarantees" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 242). Tshuma (2018) demonstrates that besides working as a self-othering ideology, the secession agenda triggers a lot of violence from the state. In the novel, the state's attitude towards the secessionist movement is vicious, as evidenced by the ruthless disbanding of a Mthwakazi rally, which resulted in the disappearance of Bukhosi (Abednego and Agnes's son). Besides, the idea of secession tends to fuel an ethnic consciousness that perpetuates the current ethnic polarisation, more so because it represents a kind of radicalism that contests "the idea of a unitary Zimbabwe state" (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: 287).[32] Given the pan-Africanist movement, recently reinforced by Thabo Mbeki's idea of the African Renaissance, it appears the African continent leans more towards regional integration than balkanisation. Although there is the contentious issue of the Saharawi Republic in Morocco, the African Union is not likely to endorse secession. It appears then that Sudan will probably be the last of the African countries to be divided. This sounds plausible considering the amnesia and aloofness that regional bodies have continued to display towards Zimbabwe since the *Gukurahundi* period.

Considering the above, Mthwakazi's separatist project is a co-journey for which arrival cannot be guaranteed. Although its members tenaciously hold on to the dream of an autonomous Mthwakazi Republic, it appears that dream is likely to remain a political rallying point for a section of the Ndebele population. It can be argued that the dream primarily serves the utilitarian purpose of moulding an identity and keeping the holders afloat in the face of enduring marginalisation and the "Shonaisation of Matabeleland", which is the subjection of the Ndebele population to epistemic violence through the imposition of Shona language and culture through television and education policies (Mdlongwa, Moyo & Ncube, 2015: 234).

[32] Evidence of enduring ethnic polarisation is abundant in the Zimbabwean media. Political parties such as Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP) continue to exploit the *Gukurahundi* issue as political capital in ways that widen the rift between the Shona and the Ndebele people. For example, in the run up to the March 2022 by-elections, the MRP leader Mqondisi Moyo ignited a furore on social media when he said that Citizens Coalition for Change leader Nelson Chamisa neither has the right to represent the people of Matabeleland nor to speak about Gukurahundi redress. See "Separatist Mthwakazi Leader Attacks Chamisa Over Gukurahundi; Says 'No Shona Person Will Solve Our Problems'" - NewZimbabwe.com (16 March 2022).

Arguably, in *House of Stone*, Tshuma (2018) depicts secessionism as a co-journey where "it is the continuation of the hunger in the relationship that gives each co-traveller the courage to continue offering new layers of themself [*sic*] to one another, without hoping for (re)solutions" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 242, 241). However, the risks of the journey, which Tshuma shows through the constant frustrations of the Mthwakazi movement by the state, do not necessarily mean that the journey is not a worthy undertaking. They only mean that radical vulnerability "is never fully attained and always in progress" (ibid.: 238).

Interestingly, *House of Stone* appears at a time when progress in media technology is increasingly making it hard for authoritarian states to control access to information and stifle counter-narratives. Online media sites, such as Newzimbabwe.com and Bulawayo24.com, and social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, are widening the discursive horizon on *Gukurahundi*, expanding political consciousness and opening opportunities for digital modes of co-authoring and co-journeying. For example, in 2020 the death of Perrance (who was the commander of the Fifth Brigade responsible for *Gukurahundi*) triggered a resurgence of *Gukurahundi* talk on social media. However, *Gukurahundi* denialists also access the same platforms where they counter these narratives (Ndlovu, 2018).

Overall, despite the inherent ambivalences of radical vulnerability as liberation praxis, *House of Stone* reinforces Nagar and Shirazi's view that "the joys and lessons of moving and creating together in a radically vulnerable mode are often deeper than the sacrifices made by individual travellers" (2019: 242). Co-journeying holds out great promises for *Gukurahundi* victims, while its participatory and victim-centred nature can help to sustain the victims' hopes for justice in a country where the government is still to fully accept responsibility for *Gukurahundi* atrocities and where Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have invariably failed.[33]

[33] Chapter 12 of the *Constitution of Zimbabwe* (2013) shows that Zimbabwe has an independent National Peace and Reconciliation Commission that, among its other responsibilities, should "develop and implement programmes to promote national healing, unity and cohesion in Zimbabwe and the peaceful resolution of disputes." See, *Constitution of Zimbabwe* 2013 (As amended up to 31st December 2018). Chapter 12, Part 6, section 252 (b). Despite the existence of this commission, the *Gukurahundi* issue has not been addressed. The failure of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions worldwide has compelled a re-evaluation of the healing potency of truth. In South Africa, for example, restorative justice failed, among other factors, due to the state's unwillingness to effect reparations and the inability of the judiciary to handle prosecutions (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999; Stanley, 2001).

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter deployed the lens of radical vulnerability to explore existential strategies adopted by *Gukurahundi* victims in Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* and Tshuma's *House of Stone*. *Gukurahundi* has been read as a precaritising impulse, considering how an entire ethnic minority is subjected to violence without recourse to state protection. The scenario invokes Butler's definition of precarity as a "condition of maximised precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection" (2010: 25–26). However, the chapter demonstrated that precaritisation promotes radical thinking among the victims, enabling them to forge intra- and intergroup solidarity networks. To explore this dynamic, I drew on Nagar and Shirazi's (2019) theorisation of radical vulnerability and its interrelated constituent concepts of hungry translations, situated solidarity, co-authoring, and co-journeying. Nagar and Shirazi's claim that radical vulnerability is fraught with uncertainties – that co-journeying takes place in the absence of a field manual – informed my evaluation of the possibilities and limits of intergroup coalition politics both during and in the aftermath of *Gukurahundi*.

My reading of Mlalazi and Tshuma's novels supported Darda's (2014) claim that literature can be a site for the forging of alliances against terrorism and precarious life. Given that Mlalazi and Tshuma narrate *Gukurahundi* from an ethnic positionality, I explored their writing as a form of co-authoring and co-journeying with an endangered ethnic minority. In solidarity with other victims of ethnonationalist violence, their narratives depict *Gukurahundi* as senseless and ridicule the state's aggression as a symptom of what Appadurai (2006) calls the "fear of small numbers". More importantly, the narratives foreground the regenerative capacities of *Gukurahundi* victims in ways that challenge "conventional definitions of vulnerability [as connoting] weakness, softness, permeability, a sense of being affected, imprinted upon or entered and shattered" (Dahl, 2017: 41). On their part, Mlalazi and Tshuma mine the seam of precarity by turning a dark history into a literary resource.[34] They deliberately repackage history to project a particular kind of truth that seeks to sustain the shared anti-*Gukurahundi*

[34] Many countries, including South Africa, Namibia, and Rwanda, have been able to convert ethnicity into a source of revenue, showing that "ethnicity can make capital even out of its own capacity for Destruction." See Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc*, p. 145.

narrative. However, the chapter also problematised how both Mlalazi and Tshuma privilege the ethnic factor in ways that create another grand narrative that perpetuates ethnic polarisation.

Reading *Running with Mother* and *House of Stone* through the lens of radical vulnerability underscored what Gill and Pratt (2008: 3, cited in Davidson, 2013: 131) see as the potential of precarity to ignite "new subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics". The lens of radical vulnerability also exposed the ambivalences that underwrite the politics of refusal, including the fact that sometimes victims of violence fail to translate their shared vulnerability into co-journeying ethics. Thus, as the chapter revealed, the serving efficacy of radical vulnerability is compromised when the precariat fails to make "a politically aware submission to one another to become a 'we' that also struggles to overcome intense mistrust, bitterness, hatred, or suspicion at times" (Nagar & Shirazi, 2019: 238). Similarly, my reading of *House of Stone* underlined the counter-productiveness of selfishly pursuing individual subjectivity at the expense of collective creativity. State aggression against the Mthwakazi Secessionist Movement hints at the scary odds that co-travellers must reckon with.

Overall, the chapter reinforced Nagar and Shirazi's contention that there is always something positive to come out of co-journeying, despite its frustrations and the absence of a field manual to guide the participants (2019: 242). Mlalazi's and Tshuma's narratives offer insightful place-specific grammars for reading the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity. Having explored how contingency can be sublimated into positive ends, this chapter reinforced the thesis's overarching assumption that marginalising impulses always leave room for pushback and strategic surrender. By exploring ways in which Mlalazi's and Tshuma's novels reorient understandings of human vulnerability, the chapter also validated my leading claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to reimagine the nation by deconstructing the cultural practices that produce and sustain precarity. In the process, the chapter set the tone for the next chapter that explores the politics of refusal through women's rejection of the patriarchal frame of motherhood.

CHAPTER 3
MOTHERHOOD AND THE ETHICS, POLITICS, AND AESTHETICS OF OPTING OUT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the political function of vulnerability in the context of women's rejection of patriarchal understandings of motherhood as depicted in Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018). While these novels depict motherhood as a site of violation, effacement, and displacement, they also foreground the female body as a site of resilience and creativity. To explore this ambivalence, the chapter builds on existing scholarship on maternal insecurities and subjectivities, including works that explore gendered violence as both destructive and creative in Dangarembga's works (Andrade, 2002; Masemola, 2002) and that explore the adaptational mechanisms adopted by Vera's heroines when confronted with the violation of their bodies (Muponde, 2005; Musila, 2007). Although these critics provide a useful critical template, there has been limited critical attention to the self-constituting efforts of women as mothers in Zimbabwean literature. As a point of departure, I deploy the lens of opting out (Ruti, 2017) to explore the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of refusal against male-defined understandings of maternity in selected primary texts.

Ruti introduces the term opting out in her book *The Ethics of Opting Out*, where she deploys it in a queer theoretical context to conceptualise ways in which gays and lesbians can attain self-actualisation by "defying the cultural status quo, refusing to play along, and living by an alternative set of rules" (2017: 1). The idea of opting out is premised on a rejection of normativity and fuelled by a desire for newness. According to Ruti, oppressive normative ideologies thrive on making false promises of happiness and blocking alternative philosophies of life. She further argues that the "defiant subject" can see through and defeat the false promises that Berlant describes as "the 'technologies of patience' that enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the cruelty of the *now*" (2011: 1, cited in Ruti, 2017: 16). I read Vera's heroines and Mai Tambu (in Dangarembga's trilogy) as defiant subjects who not only challenge androcentric conceptions of maternal roles and identities but also contribute new versions and visions of Zimbabwean maternity. Opting out can therefore be seen as an instance of politics of refusal or "the negation of that which negates us" (Garland, 2013: 376).

My departure from the more established Afro-feminist analytic lens is meant to complement rather than take away from the work of existing scholarship.[35] I tentatively propose that the idea of opting out, as a way of life, a way of telling, and a way of seeing and resistance, offers opportunities for nuance and novelty in exploring African maternal insecurities and subjectivities. It also carries overtones of unorthodoxy that dovetail with the cultural dissidence adopted by Vera's female protagonists as they reject the policing of their sexuality and violation of their bodies. Similarly, the concept of opting out can shed light on ways in which Mai Tambu ruptures the patriarchal frame that displaces the female figure from sites of knowledge production. Therefore, the lens of opting out enables me to advance my claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to reimagine the nation through contesting and de-gendering cultural practices that produce and sustain precarity.[36]

This chapter has three sections. The first section (Section 3.2) explores how Vera's heroines in *Butterfly Burning* (1998) resist the experience of motherhood and privilege their sexuality as an existential strategy in an environment where mothering is untenable and "traditional patriarchy, the colonial state, the violence of oppositional nationalism, and a gender exclusionary urban economy each erects walls which confine women to ever narrowing horizons" (Musila, 2007: 58). Deploying the lens of opting out (Ruti, 2017), I argue that these heroines' anti-normative behaviours enable them to satisfy their self-actualisation needs.

The second section (Section 3.3) explores Vera's "inventive use of the novelistic genre" (Kostelac, 2006: 1) as literary enablement for Mazvita's escape from "the yoke of ill-timed

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[35] The default theoretical grounding for most studies on African womanhood has been Afro-centric feminist theories such as womanism, Black feminism, African feminism, postcolonial feminism, and motherism. While these theoretical frameworks are pertinent to the exploration of the sensibilities, insecurities and existential struggles of African women, they also have many flipsides. For example, in her paper "African feminisms" (2001), Desiree Lewis notes that most of the prominent African feminist scholars are based in the West, a scenario that accounts for what she sees as a glaring lack of reciprocity between theory and lived experience. Lewis also contends that Catherine Obianuju Acholonu's (1995) concept of motherism, which specifically focuses on African maternity, is problematically premised on a faulty equation of socially ascribed roles and identities with feminist consciousness. As a result, motherism tends to reinforce the gender stereotypes that it sets out to challenge. See, Lewis, D. 2001. African feminisms. *Agenda*, 16(50): 4–10.

[36] I am cognisant, however, that the lens of opting out privileges a monolithic interpretation of cultural dissidence as an expression of freedom, which problematically directs attention away from how unorthodox behaviours such as women's commercialization of sex in Vera's novels can be read as acts self-objectification. To address this conceptual hurdle, I read the cultural dissidence of Vera's protagonists both as a metaphor of sexual freedom and as manifestation of the psychological harm that poverty and patriarchal policing inflict on women. This dovetails with the view of the female body in Vera's works as a site of ambivalence (Muponde, 2005; Musila, 2007).

motherhood" (Musila, 2007: 55) in *Without a Name*. The words "she had no fear of departures" (Vera, 1994: 33), which refer to Mazvita's readiness to quit unrewarding spaces and relationships, become a conceptual metaphor for ways in which Vera's unconventional writing style and Mazvita's anti-natalism gesture at the possibility of alternative versions of being. The section argues that Vera deploys her works' literariness to critique phallocentric conceptions of maternity and to radically imagine alternative ways of attaining a sense of completeness outside marriage and motherhood.

The last section (Section 3.4) examines how *This Mournable Body* (2018) undoes the prejudicial framing of stay-at-home mothers[37] as non-achievers. The discussion is framed around Tambu's description of her mother's life as "a lifetime of being nothing" (Dangarembga, 2006: 31). Drawing on philosophical reflections on the concept of nothingness (Waghorn, 2014; Ranasinghe, 2020), I challenge Tambu's reductive view of her mother and argue that the insights and micro-resistances of often side-lined stay-at-home mothers can unravel alternative knowledge about maternal insecurities and subjectivities. In that way, such mothers could be said to be opting out of the patriarchal script of motherhood that excludes women from sites of knowledge production.

3.2 Sexual beings, not mothers

A defining aspect of Vera's fiction is the celebration of cultural dissidence (Primorac, 2003).[38] Her heroines are 'potential' mothers who adopt anti-natal behaviours as a way of resisting the experience of motherhood (Musila, 2007). As Shaw puts it, "maternity defeats Vera's protagonists" and her fiction foregrounds "young women's dread of the snare of motherhood" (2004: 38). Those who give birth hardly display what Ruddick (1989) outlines as the defining features of "maternal practice", namely preservation of the child, enablement of the child's growth, and training of the child. We see in *Butterfly Burning* women who suspend

[37] I borrow the phrase "stay-at-home mothers" from Elizabeth Reid Boyd and Gayle Letherby (2010), who use the term to refer to unemployed mothers. It is interesting to note that the undervaluation of stay-at-home mothers is constantly challenged across discursive platforms. In the Zimbabwean context, Mai Chisamba the host and producer of the television talk show 'Mai Chisamba Show' is one woman media personality who has persistently challenged stay-at-home wives and mothers never to say '*handishand'* (I do not work). Also, Mbuya Bakasa, of the popular radio show 'Mbuya Nevazukuru', demonstrated on radio that playing with children is also work. In South Africa, television reality shows "Real House Wives of Durban" (premiered on 29 January 2021) and "Real Housewives of Cape Town" (premiered on Mzansi Magic on 10 July 2022) also challenge the inferiorisation of stay-at-home mothers and wives.

[38] Ironically, in the previous chapter political dissidents are targeted for elimination, underlining how the value of dissidence is context-specific.

considerations about marriage and motherhood to make sexuality and sexual attractiveness central aspects of their identities. The ability of these heroines to reclaim personhood and consolidate subjectivities outside marriage challenges the patriarchal belief that women's happiness is ultimately attainable within marriage (Begum, 2016). I read these heroines' privileging of their sexuality to motherhood as consistent with the ethics and politics of opting out of a tradition that expects women to explore their sexuality only within the confines of motherhood, a tradition that sees sexually desiring women as deviant.

Set in colonial Rhodesia between 1946 and 1948, *Butterfly Burning* foregrounds the experiences of its protagonist Phephelaphi Dube as she interacts with an older man, Fumbatha, and three other women, Zandile, Getrude and Deliwe. Having been rejected at birth by her biological mother (Zandile), Phephelaphi grows under the foster care of Getrude, Zandile's close friend. When Getrude dies, Phephelaphi briefly resides at Zandile's place before relocating to Fumbatha's place. When an opportunity arises for black women to train as nurses, Phephelaphi secures a trainee nurse post, but Fumbatha considers it unbecoming for a woman to seek employment. She defies him, but when she receives her acceptance letter, she realises that she is pregnant, and the hospital does not enrol pregnant and married women. She aborts the pregnancy to revive her chances. When she becomes pregnant for the second time, she immolates herself. Phephelaphi, Getrude, Zandile, and Deliwe do not conform to normative delineations of motherhood, and this chapter treats them as literary avatars through whose anti-natal behaviours Vera mirrors maternal insecurities and subjectivities of the time.

The cultural dissidence of Vera's heroines in *Butterfly Burning* is intricately connected to the socio-political and material conditions that were prevailing in the colonial city of Bulawayo at the time (Musila, 2007). Muchemwa avers that "the political imagination that mapped the colonial city was undergirded by violence" (2013: 1), while Benson and Chadya (2003) note that all colonial cities were largely androcentric, allowing only a few black women who stayed on the strength of official documents. Nonetheless, through illegal means, black women always made their way into the city where they got confined to the domestic space, as exemplified by Shamiso in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Mazvita in *Without a Name*. However, as Vera's novels reveal, these black women actively resisted the gendered politics of exclusion that characterised the colonial city, sometimes merchandising their sexuality as a resource for a living (Muponde, 2005: 23; Musila, 2007: 53). As I demonstrate next, the

gendered exclusion that prevailed in the city promoted a bohemian culture that allowed women to flout accepted codes of feminine conduct.

Each of Vera's female protagonists in *Butterfly Burning* offers a unique case study for exploring the antagonistic relationship between motherhood and sexuality. Zandile unsettles the notion of motherhood in the sense that she rejects her baby (Phephelaphi) soon after delivery, handing her over to her friend Getrude. This gives Zandile the status of a birth mother. Her anti-natal behaviour deconstructs the myth that every biological mother has maternal instincts. What is more fascinating about her is how she privileges sexuality over maternal identity, evident in the way she detests her Caesarean mode of delivery for leaving a permanent surgical scar, "which ruined the mood of her every subsequent encounter with a man" (Vera, 1998: 143). Zandile's behaviour buttresses the view that in Vera's fiction "sexuality takes mothers away from daughters" (Shaw, 2004: 42). The mark of the surgical incision becomes a symbol of the literal and figurative burden that Vera attaches to conventional motherhood.[39]

Zandile's rejection of a maternal role is understandable considering the precarious living conditions for black mothers in the city, exemplified by the Makokoba mothers who "gave birth and raised children on the palms of their hands" (Vera, 1998: 103). She also remembers a woman who died in her sleep because her husband had rejected her, and another whose husband "sold her to another man for the value of a bicycle wheel" (Vera, 1998: 91). The latter incident, which is reminiscent of Michael Henchard's sale of his wife Susan in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), highlights how patriarchal mothers are sometimes reduced to disposable objects. Hence, Zandile opts for "lightness" and the city's "flamboyant edges" instead of "the burden of becoming a mother". Motherhood is inconsistent with the image that

[39] Zandile's frustration with her Caesarean delivery highlights a pertinent theme in maternal scholarship – how the maternal body's procreative capacity can be a liability. David Mungoshi's *The Fading Sun* (2009) foregrounds gynecological challenges linked to child birth through the maternal protagonist (Mary) who suffers and ultimately dies due to reproductive disorders. In Zimbabwe, the dangers associated with maternity are reflected in the country's high maternal mortality rate, which the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) currently (in 2022) pegs at 614 deaths per 100, 000 live births. Maternal mortality is, however, a world-wide challenge and, for a long time, feminists and maternal scholars have been researching on ways of delinking the reproductive role from the female body. For example, Shulamith Firestone (cited in Roth-Johnson, 2010: 352) suggests that the reproductive function should be delinked from the female gender as a way of "leveling the playing field between women and men". To that end, Firestone proposes the use of reproductive technologies that enable both fertilization and gestation to take place outside the female body. Such technologies, as well as the possibility of reproduction inside the male body (androgenesis), are seen in contemporary maternal scholarship as holding out the promise of a better future for women. See Condit, D. 2010. Androgenesis. In O'Reilly, A. ed. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, pp. 52–56.
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Zandile wants to project, which is that of a woman "with earrings dangling down to her shoulders, her fingers glazed with nail polish, and her lips coated with ambition" (Vera, 1998: 143–44, 33). To preserve that image, we are told, Zandile would have thrown the baby into a ditch had Getrude not offered to look after it.

Zandile not only fails to exhibit the ethics of care that are traditionally associated with a mother but defies patriarchal standards of a good mother. Patriarchal society regards uncontrolled female sexuality as inconsistent with social hygiene, while the level of moral transgression is higher in the case of mothers, who are often imagined as asexual (Semans & Winks, 2001; Jones, 2010). In African literature, the patriarchal image of a good mother is represented by Nnu Ego, the maternal protagonist of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), who believes that bearing and nurturing children are a woman's principal duty and that love and sexuality do not matter for a mother. Nnu Ego's thinking aligns with Jones's view that "when women transition into the mother role, they encounter new restrictions on their sexuality", while their often-eroticised organs such as breasts become merely functional (2010: 1114–15). Zandile continues to mind her looks, enhancing them through fashionable dressing and skin-lightening creams. In that way, she becomes more of a sexual being than a mother, which defies the notion of a "desexualized mother" that, as Jones (ibid.) avers, is encapsulated in the popular image of The Virgin Mary who became pregnant by nonsexual means.

Through Zandile's anti-natal behaviour, Vera responds to the semi-rhetorical question: "What kind of woman could give up her own flesh and blood?" (Greenway, 2016: 150). The way Zandile maintains physical and emotional distance from Phephelaphi can be read as a case of "maternal alienation", a situation where a mother-child relationship "exhibits very little, if any of the supposed maternal instincts of warmth, acceptance, and affection" (Brooks, 2010: 699). While Zandile's anti-natalism could be explained from a psychological perspective as an instance of post-natal rejection, it is also predicated on a deep-seated hunger to reclaim her body and sexuality. This is evident in her preference for transactional relationships with men (such as Boyidi) that she can manipulate. In the following passage she demonstrates her desire to be in charge of her sexuality:

> When she sleeps with her own men Zandile stays till morning so that they can look into each other's eyes without the skin of darkness, feeling a touch of shame and sharing a lonely adult pain. She *holds* the single arm lying over the chest closer to her breasts, *enjoying* and remembering the weight of it, and *rocks* the man back to

> sleep, to wakefulness, swinging him back to a safe sleep. (Vera, 1998: 40, my emphasis)

Here Zandile, like Thandi in Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018), controls the sexual act in a way that inverts the normative order where the man, due to his penetrative role, not only has an upper hand but also monopolises sexual pleasure. Seen from another angle, Zandile's action of rocking her lover to sleep and wakefulness is suggestive of a suppressed longing for the baby that she rejected.

However, Vera also shows the ambivalences with which women's privileging of sexuality over motherhood is fraught. Although Zandile manages to physically distance herself from Phephelaphi, she cannot fully renounce her motherhood, which reinforces the claim that in Vera's fiction "motherhood is insistent" (Shaw, 2002: 89). Zandile continues to hover around Phephelaphi as the following passage shows:

> Zandile swooped into Phephelaphi's room like an eagle. […] Zandile has just borrowed the comb from a friend, and while walking back to her own house on a clear Saturday morning a kind of tenderness crept up her throat, choking her like fine dust. (Vera, 1998: 89)

It is evident in this passage that Zandile is restless and haunted by suppressed maternal feelings. On yet another occasion, she tells Phephelaphi, "I no longer wish to be loved, but to love. I want to find something which once belonged to me" (Vera, 1998: 36). These words convey an irrepressible nostalgia and desire to reunite with the daughter she has rejected.

Zandile's nostalgic feelings towards Phephelaphi hint at the messiness and emotional costs of the ethics of opting out. Kristeva's (1982) concept of "maternal abject" helps to make sense of this psychological complex. According to Kristeva, the abject is that which is 'other' to the self and which the self radically rejects or excludes as a way of instituting order within itself. The abject is, however, never entirely pushed but, as Rodgers (2010: 694) puts it, "remains on the margins, hovering and haunting one's sense of subjectivity and orderliness and with the potential to unravel the confines that have been constructed". To clarify the concept of the abject, Rodgers (ibid.) deploys the image of the pregnant body that brings both itself and the unborn baby into a togetherness that disrupts the former's organic unity. Through its fusion with an other, the pregnant body is fragmented as it has no control over pregnancy-induced physiological changes. The process of birth is therefore a case of abjection, where the self and the other are severed, and the self can reclaim its subjectivity. At a metaphorical level, Zandile's

rejection of her daughter is an attempt to reclaim her body's organic unity after its fragmentation due to pregnancy and Caesarean birth.

However, as Kristeva argues, the abjected other cannot be pushed beyond the margins where it continues to hover. She adds that in the attempt to exclude the other, the self may run the risk of abjecting itself (Kristeva, 1982). This plays out in the way Zandile appears to be haunted by 'maternal absence', which is a condition defined as "a physical, emotional, social, and sometimes legal shift in the nature and quality of a woman's relationship to her birth children" (Vallance, 2010: 695). Zandile's offer to accommodate Phephelaphi after the death of Getrude could then be read either as the mother's attempt to atone for her anti-natal behaviour or as the child's return to challenge her abjection. By demonstrating the emotional costs of maternal alienation, Vera bolsters the assertion that birth mothers who are forced by social, physiological, or economic circumstances to relinquish their motherhood to adoptive mothers are sometimes haunted by a "deep sadness and sense of the precarity" (Greenway, 2016: 151). The term precarity here underlines the uneasiness that women must reckon with when they abnegate maternal responsibilities to explore and take charge of their sexuality.

Getrude offers another complex case of dissident maternity in *Butterfly Burning*. Her successful adoption of Phephelaphi gives her a saviour image, challenges the privileging of biological mothering in the patriarchal discourse (Greenway, 2016), and compels a rethinking of the wisdom of child-dumping in circumstances such as Zandile's. Getrude counterpoises Zandile's anti-natalism by maintaining a balance between her sexual freedom and the child's needs, making sure that though she "had no food in her stomach, […] her child had to sleep under some shelter" (Vera, 1998: 29). When Phephelaphi was of school-going age, Getrude had made sure that she attended school at the United School from Sub A to Standard Six. Thus, even as an adoptive mother, Getrude upholds what Ruddick (1989) outlines as the fundamental 'maternal interests', which are the preservation of the child's life, promotion of the child's physiological, emotional, and cognitive development and ensuring the acceptability of the child in society. In this regard, Getrude is more of a mother than Zandile if we consider that preservation and nurturance are the cornerstones of mothering (Rich, 1976; O'Reilly, 2004b). Phephelaphi confirms this when she says that she knew Zandile as "a woman who was very close to my mother" (Vera, 1998: 28). This paradoxically unsettles the border between biological and surrogate motherhood. Through this paradox, Vera deconstructs the conflation of motherhood with the biological function of reproduction in patriarchal discourse.

Interestingly, neither Zandile nor Getrude fits into the patriarchal script of motherhood, which exposes the inadequacies of male-centred knowledge regimes to name maternal experiences and identities.

Yet, despite her apparent maternal interests, Getrude is also a defiant subject who prioritises her sexuality and autonomy. Like Zandile, she consciously chooses to remain outside the institution of marriage, while her alleged abortion attests to her aversion to biological mothering. As Rita Jones (2010) argues, sexuality and motherhood are often mutually exclusive as the function of a woman's body changes significantly once she becomes a mother:

> Across the globe, societies believe that once women become mothers, they forgo their open and active sexual selves. Mothers, then, become undesiring and non-sexually active persons within cultural circles, even if these women continue to procreate through sexual intercourse. When women move into the role of mother, they often find their sexuality reduced to functionality: a means to reproduce. (Jones, 2010: 1115)

Considering the above, marriage and motherhood pose threats to women's sexual desires. Getrude strives to maintain a happy medium between her maternal responsibilities and her sexuality, bringing Phephelaphi "strapped to her back to every possible appointment with every possible male stranger" (Vera, 1998: 42). Like Zandile, Getrude commercialises her sexuality both for material gains and for negotiating space in a city that excluded women. Like Zandile again, she has made sexual attractiveness a defining aspect of her identity, making sure she "looked captivating from whichever symmetric side her figure was considered" (Vera, 1998: 77). This sexualisation of the maternal body makes it a site of freedom and means of livelihood, bolstering the observation that "women in *Butterfly Burning* deploy sexual pleasure as a tool of feeling against oppression in its myriad forms – patriarchal and colonial" (Muponde, 2005: 26). Therefore, by merchandising their sexuality, women opt out of patriarchal standards of feminine decorum and manage to attain a sense of completeness.[40]

It is Deliwe who is perhaps the most elusive figure in *Butterfly Burning*. Boehmer describes her as "the charismatic, enigmatic, and ultimately destructive Deliwe" (2005: 21). Like Zandile

[40] However, as intimated earlier (Section 3.1), Getrude and Zandile's unorthodox sexual behaviours may also be read as symptoms of the psychic damage inflicted upon women's bodies by masculine surveillance and policing.

and Getrude, Deliwe does not conform to the patriarchal ideal of motherhood but her provision of inspiration and support to Phephelaphi, who looks up to her as "some kind of sun" (Vera, 1998: 63), can be read as a performance of community mothering, a scenario where child rearing is carried out as a communal responsibility as opposed to "dominant notions of child rearing and nurturing that tend toward individualistic maternal practice" (Campbell, 2010: 239). Like Zandile and Getrude, Deliwe defies patriarchal policing on women's sexuality as she has sexual relationships with a lot of men, including Fumbatha.

It might be insightful to consider Deliwe as an "outlaw mother"[41], one that rebels against the patriarchal definition of a good mother. Like Zandile, she relishes the sense of overseeing her body, a sense that comes with the ability to control the sexual act, making "a man crawl as though he had never walked on his own two legs" (Vera, 1998: 64). The idea of outlaw mothering is also suggested by the way she exposes her nakedness before municipality police who raid her house in search of evidence of her running an illicit shebeen business. According to Musila (2007: 56), through such unconventional behaviour, Deliwe challenges the "tabooing of the female body" as her "naked body rips apart the cultural veil of shame associated with female nudity, and throws the policemen's violation of her privacy right back at them, by deflecting the burden of shame and violation onto the policemen" (Musila, 2007: 56). Thus, through Deliwe, Vera subverts patriarchal delineations of good motherhood.

Zandile, Getrude and Deliwe converge in the way they hop from one lover to another, which makes them different from Phephelaphi who has a relatively stable relationship with Fumbatha. However, like the other women, Phephelaphi consciously refuses to be a mother. Her cohabitation with Fumbatha constitutes an affront to the normative expectation that she should only explore her sexuality within a marital context. Her unorthodox sexual relationship feeds into a narrative trope that has become a defining aspect of Vera's fiction. Similar interactions are displayed by Mazvita and Joel in *Without a Name*, as well as by Cephas Dube and Nonceba in *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Such unconventional relationships, which often invite comparisons between Vera's works and Dambudzo Marechera's iconoclastic writings, disrupt

[41] The concept of outlaw mothering was developed as a counternarrative of patriarchal motherhood, one that does not conform to the patriarchal definition of a 'good' mother. See O'Reilly, A. ed. 2004a. *Mother Outlaws: Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering.*

power imbalances that relegate women to the status of men's assets and sexual objects (Shaw, 2004).

Phephelaphi's two pregnancies testify to her fecundity and capacity for biological mothering. By terminating the pregnancies, she refuses to be a mother in the traditional sense of childbearing. According to Musila, "Phephelaphi's body, like Mazvita's, betrays her by conceiving in a context where […] the colonial economy shuns black women's reproductive bodies" (Musila, 2007: 55). Musila makes this claim in light of how the colonial government excluded pregnant women from the nursing profession. In such a context, motherhood becomes a liability. Louviot (2003) suggests that Phephelaphi's refusal to be a mother parallels the motif of land aridity in *Butterfly Burning*, which can also be read as a symbol of the then Southern Rhodesia's inability to sustain black people's hopes. This resonates with the claim that one of the novel's preoccupations is to "locate a subject-position for Rhodesia's displaced subalterns" (Kostelac, 2007: 122) through the symbolic actions of Phephelaphi. Interestingly, in Vera's work, land "is not the mystic and physical utopia of nationalist rhetoric" but "often mist-shrouded, a place of rape or burnt-out desolation that was once home" (Gunner & Kortenaar, 2007: 4). In step with this thinking, the pervasive image of aridity in the novel becomes a metonym for women's refusal to bear children as a defence mechanism against unfulfilling patriarchal motherhood.

Phephelaphi's self-immolation, which destroys both herself and the fetus inside her body, becomes the ultimate expression of defiance against patriarchal motherhood. The liberatory nature of Phephelaphi's death is suggested by how it is ritualised as a process of transfer of beauty from one site to another, articulated through the analogy of petals that fall from a tree during a storm, leaving the tree bare and ugly but also beautifying the ground beneath (Vera, 1998: 146). Not afraid of death, Phephelaphi says, "I would like to lie beneath the petals" (Vera, 1998: 146). Her positive view of death makes what could have been an apocalyptic ending for the novel a celebration of liberation and self-birth (Shaw, 2004; Kostelac, 2007). The idea of rebirth through self-immolation invokes the phoenix, a mythical bird of the Arabian Desert that burnt itself and rose from the embers with the freshness of youth to continue with life (Taleb, 2012). Reading Phephelaphi's death as metamorphosis rather than "the end of life" (Borg, 2006: 1) rationalises it as an expression of the freedom and agency that Fumbatha had denied her.

In *Butterfly Burning,* Vera deploys the motif of butterflies and flight to articulate Phephelaphi's quest for escape (Primorac, 2002: 106; Musila, 2007: 58). Flight evokes fluidity, invoked by Phephelaphi's first appearance as an adept swimmer, and later by the image of a bird in flight through the air (Vera, 1998: 35). This powerful kinesthetic imagery further invokes literary applications of aviation science and the theory of flight in imaginative practice. Fascinating connections have been made in literary analysis between the dynamics of aeroplane motions and flights of imagination that enable people to fashion dreams of escape when confronted with non-ideal circumstances (Rudnitsky, 2008: 237). In her novel *The Theory of Flight* (2018), Siphiwe Ndlovu mediates this flight of imagination through surrealistic depictions of human capabilities that are encapsulated in the symbolism of the protagonist's (Imogen Zula Nyoni 'Genie') flying away "on a giant pair of silver wings" (Ndlovu, 2018: 9). In the novel, Genie's death is romanticized as a flight to a better place, which resonates with Phephelaphi's flight of imagination that enables her to visualise rebirth in death. However, one needs to go beyond conventional understandings of agency to see Phephelaphi's suicidal death as an expression of agency, especially when that death is looked at "against a backdrop of popular assumptions which view agency through the lens of survival; where continuing to live, and to survive a given set of oppressive circumstances, is taken as the ultimate expression of resistance" (Musila, 2007: 59). This slippery conception of agency hints at the uncertainties of the ethics and politics of opting out of patriarchal normativity.

Considering how the four heroines of *Butterfly Burning* contribute to the politics of opting out of the patriarchal institution of motherhood, it can be argued that Vera uses women who do not conform to the normative conception of motherhood to deconstruct the conflation of motherhood with the biological function of reproduction. These women realise that their best foot forward is rejecting motherhood and shunning binding sexual relations. It is no accident, therefore, that these heroines opt for transactional and fleeting sexual alliances. Also, it is interesting to note that though Sidojiwe E2 teems with happy children who "possess nothing except an excited value placed on anything shared, and a glorious love of intimacy" (Vera, 1998: 19), the children are not situated within distinguishable family units, so that they appear like one faceless and parentless body. At a symbolic level, this disentangles motherhood both from the female body and the reproductive role.

By foregrounding the dissident sexuality[42] of unmarried women, Vera places her work within what Lewis (2005) sees as a burgeoning discourse on black women's sexuality. The subject of female sexuality is taboo in Africa (Musila, 2007) where some African political leaders and academics continue to treat issues of sexuality and sexual democracy as part of a Western discourse (Epprecht, 2013: 36). Given such a background, Vera's foregrounding of female sexuality becomes an important step toward reorienting society's perception of the issue. This is particularly vital if we consider that the question of sexuality is intricately tied to the question of power, where regulation of sexuality constitutes one conduit for the performance of power (Foucault, 1978). In other words, the disempowerment of patriarchal mothers is closely tied to the policing of women's sexuality.

Lastly, the dissident behaviours of Vera's 'potential' mothers in *Butterfly Burning* constitute context-specific maternal activism that is not divorced in motive from maternal activisms that thrive in comparatively stable socio-economic environments. As Musila argues, "contexts determine women's responses and the options open to them" (2007: 57). What Vera's heroines reject is not mothering per se but mothering from a disempowered position. The central message, then, is that the integrity of the family institution is contingent on the recognition of mothers as human beings with entitlements to private agendas and aspirations. In the absence of such recognition, women opt out of motherhood in pursuit of self-realisation.

3.3 "She had no fear of departures": The aesthetics of opting out in *Without a Name*

Critics of Vera's fiction tend to focus on her "taboo-breaking subject matter" while neglecting how she deploys language to imagine alternative worlds (Attree, 2002: 63). In response to Attree, this subsection explores Vera's aesthetic departures in *Without a Name*, with a specific focus on how her "inventive use of the novelistic genre" (Kostelac, 2006: 1) enables her to critique patriarchal understandings of motherhood. Vera has often been classified together with Ben Okri and Dambudzo Marechera as writers who "evolve a new way of rendering […] reality, one that departs from established conventions of narrative structure, participating in many of the strategies of disjuncture, disorientation and multiplicity which are the acknowledged signs of post-modernism" (Bryce, 2002: 40). While unconventional writing is a defining feature of all of Vera's novels (Shaw, 2002b), it is of critical importance in *Without a*

[42] I borrow the term from Marc Epprecht (2004) who uses it to describe non-normative sexualities.

Name how plot, time, metaphor, and narrative perspective are manipulated to represent the consciousness and affective dispositions of the heroine (Mazvita) as she tries to escape "the yoke of ill-timed motherhood" (Musila, 2007: 55) and sexual violation.

Set in 1977 during Zimbabwe's anti-colonial liberation war, *Without a Name* offers one perspective on Vera's treatment of cultural dissidence as liberation praxis. It tells the story of Mazvita's quest for refuge and self-actualisation. Having been raped and impregnated by a disembodied soldier in her village in Mhondoro, she leaves for the city of Harari where she hopes to have fresh beginnings. She is disillusioned when she realises that the city holds no great promises for women. Out of desperation, she finds herself co-habiting with Joel, a man she has a casual sexual relationship with. Her hopes are shattered when she gives birth to a baby boy that Joel is not prepared to father. The novel ends with Mazvita strangling her nameless baby and going back to her war-torn rural home.

While Vera's novels tell "the same story […] of rejection or abandonment of the child, and denial of motherhood" (Shaw, 2002a: 84), *Without a Name* takes women's rejection of motherhood a notch higher through Mazvita's infanticide. While some societies see abortion as morally and legally permissible, infanticide is generally unpardonable (Schick & Vaughn, 2003: 38).[43] Musila notes that "[i]n many cultures, infanticide is a taboo act whose existence is rarely acknowledged, and which is taken even more gravely when done by a mother" (Musila, 2007: 55). Interestingly, through her unconventional and "transgressive" (Kostelac, 2006: 105) writing style, Vera vindicates Mazvita's infanticide by emphasising its consistency with her socio-material circumstances that render motherhood untenable.

In *Without a Name*, maternal precarity is appositely captured by the visual imagery of "still, thin and unmoving" doll figures of women with children (Vera, 1994: 81). The epithets used here project both the material want and social immobility that define womanhood in the novel. The dangers of motherhood are further symbolised by the solitary "flower [that] rests in a bare

[43] There is an unresolved debate about whether abortion is the same thing as murder. Those who see abortion as a lesser evil than infanticide claim that while abortion involves the termination of a 'potential' human being, infanticide entails the wilful denial of a full lifespan to an actual human being. See Schick, T. and Vaughn, L. 2003. *Doing Philosophy: An Introduction Through Thought Experiments*, p. 38). According to practical ethics and feminist philosopher Mary Anne Warren, "a fetus is a human being which isn't yet a person, and which therefore can't coherently be said to have full moral rights" (1973: 56).

tortured tree, surviving, resisting the wind and shaking pods", as well as by trees with pods but no leaves (ibid.: 101). The imagery brings out how mothers (the bare trees) must subordinate their needs and well-being to those of their children (imaged as pods). Through this imagery, Vera castigates the patriarchal ideology of "intensive mothering" (Hays, 1996) that expects women to devote all their attention to the welfare of their children.

As in Vera's other novels, in *Without a Name* plot plays a subversive role. Reinforcing the view that postmodernist feminist writing goes against "traditional plot devices" (Keen, 2003: 73), the story in *Without a Name* moves back and forth in a way that compels the reader to continually reassemble the events to make sense of them (cf. Shaw, 2002b: 25). The abrupt plot turns reveal transgressive handling of the plot that consciously resists the narrative linearity that feminist critics have associated with male-authored fiction (Miller, 1981). Also, due to the novel's preoccupation with representing Mazvita's consciousness and affective habits, especially as she grapples with the fact of her rape, many gaps are left in the narrative that, to borrow from Keen, invoke the not-to-be-asked "notorious question 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?'" (2003: 56). For example, one notes that there is a huge narrative gap or leap between the time Mazvita moves in with Joel in the city and the moment she realises that she is pregnant. Similarly, the way the novel ends with Mazvita stuck in confusion, not decided on whether she should go to Mubaira or Kadoma, and with the baby's corpse strapped onto her back, deliberately scorns what Chatman describes as "the fundamental human need to know what is going to happen next" (1990: 20). Therefore, in her "self-conscious writing" (Shaw, 2002b: 25), Vera deploys the plot to subvert patriarchal normativity.

Another prominent aspect of Vera's transgressive writing style is her deliberate disruption of the order of cause and effect. For example, at a glance one may think Mazvita's murder of her baby is causally related to her economic insecurity as she has failed to secure a job in the city and the man (Joel) she has been depending on for her upkeep is not prepared to continue keeping her as she now has a baby. However, as Musila points out, infanticide is Mazvita's healing strategy following her rape much earlier in the narrative; she is determined "to confront the fact of her rape, and the accompanying appearance of a baby she has not planned for, a living witness to her rape" (Musila, 2007: 52). This disruption of causation unsettles the usual assumption that successive events are causally connected, which constitutes the "*post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy" (Keen, 2003; 81). Vera's conscious subversion of generic conventions associated with the androcentric narrative tradition becomes an act of dissidence that is in sync

with Mazvita's propensity for the unconventional as she "saw nothing of the wildness in her actions" and believed "rituals can be inhibiting" (Vera, 1994: 95) and need to be got rid of. This anti-normative thinking informs Mazvita's rejection of motherhood and its ritualised demands.

Also interesting is the way Vera inventively manipulates the narrative situation to unmute Mazvita's voice. The term 'narrative situation' refers to "where the narrator is located, how overtly or covertly the narrator makes his or her presence felt, and what relationship the narrator has to the characters" (Keen, 2003: 30). Here, I am particularly interested in Vera's deployment of narrative perspective to represent Mazvita's consciousness, such as the use of an omniscient third-person's voice in the following passage:

> *Amai*. She was indeed a mother. She was indeed a mother. It was heavy to be a mother. It made one recognizable in the streets, even when one no longer recognized oneself. *Amai*. It was painful. *Amai*. […] It referred to any woman who passed by, who carried a baby on her back, who was a potential mother. (Vera, 1994: 40)

Here, Mazvita's rejection of a maternal identity is expressed as "narrated monologue", the representation of a "character's mental discourse in the guise of the narrator's discourse" (Keen, 2003: 61). The use of narrated monologue gives Mazvita a virtual voice at a point in the narrative when she has not yet recovered her voice following her rape. The tendency of rape to rob the victim of their voice is explored elsewhere by Muponde (2015a: 72), who notes how Runyararo loses her language upon discovering her daughter's (Zhizha) rape in Vera's *Under the Tongue*.

Mazvita's rejection of a maternal role is also evident in the way Vera deliberately renders the term 'mother' (cited above) ambiguous to critique conventional understandings of what it means to be a mother. Through that ambiguity, Vera calls for a gynocentric redefinition of the concept of motherhood. Such a rebranding also speaks through the titular words, "without a name", which encapsulate women's refusal to mother under conditions of abuse and disempowerment. On one hand, the words refer to Mazvita's refusal to name her baby, which translates to her refusal to be a mother; she feels "a name binds a mother to her child". On the other hand, they capture Mazvita's determination to reinvent or rebrand herself as she believes a name recalls places and memories "she has chosen to forget" (Vera, 1994: 75, 102). According to Musila (2007), not giving the baby a name helps Mazvita to recover her name.

As in her other works, in *Without a Name* Vera deploys "poetics of metaphor" (Shaw, 2002b: 25) to castigate patriarchal conventions. Mazvita's dissatisfaction with patriarchal normativity, like her search for newness, is subtly conveyed through the symbolism of the land. Mazvita sees the land as dispensable while Nyenyedzi sees his life as intricately bound to it. Considering that in Zimbabwe's patriarchal discourse land is a male space (Gunner & Kortenaar, 2007), Nyenyedzi can be read as a symbol of patriarchal normativity. Parallels can be drawn between him and Fumbatha (in *Butterfly Burning*) who, before meeting Phephelaphi, "had never wanted to possess anything […] except the land" (Vera, 1998: 28). Ironically, in *Butterfly Burning* the land is depicted as arid and incapable of sustaining local livelihoods (Shaw, 2004), while in *Without a Name* it is portrayed as an unreliable resource that "had no fixed loyalties" as it had allowed 'strangers' (colonialists) to be prosperous on it. Hence, Mazvita "had no fear of departures" from that land; "she needed a new angle to her reality, an untried advantage" (Vera, 1994: 33–34, 4). It can be argued, therefore, that Vera uses the imagery of land in a transgressive way to expose the inherent instabilities of male-authored traditions and discourses, including patriarchal understandings of motherhood.

Interestingly, Vera underlines the ambivalence of the land that renders it simultaneously a symbol of patriarchal oppression and a point of departure for women's search for newness. Mazvita believes her "relationship to the land involved such buoyant freedoms" and she sees herself as a seed that "could grow anywhere" (Vera, 1994: 34). Mazvita's rejection of patriarchal normativity is suggested by the way she "rose above the land and scorned its slow promises, its intermittent loyalties" (ibid.: 39). The words "slow promises" invoke Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism", which explains how individuals or social groups sometimes continue to subscribe to injurious norms even when it is glaringly evident that nothing positive comes out of them. Mazvita's readiness to depart from her ancestral land symbolically translates to defying cruel optimism.

Vera also symbolically demonstrates how women can attain a sense of freedom by appropriating Western models of beauty through skin-lightening rituals, bodily accoutrements such as "Afro wigs" and upbeat sartorial self-stylisation. In *Without a Name*, the *Ambi* skin-lightening cream serves as a mask that holds the promise of mobility and freedom for city women. Through the extended metaphor of *Ambi*, Vera shows that "freedom was, after all, purchasable. It was sensual, and that was to be longed for, procured even if the cost was nothing less than one's soul" (Vera, 1994: 26–27). The sense of achievement that city women gain

through using skin-lightening creams underlines how a sense of completeness can be achieved even in hostile circumstances. That is, sometimes agency can be exercised even in small ways; it does not always need to be "a function of heroic feats of self-actualisation that are designed to enable us to overcome the constraints of our positionality in the world" (Ruti, 2009: 6–7). This dovetails with the way the precariat in all the texts studied in this thesis tends to keep itself buoyant through seemingly small successes.

Through the extended metaphor of *Ambi*, Vera also hints at the darker side of women's cultural dissidence. The use of *Ambi* "left one with black-skinned ears" (Vera, 1994: 26), which symbolically underlines the ambivalence and messiness of the ethics of opting out. Besides the self-hate that underwrites the whitening of black bodies – invoking the Fanonian "Black skin, white masks" syndrome – scientific research has proved that some skin lightening ointments contain cancer-causing substances. In a way, the self-preservation antics adopted by women in Vera's fiction gesture at the warped understandings of the poor on certain issues which promise them freedom, while in the bigger scheme of things are adding to their lot and undermining their humanity. Such ambivalences are further implied in the metaphor of dazzling white mushrooms that Mazvita picks, only to discover that they have "brown spots within the grooves", with Nyenyedzi suggesting that the mushrooms "could be poisonous" (Vera, 1994: 6). The brown spots that are hidden in the grooves of white mushrooms symbolise the vicious violence that lurks beneath the simulacrum of order projected by patriarchal normativity and its related institutions, such as motherhood. Slavoj Žižek uses the term "systemic violence" to describe this species of institutionalised violence that runs as an undercurrent beneath "the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (2008: 1–2). Therefore, the brown spots and the possibility that the mushrooms could be poisonous stand for blind spots in women's struggle for freedom and newness. For example, in an attempt to reinvent herself, Mazvita ends up being troubled by a sense of disorientation that leads her to contemplate suicide. In a way, like Zandile, she fails to fully recover from wounded maternal feelings.

However, while literary critics have generally romanticised Vera's unique poetics, not much attention has been given to its flipside. Some critics, such as Ranka Primorac, note how "all of Vera's novels are couched in an opaque, lyrical prose style" (2005: 150). However, the impact of that opacity on the reception of Vera's work has not been fully explored. I suggest that Vera's esoteric writing makes it inaccessible to actual readers who are not part of her implied readership. Here, a distinction should be made between the actual or real reader, who is the one

who reads the text, – and the implied readership, which refers to "the profile of readerly traits that seems to be assumed by the text" (Keen, 2003: 35). According to Keen, some texts demand "a reader of a certain age or level of education" but at times most of the actual readers do not live up to the standard projected by the text (ibid.). I argue that this is the case with Vera's fictional writings that, like those of Dambudzo Marechera, seem to speak only to an enlightened inner circle of literary academics. Shaw also hints at the opacity of Vera's poetic fiction:

> At the beginning of each novel, you never know which way is up: Who is speaking? What is she talking about? What is real? What is imagined? By one or by many? What matters? Your confusion does not lift through knowledge, but through feeling. (2002b: 25)

Therefore, while Vera's cryptic postmodernist rendering of reality has been highly praised by literary critics, her works may not reach out to the many Mazvitas and Phephelaphis out there who might not match the level of epistemic privilege demanded by the texts.

Shaw observes that most of Vera's works have tragic endings, and that "the oppositions, dualities and dichotomies that she employs are not easily resolved" (2002a: 92). This is true of *Without a Name*, which ends with Mazvita cherishing suicidal thoughts as she feels "the end had always been there, had always waited" (Vera, 1994: 42). However, the novel also gestures at the power of gendered insecurity to ignite creative responses from the victims. This paradox is implied in the remarks made by passengers on the bus concerning hot weather: "A heat like this brings death. […]. Such heat brings rain" (Vera, 1994: 53). The metaphor of the heat captures the simultaneity of life and death, which in turn resonates with what Standing (2011), among other scholars, sees as the paradoxical power of precarity. Such a realisation informs Vera's feminist consciousness.

3.4 Opting out of "a lifetime of being nothing"

Tsitsi Dangarembga is one of the leading African women authors, and together with Neshani Andreas, Buchi Emecheta, Sindiwe Magona, Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie and Nawal El Saadawi deploys her writings to deconstruct cultural practices that marginalise women. Dangarembga's canon includes the play *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), and a trilogy of novels (*Nervous Conditions*, 1988; *The Book of Not*, 2006; *This Mournable Body*, 2018). The novels are daughter-centric, tending to depict women's experiences and sensibilities from the perspective of the protagonist Tambudzai Sigauke (hereafter referred to as Tambu), who begins

as a young girl in *Nervous Conditions*. However, from the fringes of Tambu's narrative, the novels open vistas for us to see emerging and continuing trends in maternal politics. Here, I explore how Dangarembga portrays the often neglected and negatively framed stay-at-home mother. The discussion is prompted by Tambu's conflictual relationship with her mother (Mai Tambu) whose life she describes as "a lifetime of being nothing" (Dangarembga, 2006: 31). The focus is on how the micro-resistances of Mai Tambu and other stay-at-home mothers contribute to the politics of opting out of the patriarchal script of motherhood. Although I primarily focus on *This Mournable Body*, I make wide references to the other novels in the trilogy, considering how each novel brings something new while retaining part of the old, and how Mai Tambu's vision grows consistently throughout the texts.

Unlike *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name* which have a colonial setting, *This Mournable Body* is set in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Therefore, reading the novel alongside Vera's novels gives the reader of a long trajectory of Zimbabwean women's subversion of patriarchal conceptions of motherhood. Immediately evident in *This Mournable Body* is the increased maternal participation in the public domains of community leadership, the paid labour market, 'mamapreneurship',[44] and women-initiated community development programmes. Many mother figures are in the paid labour category, ranging from domestic servants, such as Mai Taka (who works for Tambu's cousin Nyasha), to skilled professionals such as Mrs Samaita (the headmistress of Northlea Secondary School where Tambudzai temporarily serves as a biology teacher), as well as the many single mothers who work in the Green Jacaranda Safaris building. These emerging spatialities reflect global trends and result from increasing economic hardship that has made it mandatory for mothers to supplement family incomes in the era of neoliberal capitalism (Gatrell, 2010). Maternal paid work should then be seen as an extension of the ethic of care that is linked to the three key areas of maternal practice identified by Sara Ruddick (1989), namely preservation of the child, enablement of the child's growth, and training of the child.

One sees a strong link between Tambu's reductive view of her mother and the latter's position as a poor, uneducated stay-at-home mother. The increased maternal involvement in corporate spaces in *This Mournable Body* points to how Dangarembga predicates her emancipation vision

[44] I borrow the term from Wilson and Yochim (2005), who deploy it to denote entrepreneurship as practiced by mothers.

on the ability of women to defy patriarchal domesticity. Such a vision is formulated against the backdrop of a historically situated gendered division of social space that meant the confinement of women to domestic space (Tamale, 2004, 2020). It would appear, therefore, that stay-at-home mothers are non-actors in this emancipation vision. Throughout Dangarembga's trilogy, Mai Tambu generally leads a life of poverty and dependency. Tambu describes her relationship with her mother as "a case of out of whose stomach a person came that makes one woman to another a mother or daughter" (Dangarembga, 2006: 11). Tambu's matrophobia, "the fear of becoming one's mother" (Wilkins, 2010: 457), symbolically reaches another level in *This Mournable Body* where she rejects the gift of mealie meal from her mother. This conflictual mother-daughter relationship evokes Doris Lessing's *Martha Quest* (1952) in which the mother stands for everything the daughter resents.

By contrast, Tambu has a special liking for Maiguru who "exemplifies the type of woman that Tambu would like to become" (Andrade, 2002: 38). Maiguru is formally employed in the public service, and together with her husband (Babamukuru) represents the face of Western modernity and progress that Tambu is pursuing. For Tambu, her mother painfully reminds her of the poverty and domesticity she is trying to escape. According to Gillies (2007), there is a close correlation between parenting strategies and the parent's class, education, and occupation, and the parent's class position predetermines many aspects of the child's life, including self-esteem. Therefore, when Tambu leaves home to stay at the mission school in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), she gets attracted to Maiguru who instantly becomes her role model. This evokes Wilkins' (2010) contention that as girl children grow and interact with the external environment (outside the home), they often get exposed to other models of womanhood. The result is that they may cease to take their mothers as role models and become more conscious of the distinction between femininity and motherhood (ibid.).

Tambu's cynical view of her mother is microcosmic of the inferiorisation of stay-at-home mothers in general. In *This Mournable Body*, Leon (Nyasha's white husband) cites Mai Tambu as a typical example of a poor peasant woman who only serves as an instrument in the service of neoliberal capitalism:

> Think about your aunt at the homestead, Nyasha! She's a bit in a calculation. A vote here, a price there for a dose of something. The people out here are just translated into ballots and markets for GMOs, Depo-Provera, and fertilizer. (Dangarembga, 2018: 142)

This description paints a gloomy picture of the life of a disempowered rural mother who is deprived of both her humanity and sense of self. It resonates with Butler's claim that the life of a precarious subject "is effectively transformed into an argument, a target, or a number, or is effaced with only a trace remaining or none at all" (2010: ix–x). This view, however, creates the impression that the precariat is a passive mass, which is contrary to the lived experiences of precarious subjects as this thesis has so far demonstrated. In the passage above, Leon makes a blanket comment that does not recognise individual differences among stay-at-home rural women. Therefore, Dangarembga lampoons, ridicules, and censures his voice and perception, which betray myopia and ignorance, especially coming from a white man who is removed both by race and gender from the lived experiences of black women.

Tambu and Leon's contemptuous views about stay-at-home mothers make them blind to how such mothers constantly negotiate agency and contribute to the larger maternal and nationalist struggles. A close look at Mai Tambu calls for a rethinking of Tamale's (2004) view that the ideology of domesticity deprives African women of access to resources that should enable them to contribute meaningfully to family and national development. Although grounded in the peasantry, Mai Tambu develops consistently throughout Dangarembga's trilogy. She radically challenges the silencing and containment enforced upon women by colonial and traditional patriarchal disciplining. She ultimately demonstrates that the margins have a voice, despite the claim that the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 1988) or that "containment implies not just bodily discipline, but a limitation of expression of will and individual agency" (Shaw, 2004: 39). In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Mai Tambu is quick to notice that the problem with Tambu's cousins (Nyasha and Chido) is "Englishness", adding that "it will kill them all if they are not careful" (Dangarembga, 1987: 204). Her aversion to Englishness is rooted in a deep-rooted understanding of the historical tension between whites and blacks that Tambu does not understand.

The motif of Englishness also speaks through the way Mai Tambu highlights the persistence of patterns of racialised dispossession and displacement as "imperial debris", to borrow from Stoler (2008). Without the exquisite grammar to clothe her sentiments, Mai Tambu warns her daughter about the dangers of blindly interacting with white people: "These white people, they say something and they do it too, but the way they do it, you just never know what it is they first said they were doing" (Dangarembga, 2018: 239). Paradoxically, with her academic education, Tambu fails to see how throughout her life she has been a victim of racial prejudice

that first became apparent at The Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart where the best results award meant for her is duplicitously given to a white student, Tracey Stevenson. After high school, Tambu again loses her credit for the copy she creates at Steers *et al.* advertising agency to a white person. Later, as she works for Green Jacaranda Getaway Safaris, Tambu is compelled by Tracey (who is the owner of the company) to lead a Village Eco Transit project in which Mai Tambu and other village women perform a semi-naked dance for the amusement of white tourists. The occasion results in the humiliation of both Tambu and her mother after the latter spurns the idea of being photographed while half-naked.

It is ironic that even after a series of demeaning encounters with white people, Tambu still naïvely claims to understand them, to which her mother responds, "It's me you should know better" (Dangarembga, 2018: 248). This statement has profound historical resonances with the betrayal of African communities by their traditional leaders, such as King Lobengula who failed to understand the imperialist motives of white people. Interestingly, the humiliating encounter with whites at the Village Eco Transit event proves Tambu wrong, showing that she has not only misunderstood them but also herself and her mother. Mai Tambu throws back the tag of nothingness to her daughter when she says, "Isn't that why you have been *nothing* all this time, because of too much of those people? Leave them alone. Go and find your own thing" (Dangarembga, 2018: 238, my emphasis). Aware of the historical mistrust between whites and blacks, Mai Tambu's sentiments here evoke Lawino's pan-Africanist ideology in Okot p'Bitek's poem "Song of Lawino" (1966); both women attribute African problems to European imperialist aggression.

In defying Herr Bachmann's (the white tourist) order that she poses half-naked for a photo shoot with her daughter, Mai Tambu defies two archetypal tropes: the sexist trope that manifests itself in a male voyeuristic gaze that wants to prey on the female body, and the racial trope that freezes the black woman's image in a distant past characterised by half-nakedness. Interestingly, the half-naked body that Herr Bachmann wants to merchandise is no longer a tenable feature of African identity. It is Mai Tambu, more than any other character in Dangarembga's trilogy, who challenges white supremacism and its attendant epistemic violence. At one point in *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Mai Tambu goes on a hunger strike and refuses to do any of her usual domestic duties as a way of protesting against what she sees as Babamukuru's and Maiguru's contamination of her children with their white ways (cf. Andrade, 2002: 42). This is after Babamukuru decides to send Tambu to Sacred Heart College.

In light of this, Mai Tambu contributes to the pan-Africanist and decolonial struggles that nationalist leaders such as Robert Mugabe, Agostino Neto and Kwame Nkurumah have come to be identified with. Zwicker's view of *Nervous Conditions* as "a contribution to the nationalist struggle" (2002: 8) needs to be understood outside the context of Zimbabwe's patriotic history that sees the nationalist struggle in ZANU-PF's terms as a male-orchestrated armed struggle (Muchemwa, 2005; Ranger, 2005; Parpart, 2007). Dangarembga deconstructs this monolithic conception of the nationalist struggle through Mai Tambu's unsung fight against what Geller (2002: 149) describes as "colonial ethnocide".

Given the above, Dangarembga uses Mai Tambu to articulate subtle insights about enduring racialised violence against black people, a theme that postcolonial scholars such as Fanon (1963) and Mbembe (2001, 2017) explore at length. Mai Tambu's cultural nationalist thinking, condensed in her resentment towards Englishness constitutes an important dimension of maternal activism, especially as it demonstrates that participation in nationalist politics is not exclusive to men (cf. O'Reilly, 2007).

Muponde, one of the few scholars who pay substantial attention to Mai Tambu, describes (in his review of *The Book of Not*, 2006) her as a trendsetting woman who is endowed with a powerful voice and insight. He contends that "Tambu's mother, vile and shrewish as she is, is the first woman in Tsitsi's novels, and in Zimbabwean literature, to consistently denounce the self-importance of the educated elite" (Muponde, 2007: 167). He further avers that

> It is Tambu's mother who remains true to herself when others are floundering, buffeted by the torrid winds of change. No one steals from or cheats Tambu's mother in her self-help tomato business. As the real survivor she should perhaps have penned the story that Tambu possessively claims as her own. (Muponde, 2007: 169)

Here, Muponde suggests that Mai Tambu is the strongest character in both *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006), arguing that she remains firm when "everyone else at the rural homestead withers away" (168). He also makes a comparison between her and the highly educated Maiguru whom he views as Mai Tambu's foil:

> Maiguru, who teaches Latin, a dead language, and spends time singing stupid endearments to her husband and ladling chicken portions onto his plate at the dining table, finds that no colleague at the school consults her on anything in spite of her MA degree. (Muponde, 2007: 168).

Muponde's analysis projects Maiguru as an educated nonentity whose characteristic cluelessness contrasts sharply with Mai Tambu's astuteness and polemic stance on many issues. Besides her sceptical view of Western modernity, Mai Tambu does not romanticize the liberation war as something that holds the hope of black people. Rather, she looks at the war as a site of trauma and indiscipline, where her daughter lost a leg and got impregnated. For Mai Tambu, the war is where "while some were fighting, some were having children" (Dangarembga, 2018: 234). Mai Tambu's objective stance on the war significantly adds to counter-hegemonic narratives that expose the grey areas of Zimbabwe's Second *Chimurenga*. Such narratives include Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997), and Nhongo-Simbanegavi's *For Better or Worse?: Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle* (2000). Among other things, these narratives expose the gendered abuses that women, both combatants and civilians, suffered at the hands of male combatants.

Muponde also observes that Mai Tambu's "self-help [gardening] project could also be the answer to the various elitist projects of national progress" (2007: 167). Although Mai Tambu is not employed, she generates money from her small-scale gardening business and uses the proceeds to fend for her family. This challenges Tambu's negative view of her mother as the epitome of nothing beyond "the awful covetous emptiness in her eyes, and […] the nothingness upon which she stood as upon the summit of her life" (Dangarembga, 2006: 9). By fending for her family with money from her gardening project, Mai Tambu also challenges the patriarchal conflation of mothering with care work, where mothers are not expected to be breadwinners. Besides, she deconstructs the meaning of work by earning a living out of domestic work that, according to Tamale (2004, 2020), is not traditionally regarded as work. Male-based accounting systems are not designed to include domestic work as a form of contribution to the economy, resulting in the lack of recognition in economic terms for women's unpaid labour that ranges from childcare, childbearing, and household production (O'Reilly, 2006).

Another fascinating dimension to the issue of domestic labour and motherhood is represented by Mai Taka (Nyasha's housemaid in *This Mournable Body*), a mother who gets paid for 'motherwork'[45], that is, for looking after another woman's children. Traditionally, child

[45] The term 'motherwork' is based on the work of Toni Morrison. It was popularized by Andrea O'Reilly who deployed it as a variant form of maternal practice in the African American context. I recontextualize it here as an umbrella term for all the work that a mother does towards the growth and wellbeing of the child.

rearing, among other forms of domestic work, is not classified as paid work (Tamale, 2004; Gatrell, 2010). Therefore, Mai Taka straddles the thin line between domesticity and maternal employment. Such an interstitial position enables her to enjoy the benefits of maternal employment, such as the opportunity to develop "a sense of autonomy and competence while offering her social contact with other adults to offset the isolation of being at home with a child" (Ennis, 2010: 343). However, such a position also allows her husband (Silence) to encroach onto her workspace and dictate things to her. For instance, when she decides to join her employers on a cinema excursion without seeking permission from him, he orders her to disembark their car. However, her refusal to comply is more interesting and accompanied by a bold declaration: "Nothing that happens now will stop anything anymore" (Dangarembga, 2018: 156). These words carry overtones of defiance that seem to suggest that mothers can empower themselves by venturing out of the domestic space. The event not only marks a significant turning point in Mai Taka's relationship with her abusive husband but also opens our eyes to the many unsung daily activisms of often disregarded mothers.

The maternal activisms of Mai Tambu and Mai Taka become more conspicuous when viewed against the patriarchal mentality of Mai Manyanga, another stay-at-home mother in *This Mournable Body*. Mai Manyanga represents mothers who are complicit in their inferiorisation by advancing a patriarchal mentality that reduces married women to their husbands' appendages. After the death of her husband, she continues to identify herself in his terms: "I am my husband's window" (Dangarembga, 2018: 30). She is content to subsume her contribution to family success under that of her husband and sons. She proudly remarks: "I am a widow and my sons have left too. But I receive so much power. Not for myself but for someone else" (ibid.: 39–40). Mai Manyanga is a paradoxical symbol of both power and disempowerment as she has neither the power nor will to formulate and pursue personal ambition but has the power to empower both her husband and children.[46] Her scenario invokes the notion of "female masochism" (Baraitser, 2010: 725), where mothers propel others into the

[46] Porter (2010: 721) identifies four different forms of power that may help clarify the relationship between motherhood and power: power-over, power-to, power-with, and transformative power. Power-over is power that is associated with oppression, of which most mothers are victims. Power-to refers to the power to be an agent of change. Power-with is derived from interactions with others who may be family members or colleagues. It leads to empowerment. Transformative power is the power that helps others to grow or attain subjectivity, of which motherwork is an example.

public space while they remain in the private sphere. Mai Manyanga's internalisation of patriarchal thinking also speaks through her privileging of paid work, which traditionally means men's work. When she asks Tambu, "Tell me, are you working?" (Dangarembga, 2018: 31), she is referring to paid work. Tambu, who is unemployed at that time, is uncomfortable with this question that reduces to nothing all the unpaid work that women do in the home. Ironically, Mai Manyanga herself does a lot of unpaid work without regarding herself as a worker.

Through Mai Manyanga, Dangarembga underscores the role of Christianity in institutionalising patriarchal values, especially by confining mothers to domestic spaces and delineating the qualities of good and bad mothering (Sumani, 2017). So, when Mai Manyanga, who is a devout Christian, asks Tambudzai: "Are you married by common law, or any other, or thinking of it?" (31), she cannot imagine a morally upright woman outside any of the three categories she states. The great value attached to marriage in Africa not only invites contempt for those who mother outside marriage, like Lucia in Dangarembga's trilogy but also sees married women enduring abusive husbands for the sake of marriage. Examples of mothers in African literature who urge their daughters to endure abusive husbands/men include Kauna's mother in Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2004), Onai's mother (MaMusara) in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), and Martha's mother in Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps.* In *This Mournable Body,* the link between maternal insecurity and religion is encapsulated by the way Mai Manyanga nurtures a culture of dependency that makes it impossible for her to attain independence or imagine life outside the aegis of her late husband. Consequently, her life rapidly deteriorates after her husband's death and she ultimately dies "a pauper" (Dangarembga, 2018: 253) after one of her sons (Ignore) takes over the family house. The fate of Mai Manyanga is a common trope in African literature where many customarily married women lose entitlement to family assets upon the death of their husbands (Tamale, 2004).

However, it would be inappropriate to describe Mai Manyanga's life, in Tambu's terms, as "a lifetime of being nothing" (Dangarembga, 2006: 31). Although she suffers abuse and dispossession at the hands of her sons, Mai Manyanga possesses a buoyant spirit that enables her to bear her hardships with Christian fortitude. Philosophical reflections on the link between Christianity and the notion of nothingness can shed light on the nature of Mai Manyanga's power. According to Ranasinghe (2020), "in Christianity, the meaning of life emanates from

both within and without", citing the Book of John where it is stated: "Through him, all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1:3). This implies that in the Christian cosmology the meaningfulness of life derives neither from having material riches nor from holding sound earthly visions, but from divine grace. Accordingly, the Bible condemns material wealth as a hindrance to one's inheritance of the Kingdom of God (Mathew 19:24) and states that it is the poor who shall inherit that kingdom (Luke 6:20-21). This Christian perspective complicates the meanings of somethingness and nothingness, reinforcing the view of "nothingness as a simultaneity of nothing and something" (Ranasinghe, 2020: 300). Ranasinghe underlines the paradoxical power of nothingness by arguing that in Christian literature "salvation necessitates the reduction of humans to nothingness and it is nothingness that forms the foundation for salvation" (2020: 304). Considering this view, Mai Manyanga's power lies in her ability to stand firm in pursuit of her ideological persuasions and to derive a sense of completeness from them.

Who then is nothing? In his book *Nothingness and the Meaning of Life* (2014), Nicholas Waghorn contends that answers to epistemological questions concerning the essence of being and what makes life meaningful or meaningless are relative to individuals and societies. According to Ranasinghe, individuals often find themselves grappling with an existential crisis surrounding the meaning and essence of life when faced with social malaise. This aptly captures Tambu's situation in *The Book of Not* (2006) and *This Mournable Body,* where she must reckon with persistent feelings of melancholy, ennui, and frustration. Her cynical view of her mother is therefore a product of a wounded psyche, which Ranasinghe aptly describes as "a profound loss of meaning about life resulting in significant meaninglessness" (2020: 301). This is supported by Chigwedere (2016: 169) who in her reading of *The Book of Not* (2006) argues that Tambudzai's low opinion of her mother emanates from a "fractured sense of self" that also manifests itself through "a profound belief in her own inferiority and that of her people". In light of these claims, Mai Tambu's nothingness is merely a product of Tambu's subjective thinking.

In many ways, Dangarembga upends Tambu's reductive view of her mother, suggesting that it is Tambu herself who ultimately becomes a 'not' (as in the titular words "the book of not"). Augmenting this view, Muponde observes that "much as Tambu dislikes her mother, and strives to be as different from her as possible, she must try to return to her in order to understand where she missed her own" (2007: 167). He further argues that Tambu's truncated aspirations

are condensed in the Shona idiophone "fototo" which translates to "squashed or deflated", and that this corresponds to the way the "*The Book of Not* ends with a confused, uncertain and disoriented Tambu, jobless and on the verge of being evicted from a hostel by an old white matron" (ibid.: 165). Muponde's analysis is supported by Chigwedere who sees Tambu as the ultimate face of failure:

> Contrary to her declaration, in *The Book of Not*, Tambu undeniably fails to resist the negative impacts of her expansion and there is evidence in the narrative to suggest that her Western education has succeeded in "killing" her by brainwashing her into believing in the inferiority of her race, her people and her culture; a belief that dents her own sense of self-worth and subjectivity, leading to an ontological insecurity. (Chigwedere, 2016: 173)

Thus, Chigwedere, like Muponde, suggests that Tambu sinks below what she wrongly sees as her mother's non-achievement. Probably nowhere else is this reality more aptly captured than when Muponde avers that "Tambu conjures up the typical going-nowhereness of Marechera's narrator in his two stories 'House of Hunger' and 'Protista' (1978)" (2007: 167). However, *This Mournable Body* ends on a promising note with Tambu securing a managerial post at Mainini Lucia's AK Security company, and with the novel insinuating that she has learnt from her past mistakes.

That said, my discussion in this section has unravelled disconnections between the reductive framing of stay-at-home mothers and their lived experiences. The lives of such mothers do not amount to nothing if nothingness implies "the indeterminacy of being" (Ranasinghe, 2020: 312). Rather, these often-side-lined mothers represent both power and disempowerment; though marginalised they actively contribute to the production of knowledge and visions that can advance humanity. Their micronarratives and resistances are microcosmic of the larger maternal politics at a global level.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter offered a reading of Vera's novels *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name* and Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body*. The aim was to demonstrate how women radically challenge male-defined understandings of motherhood. To that end, I deployed the lens of opting out (Ruti, 2017), which, though formulated from a queer theoretical perspective, is transposable to other discursive contexts where precarious subjects defy normativity as an expression of radical refusal. I explored the politics of opting out at three different levels. The

first section focused on how Vera's heroines in *Butterfly Burning* shun the institutions of marriage and motherhood as a form of refusal politics against patriarchal policing of their sexuality. The second section read Vera's politico-aesthetic departures in *Without a Name* as a form of literary enablement of women's opting out of patriarchal motherhood. The last section explored the politics of opting out as enacted through the micronarratives and resistances of stay-at-home mothers in *This Mournable Body*.

My reading reinforced the contention that the policing of the maternal body and the exclusion of mothers from processes of knowledge production and decision making are intertwined with how the system of gendered identity conflates motherhood with the biological function of reproduction (Rich, 1976; O'Reilly, 2010). This conflation sustains the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) that not only confines mothers to the private space but also requires them to devote all their energies to childcare at the expense of their other needs. It is against this background that Vera's heroines shun both the experience and identity of motherhood by adopting unorthodox behaviours. I read the cultural dissidence as a liberation praxis that enables women to pursue their self-actualisation needs in a context where motherhood is a liability.

The chapter also highlighted the limitations of "opting out" as an analytic paradigm, especially its single-eyed celebration of cultural dissidence as an existential strategy. This problematisation enabled me to unravel the ambivalences that underwrite the ethics and politics of opting out. Thus, while reading the adoption of unorthodox sexual behaviours as attempts to reclaim freedom and agency in the face of patriarchal policing (in Vera's novels), I have also indicated that women's resort to commercialisation of their bodies for survival reflects how the institutionalised exclusion of women from participating in the mainstream political economy drives them to assume dehumanising self-preservation repertoires.

Reading maternal precarity and subjectivities through the aesthetics of opting out (in *Without a Name*) placed my discussion within an existing body of critical work on Vera's peculiar deployment of language to accentuate the consolidation of female subjectivity. My focus, however, was on ways in which the author deploys her works' literariness to gesture at the urgent need for alternative maternal spaces and identities. This complemented my discussion in Chapter 2 of how writing can be an act of co-journeying with the precariat.

This chapter unravelled (dis)connections between Vera and Dangarembga's representation of motherhood. Vera creates literary worlds populated by 'potential' mothers, women who abort pregnancies and dump or kill their babies to eschew the experience of motherhood. In that way, she indirectly depicts maternal insecurities and subjectivities through the experiences of women who resist becoming mothers. It appears Vera has no faith in the revolutionary potential of mothers; hence, she depicts maternal precarity through the experiences of young women who are non-mothers, which in turn subscribes to early radical feminist thinking that was seen as "antimotherhood" (Kinser, 2010: 396). By contrast, Dangarembga subscribes to later feminist thinking, associated with Adrienne Rich (1976), that saw motherhood as a site of ambivalence where mothers can exercise agency in the face of heteropatriarchal control. My reading of *This Mournable Body* showed that even the often-side-lined stay-at-home mothers have a voice and can actively participate in knowledge construction. However, Dangarembga seems to be apologetic for her more liberal stance as attested by the way her literary works narrate female experience from a daughter-centric perspective. Reading Vera alongside Dangarembga, therefore, helped to bring out diametrically different ways of confronting the patriarchal script of motherhood. Differences in the two authors' visions and politico-aesthetic strategies gesture at the diversity of existential strategies at the disposal of women in non-ideal mothering circumstances.

Overall, the chapter reinforced this thesis's guiding premise that the experience of precarity promotes radical thinking that enables the precariat to engage in refusal politics (Standing, 2011; Botha, 2014). The studied texts show a causal relationship between gendered oppression and the politics of opting out and how precarious subjects can challenge "conventional definitions of vulnerability [that] connote weakness, softness, permeability, a sense of being affected, imprinted upon or entered and shattered" (Dahl, 2017: 41). As the chapter revealed, the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of opting out are a direct response to oppressive patriarchal politics. The next chapter focuses on how PWA consolidate subjectivities in the face of social exclusion and cultural disablement.

CHAPTER 4
UNDOING THE ALBINO TROPE IN PETINA GAPPAH'S *THE BOOK OF MEMORY* AND BEN HANSON'S *TAKADINI*

> Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. (Taleb, 2012: 3)

4.1 Introduction

The epigraph encapsulates Nassim Taleb's (2012) notion of antifragility, which I use to frame my reading of the paradoxical role of precarity in the consolidation of albino subjectivities. The two novels selected for this chapter, Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* (2015) and Ben Hanson's *Takadini* (1997), mirror the self-constituting efforts of characters with albinism in cultural environments where the albinic[47] body is negatively framed as disabled, freakish, and subhuman. In some African communities, such as the Bamileke of Southern Cameroon the albinic body is rendered "ungrievable" (Butler, 2004) by a traditional decree against mourning and performance of the usual funeral rites when a person with albinism dies (Baker *et al.*, 2010). In Hanson's and Gappah's texts, the albinic body inhabits a precarious liminal position between whiteness and blackness, normalcy and abnormality, and hypervisibility and invisibility. This liminality plays out in the way the albinic body is depicted both as a surface for the inscription of "unstable meanings attached to skin colour" (Veit-Wild & Naguschewski, 2005: xvi–xvii) and as a site for the exercise of agency. This chapter deploys the lens of antifragility (Taleb, 2012) to explore ways in which the novels under study attempt to subvert the persistently negative albino identity portrayed in popular discourse, imaginative writing, and different media platforms, what Miller (2018) calls the 'albino trope'. This is to sustain the argument that in Hanson's and Gappah's narratives, the albinic body is a cultural text for undoing the albino trope and reorienting understandings of difference.

Takadini and *The Book of Memory* are part of a growing number of African novels that set out to contest myths about albinism, and as Eze (2021: 96) says, depict PWA "from inside out, as

[47] I borrow the term 'albinic' from Miller (2017), who uses it as a qualifier for the body with albinism. Also, Miller, among other scholars, have proposed the polite term 'person with albinism' as a substitution for 'albino', which has been criticized for demeaning people with the condition (See also Baker, 2011, p. 2). Therefore, the term 'albino' is only used in this chapter (and in other parts of this study) in certain particularized contexts where no other term can effectively capture the intended sense or effect.

humans who have the same wishes as others do". These novels include Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000), Stephen Alumenda's *Anani the Albino Boy* (2002), Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2014), and Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018). By foregrounding albino protagonists who consolidate subjectivities in the face of cultural disablement, these works mark a departure from earlier works such as Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1970), Buchi Emecheta's *The Moonlight Bride* (1983), José Agualusa's *The Book of Chameleons* (2008), and Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* (2011), where albinism functions merely as a trope with prosthetic functions (Eze, 2021: 95).

Nassim Taleb's (2012) antifragility model offers a useful analytic paradigm for conceptualising how Hanson's and Gappah's albino protagonists turn their stigmatisation and discrimination into a resource. Taleb uses the word 'antifragile' to describe that which 'gets better' when exposed to shock. At the elementary level, antifragility is conceived of in terms of two pharmacological concepts: 'mithridatisation' and 'hormesis'. The former denotes "the result of an exposure to a small dose of a substance that, over time, makes one immune to additional, larger quantities of it" (Taleb, 2012: 37). The latter applies to a pharmacological context "when a small dose of a harmful substance is actually beneficial for the organism, acting as medicine" (ibid.). In both cases, however, the organism on which the dosage is administered "gains from harm" (ibid.). Taleb's antifragility logic is further condensed into two metaphors: the legendary phoenix, which would rise from its ashes whenever it was destroyed, and the multi-headed serpent-like Hydra on which two heads would instantly grow whenever one was cut off. Thus, while the phoenix defies harm, Hydra thrives on it. On one hand, the metaphors of Hydra and the phoenix are deployed in my discussion of how Hanson's and Gappah's albino protagonists defy death. On the other hand, I invoke the concepts of mithridatisation and hormesis in my examination of how the albino protagonists indemnify themselves against further suffering from the force of stigma and discrimination.

Also significant to my discussion is Taleb's (2012) idea of 'evolution', a higher-level antifragility in which the organism receiving the dosage dies but after transferring benefits to those of its kind that survive. Unlike mithridatisation and hormesis which refer to the 'robustification' of individuals, evolution guarantees the antifragility of whole social groups and 'future generations'. Evolution is not episodic but processual and depends on the fragility of parts and that of current generations (Taleb, 2012: 64–67). The concept helps to make sense of how the suffering of Hanson's and Gappah's albino characters is an act of sacrifice that

individual parts must make to ensure the survival of the whole and posterity. I also draw on the more general import of the term evolution as the accumulation of changes over successive generations. This additional sense helps me to conceptualise how PWA continue to benefit from gradual changes in societal attitudes towards them. Such attitudinal changes are explored at both intra- and intertextual levels. For example, while the plot of *Takadini* shows the gradual improvement of ableist society's attitudes towards PWA, the changes become more noticeable when one reads *The Book of Memory* after *Takadini*, which is set in precolonial times when the practice of killing albino babies at birth was still in place. In Taleb's terms, such a shift implies that the present generation of PWA has 'gained' from the harm suffered by past generations.

Much of the existing scholarship on albinism focuses on the role of myths about albinism in precaritising persons with the condition (Baker *et al.*, 2010; Machoko, 2013). Some scholars extoll literary attempts at mainstreaming albinism as a way of raising awareness about the condition (Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018; Baker & Lund, 2017; McCann, 2016). McCann, for example, applauds the conferment of voice and agency to albino protagonists by making them the locus of narration. Wright (2008) and McDermott and Varenne (1995) explore albinism from a disability theory perspective, which dovetails with my exploration of the intersection between albinism and disability. Hove (2013) and Tagwirei (2012) criticise *Takadini* for appearing to reinforce the alterity that it sets out to undo. I find this problematisation pertinent to my evaluation of Hanson's and Gappah's literary attempts to reorient understandings of difference. As a point of departure, I deploy the lens of antifragility within the framework of precarity theory to explore how characters with albinism transcend the limitations imposed upon them by their dermatological condition. This is to reinforce my claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean creative writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to expand an understanding of the cultural production of precarity.

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section (Section 4.2) draws on Garland-Thomson's (2003) concept of enfreakment, the cultural construction of 'freaks', to explore the role of signification tools in the ideological construction of albinic otherness in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory*. Also important to the discussion are Hall's (1997) reflections on the role of language in the production and exchange of cultural meanings and how ableist society reacts to "the spectacle of the Other", as well as the ideas of Foucault (1979) and Bourdieu (1991) on society's mechanisms of disciplining the body. The focus is on the discursive tools, such as labelling, name-calling, stereotyping, and normalising practices used to construct a disabling

albino identity. My argument is that the albinic body's alterity is an unstable ideological construct that is sustained by an equally unstable signification system. The section serves as a foundation for my exploration of ways in which the albinic body resists cultural disablement.

In the second section (Section 4.3), I deploy the metaphor of the undying phoenix (Taleb, 2012) as an overarching conceptual metaphor to explore narrative tools employed to salvage albino subjectivity in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory*. The focus is on how albino characters, and those whose fate is intricately tied to theirs, gain antifragility through exposure to harm. Thus, the section validates the notion of "ruthlessness as an engine of improvement" (Taleb, 2012: 69) and places the two texts under study within the broader context of resistance literature. The subsection argues that the capacity of albino protagonists to survive against all odds is part of the texts' strategy to expose the disjuncture between the 'wrong' skin colour myth and the lived experiences of PWA.

The last section (Section 4.4) deploys Taleb's (2012) concept of evolution to read *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* as future-oriented texts that are primarily concerned with the antifragility of the entire genus of PWA. To sustain this logic, this section reads the novel's albino protagonists as individual organisms that must perish, as Taleb (2012: 65) would say, so that "the benefits are transferred to others, the surviving ones, and future generations." The social injustices perpetrated against albino characters, therefore, act as catalysts for the collective robustification of future generations of PWA.

4.2 The ideological construction of albinic otherness

In *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory*, the albinic other is depicted as a social construct whose identity is mediated by traditional beliefs and practices rather than by biomedical understandings of albinism. Both texts underscore how the negative framing of the albinic body derives from notional understandings of its condition. Studies on the cultural construction of freaks (Thomson & Thomson-Garland, 1996; Garland-Thomson, 2003) show that the freak or the anomalous body is historically and culturally constructed through discourses of enfreakment that exist at sundry levels, including race, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, and sexuality. Thomson and Thomson-Garland note that "corporeal otherness" or "embodied deviance" underwrites and legitimates politics of exclusion (1996: 10). Garland-Thomson underlines how enfreakment is mediated by "social practices that invest bodies with meanings", such as labelling and commercialization of people as freaks on media platforms and other

exhibition sites (2003: 130). In this section, I demonstrate how the idea of enfreakment plays out in Hanson's and Gappah's texts through different discursive practices, including stereotyping, name-calling, and labelling, that are deployed in the cultural construction of albinic otherness.

Brief plot synopses of the texts under study help to establish the context in which albinic otherness is ideologically constructed. *Takadini*, set in precolonial Zimbabwe, tells the story of Sekai who gives birth to an albino son (Takadini) in a society where tradition decrees the immediate killing of such babies. Sekai and her son flee to another village where, despite being exposed to stigma and discrimination, they gradually get integrated into village life. Similarly, in *The Book of Memory*, the albino protagonist (Memory) suffers from social exclusion and later becomes "the first woman in more than 20 years to be sentenced to death" (Gappah, 2015: 26) on allegations of murder of her white benefactor Lloyd Hendricks. The narrative ends with Memory in Chikurubi Maximum Prison where she has learnt to transcend the limitations imposed by her dermatological difference.

Takadini and Memory are born into communities with a pre-established grammar for naming difference, where the social organisation grants those with 'normal' pigmentation the power to name those who are 'wrongly' pigmented. So, when Takadini is born a *musope*, one born "without skin", he must be "sen[t] back to the ancestors" (Hanson, 1997: 21, 12, 13). Likewise, Memory is born with "a ghastly whiteness" and so she is immediately identified as a *murungudunhu*, a fake white person (Gappah, 2015: 10). Elsewhere, in Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2014), the albino protagonist (Chipo) is pejoratively named 'peeled potato', 'monkey', and '*sope*' (Vandermerwe, 2014: 14–15), while in Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2002: 19) the albino character (Emmanuel) is nicknamed 'white monkey'. The way the albinic body attracts negative attention bolsters the view that "bodies that depart from social expectations have always been the objects of intense visual interest rooted in a drive to explain and contain the extraordinary. The ordinary is safely anonymous, going unremarked and unnoticeable" (Garland-Thomson, 2003: 131). What becomes apparent is that the derogatory terms derived from the albinic body's materiality serve as metaphors for deep-rooted cultural essentialisms about what it means to be different and tend to diminish the organic unity of the albinic body by directing all attention to its pigmentation.

The role of language in the construction of a demeaning albino identity can be understood in terms of what Hall (1997) sees as the capacity of language to arbitrarily attach meanings to

objects, persons, and social groups. He adds that meaning production is intricately connected to power relations so that those with power have the privilege to "define what is 'normal', who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded" (Hall, 1997: 10). Building on Hall's thinking, Campell (2016) observes how non-white racial groups are rendered invisible in American media. Foucault's (1979) view of the body as a site of subject-object formation also helps to illuminate how negative labels get deposited onto bodies that are marked by difference. He argues that the mechanism of power construction entails the deployment of disciplining and normalisation strategies that keep the disempowered in their place. The dehumanising labels attached to Takadini and Memory, therefore, serve as normalising tools.

The idea of normalisation bears kinship with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of bodily *habitus,* which refers to mental dispositions that we are socialised into from childhood, inhering in our bodies for life, and compelling us to behave in specific ways. Bourdieu contends that social orders exploit language and bodily dispositions to institute mental states. Although the notion of *habitus* also relates to positive dispositions (Reay, 2015), it helps here to conceptualise how the albinic body becomes a site for the inscription of cultural texts that impose an identity on it. In *Takadini,* bodily *habitus* finds expression in society's reaction to the spectacle of irregular pigmentation. For Makwati (Takadini's father), the albino baby is neither normal nor human and his disowning of Takadini reflects society's *habitus* concerning PWA and all persons marked by difference. Such a *habitus* is encapsulated in the Shona proverb: "*It is the nature of a duiker to produce young that have a tuft of hair on the head*" (Hanson, 1997: 17, italics in original). It is a mode of thinking that is predicated on the Africanist philosophy of ubuntu that privileges majoritarian interests and strives to "prevent discord and disequilibrium among accepted beings" (Imafidon, 2017: 163). The body with albinism affronts society's sense of equilibrium and so it is regarded, in Douglas's (1966: 36) terms, as 'dirt' or "matter out of place". According to Douglas, society reacts in two ways to those who disrupt its idea of order: "negatively, we can ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place" (1966: 47). The society in Hanson's and Gappah's novels chooses the extreme negative option of perceiving and condemning the body with albinism.

Society's fear of discord or "fear of the over-proximity of the Other" (Žižek, 2008: 58) is presented as real in Hanson's and Gappah's novels. In *Takadini* pregnant women eschew the sight of Takadini as they fear it would 'infect' their unborn babies with albinism. Similarly, in

The Book of Memory, Marvellous, a female inmate at Chikurubi Maximum Prison, is so frightened by Memory's looks that she pleads with prison guards to be placed in a cell that is far away from Memory's. These repulsions at the albinic body invoke the concept of "the uncanny, *das Unheimlich*", where the uncanny is "all that arouses dread and horror" (Freud, 1919: 219).[48] This is reinforced by Davis (2005: 175), who contends from a disability studies perspective that ableist society sees the disabled body as *das Unheimlich*, "the familiar gone wrong". For Davis, normalcy and ableism are rooted in myths of ugliness and beauty, and he likens the repulsion that able-bodied persons experience at the sight of disability to the revulsion aroused by the frightening gaze of Medusa in Greek myth.[49]

Given the above, Takadini and Memory's bodies are *das Unheimlich* because of their defamiliarizing effect and for thrusting themselves onto the public gaze since the uncanny is that which "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light" (Freud, 1919: 225). The plan to eliminate Takadini at birth and the unjust incarceration of Memory (which amounts to quarantine) are efforts to conceal the uncanny from the public gaze. This evokes the story of Mangy-Dog in Louis Bernardo Honwana's *We Killed Mangy-Dog* (1969). Mangy-dog's skin is "old and covered with white hair, scars, and lots of sores" and "no one liked him because he was an ugly dog" (Honwana, 1969: 75, 77). He is finally killed due to his frightening looks. Interestingly, characters who interact closely with PWA, such as Baba Kutukwa in *Takadini* and Lloyd in *The Book of Memory*, reveal that the uncanniness that society inscribes on PWA is a fallacious and absurd psychological complex.

Interestingly, the anathematisation of the albinic body's white skin unsettles historically situated notions about beauty and ugliness. Many scholars have underlined the great social capital that is attached to white or light skin (Gabriel, 2007; Phoenix, 2014; Mitchell, 2020). Phoenix (2014) underscores the primacy of colourism, "prejudice on the basis of skin shade", in informing perceptions about beauty and ugliness. Considered from a feminist perspective, colourism poses a challenge to especially dark-skinned young women who do not meet "the hegemonic ideal of the beautiful fair white woman" and are therefore doubly displaced at the intersections of race and colourism (Phoenix, 2014: 97, 98). The privileging of light-coloured

[48] Sigmund Freud, however, hastens to state that the term 'uncanny' does not apply to anything that excites fear. Rather, the impression of uncanniness arises when "something long known to us" become terrifying (Freud, 1919: 225).

[49] According to the myth, Medusa's gaze was so frightening that whoever dared look at her would instantly go blind.

skin speaks through a close correlation "between colourism and the alleged practice of whitewashing the skin tones of black women in print media marketing communications" (Mitchell, 2020: 1366). Ironically, in *The Book of Memory* society clearly distinguishes the privileged whiteness of characters such as Lloyd from the 'fake' and "ghastly whiteness" of the albinic body, the *murungudunhu* (Gappah, 2015: 10).

Albinic otherness is a function of prejudice, myths and misconceptions (Baker *et al.*, 2010; Machoko, 2013). In *Takadini*, the tradition of killing albino children at birth is predicated on the fallacy that such children are congenitally disabled and will not survive to adulthood. Ambuya Tukai, one of the midwives present at Takadini's birth, reveals this when she explains to Sekai why the albino baby must be destroyed: "But my daughter, how will he be able to live without skin?" (Hanson, 1997: 13). This fallacy casts its shadow on other African literary works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Taban Lo Liyong's *The Colour of Hope* (2010). The problem with myths is that they are "based on often simplistic, abstract, and omni-historical explanations of reality, and they are difficult to disprove for that reason" (Eze, 2021: 93). This is compounded by the fact that PWA would not be allowed to grow to adult life and disprove the fallacies.

The belief that Takadini would not survive to adulthood underscores how mainstream society conflates albinism with disability. According to Baker and Lund, this conflation stems from the "assumption that a deficit in one part of the body is necessarily linked to another" (2017: 279). When Makwati asks Sekai if the baby is whole, he wants to know if it is an able-bodied "man-child to carry his name and help fulfil his dreams" (Hanson, 1997: 15, 12). As an albino child, Takadini fails to live up to his father's definition of a man-child, which also shows how ableism genders the albinic body. The fact that Makwati, as the face of ableist society, is not prepared to give Takadini a chance to prove his wholeness supports the view that "albinism constitutes barriers to doing and to being" (Eze, 2021: 92).

Explaining the cultural disablement of the albinic body, Baker (2010) contends that its skin's failure to perform the normal function of protecting the body from inclement weather elements is often misconstrued as a sign of mental inadequacy. This is because, she argues, the skin metaphorically serves as "a divide between the individual and the world", containing and delimiting the inner person. Therefore, the albinic skin's 'transparency' is erroneously conflated with a "sensitivity or transparency of emotions" that, in turn, symbolically implies openness "to the imposition of identity from the outside" (Baker, 2010: 93–94). This echoes

the view that "the absence of color makes the [albinic] body into something transparent and radically open to interpretation" (Benthien, 1997: 3). These claims shed light on how a lack of melanin becomes a synecdoche for albino identity in Hanson's and Gappah's texts.

By underscoring the cultural constructedness of albinic otherness, Hanson and Gappah subscribe to the social model of disability which maintains that although persons with impairment may suffer from reduced somatic functionality, it is the society that entrenches and perpetuates their disability (Oliver, 1996). Generally, definitions of disability have come from two perspectives, the biomedical and the sociological. The biomedical approach focuses on the disabling impact of disease, physical impairment, or dysfunction, while sociological definitions focus on the disabling aspects of the cultural environment or circumstances in which individuals are placed. The sociological perspective maintains that the meaning and impact of disability tend to vary from society to society in step with variations in particularities of each cultural environment (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Williams, 2001). Mike Oliver (1996), who proposed the social model of disability, contends that although persons with impairment may suffer from malfunctionality of the body or parts thereof, it is the society that entrenches and perpetuates the fact of such persons' disability. This view is reinforced by Siebers (2008: 4), who argues that disability is merely an "elastic social category" and not a fixed biological condition. The social model of disability helps to explain how in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* the albinic body is not congenitally disabled but becomes culturally disabled through the society's signification system.

In *The Book of Memory*, Gappah demonstrates the disabling effect of the cultural meanings attached to albinism. Memory remains apprehensive and aloof for the greater part of her life, which she confirms with the statement: "I spent much of my time trying to be visible" (Gappah, 2015: 51). Her withdrawal from society results from name-calling and the attitudes of various characters towards her. These characters include Sekuru Jonas, who always spits whenever he sees her; Mai Tafadzwa, who would mutter something under her breath and spit; and the Malawian Phiri family, who looked at Memory "with eyes of pity" (Gappah, 2015: 52). It is a result of such attitudes that Memory's childhood is characterised by her invisibility. According to Machoko (2013) and Cruz-Inigo *et al.* (2011), stigma and discrimination result in loss of self-esteem and subsequent withdrawal of most PWA from social activities. This is reinforced by Siebers (2008) who contends that disability has always been linked to stigmatised social positions.

It should be argued, however, that both Hanson and Gappah complicate their representation of society's disabling impact on PWA. Each of the albino protagonists is placed at the intersection of multiple disabling positions, which makes it difficult to draw demarcation lines between the disabling effects of their medical condition[50] and society's disabling tendencies. From a medical perspective, both Takadini and Memory are disabled by their hypersensitivity to the glare of the sun, which undermines their ability to participate in childhood games. On one hand, Takadini would just stand "at the edge of the playing area watching as the others sang and danced" (Hanson, 1997: 65). On the other hand, Memory tells us: "I longed to play on Mharapara with the others but I could not join in. I could not join in because, if I went out and stayed in the sun for any length of time, my skin cracked and blistered" (Gappah, 2015: 47). Therefore, to an extent, medical challenges associated with their condition as PWA undermines Takadini and Memory's ability to interact with other children.

Takadini's situation is complicated by the fact that he is also physically impaired following an attack by bees when he was still a baby. As a result of the impairment, Takadini "was still not crawling" (Hanson, 1997: 35) well after his agemates had passed that development stage. This physical condition accentuates the ableist conception of albinism as a sign of deficiency in all aspects of the albino person's life. More importantly, it renders it difficult to tell whether Takadini's inability to herd cattle, go out on hunting expeditions and participate in children's games is due to social exclusion or his being crippled. By making Takadini's body a site of different forms of disablement, Hanson nuances disability and challenges monocentric understandings of the body with albinism. A similar scenario is depicted in Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2002) where the albino protagonist, Emmanuel, gets injured in a car accident.

Likewise, Memory's disablement by society cannot be fully explained in terms of a single disabling factor. Gappah draws attention to the multidimensionality of Memory's marginality, which is an interplay of her albinism, femaleness, poor family background, blackness, as well as the country's retrogressive carceral and judiciary systems. The complexity of Memory's situation is hinted at by the statement: "[t]o be an albino is a terrible thing, but to be a girl

[50] As a dermatological disease, albinism comes with a host of medical challenges for persons living with the condition. These challenges include reduced visual acuity, photophobia and high susceptibility to skin cancer. See Grønskov *et al.* 2007. Oculocutaneous albinism. *Orphanet Journal of Rare Diseases,* p.2.

albino is the worst of all" (Gappah, 2015: 176). This complicates Gappah's presentation of cultural disablement. Like Hanson, Gappah gives credence to intersectionality theory, which maintains that marginality and oppression are constituted by intertwining and mutually constructing power relations (Crenshaw, 1989).

Takadini and *The Book of Memory* not only show the power of society to disable PWA but also demonstrate how society is itself morally disabled by its obsessive desire to punish and eliminate difference. This aligns with the view that "a disability may be a better display board for the weaknesses of a cultural system than it is an account of real persons" (McDermott & Varenne, 1995: 327). I also demonstrated that the marginalisation of PWA stems from historically rooted prejudices that are perpetuated through stereotyping, name-calling, labelling and bad representational strategies in art. In the following subsection, I deploy the image of the undying phoenix (Taleb, 2012) to explore how Gappah's and Hanson's albino protagonists weaponise their marginalised positions as part of the larger process of subverting the enfreakment of the body with albinism.

4.3 Reborn from the ashes: adaptive capacities and infrastructures of care

Takadini and *The Book of Memory* are stories of suffering, escape, resilience, and renewal. They demonstrate that the exposure of albino characters to social exclusion calls forth an ethic of resilience that enables them to defy cultural disablement. It is against the background of systematic othering of the albinic body that I now focus on ways in which albino characters, and those whose lives are intermeshed with theirs, discover the art of radicalising their vulnerability. Among other strategies, albino characters tell their own stories, discover ways of inuring themselves against further harm, convert their isolation into a useful time resource, and assertively develop a sense of self-hood through a change of attitude. To explore these strategies, I invoke the metaphor of the legendary phoenix that defies death by continually rising from its ashes. The pharmacological concept of hormesis, "when a small dose of a harmful substance is actually beneficial for the organism, acting as medicine" (Taleb, 2012: 37), helps to shed light on ways in which albino protagonists in Hanson's and Gappah's novels build resilience from the experience of social exclusion. This paradox invokes a pharmacological scenario when the organism on which the dosage is administered "gains from harm" (ibid.). I demonstrate that for Takadini and Memory, "the road to robustification starts with a modicum of harm" (ibid.: 39) and read the two protagonists' efforts towards resisting

cultural disablement as integral to the greater exercise of undoing the albino trope within the context of the global human rights discourse.

Contrary to the view that disabled characters are often relegated to the background in fictional works (Davis, 1997), Hanson and Gappah make their culturally disabled albino characters the locus of narration. This aligns with the claim that albino characters reclaim agency when they are placed at the centre of the narrative (Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018). In *The Book of Memory,* which adopts the form of an epistolary notebook, Memory becomes the narrator-cum-writer as she narrates her life to Melinda Carter, an American journalist. The novel's autobiographical elements render it a significant addition to a growing list of autobiographical works by PWA, including, as identified by Baker *et al.* (2010), Mongezi Ngidi's *Black or White, Does it Matter?: My Journey with Albinism* (2006) and Lee Edwards' *Too White to be Black and too Black to be White: Living with Albinism* (2001). The titles of these texts highlight the precaritising liminality of the albinic body, while the works call for the recognition of the human being beneath the skin. They also narrate albinism from an insider perspective as a way of safeguarding against the twofold challenge of misrepresentation and underrepresentation, both of which Memory alludes to when she narrates how "none of the journalists in Harare have been interested in [her] story" and how the report of Lloyd's death focused on her condition (Gappah, 2015, 9). Here, Memory evokes what Eze sees as a misrepresentation of PWA in African literary texts such as Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1970), José Agualusa's *The Book of Chameleons* (2008), and Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* (2011), in which albinism is reduced to a mere narrative trope (Eze, 2021: 95).

Therefore, by telling her story Memory not only reclaims her voice but also contests falsehoods around her alleged murder case. At a symbolic level, she is writing back to disabling cultural frames against all PWA, while as a personal safety valve, she writes to keep her buoyant in the face of social exclusion and undeserved incarceration. She says, "I am writing to keep myself alive" (Gappah, 2015: 88), which suggests how, to borrow from George Lamming (1953), writing enables her to find refuge "in the castle of [her] skin". Here, Memory invokes the symbolism of the phoenix's rebirth from the ashes, which resonates with what Muponde describes, in his memoir *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse*, as "the resurrecting power of storying" (2021: 10). Muponde is talking about the power of stories, which points to the utilitarian function of life writing. This function is explored at length by Nyanda (2016: 28),

who argues in the context of Zimbabwean political autobiography that life writing is a strategy of salvaging the self from ruination.

Similarly, Takadini sings himself into existence through *mbira* music.[51] Like writing, music offers opportunities for self-expression. His music primarily serves as solace as he "turned to his instrument for spiritual strength and comfort, pouring out his soul and his solitude in a song of his own creation" (Hanson, 1997: 131). Takadini's songs are a form of life writing as they articulate personal experiences and defiantly express a zest for life in a world that seeks his elimination. The nexus between *mbira* music and defiance is hinted at by Hancock-Barnett (2012), who explores how *mbira* music served as a cultural text for the preservation of local notions of identity, and therefore, enabled the Shona people of Zimbabwe to covertly resist the detrimental cultural implications of colonial resettlement. Later, in the 1970s, Zimbabwean musician Thomas Mapfumo effectively deployed the *mbira* music genre as a conscientisation and mobilisation tool during the anti-colonial struggle (Pongweni, 1982).[52]

By a stroke of ingenuity, Takadini infuses personalised content into his songs while at the same time living up to community taste. This enables him to exploit the *mbira* genre's affective aspects and participatory nature to negotiate belonging. It is symbolically significant that Takadini's first public performance, which happens at a traditional ceremony (*bira*) in honour of the late Baba Chivero, marks the beginning of his acceptance in the community; among the Shona people, the *bira* is a space of "democratic practice" and a convergence forum for the living and the dead (Hancock-Barnett, 2012, 17). In real life, the role of music in soliciting acceptance for PWA is exemplified by many artists across the world, including John Chiti of Zambia, Salif Keïta of Mali (affectionately nicknamed the 'Golden Voice of Africa'), Cano Estremera from Puerto Rico, and the Jamaican dancehall musician Winston 'Yellowman' Foster. The success stories of these artists underline how music constitutes an important front for subverting the ideological construction of albinic alterity. Similarly, Takadini's ability to discover his strengths through music is integral to the development of his sense of self-worth. He had always yearned for company and a sense of fulfilment, both of which he ultimately

[51] The term '*mbira*' refers to both a genre of Zimbabwean traditional music and the keyed instrument, a finger piano, used to produce the music.
[52] Many other Zimbabwean musicians have used *mbira* music to advance different existential struggles. These artists include Chiwoniso Maraire, Ephat Mujuru, Stella Chiweshe, Mbira DzeNharira, and Jah Prayzah.

attains. In the process, he brings immense joy to his mother who regards this happy present as "worth all the years of pain and sorrow she had endured" (Hanson, 1997: 101).

Besides self-representation, Hanson's and Gappah's albino protagonists turn their social exclusion into a resource for attaining self-actualisation. Shunned by other children, Takadini spends much of his time with elders who teach him to discover and nurture his capabilities. Baba Kutukwa, a village elder, grooms Takadini into an outstanding *mbira* musician, which ultimately earns him acceptance in the community. Likewise, Baba Chivero helps Takadini to discover alternative ways of becoming a hero without necessarily being a hunter or a warrior, especially by telling the albino boy stories of "small and weak" animals that outsmarted big animals (Hanson, 1997: 79). These vital life lessons often come in the form of axioms and stories. For example, Baba Chivero tells Takadini: "*The baobab is not as slim and as pretty as other trees, but it is stronger and lives longer than any other tree in the forest. And it is also very useful, Taka*" (Hanson, 1997: 74, italics in original). Here, Hanson deploys the visual imagery of the baobab to challenge conventional notions of beauty. The daily excursions into the bush with Baba Chivero make Takadini "stronger and self-confident" while the lessons from the old man "made him much wiser than the other children of his age" (Hanson, 1997: 71). Baba Chivero assures Takadini that he is going to be a greater traditional healer than himself, which will also guarantee his acceptance in the community. Takadini's exceptional intelligence parallels that of Memory who outperforms other students in class, and whose report "every term spoke of a one hundred per cent pass rate in every subject" (Gappah, 2015: 55). The outstanding performance of Takadini and Memory validates the claim by Grønskov *et al*. (2007) that PWA are not different from non-albinic people in terms of intellectual ability.

Related to the above, the stories that Baba Chivero tells Takadini are designed to teach him to become a better human rather than to make him live up to the normative ideal of masculinity that "privileges mobility, conquest and perfectionism" (Chinyowa & Chivandikwa, 2017: 57). It is ironic, however, that Takadini faces social exclusion in a society that has fashioned tales that advocate for the respect of the rights of those who are marked by difference. The need to respect the small and the weak is a defining motif in Shona folktales. Writing in the context of the story about animals that dug a well during a drought period in Charles Mungoshi's *Stories from a Shona Childhood* (1989), Muponde (2018) notes that despised animals are made heroes as "tricksters are brought to justice through the ingenuity of underrated animals such as Tortoise and Frog". However, he problematises this formulaic narrative and characterisation

trend in which society's "thoughts and yearnings [are] sewn into the bodies and shapes of the unchanging animals" (Muponde, 2018: 67, 69). Thus, the rigid narrative and characterisation patterns of the folktale genre translate into an inflexible social organisation.

In Gappah's novel, isolation gives Memory freedom to introspect and discover the paradoxical power of her liminal position between whiteness and blackness. This power is conceptualised through the symbolism of the peppered moth (*Biston betularia*), whose white and black colours served as camouflage that enabled it to survive the scourge of predatory birds that nearly decimated the population of its white-coloured counterparts in pre-industrial England (Gappah, 2015: 175). The story of the peppered moth allegorically underscores the beauty of difference. Realising this beauty helps Memory to build resilience and to reject the belief in fate that had enslaved her parents. Rather, she chooses to see all the mishaps that had befallen her family as acts of "random chance" (Gappah, 2015: 262) as opposed to some predestined liability to calamity.

Memory's existential philosophy, premised on the Kantian belief in the capacity of man to take charge of his life through practical reason, enables her to exorcise the many spectres that had previously haunted her life. These spectres include the avenging spirit (ngozi) that makes Memory's mother kill her children; Memory's memories of her stigmatization and isolation; her frequent visions of njuzu (mermaids) and Chimeras drawing her into the water; the ominous pieces of a family photograph stashed in a copy of Emmanuel Ribeiro's 1967 novel *Muchadura* (*You will Confess*) which mirrors the trials and tribulations of a Shona family torn apart by the spirit of ngozi – all tied up with Lloyd's lecture on the concepts of ngozi, fate and haunting. Memory's ability to reinvent herself bolsters Koselleck's (2004) contention that history is makeable and disposable

Considering the above, Hanson and Gappah underscore the importance of transgressing culturally constructed borders between normalcy and abnormality, which Takadini and Memory amply demonstrate. The arbitrariness of such borders is aptly explained by Chipo, the albino protagonist of Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, who draws an analogy between identity borders and national borders. Chipo realises, for instance, that the borderlines that appear on the map of Africa "*exist only in the minds of politicians, who guard their man-made borders with soldiers in uniform, wearing black boots and carrying clipboards and ak-47s"* (Vandermerwe, 2014: 10, italics in original). Through her interaction with the real physical world, Chipo discovers that borders are merely a policing and surveillance strategy in the

service of those in power. As a person living with albinism, Chipo not only realises that society has established invisible borders that separate albinic and non-albinic persons but also convinces herself that the borders can be crossed. Similarly, in Siphiwe Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018), Livingstone Stanley Tikiti (Golide) successfully transcends the disabling identity imposed on him by his albinism:

> Livingstone Stanley Tikiti grew into a man. His self-possession made him a natural leader. His self-confidence instilled confidence in others. People gravitated towards him because he was not what they had expected him to be. They had expected him to be ashamed of his skin, to be cowed by life, to regret his circumstances. But when he held his head high they realised just what was possible. They believed that he saw into the future and that the future was good. (Ndlovu, 2018: 21)

In the above passage, Ndlovu endows the albino character with larger-than-life attributes to deconstruct the disabling identity that ableist society inscribes on the albinic body. In Ndlovu's novel, Livingstone Stanley Tikiti further challenges the suppression of the male albinic body's masculinity (as seen in *Takadini*) when he becomes a freedom fighter, and by extension, attains military masculinity, which Connell (1995) asserts is valorised in patriarchal societies.

Takadini underscores the role of proxy agency and interpersonal support networks in the robustification of PWA. In *Takadini*, Baba Chivero's home becomes a convergence point for differently disadvantaged characters. Baba Chivero himself and his late wife Shuvai had "secretly nursed [grief] for many years" (Hanson, 1997: 32) after losing their only son to a custom that mandated the killing of one of any twin babies. Out of the realisation of shared trauma, he accommodates Sekai and Takadini. Similarly, he brings in to be Sekai's friend the village chief's youngest wife (Tendai) who is equally lonely, having been given to the old chief as an offering to end inter-tribal fighting. The four, Baba Chivero, Sekai, Tendai and Takadini, represent different marginalised locations while their assemblage becomes a performance of coalition politics that, as Baker *et al*. (2010) aver, may take place at interpersonal, family and community levels.

Likewise, in *The Book of Memory,* Gappah seems to suggest that the future survival of PWA is contingent on how far society is prepared to embrace the ethics of cohabitation. Lloyd Hendriks's house 'Summer Madness' becomes a coalition site for those who are marked by difference: Memory, who is an albino girl from a poor family, Lloyd, who is a rich white gay, and Zenzo, who is a bisexual black man. The house is a place of privilege and utopian

possibilities; it is where Memory reclaims her voice and personhood. The rescue of Memory by a white man spells a new dynamic in racial relations that not only gestures at the increasing spatial connections and porosity of postcolonial racial borders but also calls for a rethinking of Fanon's (1963) Manichean city topographies. Like Baba Chivero's compound or the Ibis in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Lloyd's Summer Madness becomes a cosmopolitanism of the marginalised. Bhabha coined the term "subaltern cosmopolitanism" to name a "cosmopolitan community envisaged in a *marginality*" (1996: 195). It resonates with Butler's "ethics of cohabitation", which maintains that we should "respond ethically to suffering at a distance" (Butler, 2012: 134). This also dovetails with Standing's claim that "a good society needs people to have empathy, a capacity to project oneself into another's situation" (2011: 22). Nowhere do we see such ethics being more clearly demonstrated in Gappah's novel than when Lloyd closes a racial gap by rescuing a black albino girl.

Through Lloyd's benevolence towards Memory, Gappah exposes the hollowness of the African humanist philosophy of *Ubuntu/Unhu* that fails to protect minorities. According to Imafidon (2017: 176), there would be an end to the institutionalised ill-treatment of minorities if Africans were to live up to their moral philosophy that is premised on interdependency. Lloyd's capacity to see beyond difference is paralleled by that of Shingai (in *Takadini*) whose love for Takadini stems from an ability to see "beyond his disability" and to appreciate "the person within that ill-favoured and despised body" (Hanson, 1997: 129). Like Lloyd, Shingai rejects all notional understandings of the body with albinism. Such a philosophy is condensed in her rhetorical question: "Did the chickens or the other animals reject one another because they were different in hue?" (Hanson, 1997: 130). Again, this rhetorical question exposes the falsity of the concept of ubuntu by suggesting that animals can be more humane than humans. This evokes a recent study on abnormal pigmentation in animal species that reveals that while abnormally coloured animals are often vulnerable to predation and harmful solar radiation (Mira-Mendes *et al*., 2017), there is no evidence of discrimination by those of their kind that have normal pigmentation. Patterson (2021), who observes odd coat patterns and colour variations among zebras, surmises that the irregular colouring portends the extinction of what she sees as a new subspecies of the zebra genus due to the way it makes the abnormally coloured zebras more conspicuous to predators and biting flies (Larison, cited in Patterson, 2021). Interestingly, from the photographs that accompany the article, the oddly coloured zebras seem to be living in harmony with those that have the usual coat colours and stripe designs. Such camaraderie in

the animal kingdom is largely lacking in the human worlds depicted by Hanson and Gappah, where the 'oddly coloured' protagonists are vulnerable to predation by their kind.

While Hanson and Gappah foreground albino protagonists who manage to transform their precariousness into a creative force, their texts show a tendency towards a grossly romanticised depiction of the albino subjects. Such a characterisation tendency has come to be a defining feature of much of protest literature in postcolonial, feminist, and disability contexts where characterisation is subordinated to the narrative goal of re-inscribing the image of the marginalised subject, a mode of representation that Lipenga (2014) describes as "narrative enablement". However, such a characterisation trend may further entrench the negative framing of PWA as, for instance, depicting albino protagonists as super-intelligent. Gappah and Hanson unwittingly reinscribe the characters' alterity by creating the impression that PWA are extraordinarily intelligent. In his reading of *Takadini*, Tagwirei (2012) avers that Hanson's attempt to represent difference in *Takadini* only amounts to a reinvention of the otherness he seeks to subvert. Representational strategies that either exaggerate the incapacitating effects of albinism or adopt a patronising attitude towards characters with albinism have been found to further entrench the alterity of the albino body (Miller, 2017). The scenario above supports the claim that disability is often used by creative writers as a "narrative prosthesis" or as "an opportunistic metaphorical device" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000: 47). Such a scenario mostly thrives where albinism is narrated by non-albinic writers, as the case is with Hanson and Gappah.

The second line of criticism regards Hanson's treatment of the idea of agency in *Takadini*. Although Takadini is vested with an intrinsic drive to resist marginalisation and disablement, such a drive is disturbingly subordinated to the force of chance. Takadini is depicted as providence's favourite, one who must win against all odds, while his survival is punctuated by a rare combination of favourable circumstances that include the decision by the midwives attending to his birth to postpone his destruction by a day (which allows his mother to escape with him) and the coincidental discovery by the elders of their host village of a decree that prohibits the withdrawal of hospitality to strangers. As he grows up, Takadini continues to be on the winning streak in ways that make him the proverbial phoenix that miraculously rises from its ashes or the legendary Hydra that gains more heads when one is cut off (Taleb, 2012). The emphasis on the role of chance in shaping Takadini's life ironically diminishes his power to take charge of his life; his survival becomes more a function of external or proxy agency

rather than the outcome of self-assertiveness. This, in turn, runs off at a tangent from this thesis's guiding assumption that the precariat has an in-built power to spearhead its liberatory struggles. It is in light of Hanson's romanticised depiction of Takadini that Hove argues that the novel "stubbornly etches both Sekai and Takadini as inferior" (2013: 7).

The representational challenges cited above underline the ambivalences of representing difference from an outsider positionality. The philosophical question "What is it like for a bat to be a bat?" (Hacker, 2002: 169) encapsulates the epistemological challenge of explaining the affective dispositions, consciousness, and psychological states that inhabit an external body. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak (1988) suggests that representing the disempowered from an outsider and elitist positionality merely serves to further silence the marginalised. Similarly, in her article "Marginality as Site of Resistance" (1990), bell hooks contends that when one tells the story of an 'other', such a narrative is appropriated and gets divorced from its source (Cf. Roy, 2020: 462). In his book *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007), Ato Quayson deploys a disability studies framework to expose the narrative glitches that, usually in subtle ways, punctuate the literary representation of disability. Quayson categorically states that disability "resists representation" (2007: 22). He deploys the term 'aesthetic nervousness' to name the scenario "when the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short-circuited in relation to disability" (ibid.: 15). Quayson argues that such short-circuiting spells the experience of uneasiness that naturally obtains at the point of contact between disabled and non-disabled persons, whether such an interaction takes place in real life or at a textual level. According to Quayson, a non-disabled writer who sets out to narrate disability places themselves in a difficult position where they attempt, often in vain, to transcend this nervousness.

The idea of aesthetic nervousness is transposable to many other contexts where difference is narrated from an outsider's perspective. Vandermerwe (2018: 89) hints at the difficulty of imagining the other by alluding to the story of South African writer Njabulo Simakahle Ndebele who had to abandon work on a novel that had a white protagonist after realising that "he could not imagine what that protagonist would be feeling when he walked into a room and saw his white mother". Having found himself unable to imagine the white other, all of Ndebele's literary works ended up having black protagonists. In some cases, representing PWA from an outsider position has merely served to perpetuate the negative albino identity, as

observed by Miller (2017) in American filmic texts such as *The Heat* (2013), *The Da Vinci Code* (2006), and *The Matrix Reloaded* (1999).

However, despite the representational challenges cited above, I argue that in the absence of Zimbabwean writers who can represent albinism from an insider perspective, Gappah's and Hanson's novels go a long way towards undoing the albino trope and negotiating social inclusion for PWA. What might appear as symptoms of aesthetic nervousness do not necessarily take away from the authors' effort to subvert notional understandings of the albinic body. As Roland Barthes suggests in "The Death of the Author" (1968), writing is a neutral space that separates what is written from its creator, where the identity of the author becomes insignificant in the act of decoding the writing. This calls us not to apply what we know about Hanson and Gappah to our reading of their texts. In any case, misrepresentations of the lived realities of PWA can be explained in terms of the "intentional approach" to representation which maintains that "it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language" (Hall, 1997: 25). Besides, as Edward Jayne (1992) contends, "misrepresentation is a natural constituent of fiction, for unless the truth is distorted or reorganised, fiction cannot, by definition, be fiction" (cited in Baker, 2010: 95). In the next section, I focus on the consolidation of albino subjectivity through the lens of Taleb's concept of evolution.

4.4 Towards an evolutionary antifragility

Taleb's (2012) notion of evolution that frames my discussion in this section requires that we look at individual albino characters as 'organisms' whose lives are being sacrificed for the benefit of posterity. Arguably, the sense of the term evolution as put forward by Taleb does not depart much from its deployment in Charles Darwin's (1909) theorisation of the gradual improvement of the human species through the elimination of the weak and survival of the fittest. In both senses, evolution is processual rather than episodic. According to Taleb, evolution is not concerned with the antifragility of individual organisms "but rather that of their genetic code, which can survive them" (2012: 63). Therefore, having focused on how individual albino characters attain antifragility in the preceding subsection, here I explore how Hanson's and Gappah's novels gesture at the possibilities of transfer of Takadini and Memory's 'gains from harm' to future generations of albinic people. To examine these possibilities, I consider the following narrative strategies: the use of storytelling as means to reach out to posterity; the deployment of a precarious aesthetic to excite the reader's empathy; the use of

characters who break or question taboos that violate the rights of PWA; society's evolving beliefs and attitudes towards PWA; and emerging trends towards intra- and inter-category coalition politics.

One significant way in which the present connects to and informs the future is through storytelling. In her exploration of the representation of precarity in Thomas King's novel *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), Fraile-Marcos (2020: 482) claims that story-making and storytelling are "crucial mechanisms undergirding the processes of meaning-making, world-shaping and life-saving". The role of story-making and storytelling in shaping lives can be understood in terms of Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) concept of 'dialogic connections' which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6. The idea of dialogic connections maintains that nothing exists in isolation but relationally, and that the other's perspective is integral to the construction of the self (cf. Hall, 1997). The dialogic theory helps to conceptualise how storytelling takes place at the intertextual level where different texts converge in the acts of story-making and storytelling. That in turn helps to explain how *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* are in conversation with many other texts, such as cinematic, literary, and nonfictional, that also retell the story of PWA. In jointly telling this story to crusade for an all-inclusive Zimbabwe, the narratives invoke the eclectic narrative strategy that is often associated with slave narratives.

At the intra-textual level, Memory's story-within-a-story immortalises personal experiences in her autobiographical 'notebook' as a way of reaching out to future generations of PWA. The importance of Memory's telling her own story cannot be overemphasised; throughout the narrative, she remains in helpless quarantine in Chikurubi Maximum Prison. This confinement, from which the prospect of escape is only given as a faint possibility, implies some disturbing stasis. However, although Memory is writing her account "in the shadow of the gallows" (Gappah, 2015: 9), she is not dead to the world as her unfettered mind and spirit reach out to the world through the story that she is telling. McCann, who reads *The Book of Memory* as prison literature, contends that Memory's act of narrating her ordeal is self-empowering as it enables her to face her condition with "renewed agency" (2016: 98). I argue that the reader's encounter with Memory's story is necessary for social change as the story serves as a conduit for the transfer of new insights on the issue of albinism and the rights of people with the condition. According to Stobie (2020), the stories that are told in novels are instrumental in educating people and shifting their perceptions about PWA. The idea of evolution is premised on this shifting of perceptions, which is also underlined by Gare (2001), who argues that our

attitudes change as we live through the stories that others tell and that stories offer a conduit for intergenerational or transhistorical transmission of sensibilities and agendas at family, community, and national levels. Muponde highlights how we are constituted by other people's stories by suggesting that his memoir is "a story about stories" and that through the act of reading we "retell the stories together" (2021: 8, 10). Considering this, Memory's story has usefulness beyond the self and the present.

As an integral aspect of story-making, *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* deploy a precarious aesthetic to reimagine the Zimbabwean nation. Arguing in the context of economic precarity, Lemke (2016: 163, 165) states that the objective of a precarious aesthetic is "to relate or connect the viewer to precarious conditions, classes, and individuals", to "plead" for the elimination of precarity. Thus, the precarious aesthetic seeks to achieve change through emotional appeal. This is bolstered by Stobie (2020), who deploys the term "poverty porn" to describe a mode of writing that is preoccupied with graphically presenting precarity. In her reading of NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013), Stobie contends that "the effects of compassion and prurience aroused by such texts can stimulate readers' impulse for meaningful reflection leading to changed attitudes" (2020: 517). Stobie also argues that "in texts which include educational and entertainment effects, the consumer's transgressive pleasure of prurience can be mobilised alongside compassion to prompt meaningful political reflection" (ibid.: 522). Both Lemke and Stobie underscore the power of emotional appeal in transforming perceptions regarding marginalised social groups. Memory's lawyer Vernah Sithole is aware of this power when she asks Memory to "record everything that could make a sympathetic case" (Gappah, 2015: 8) if she is granted a new trial. Within the broader frame of human rights discourse, *The Book of Memory*, therefore, appeals to sympathy and reason for the recognition of the rights of PWA. This is despite the fact that Memory does not get much sympathy from those around her.

Similarly, in *Takadini* Hanson combines emotive and scientific approaches to story writing to crusade for the recognition of PWA as full humans. The following passage illustrates how Takadini's story deploys a precarious aesthetic to excite empathy and call for a revision of societal attitudes towards PWA:

> *What had she done wrong?, [Sekai] asked herself. Was her yearning for a child not normal? And was her son not human? True, he was somewhat different but only in his colour. He had no more fingers and toes than his father, and the same number of eyes and ears … she had counted them all. When everything was put*

> *together he was more like the others around him than he was unlike them. So why did they want to kill him?* (Hanson, 1997: 28-29, italics in original)

Here, Sekai deploys rhetorical questions to underline both her innocence and her son's normality. She also asserts her innocence by naming her baby 'Takadini', a name that roughly translates to 'What have we done?' Such an assertion is necessary for her context, where the child's albinism is blamed on the mother (cf. Lund, 2016: 3). The power of appeal to empathy is also demonstrated at the first village meeting in Musasa when the elders deliberate on whether to accommodate Sekai and her albino child. The two are allowed to stay on the strength of Baba Chivero's well-reasoned appeals.

As Hanson demonstrates, the future antifragility of PWA largely depends on the eradication of existing attitudes and traditional practices that promote stigmatisation and discrimination. The plot of *Takadini* is based on the overturning of traditional practices, beginning with Sekai's refusal to allow the midwives to send her albino son 'back to the ancestors' as tradition dictates. By accommodating Sekai and Takadini, the people of Musasa village not only break the long-standing tradition of killing babies with albinism but also set a trend for more taboos to be broken. For example, as Takadini becomes an adult a serious moral dilemma arises concerning whom he could marry. So, when he finally settles for one of the village girls (Shingai), another taboo must be broken since none of the villagers would have Takadini for a son-in-law.

In light of the above, *Takadini* underscores how cultural change and breaking of taboos are necessary for the creation of new social orders. The novel shows how long-standing wisdoms are constantly revised in step with prevailing situational contexts. When Takadini's father Makwati said "*It is the nature of a duiker to produce young that have a tuft of hair on the head*" (Hanson, 1997: 17, italics in original), it is in a context where an excuse had to be made for him to disown an albino baby. Interestingly, 17 years later the same wisdom is challenged during a village meeting when Mukaru (a village elder) poses the question: "If it is the nature of duikers to produce other duikers, can you tell me why people who seem perfectly normal sometimes bring forth *sope* children? Is it possible that a *sope* father may produce a normal child?" (ibid.: 141). Mukaru might not have the scientific terminology to explain the genetics or aetiology of albinism, but he aptly exposes a long-held African patriarchal fallacy that children must closely resemble their fathers. The village *dare* (a place where men deliberate on important issues) becomes an important site for the interrogation of old common senses and the construction of new knowledge.

The breaking of taboos in *Takadini* bolsters the view that although precolonial African societies had great respect for traditional beliefs and practices and often had stiff penalties for transgressors, there were always society members who were critical of unreasonable beliefs and practices (Akinola, 2019). In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Obiako challenges an oracle that asks him to sacrifice a goat for his dead father by telling the oracle, "ask my dead father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive" (Achebe, 1986: 15). Similarly, in *Takadini* radical elders such as Baba Chivero and elder Mukaru become champions of social change when they plead on behalf of Sekai and her albino son. Likewise, in *Takadini* Shingai defies tradition by marrying a person with albinism. Through these acts of defiance, Hanson suggests that cultural preservation should not be a blind exercise but something that guarantees the ultimate improvement of humanity.

In *Takadini*, Hanson also demonstrates that familiarity with difference is crucial to the evolution of attitudes towards those marked by difference. Several characters who interact with Takadini at a personal level end up losing their fear of him. One such character is Baba Kutukwa, who Baba Chivero had asked to teach Takadini how to play the *mbira* instrument. Baba Kutukwa takes a long time to fulfil his promise because of his fear of the boy's unusual pigmentation, but he finally gets over the fear through daily interactions with the boy. The fear is replaced by a strong liking for Takadini so that besides teaching him how to play the instrument, he also prepares crutches that enable Takadini to walk without difficulty. Later, when Takadini is embroiled in a tabooed relationship with Shingai, Baba Kutukwa vows to pay the bride price for him. Baba Kutukwa also calls on other villagers to understand PWA through his testimony:

> Like the rest of you, I too was afraid of the taboo which surrounds this boy. And because I was afraid of the taboo, I remained far from the boy and did not get to know him. But since I started to teach him, I have touched his flesh, it is like ours. I have spoken to him, his thoughts are like ours. We have made music together; he is a great musician whose music is as good as mine and will be greater. (Hanson, 1997: 119–120)

Baba Kutukwa's testimony reinforces the claim that stigmatisation and discrimination against PWA emanate from ignorance about their condition (Baker *et al*., 2010; Cruz-Inigo, *et al*., 2011). The villagers in *Takadini* gradually accept Sekai and Takadini as they increasingly become familiar with them. The young ones became "familiar with" and learnt to "ignore his disabilities", while "all the women of the village had grudgingly accepted Sekai" (Hanson, 1997: 88-89). This also goes to show the dynamic nature of human relations and attitudes, and

how the ultimate acceptance of PWA is predicated on that dynamism. In this way, Hanson's novel confirms the claim that the ultimate remedy to the social exclusion of PWA lies in attitudinal change by victims and perpetrators of ableist violence (Machoko, 2013; Olagunju, 2019).

The issue of solidarity networks in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* (discussed in Section 4.4) also signals a positive direction in the welfare of PWA. The role of cosmopolitanism in guaranteeing the future antifragility of marginalised groups is hinted at by Beck and Sznaider (2010), who deploy the term 'cosmopolitanisation' to describe what they see as recent global transformations associated with "the mutual constitution of the local and the global" (cited in Schiller, 2010: 414, 415). If, as the scholars envisage, the recent global trend is towards the integration rather than the disintegration of subaltern communities, there is room to hope for the intensification of regional and global coalition politics. As the American intersectionality scholar Crenshaw (1991) contends, intragroup and intergroup coalitions enable marginalised social groups to challenge oppressive social structures. However, Werbner (2006: 497) warns against placing so much hope on these mushrooming cosmopolitanisms of the marginalised that fail to account for "the millions of refugees and migrants fleeing violence and poverty". Thus, Werbner points to a disturbing theory-praxis disjuncture on the issue of cosmopolitanisms.

Confirming Webner's claim above, *The Book of Memory* shows that characters who inhabit different precarious spaces do not always realise their shared vulnerability. For example, Sekuru Jonas "who limped on his left leg" and lived in poverty never misses an opportunity to spit every time he sees Memory (Gappah, 2015: 52). Similarly, Memory fears and looks down upon Lameck who also has albinism. Being in a privileged position where she has access to dermatologist services and accessories that alleviate her condition makes Memory look detestably at Lameck who

> looked incomplete, as though he had been fashioned at *mahumbwe*[53] play by a careless child, and then been fought over before being abandoned to be stamped on as the children hurried in to their suppers. (Gappah, 2015: 54)

[53] Shona word for children's play.

The reader cannot help noticing the brutal edge of imagination that prompts Memory's prejudicial description of Lameck who shares her condition. By emphasising Lameck's ugliness, Memory displays an attitude that is characteristic of ableist non-albinic persons who view PWA as *das Unheimlich* (the ugly); Freud, 1919; 219). Later, in an ironic twist to expectations, Memory betrays Lloyd by reporting his same-sex sexual activities to the police. This is despite the role that Lloyd has played in saving her and developing her capabilities. Thus, Memory's behaviour runs counter to the "ethics of cohabitation" that require one to realise that "what happens there also happens here" (Butler, 2012: 150).

It is important to note, however, that Memory's attitude towards other people who are also marked by difference evolves in the course of the novel. As she reflects on the same-sex sexual relationship between Lloyd and Zenzo, years after the death of Lloyd, she undergoes an attitudinal shift towards tolerance of difference. Realising now how, like her, Lloyd had led a solitary life, Memory regrets why she had lacked such an understanding before:

> If I had been mature enough I could have seen how lonely he was, how terrifying it was to live in a country that did not accept you. Not even Lloyd's whiteness could have saved him from the stigma of homosexuality because it is a stigma that cuts across race and tribe and religion and class and sex and political beliefs and all the artificial divisions this country has erected to keep people apart. (Gappah, 2015: 197)

The above passage not only reinforces Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) assertion that marginality is multiply constituted but also bolsters the view that there are more commonalities than divergences among the oppressed, which should be the greatest motivation for forging intergroup support networks. From what Memory says, the Zimbabwean society has varying levels of prejudice toward those who are different, as reflected in the way homophobia seems to surpass other prejudices such as racism, tribalism, and sexism in its capacity for exciting repulsion.

The fact that Lloyd's death causes a significant turning point in Memory's attitude towards other marginalised characters means that Lloyd has managed to transfer the benefits of his own experience of isolation to those who survive him. This scenario encapsulates Taleb's (2012) notion of evolution. Memory acknowledges that Lloyd had bestowed on her "an understanding that took [her] outside of [herself], that there was a life beyond things; [that] there was an existence that went on long after the self had gone" (Gappah, 2015: 269). That understanding, viewed in terms of the idea of evolution, means an appreciation of the part that one must play

in the larger scheme of things towards enhancing the continuity and antifragility of humanity, and towards passing on the relay button to those who come after oneself.

Takadini and *The Book of Memory* also show that ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs are situated both spatially and temporally. Movement across temporal and geographical borders is presented as liberating; the novels show a close correlation between migration and healing, which is a motif in diasporic literature (Chidora, 2017). However, the precolonial society, as depicted in *Takadini*, was relatively closed and so self-contained that interaction with outsiders was quite limited. It was difficult, for example, for ostracised persons to get help from the outside world, as attested by the case of the *Osu* in *Things Fall Apart*. In *Takadini*, the closed nature of the society makes Sekai and Takadini's quest for refuge elsewhere difficult and risky. By contrast, the postcolonial urban space mirrored in *The Book of Memory* is characterised by greater physical mobility. This is attested by the relative ease with which Memory's parents migrated from the countryside to the city after the birth of Memory, and by Memory's easy transfer from her home township of Mufakose to Lloyd's home in Umwinsdale.

The concept of evolution is also implied in the comparatively better treatment of the younger generation of PWA as represented by Loveness' daughter Yeukai. We learn that at Yeukai's school there are three other pupils with albinism and that none of them is stigmatised or discriminated against as the case was during Memory's primary school days in Mufakose. Gappah uses Yeukai to highlight significant changes in the Zimbabwean society's attitude towards PWA, including the fact that there are now civic societies, associations and nongovernmental organisations that work towards alleviating the plight of PWA. For example, Loveness mentions the Albino Society which helps with advice and sunscreens (Gappah, 2015: 243). Recent research reveals that global intervention strategies for the protection and upliftment of PWA are taking place against the backdrop of ritual murders, rape and social exclusion of PWA, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Machoko, 2013). Hong, Hajo, and Repacholi (2006) observe a gradual improvement across Africa in terms of health support systems for PWA. Part of this support comes from nongovernmental organisations such as SOS Albinos in Mali and SOS Enfants Vulnerables Sans Frontiers in Congo, as well as from economically privileged PWA such as politicians, professionals, and musicians who bank on their privileged public positions to support their underprivileged counterparts (Hong *et al.*, 2006). These developments are taking place against the background of atrocities committed against earlier generations of PWA. This in turn invokes the idea of "post-event adaptation" or

"ruthlessness as an engine of improvement" (Taleb, 2012: 67, 69). However, as Hong *et al.* (2006) also observe, there is still a lot of ignorance among medical personnel and society at large about the aetiology of albinism and the special needs of people with the condition.

This section explored ways in which Hanson's and Gappah's novels gesture at the possibility of future antifragility of the entire genus of PWA. The novels demonstrate the sundry ways in which the current generation of PWA can transfer their gains from the harm of social exclusion to posterity. These ways include storytelling, breaking taboos that discriminate against PWA, forging intra- and intercategorical coalitions (Crenshaw, 1989), and crossing different identity borders to care for and identify with those who do not seem to be part of us. Hanson's and Gappah's novels also live up to two basic senses of the term evolution: the accrual of changes over time, and survival through adaptation, whose antitheses are stagnation and extinction, respectively.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explored the politico-aesthetic tools deployed by Hanson and Gappah in a bid to subvert the albino trope in *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory*. The focus has been on how the two narratives deconstruct notional understandings of albinism and its aetiology. In the process, the chapter unravelled disconnections between those myths and the lived experiences of PWA. Taleb's (2012) concept of antifragility framed my discussion in two ways. First, its metaphors of organisms that gain from harm and of the legendary phoenix that rises from its ashes enabled me to conceptualise ways in which Hanson's and Gappah's albino protagonists resist the disabling identity inscribed on them. Second, Taleb's concept of evolution, which spells a higher level of antifragility, helped me conceptualise ways in which *Takadini* and *The Book of Memory* may be read as future-oriented texts whose main concern is not the consolidation of individual subjectivities but the ultimate antifragility of the entire genus of PWA. Hence, the novels' protagonists were read, in Taleb's terms, as individual organisms whose self-preservation strategies are transferable to posterity. On this issue, positive shifts in society's attitudes towards PWA (in the studied texts) were read as pointers to contemporary trends towards cosmopolitanisation and, to borrow from Butler (2012), "ethics of cohabitation".

Like the preceding chapters, this chapter underscored the link between precarity and prejudicial framing of difference. Drawing on theoretical reflections on the idea of enfreakment, the

cultural construction of freaks (Garland-Thomson, 2003), – the chapter reinforced existing knowledge on the ideological construction of otherness through rhetorical practices such as labelling and reification. The connection between cultural disablement and precarity is suggested by Standing, who contends that "disability and the precariat come together. Those identified as different are not only more likely to find life opportunities restricted to precarious options but they are also more likely to be pushed that way" (2011: 87). However, in conversation with previous chapters, this chapter underscored the power of displacement to promote radical thinking that enables the precariat to weaponize its condition.

The chapter underscored the significance of the literary front in spearheading social change and addressing what Miller (2017) sees as the double-faced challenge of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of marginalised social groups in popular discourse and cinematic texts. Hanson and Gappah deploy narrative means to subvert the 'wrong' skin colour myth to make an emotional appeal for the acceptance of PWA and to reposition understandings of what it means to be albinic. The novels bolster the assertion that texts are discursive instruments for negotiating identities and changing our perception of our own and other people's impairments (Wright, 2008; Stobie, 2020). In that way, the texts assert their position within a continuing discourse on the need to accept difference in its sundry forms, a thematic preoccupation of many earlier Zimbabwean literary texts such as Geoffrey Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1979), Stanlake Samkange's *The Mourned One* (1975), Nobert Mafumhe Mutasa's *Mapatya* (1979), Genius T. Runyowa's *Akada Wokure* (1981), and Claudius Maredza's *Harurwa* (1987).

My discussion also highlighted grossly romanticised portrayals of albino protagonists that in a way unwittingly reinscribe the albino trope that Gappah's and Hanson's novels seek to subvert. I deployed Quayson's concept of aesthetic nervousness to explain the inescapability of this narrative trend in texts that set out to represent difference from an outsider positionality. However, in step with Barthes's (1968) call for the separation of a text from its author, I read Gappah's and Hanson's conferment of larger-than-life capabilities to their albino protagonists as an exercise of narrative enablement. In the process, I argued that Gappah's and Hanson's novels should be applauded for bringing attention to an underrepresented topic at a time when at the local scene no creative writer has come out to narrate albinism from an insider perspective.

Whereas this chapter focused on the ultra-visible-yet-invisible albinic body, the next chapter explores the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity in the context of same-sex sexualities, identities, and relationships.

CHAPTER 5
NEGOTIATING HETERONORMATIVITY: TOWARDS A LIBERATING ETHIC OF SEXUALITY[54]

> When the prevailing winds bend a young tree long enough, it stays bent … but it doesn't change its species. (Warren, 2004: 58)

5.1 Introduction

Africa is associated with an enduring homophobic culture. However, there is a great diversity in terms of how persons of non-normative sexual identities are perceived throughout the continent (Ndashe, 2013: 162). On one hand, several lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) movements are gathering momentum, while South Africa has taken a leading role in constitutionally instituting sexual democracy in sub-Saharan Africa (Gevisser, 2020). On the other hand, countries such as Uganda, Eswatini, Namibia, and Ghana still have draconian anti-LGBTI laws in place. Zimbabwe, in particular, got into the limelight for its anti-LGBTI culture following former President Robert Mugabe's description of gays and lesbians as "worse than pigs and dogs" in 1995 (cited in Epprecht, 2004: 4). The case of Neal Hovelmeier, cited in Section 1.1, is just one of the many instances of homophobic violence in Zimbabwe. The country's anti-LGBTI rhetoric, sustained by a cultural nationalist ideology, homophobic legislation, and religious fundamentalism, not only criminalises same-sex relationships but also imposes censorship on pro-sexual democracy discourses. Nevertheless, Zimbabwean writers have always subversively engaged with the subject of non-normative sexualities. In this chapter, I explore how three Zimbabwean texts, Nevanji Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew* (1996), Charles Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives" (1997), and Tendai Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2010), attempt to challenge heteronormativity. Deploying Butler's (2010) notion of "frames of war", I propose two different narrative positionalities: a within-the-frame perspective that reinscribes heteronormativity, and an out-of-the-frame positionality that boldly challenges heteronormative norms. Overall, I argue that while the literary medium can open vistas for envisioning sexual democracy in Zimbabwe, it does so within a strictly

[54] I borrow the phrase from Ellison's *Erotic justice: A liberating ethic of sexuality* (1996). Ellison underlines the urgent need to address the ongoing crisis of sexuality that emanates from heterosexism and institutionalized silence on sexual matters at family level.

controlled imaginative and intellectual space that sometimes undermines its illocutionary power.

The epigraph above that captures a botanical phenomenon where trees naturally develop resistance mechanisms to violent winds resonates with how persons of "alternative sexual identities" (Mateveke, 2022: 32) actively resist criminalisation, public denigration, and social exclusion (Nyanzi, 2013; Mwangi, 2020; Matebeni, Monro & Reddy, 2018). The way gay characters in texts under study resist 'compulsory heterosexuality'[55] places this chapter in conversation with previous chapters that focused on how the precariat creatively responds to marginalising ideologies. Besides demonstrating the regenerative capacities of the gay characters in Madanhire's, Mungoshi's and Huchu's texts, I also explore context-specific factors such as state censorship, self-censorship, religious fundamentalism, and publication politics that not only sustain homophobia but also impact the narrative choices made by Zimbabwean writers as they set out to represent same-sex sexualities and relationships.

The heteronormative norms that sustain Zimbabwean homophobia can be understood in terms of the "hegemonic field of representation" (Butler, 2010: 1), derived from Sontag's (1973) theorisation of the political uses of photography. Sontag contends that photographs are deployed, among other uses, as a tool of "surveillance and control" (2005[1973]: 3). Butler (2004, 2010) redeploys the political uses of photography in her ontological precarity theory to conceptualise how powerful states manipulate media tools to project the lives of unwanted individuals and groups as ungrievable or "not considered lives at all" (Butler, 2004: 148, 34). Butler proposes two different scenarios of being framed. In one sense, "'to be framed' means to be subject to a con, to a tactic by which evidence is orchestrated so to make a false accusation appear true", in which case "one cannot break out of the frame". In the other sense, "the frame is understood as a certain 'breaking out', or 'breaking from', then it would seem to be more analogous to a prison break" (Butler, 2010: 10). The notion of frames can shed light on ways in which heteronormative society in the texts under study violently frames same-sex sexuality to justify homophobia. The scenario where "one cannot break out of the frame" (ibid.) not only applies to persons of same-sex orientation who may fail to withstand homophobia but also to writers (such as Mungoshi) who unwittingly endorse the heteronormative frame. Similarly, I

[55] The phrase 'compulsory heterosexuality' is attributed to Adrienne Rich (1980), who uses it to refer to the stringent adherence to heterosexuality and non-tolerance of other sexualities.

draw on the metaphor of prison break to conceptualise how gay characters in the texts defy heteronormative policing and how writers (such as Huchu) successfully challenge the heterosexual bias.

Zimbabwean scholars on gender and sexuality have systematically avoided the subject of same-sex sexuality due to the inhibitive imaginative and intellectual environment (Epprecht, 2013a: 10). However, there is a growing body of scholarship on the subject, which this chapter seeks to complement. This includes the work of Shaw (2005, 2006), who explores literary representations of same-sex relationships through the topos of 'transgression'; Chitando and Manyonganise (2016), who deploy the lens of hegemonic masculinity to explore Huchu's treatment of the theme of homophobia in *The Hairdresser of Harare*; Mangena (2019), who discusses non-normative sexualities through the trope of 'contested criminalities'; and Mateveke (2022), who explores the subversion of heteronormative norms in Zimbabwean popular cultural texts. Shoko's (2010) comparative analysis of the role of traditional Shona culture and religious fundamentalism in engraining homophobic attitudes in Zimbabwe supports Epprecht (1998, 2004, 2008, 2013) in debunking the myth that same-sex desire is un-African. Tirivangana (2015) adopts a polemic stance by applauding "Of Lovers and Wives" for endorsing Zimbabwe's cultural nationalist ideology. His reading, like that of Chemhuru (2012) that examines non-normative sexuality from a legal perspective, is central to my discussion of the challenges of narrating same-sex sexuality in a homophobic environment. While drawing on these studies, this chapter seeks to animate existing scholarship by deploying the lens of frames (Butler, 2010) to explore how selected authors situate themselves within the global discourse of sexual democracy. In the process, I support my claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to reorient understandings of the cultural production of precarity and to deconstruct the gendered identity system that sustains precarity.

This chapter has three sections. The first one (Section 5.2) deploys the concept of frames (Butler, 2010) to explore the cultural production of precarity for persons of same-sex sexuality. I focus on the part played by cultural and religious fundamentalism, non-statutory homophobic laws, and popular discourse in entrenching homophobic culture. The section argues that the heteronormative frame not only endangers persons of alternative sexual identities but also impacts the narrative choices made by writers in representing same-sex sexualities and relationships. The section serves as background to my reading of Mungoshi's and Huchu's works in succeeding subsections.

The second section (Section 5.3) explores the impact of Zimbabwe's homophobic culture and self-censorship on Mungoshi's depiction of gay relationships. I invoke Butler's claim that in some scenarios "one cannot break out of the frame" (2010: 10) to conceptualise what appears to be Mungoshi's endorsement of Zimbabwe's cultural nationalist homophobia. The section argues that the literary representation of same-sex relationships in Zimbabwe takes place in such a controlled imaginative space that the writing can easily slide off into mere endorsement of the norms it seeks to contest.

The last section (Section 5.4) draws on Butler's (2010: 10) metaphor of prison break to explore ways in which both Huchu and his gay characters break out of the frame of heteronormativity. The section examines the different narrative strategies deployed to denaturalise heteronormativity. The overarching argument is that an out-of-the-frame positionality empowers the writer to negotiate acceptance for persons of alternative sexual identities.

5.2 Ideological construction of the heteronormative frame: a reading of Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew*

In many parts of Africa, persons of non-normative sexualities continue to face harassment, stigmatisation, discrimination, persecution, extrajudicial killing, and rape, among other forms of homophobia-induced violence (Matebeni *et al.*, 2018; Gervisser, 2020). However, gender and sexuality scholars have established that factors that precipitate homophobic tendencies are invariably based on subjective judgements rather than on well-reasoned arguments (Corvino, 2013; Meyers, 2015). My reading of Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew* in this section seeks to explore the many intersecting factors – including the heteronormative tradition, misogyny, politics, and religious fundamentalism – that precaritise people of same-sex sexual orientation by framing them as unnatural, morally depraved, effeminate, and pathological lawbreakers. This violent framing rationalises compulsory heterosexuality and relegates persons of non-normative sexual identities to a zone of 'derealization', where their lives are "not considered lives at all" (Butler, 2004: 148, 34).

The timing of Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew* (1996) almost coincides with the infamous expulsion of members of GALZ from the 1995 edition of the International Book Fair by former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. *If the Wind Blew* details the experiences of its female protagonist (Isis Ndlovu), who is an investigative journalist for the *Guardian* newspaper. The issue of same-sex desire, involving Isis's husband (Hebrew) and his Swedish partner

(Christiaan), comes up almost as a peripheral concern towards the end of a novel that foregrounds male domination, political intrigue, and partisan media reportage. The unmasking of the relationship destroys Isis and Hebrew's marriage, leaving the latter scathed but certain that that is what he "always wanted" (Madanhire, 1996: 98).

One notes that in *If The Wind Blew* heteronormativity overlaps with ideologies that marginalise women and political minorities. The society in question privileges powerful heterosexual males as embodiments of full humanity; hence, sexual, gender, and political minorities are subjected to the same inferiorisation strategies. Thus, issues of sexuality meld seamlessly with gender relations in national politics, the media industry, and in the protagonist's (Isis) marital life. The notion of frames of war finds mediation in the way the ruling party Liberation Party deploys media tools such as the *Guardian* paper to frame the Movement for True Democracy as a party of "murderers, rapists, and grisly criminals" who want to reverse the gains of independence (Madanhire, 1996: 89). In this conflictual political space, rhetoric and partisan media reportage are deployed to render the assassination of opposition party leader Robson Gumpo a non-event.

Similarly, the society in Madanhire's novel has institutionalised the inferiorisation of women by reducing them to the status of 'girls'. This plays out at different levels but mostly through the demeaning actions of such men as the Editorial Director of *The Guardian* who tries to use his position to force Isis into sleeping with him. At other times it is through the belittling utterances of men such as the motel receptionist who addresses Isis as 'girl'. The infantilisation of women, like the dehumanisation of opposition politicians, serves to institutionalise their abuse. Madanhire's narrative design thus entails foregrounding the vicious framing of women and political minorities as a prelude to the condemning of same-sex desire as unnatural and abominable. The above analogy underscores the interconnections among masculinism, political hegemony and homophobia as precaritising ideologies. In a way, these interconnections make Madanhire's novel a political satire that combines critical and socialist realism to project a nation whose laws, politics and economics have gone rogue.

As I explored in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2) in the context of the albinic body, the cultural construction of otherness is fuelled by notional understandings of difference. In Madanhire's novel, an essentialist understanding of what it means to be gay results in Isis believing, like Shamiso (Shami) in Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives", that gays must be visibly abnormal or different from other men. This attempt to ascribe an essence to the sexually queer body is problematic in light of contemporary psychoanalysis that maintains that sexual orientation and

sexual behaviour may be so discordant that some persons of non-normative sexuality may live in ignorance of their sexual orientation (Pickett, 2009). The tendency to essentialise sexual queerness also plays out in the way heteronormative society regards same-sex desire as unnatural. Isis says Hebrew "had behaved strangely ever since they married" (Madanhire, 1996: 96), which is strikingly similar to Vimbai's declaration (in *The Hairdresser of Harare*): "*I knew there was something not quite right* about Dumi the very first time I ever laid eyes on him" (Huchu, 2010: 1, italics in original). The word 'strangely' is synonymous with unnaturally, unusually, queerly, unfamiliarly, and abnormally, which all appositely capture how gays and lesbians, among other members of the LGBTI community, are viewed in a homophobic society. Isis's shock upon discovering Hebrew's same-sex sexual behaviour belies her claim that Hebrew had always behaved unnaturally, especially considering her acknowledgement that he had always posed as a "perfect husband" (Madanhire, 1996: 96). Isis's labelling of Hebrew's behaviour as unnatural is challenged by the view that the unnaturalness of same-sex sexual behaviour is only "in the sense of *statistical abnormality"*, and that "to call something 'unnatural' is not to *describe* its infrequency but to *prescribe* its avoidance" (Corvino, 2013: 80-81, emphasis in original). The latter premise points to the viciousness that underwrites the act of labelling same-sex desire as unnatural.

The aetiology of the belief that same-sex sexuality is unnatural is often traced back to the ideas of natural law theorist St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who held that non-procreative sexual acts such as homoerotic desire, bestiality, oral sex, and masturbation are both unnatural and sinful. Aquinas's ideas significantly influenced attitudes towards same-sex sexuality as his thoughts got integrated into religious fundamentalism (Corvino, 2013: 78–79). Aquinas's stance is extended by scholars who explore same-sex sexuality in terms of evolution and adaptation. Such scholars argue that part of the problem of same-sex sexuality is that it defies the evolutionary view of the essence of human life as "reproductive fitness" (McKnight, 1997). The evolutionary theory maintains that the continuity of humanity is predicated on reproductive ability. In such a framework same-sex sexuality makes no sense. Modern sex researchers have, however, widely criticised the futile sex theory by arguing that there is more to same-sex relationships than sex (McKnight, 1997: 3).

The primacy of the prescriptive view that sex should be procreative in entrenching homophobic tendencies is attested by the intertextual connections between Madanhire's novel and *The Hairdresser of Harare*. In the latter text, the female protagonist (Vimbai) remarks: "My

daughter had been the product of the union between man and woman. What could a man and a man ever hope to produce in a million years?" She adds that "even animals have sense enough to tell which one is female and which one is not" (Huchu, 2010: 167–168). Here, Vimbai evokes Robert Mugabe's aspersion that lesbians and gays are "worse than pigs" (cited in Epprecht, 2004: 4), which implies that Mugabe's homophobic sentiments are premised on the belief that sex should be generative (cf. Tirivangana, 2015). Placing gays and lesbians beneath the level of pigs is more than animalising them.[56] In step with Isis's and Vimbai's logic, same-sex sexual intimacies is misplaced and detrimental to the institution of marriage. Aeneas Chigwedere, former Zimbabwean cabinet minister, aptly articulated these homophobic sentiments when he said the following about gay and lesbian subcultures:

> What is at issue in cultural terms is a conflict of interest between the whole body, which is the Zimbabwean community and part of that body represented by individuals or groups of individuals … The whole body is more important than any single dispensable part. When your finger starts festering and becomes a danger to the body you cut it off. The homosexuals are the festering finger. (cited in Mtenje, 2019: 177)

Chigwedere's extremist views above speak of vicious disapproval of same-sex relationships. That, in turn, underscores the dangers associated with being gay or lesbian in Zimbabwe.

The view of same-sex desire as unnatural is entangled with the myth that black Africans who engage in same-sex relationships must have been influenced by (especially Western) foreigners (Epprecht, 1998, 2004, 2013). Madanhire seems to subscribe to this myth by depicting a same-sex relationship that involves a local black man and a 'foreigner' from Sweden (1996: 97), though it can also be argued that "the interracial sex trope functions to mock political pretensions" (Drew, 2006: 275) about same-sex desire being un-African.[57] Similarly, in *The*

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[56] Ironically, a study on animal same-sex sexuality by Poiani (2010) reveals that same-sex sexual desire is not exclusive to humans as it is also common among other mammal species that reproduce sexually. Poiani's findings nullify the charge of unnaturalness of same-sex desire.

[57] Emerging African fictional narratives on same-sex relationships buttress the view that such relationships have always been an aspect of African social reality. For example, "Chebor's Light" (2018), a short story by the Kenyan author Nancy Linda Ilamwenya, foregrounds an ancient scenario in which a woman (Chebor) who had spent miserable years in a childless marriage that resulted in her divorce finally gets salvation when her father and two other village elders (Mzee Kimtai and Mama Cheyech) arrange that she marries Chebet, an eighteen-year-old widow who has been equally lonely. The marital arrangement resuscitates an old African tradition where one woman could marry another in certain circumstances. According to the tradition, Chebor would automatically assume the title of father to Chebet's children and could, if she wishes, find Chebet a young man who would give them more children. The narrator tells us how the occasion of Chebor's marriage "gave the elders a chance to regale them with the ways of their traditions." The elders talked of a bygone "compassionate society where individual flaws and limitations were borne by everyone" (Ilamwenya, 2018: 259).

Hairdresser of Harare, Vimbai alludes to "rumours of white tourists coming into the country and corrupting the youth" (Huchu, 2010: 167). The conflation of same-sex relationships with the West and whiteness became a defining aspect of Zimbabwe's post-2000 anti-white rhetoric and reverse racism, and such a conflation has continued to influence the popular discourse on same-sex sexuality despite the lack of supportive evidence (Epprecht, 1998, 2004, 2008, 2013; Shoko, 2010).[58]

The misconception that same-sex desire is exotic to Africa is likely to impact the narration of same-sex sexuality for a much longer time in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. The historical mistrust between the West and Africa persists in the way the struggle for gay and lesbian rights is generally perceived to be a Western cultural imperialist concern (Epprecht, 2004, 2013). As my reading of Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives" (in the next subsection) demonstrates, this has implications for how Zimbabwean writers approach the subject of same-sex relationships. In *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (2007), Neville Hoad appositely captures this scenario by exploring the lesbian and gay rights discourse through the conceptual metaphors of "white man's burden" and "white man's disease":

> Lesbian and gay human rights circulate transnationally and appear as an extremely unstable placeholder for a set of desires, anxieties, claims, and counterclaims around modernity and cultural authenticity in the discourses of postcolonial nationalisms, which are themselves transnational. Within these national discourses, they are frequently described as a threatening imperialist import. It is asserted that their point of origin is outside the space, norms, and psyche of the nation and that their mode of circulation is dangerously foreign, embedded as it is in Western NGOs (nongovernmental organisations), Western-funded local NGOs, universalist human rights discourse, and problems of "Third World" development at the state level. (Hoad, 2007: 69)

Although Madanhire's novel is not reducible to this context, Hoad's argument certainly bears on how African writers will continue to situate themselves vis-à-vis the global homosexual rights discourse. It can be argued that the political homophobia that impacts Zimbabwean readership's perception of literature on same-sex desire (Leroux, 2019) is partly rooted in the polarisation between Zimbabwe and the West.

[58] Epprecht (2004) alludes to images in the form of Khoisan rock paintings that depict African men engaged in anal sex and thigh sex from as far back as two thousand years ago. He intimates that the earliest known image is located in a closely guarded site in Harare.

If the Wind Blew also underscores how misconceptions constitute an important factor in pathologizing and viewing same-sex sexuality as immoral. Isis believes that Hebrew cannot be gay and be a 'perfect husband' simultaneously. In her eyes, his sexual conduct is a blemish on his otherwise agreeable character. However, unlike Vimbai (in *The Hairdresser of Harare*) who castigates same-sex sexuality on grounds of its being unholy from a Biblical perspective, Isis does not offer any justification for her disapproval of Hebrew's sexual conduct other than that she is concerned about "what everyone would say" (Madanhire, 1996: 98) when the cause of her divorce with Hebrew becomes known. Isis's lack of concrete justification for her homophobic sentiments supports Howard Becker's (labelling theorist) claim that (sexual) deviance is subjectively constructed:

> Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label. (Becker, 1963, cited in Greenberg, 1988: 2)

As Becker contends, subjective judgement underwrites the construction of sexual deviance. With her belief that same-sex sexuality is an affront to society's moral health, Isis poses as society's watchdog on sexual hygiene. Similar sentiments feed Memory's aversion for her white benefactor Lloyd Hendrick's gay activities with Zenzo in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* (2015).

Related to the above, homophobic characters such as Isis represent heteronormative society's surveillance mechanism that compels gays and lesbians to conceal their sexual identities and relationships. In *If the Wind Blew*, Hebrew counterfeits numerous love affairs with women to create the impression that he is a "womaniser of sorts" (Madanhire, 1996: 96). As a result, it takes Isis two years to discover Hebrew's sexual preference. As Epprecht (2013) observes, the criminalisation of same-sex desire exposes persons of non-normative sexualities to brutal forms of homophobia, including physical harassment and extrajudicial killing. While Madanhire's text leaves the fate of Hebrew and Christiaan to the reader's imagination, *The Hairdresser of Harare* hints both at the criminalisation of same-sex relationships and the non-existence of recourse to the law for gays and lesbians who get victimised. This supports the observation that contemporary sexual politics in Zimbabwe is configured in ways that limit sexual minorities' "access to legal or discursive exculpation" (Phillips, 2009: 345). The

criminalisation of same-sex relationships is, therefore, one way in which Zimbabwe renders the lives of gays and lesbians ungrievable (Butler, 2004: 34).

Heteronormative society's marginalisation of gay culture is subtly embedded in Madanhire's portrayal of Hebrew as "strikingly handsome" (Madanhire, 1996: 96), which compares with the portrayal of Dumi (in *The Hairdresser of Harare*) as a cute young man "with a well-proportioned boyish physique, pleasing to the eye" (Huchu, 2010: 6). Such a characterisation trend feeds into a heteronormative assumption about the corporeality of the sexually queer body. The intertextual link reflects how mainstream society has stereotyped gays as effeminate, especially considering that the word 'cute' is usually used in association with women and kids. The emphasis on the bodily attractiveness of gay characters (at the expense of their personality and other attributes) evokes ancient male-male sexual relationships in ancient Japan and Korea where young men who were involved in pederastic relationships with Japanese royalty and Korean kings were "handsome youths" or "flower boys" who "were chosen for their beauty" (Leupp, 1995: 17–18).

The scenario above underlines how heteronormative society genders same-sex sexuality. Scholars have indicated that it is dangerous for gays to be seen as either masculine or feminine. As Epprecht observes, homophobic attitudes among many Zimbabwean men manifest themselves in "assertively masculinist behaviour" (1998: 631). In their reading of *The Hairdresser of Harare*, Chitando and Manyonganise (2016: 560) also underline the role of homophobia and heterosexuality in sustaining hegemonic masculinity. Elsewhere, Britton (1990) contends that male homophobia is predicated on the need to uphold standardised definitions of masculinity and maintain the border between masculine and feminine gender roles (Cf. Balogun & Bissell, 2018). Thus, in the eyes of heterosexual men, gays represent a competing version of masculinity that should be suppressed. Also, seeing gays as effeminate is one way in which society justifies violence against gays. This is because, as Plummer and DeCecco (1999: 8) claim, "homophobia is primarily disapproval of men who act like women". Therefore, when gays are viewed as effeminate, they are placed at the intersections of homophobia and misogyny, which results in a double displacement (cf. Epprecht, 2013: 6).[59]

[59] In her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), Adrienne Rich avers that the gendering and sexualization of lesbianism make female homosexuals worse off than their male counterparts. She contends that lesbianism and male homosexuality are more different than they are similar, that there are many

Assigning gender roles to same-sex sexual partners also negates the essence of same-sex sexuality which, according to Pickett (2009), lies in disrupting dichotomous gender systems through the performance of gender roles that do not match with biological sex.

Isis's exclusive focus on the sexual aspect of Hebrew and Christiaan's relationship (Madanhire, 1996: 97–98) draws attention to the sexualisation of same-sex relationships, which is another controversial issue in sexuality studies (Rich,1980; Hoad, 2007; Pickett, 2009). Rich (1980) argues that the sexualisation of gay and lesbian relationships implies reducing them to copulation, which overlooks other dimensions of interaction between actors in a same-sex sexual alliance. Isis's aversion to same-sex sexual desire makes her blind to the nonsexual dimension of Hebrew and Christiaan's relationship. According to Rich (ibid.), the sexualisation of same-sex relationships is closely linked to the tendency of seeing reality in binaries, leading to the imposition of gender on same-sex sexual partners. In turn, this reduces a same-sex sexual relationship to that of husband and wife. The assignment of male and female sex roles to gay partners is part of the heteronormative strategy of condemning same-sex relationships as futile and inconsistent with the heteronormative ideal of complementarity of the penetrative and the receptive roles performed by the male and the female partner, respectively (Plummer & DeCecco, 1999; Pickett, 2009).

It should be noted that the violent framing of same-sex sexuality in Madanhire's novel is emblematic of larger global patterns. For instance, in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), queer theorist Jasbir Puar avers that sexual prejudices inhere even in spaces that are considered accommodative to alternative sexualities. Puar explores interconnections among race, sexuality, class, nation, and gender in the context of contemporary Western biopolitics, surveillance politics and nationalism. He coins the term 'homonationalism' to describe the strategy adopted by America, Britain and Netherlands, among other Western states, to biopolitically manage lives by delineating "which queers live and which queers die" (Puar, 2007: xii). According to Puar, sexual otherness is co-opted as a force in Western acts of securitisation and counterterrorism against Muslim, Arab and Sikh populations based in the West. Those minority populations are 'homosexualised' and targeted for elimination in a move that Puar describes as an act of "homosexual sexual exceptionalism". In turn, this

points of convergence between lesbians and heterosexual feminists as both groups face gendered oppression in patriarchal contexts.

exceptionalism serves to eliminate gay and lesbian Muslims, Sikhs and Arabs. More importantly, it exposes the duplicity of Western discourses of sexual democracy and multiculturalism. The view that sexual prejudice can be deployed as a tool of biopolitical control (Foucault, 1978; Puar, 2007) can reorient perceptions about same-sex sexual relationships.

That said, cultural fundamentalism and notional understandings of same-sex sexualities are central to the cultural production of precarity for persons of alternative sexual identities. This is because consensus thinking, as opposed to rational judgement, constitutes society's unwritten laws on issues of sexuality. Madanhire's text reveals that the sexually queer body is condemned as a pollutant that threatens social hygiene and progress. The next subsection evaluates Mungoshi's representation of gay culture.

5.3 Narrating same-sex desire from a within-the-frame perspective: a reading of Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives"

Writing in the context of disability in contemporary African writing, Lipenga contends that "representations of disabled subjects are always infused with particular ideologies and carry the baggage of existing traditions or habits of depiction and response" (2014: 14). Here, Lipenga draws our attention to the challenges that outsider writers must reckon with when they set out to narrate difference. Perhaps nowhere is this problematic scenario more evident than in literary representations of same-sex sexual relationships in Zimbabwe. As noted by Plummer and DeCecco (1999), sometimes homophobic culture infiltrates the views of writers and readers as both operate within historically situated writing and reading conventions. Taking my cue from Butler's claim that in certain socio-political scenarios "one cannot break out of the frame" (2010: 10), I explore how Mungoshi's short story "Of Lovers and Wives" narrates a same-sex sexual relationship within the heteronormative frame, and by extension, perpetuates the homophobic culture that endangers people of alternative sexual identities. I argue that adopting a within-the-frame positionality tends to compromise the capacity of the literary medium to negotiate acceptance for individuals and social groups who are marked by difference.

"Of Lovers and Wives" foregrounds a triangular relationship involving Shamiso and her husband Chasi who is in a same-sex relationship with Peter. The story begins with Shamiso discovering Chasi's gay affair, eighteen years into her marriage. The narrative, centred on

Shamiso and Chasi's conflictual marriage, ends with Peter's death and Chasi's departure from home. Commenting on Mungoshi's short story, Shaw Drew argues: "The story is ostensibly a serious and sensitive treatment of a taboo topic, but, problematically, it slips at crucial moments – the beginning and the ending – into a powerfully judgemental homophobic discourse" (2005: 99). This assessment sums up the blind spots of Mungoshi's treatment of same-sex desire in the short story.

Towards subverting heteronormative culture, "Of Lovers and Wives" challenges some of the prejudicial views about same-sex sexuality explored in the previous section. Its emphasis on the mutual understanding between Peter and Chasi questions the sexualisation of same-sex relationships that, as Rich (1980) contends, reduces them to penetrative and receptive roles. By foregrounding Chasi and Peter's almost faultless relationship, Mungoshi not only demonstrates that there is more to same-sex relationships than sex but also drives the reader's attention away from the question of who assumes which gender role within the same-sex sexual alliance. The latter enables the narrative to transcend the temptation of depicting gay partners in terms of husband and wife, which, as Pickett (2009) contends, feeds into the heteronormative tradition.

Mungoshi's story also challenges the homophobic view that same-sex desire is unnatural. Peter defiantly tells Shamiso that "there is nothing natural or unnatural about it. […]. Once upon a time, the fact that the world was round was considered unnatural by the highest human authority in the world of that time" (Mungoshi, 1997: 108). Peter's deconstructive analysis of sexual identity resonates with the Foucauldian view that knowledge systems are subjectively constructed, and by extension, can be challenged. The implication is that sexual deviance is a social construct rather than an intrinsic human attribute (Greenberg, 1988), hence it is wrong for society to use the terms 'natural' and 'unnatural' as differentials in the creation of sexual identity. Peter also contends that same-sex sexual orientation is not a matter of choice but something innate to humans. Hence, he tells Shamiso to endure Chasi's sexual behaviour because "there is no other way" (Mungoshi, 1997: 110). Peter's view is supported by Epprecht (2013b) who calls for society to change its attitude towards non-normative sexualities since they are there to stay:

> This is a fact that will not go away no matter how strongly one wishes it to go, no matter how many times one quotes the Bible or the Qur'an, and no matter how fiercely one tries to suppress sexual minorities through the law or violence or so-called sexual reorientation/conversion therapy. People can, of course, hold back

> from expressing their sexual desire and can suppress it by all kinds of means, but they cannot be 'cured' of it. (Epprecht, 2013: 22–23)

Therefore, through Peter, who appears to be equipped with answers to questions that straight persons might have concerning alternative sexual relationships and identities, Mungoshi denaturalises the privileging of heterosexuality.

Mungoshi's writing also feeds into a narrative trope that depicts same-sex relationships as comparatively more fulfilling than heterosexual relationships, which, as the next subsection demonstrates, is also found in Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* and Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew*. In the title of his short story, Mungoshi juxtaposes two domains of human interaction that are represented by the two identity markers, 'lovers' and 'wives'. The term 'wives' implies the female gender role within the institution of heterosexual marriage, while 'lovers' evokes a broader human category that transcends the heteropatriarchal institution of wifehood. The two terms invite a comparative look at the quality of human relations within and outside heterosexual institutions. By juxtaposing Shamiso and Chasi's tension-filled heterosexual marriage against Chasi and Peter's intimate same-sex relationship, Mungoshi suggests that true love is not consistent with heterosexual relationships. The reader sees that Shamiso and Chasi's (heterosexual) relationship is characterised by silence and awkwardness, which leaves Shamiso haunted by the feeling that she has "been pushed to the periphery, to the place where the light ends, to the edge" (Mungoshi, 1997: 109). The powerful visual imagery deployed here paints a gloomy picture of heterosexual alliances.

However, the scenes at the end of Mungoshi's story (the symbolic breaking of a bottle of whisky, Peter's sudden death in a car accident, and the subsequent dissolution of Chasi and Shamiso's marriage) tend to reinscribe the heteronormative frame. The tragic end symbolically takes away the voice and agency that the narrative had appeared to render to Chasi and Peter. Therefore, what had appeared to be the author's pro-same-sex posture fizzles into a politically correct punitive stance. That stance is evident in the callous voice with which the narrator relates the news of Peter's death. The narrator tells us that the death "had such a fitting rightness to it" and that "there could be no question about the rightness of certain situations, under certain circumstances" (Mungoshi, 1997: 111). The phrase 'a fitting rightness' serves to dismiss Peter as not worth grieving for, which speaks through Shamiso's callous reaction to the news of his death: "she didn't feel grieved when she rang Chasi to tell him that, 'Peter has just had an accident. He died on the spot'" (Mungoshi, 1997: 111). Coming at the end of the story, these

statements may be read as summing up Mungoshi's stance on homosexual practice. Drew raises similar sentiments when he says,

> To many readers, this devastating 'resolution' might not have "a fitting rightness" to it at all. Its condemnatory tone, devoid of irony in the narrative voice, is deeply disturbing. Non-judgemental readers may dispute the necessity for Peter's death and find its coldly unsympathetic treatment quite distressing. (Shaw, 2005: 99)

Shaw further argues that though the story can be applauded for helping to break the silence on a highly sensitive issue in Zimbabwe, "it slips at crucial moments – the beginning and the ending – into a powerfully judgemental homophobic discourse" (Shaw, ibid.). Leroux reinforces Shaw's analysis of the events at the end of the story: "The repetition of the noun 'rightness' points to a problematic sense of closure. Although the rest of the story is much more nuanced, this ending seems to confirm a certain vision of homosexuality" (2019: 2). Arguably, Mungoshi had several options regarding how to end his story, but he chooses to endorse the cultural nationalist homophobia that has come to be associated with Zimbabwe. The problematic nature of the narrative's abrupt turn is confirmed by the critical responses the story has generated.

Tirivangana (2015), however, praises Mungoshi's story for espousing Zimbabwe's cultural nationalist ideology. He argues that "homosexuality is an aberration that threatens the extinction of the future of the human race" and, also, that the story is an "eye-opener to the younger generation who experiment with all sorts of ideologies and sensibilities that challenge the African way" (Tirivangana, 2015, cited in Leroux, 2019: 2). Tirivangani's stance can be understood in light of the following argument:

> Despite almost growing consensus on the tolerance of homosexuality among globalising, democratising and libertarian societies of the world, same-sex relationships remain alien, travesty, unthinkable and difficulty to justify from a Zimbabwean perspective where generally value systems are sacrosanct to the philosophies of communitarianism and 'unhuism' among other values that formed the mainstay of traditional Zimbabwean and African communities at large. (Chemhuru, 2012: 1)

Considering Chemhuru's argument above, Tirivangana's homophobic stance is predicated on Zimbabwe's cultural nationalism that is rooted in the idea of *Ubuntu/Unhuism*. Mungoshi's other works such as *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1983), and *Makunun'unu Maodzamoyo* (1970) also assume a didactic mould that is traceable to an earlier

generation of Zimbabwean novelists such as Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa, who placed their novelistic works at the intersection of didacticism and Christian moral teaching.

How Mungoshi's story appears to be perpetuating stereotypes about people of non-normative sexual orientation invokes Casement's observation that the process of writing is influenced by the writer's subjectivity and "intellectual heritage" (1987: 105). When such an intellectual heritage includes discursively constructed stereotypes, it becomes hard for literary advocacy to serve what Pines (2018) sees as its major role or the overturning stereotypes about marginalised identity groups. My reading was guided by the assumption that Mungoshi intended to place his story within that genre.

Mungoshi's self-censorship in "Of Lovers and Wives" is microcosmic of how writers have generally positioned themselves vis-à-vis the subject of same-sex sexuality at a global level, especially in totalitarian and homophobic governments. For instance, the Communist government of China saw literary works as a dangerous ideological weapon and suppressed the publication of literary texts on same-sex sexuality, among other sensitive issues (Pickett, 2009). According to Pickett, the rise to power of the Communist Party in Russia saw the repression of same-sex behaviour and literature, resulting in the imprisonment of the poet Gennady Trifonov in the 1970s. It was only after the 1980s that Russian writers such as Yevgeny Kharitonov took the risk of writing about same-sex sexuality. Pickett avers that although a new generation of gay writers such as Nikolas Koro continues to brave the strictly controlled Russian literary scape, same-sex desire is still a sensitive theme. This has often compelled writers to resort to marginal publication presses.

Similarly, Zimbabwe has a long censorship tradition that goes back to the colonial era. Literary writing has been a strictly controlled practice with local and global factors, including national ideology, censorship, and publication politics continue to influence narrative choice. Works of art that oppose or ridicule state ideology continue to be banned from as early as1956 when the then colonial government established the Southern Rhodesia Writing Bureau to 'protect' the public from offensive art. The bureau was meant to counter the publication of "revolutionary art" (Hassanin, 2020: 7). The effect was that early Shona novels such as Patrick Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* (1959), *Pfumo Reropa* (1961), and Kenneth Bepswa's *Ndakamuda Dakara Afa* (1960) were confined to non-subversive themes such as "murder, polygamy and the effect of westernisation on Africans particularly those in urban areas" (Hassanin, ibid. Cf.

Zenenga, 2008). Patel (1997) argues that there has always been a disjuncture between policy and reality on the issue of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

While state censorship has mainly targeted politically subversive writings, the issue of non-normative sexualities has also been systematically policed in Zimbabwean fictional writing. Firstly, advocating for sexual minority rights is incompatible with Zimbabwe's rigid cultural nationalist ideology that is rooted in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Unhu*. The philosophy is premised on the preservation of communities, and not that of individuals (Epprecht, 2013), which makes it a threat to people of same-sex sexual orientation who constitute a numerical minority. Secondly, as noted by Munro (2017: 187), in Africa the sexually queer body has been seen as a symbol of "colonial penetration of Africa and cultural inauthenticity" (Munro, 2017: 187). This particularly bears on how Zimbabwean writers approach the subject of homosexuality, especially considering how the country has become the proverbial cradle of anti-homosexual prejudice in sub-Saharan Africa (Epprecht, 2004, 2013). This partly explains why there have been very few writings on alternative sexual identities in Zimbabwe. Leroux (2019) alludes to how the Weaver Press publisher Irene Staunton had intimated to him in an email that Huchu's novel *The Hairdresser of Harare* only got published in Zimbabwe because the gay protagonist is severely punished and exiled at the end of the novel. This highlights the kind of environment in which "Of Lovers and Wives" was written.

This section examined how the narration of same-sex sexuality is impacted by sundry factors that include state-sponsored censorship, self-censorship, publication politics, literary traditions, theoretical practice, and the writer's subjective judgements. These factors have such a strong bearing on the process of writing that sometimes authors end up reinforcing some of the negative stereotypes that continue to sustain homophobia and heterosexual bias. In Butler's (2010) terms, that implies that the writer would have failed to break out of the heteronormative prison. By pointing out these narrative and epistemological challenges, I seek to bring attention to narrative pitfalls that both seasoned and aspiring writers need to be aware of as they position themselves within global LGBTI politics.

5.4 Narrating tabooed sexual relationships from an out-of-the-frame positionality: an analysis of Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare*

Huchu's *The Hairdresser of Harare* is part of a growing canon of Zimbabwean writing on non-normative sexual desires, identities, and relationships. Its precursors include Dambudzo

Marechera's *Mindblast* (1984) and Shimmer Chinodya's "Play Your Cards" (1989), which depict interracial sex and marriage; Stanley Nyamfukudza's "Posters on the Wall" (1991), which briefly touches on the theme of homosexuality in a prison context; and Melissa Tandiwe Myambo's "Deciduous Gazettes" (1999), which narrates 'gender transgression' (Shaw, 2006). Like these earlier works and other African fictional narratives such as Zakes Mda's play "The Hill" (1990) and Makhosazana and Martin's co-edited anthology, *Queer Africa: Selected Stories* (2018), Huchu's novel critiques normative standards of sexual behaviour that are rooted in heteropatriarchal culture. Huchu deploys strategies of "narrative enablement" (Lipenga, 2014) to consolidate gay subjectivities and advance an all-inclusive ethic of sexuality. Here, I draw on Butler's (2010: 10) metaphor of prison break to analyse how both Huchu and his gay characters challenge heteronormative policing.

The Hairdresser of Harare foregrounds the experiences of its gay protagonist Dumisani Ncube (shortened to Dumi). Aware of the homophobic culture around him, Dumi masks his sexual orientation in many ways, including forging a sexual relationship with Vimbai (the novel's female narrator). When Vimbai finally uncovers Dumi's same-sex sexual relationship with Mr M_ (a retired army commander), she reports the affair to the latter's wife who is a cabinet minister. Dumi is severely beaten by 'war vets', and on Mr M_'s advice, flees to the United Kingdom. The novel ends with Vimbai affirming her love for Dumi. The narrative castigates the privileging of heteronormativity, which can be defined as "the cultural bias in favour of opposite-sex/gender relationships, to that of same-sex/gender relationships" (Rainbow Resource Centre, 2012). By foregrounding an intra-racial gay relationship, the novel critiques the attribution of African same-sex sexual relationships to external (especially Western) influence.

Towards deprivileging heteronormativity, Huchu's novel highlights the comparative beauty of same-sex relationships. Dumi's same-sex relationships are portrayed as perfect alliances, as attested by his diary entries. One entry describing his relationship with Colin (Dumi's Canadian lover) reads: "*No man has ever made me feel so good about myself*", while another entry that alludes to his more recent relationship with Mr M_, says, "*Met strong, dashing man who literally saved my life …*" (Huchu, 2010: 163, 165, italics in original). Both relationships are depicted as built on mutual understanding and concern for each other's needs, as shown by Mr M_'s daily visits to the hospital where Dumi is admitted after his attack by the war vets. The grandeur of this love affair is further suggested by what appears to be telepathic communication

between Dumi and Mr M_, evidenced by what Vimbai sees as a bizarre and intuitive mutual attraction between the two men (Huchu, 2010: 135).

The motific absence of conflict in Dumi's gay relationships signals a romanticised depiction of same-sex relationships that aims to radically retell the narrative of the sexually queer body. Dumi's romanticised relationships contrast sharply with the conflictual heterosexual relationship between Mr M_ and Minister M. A similar narrative strategy surfaces in *If the Wind Blew* in which Hebrew and Christiaan's relationship is portrayed as mutually fulfilling. However, this idealised portrayal of same-sex sexual relationships belies unpleasant realities surrounding such relationships. Elsewhere, K. Sello Duiker's short story "Chapter Thirteen" (2018) and Michaela Coel's film "I May Destroy You" (2020) reveal that gay and lesbian relationships are underwritten by distrust, isolation, and non-consensual sex. Similarly, the public displays of love and hate in the same-sex marriage of South African gay celebrity Somizi Mhlongo have shown that same-sex sexual relationships are fraught with ambivalences and conflicts. In South Africa, crimes of passion and increasing gender-based violence have been aptly dubbed a second pandemic.

Huchu's romanticisation of Dumi is part of a radical strategy to humanise same-sex desire and affirm both the humanity and masculinity of gays. Besides being endowed with a uniquely charming character that makes him agreeable with all his workmates and clients at Khumalo Hair and Beauty Treatment Salon, Dumi displays exceptional hairdressing skills. That transforms the salon into the talk of the city within three months of his assumption of duty. Interestingly, he excels in a traditionally female space, "a woman's job" (Huchu, 2010: 7), and rises within that space to become the titular 'hairdresser of Harare'. This symbolically subverts the normative division of roles along gender lines. Yet, despite his gender transgressive behaviour, Dumi retains his masculinity. The novel makes numerous references to Dumi's masculinity, such as when Vimbai tells us that "everything about him was masculine", and when Mr M_ describes Dumi as "a very brave young man" who could have served as a freedom fighter (Huchu, 2010: 166, 109). These descriptions negate what Connell (1995: 143) and Kimmel (2001: 276) see as the suppression of gay masculinities in a heteronormative society. In his book *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861–1913* (2005), Sean Brady reveals that in the last half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, British men who practised male-male sex were not seen as effeminate but represented "an alternative to acceptable masculinity" (Brady, 2005: 48). Gay masculinities posed a threat to the normative

Victorian and Edwardian masculinity that was predicated on the capacity of married men to father children and support their spouses. Brady's case study of British gay masculinities supports Huchu's portrayal of Dumi's character, which shows that the effeminacy of gays is merely a cultural construct.

Bradford (2007) justifies the use of romanticisation as a narrative strategy by arguing that advocacy literature necessarily relies on elision and idealised rendering. However, while the technique enables Huchu to adopt a radical humanising position, it may also unwittingly reinscribe the negative images that he seeks to subvert. For example, by endowing Dumi with supernatural abilities, Huchu reinforces the tag of unnaturalness associated with gays and lesbians. In Section 5.3, I illustrated how a romanticised portrayal of albino characters in *Takadini* (1997) and *The Book of Memory* (2015) tends to reinscribe albinic otherness.

Huchu's narrative strategy in *The Hairdresser of Harare* also entails using radical characters who question cultural and religious fundamentalisms that sustain homophobia. Michelle (Dumi's sister) represents a voice of solidarity with persons of non-normative sexual orientation by accepting Dumi as somebody who is "just different, in a world which wants to force him to be what he is not" (Huchu, 2010: 186). Unlike Mungoshi's "Of Lovers and Wives" and Madanhire's *If The Wind Blew* in which gay characters do not have support from outside, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (published more than a decade later than the other texts) suggests that societal attitudes towards same-sex sexualities and relationships are shifting by depicting straight characters who challenge homophobia.

Besides Michelle, Huchu contests heteronormative culture through Fungai (Vimbai's brother), a self-proclaimed philosopher and a university dropout whose passion for philosophy has led him to establish a philosophy club. The philosophical debates he presides over become a significant rhetorical tool in Huchu's critique of heteronormative bias. Among other issues, Fungai challenges the use of the Bible as the sole point of reference on moral issues, arguing that human conceptions of right and wrong are independent of Judaeo-Christian teachings since not everyone is a Christian. For him, the Bible is not "an authoritative text [but] just one of the many philosophical texts" (Huchu, 2010: 176), so it cannot serve as a neutral point of reference on matters of morality.[60] Fungai's claim resonates with that of Meyers (2015: 92), who avers

[60] Despite its central role in entrenching homophobia, the Bible raises a number of controversial issues vis-à-vis the issue of same-sex sexuality. Some scholars, including Chris Meyers (2015) and Mark Epprecht (2013),

that if same-sex sexuality was intrinsically bad as homophobes claim, then our conscience would be enough to tell us that without us having to consult the scriptures. Therefore, Fungai not only lambastes the subjective moral judgements of Pastor Mvumba and Vimbai that are grounded on religious fundamentalism but also castigates the Judeo-Christian religion that, according to Epprecht (2004, 2013), has been a major contributor to homophobia.

Fungai further criticises the dichotomisation of sexuality that occludes other sexualities. He also castigates the criminalisation of same-sex sexuality, arguing that such an act is "the product of man-made laws" and not "natural law". (Huchu, 2010: 178). His argument is consistent with the view that sexual difference "is often portrayed as dichotomous, opposite, and symmetrical" and that this arbitrary dichotomisation, which has a bearing on how same-sex sexuality is perceived, plays out in the way "a man is simultaneously the *opposite* of a boy, a woman, transvestite, and a homosexual" (Plummer & DeCecco, 1999: 7–8). Fungai, however, hastens to argue that "there are things that are wrong in both natural and man-made laws". This shows how wary he is of the pitfalls of assuming absolute standpoints, though he goes on to raise the controversial claim that "homosexuality between consenting adults behind closed doors harms no one" (Huchu, 2010: 178). Huchu's novel shows how Dumi and Mr M_'s relationship strains the two's partners' other (heterosexual) relationships. The same pattern is seen in Mungoshi and Madanhire's texts where gay relationships result in the dissolution of heterosexual marriages. By vindicating same-sex relationships, Fungai exposes the flipside of queer theory that seems to be oblivious of the emotional constraints caused on straight people by same-sex sexual relationships.

Fungai's ability to influence attitudinal change in Vimbai symbolically communicates the power of literature to reorient perceptions about difference (Epprecht, 2004; Stobie, 2020). Vimbai's transformation is encapsulated in the statement that she makes at the end of the novel: "In a way I will always love Dumi. He restored my faith that there are still some good men out there" (Huchu, 2010: 189). Thus, through her interaction with Fungai, Vimbai is finally able

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contend that the Bible does not explicitly condemn same-sex sexuality and that the attribution of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to God's wrath against sodomy is contrived. Other scholars cite evidence that shows the Bible is not against same-sex sexuality. For example, Pickett (2009) cites verses in the Bible's Old Testament that makes reference to beautiful men such as Saul and David and also men who were attracted by the beauty of other men. Pickett says that the First Book of Samuel offers a description of David's intimate relationship with Jonathan, in which the former expresses his love for the latter (2 Samuel 1:17–26, cited in Pickett, 2009: 29–30). Pickett also claims that Paul's letter to the Romans (1:26–32) contains an "unambiguous reference" to male-male same-sex sexuality.

to look at Dumi as an epitome of virtue despite his tabooed sexual orientation. On one hand, Fungai exposes the stereotypes that preclude homophobes from appreciating the good that may come out of the sexually queer body. On the other hand, Vimbai's receptiveness to enlightenment symbolically translates to the human capacity for moral refinement. In short, Fungai plays a significant role in enabling Vimbai to appreciate sexual difference as one way of being and not as a marker of moral deficiency. In light of the above, I suggest that Huchu could have significantly changed the complexion and illocutionary power of the narrative had he endowed either Dumi or Mr M_ with Fungai's powerful voice.

It is worrisome, however, that the topic of same-sex sexuality leads to the dissolution of the philosophy club and the labelling of Fungai as a *ngochani*.[61] The disbandment of the club reflects both the toxicity of the subject of same-sex sexuality in Zimbabwe and the impact of self-censorship on people's thinking, talking, and writing about the topic (which I explored in Section 5.3). Through this unfortunate occurrence, Huchu seems to be sending a cautionary message about the need for people to exercise caution in how to position themselves vis-à-vis the issue of same-sex sexuality in extremely homophobic societies such as Zimbabwe. The fate of Fungai and his club also symbolically explains how the topic of same-sex sexuality has been systemically marginalised in academic research (Epprecht, 2004: 10) and creative writing.

In *The Hairdresser of Harare*, Dumi is the locus of the narrative though he is not the narrator. Towards the end of the narrative, Dumi stands his ground in defence of his sexual orientation:

> For a long time I used to think of my gayness as a cancer for which I needed treatment. Then I met Colin and he told me how wrong I was. Now, I realise it is just something I was born with and as long as Zimbabwe can't accept it, I'd better live somewhere else. (Huchu, 2010: 184)

Here, in his confession to Vimbai, Dumi not only challenges society's pathologizing of same-sex sexuality but also suggests that there is always an escape route for victims of homophobia. By asserting that his sexual orientation is natural and unalterable, Dumi gives credence to the view that society must learn to accept sexual difference since it is a universal and permanent aspect of human nature (Epprecht, 2013b). Dumi's sentiments are echoed by Hebrew's (in *If*

[61] Local name for a gay or a lesbian. Its authenticity as a Shona word is contested by some Zimbabweans. Scholars, however, cite its current circulation in the Shona language as proof that same-sex sexuality has always been part of the Shona culture (Epprecht, 2004).

The Wind Blew) confession to Isis: "I tried to suppress it, but its [*sic*] my preference. I am convinced now that it's what I always wanted" (Madanhire, 1996: 98). The defiance of these gay characters is microcosmic of the tenacity of Zimbabwe's LGBTI community and politics in the face of enduring persecution, attested by the boost in gay awareness in Zimbabwe following the historical banning of GALZ from participating in the 1995 Book Fair. According to Shaw, the ban only "generated greater public awareness" (2005: 94). This invokes the paradoxical power of precarity to ignite transformative politics (Standing, 2011; During, 2015).

The discovery of Dumi's same-sex sexual activities evokes one area of controversy around the issue of non-normative sexualities, namely the benefits of masking one's sexual orientation and preference versus the practice of outing. According to Pickett (2009), the term outing came into same-sex grammar recently and it refers to the old practice of exposing someone's sexual orientation. It also applies when a person of a non-normative sexual identity wittingly breaks out of the closet to share their orientation. According to Pickett, when someone is "involuntarily outed" in a homophobic society, the intention is usually to blackmail them or to ruin their reputation and/or political career. Huchu's novel highlights the power of homophobia to inflict political ruination through Minister M_'s fear that her political career might be destroyed if the information about her husband's gay activities falls into the hands of her political enemies.[62] Consequently, she swiftly deploys her secret agents to attack Dumi to avert her ruination. Pickett notes that in the sixteenth-century outings were deployed as a political stratagem in the religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics, where Pope Julius III was exposed as a 'sodomite' in 1551. Pickett further argues that while previously outing was deployed by homophobes as a strategy to de-legitimate exposed persons, gay and lesbian activists later used the strategy to advance their cause, especially by exposing 'closeted' homosexuals who defended anti-homosexual policies. Therefore, while the practice of outing can degenerate into a vicious instrument of violence and blackmail, its proponents, such as

[62] The deployment of homophobia in national politics, also referred to as 'political homophobia', invokes the power of blackmail as a mechanism of control. Such a system of control is encapsulated in the Russian term *kompromat*. The idea of *kompromat* arose in the context of massive government corruption and incompetence in Ukraine, Russia. The top government leadership encouraged the said vices but put in place an extensive surveillance mechanism in which the crimes and corrupt dealings of government officials were recorded by secret state agents. The incriminating evidence *(kompromat)* would then be used to secure compliance from the officials who would have to choose between life and death (see, Darden, K. A. 2001. Blackmail as a tool of state domination: Ukraine under Kuchma East Eur., p.68). The case of Zimbabwean Vice President Kembo Mohadi who resigned in 2021 following the disclosure on social media platforms of telephone communication audio that revealed his illicit sexual affairs shows how matters of sexuality can ruin political careers.

Michelangelo Signorile, maintain that it has made a substantial contribution to the struggle for recognition of sexual minority rights (Pickett, 2009: 150–151).

In Zimbabwe's homophobic space the idea of outing, whether intentional or unwilled, has proved to be dangerous. The outing of former Zimbabwean president Canaan Sodindo Banana in 1997 became a tragic turning point in his life. Besides losing his job as a University of Zimbabwe lecturer and dignity in society, Banana got imprisoned. The way the sexual scandal was framed in the media rendered him a social outcast, and it was a badge of shame that stuck with him till his death in 2003. For Dumi, masking helps him secure re-admission into family life as his mother thinks that he has finally been 'cured' of his sexual deviance (Huchu, 2010: 117). Masking, then, becomes a form of strategic surrender that works in contexts where alternative politics of refusal are limited. However, as in Mungoshi and Madanhire's texts, masking only offers temporary protection as the gay characters are ultimately outed.

The case of Neal Hovelmeier (mentioned in Section 1.1) demonstrates both the dangers and benefits of an outing. By outing himself, Hovelmeier lost his work, but the daring act earned him instant visibility and international accolades,[63] which, in turn, made him eligible for a Radcliffe fellowship at Harvard University. The outing of prominent persons in society might also go a long way towards boosting the self-esteem of other persons of non-normative sexual identities. Pickett (2009) notes that areas of emphasis in minority sexual rights struggles have continued to shift throughout the history of same-sex sexuality, ranging from the listing of renowned gays such as Socrates and Michelangelo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the current preoccupation with deconstructing the privileging and naturalisation of heterosexuality within more specific spatiotemporal contexts. According to Pickett, the practice of enumerating outstanding gays was meant to de-pathologise same-sex sexuality by showing that "truly amazing people have been deeply attracted to persons of the same sex" (Pickett, 2009: xiv). The practice of outing may, therefore, positively contribute to gay and lesbian politics, which explains why gay relationships are outed in Huchu's novel.

[63] Many international papers, including the *Sunday Times*, praised him for his courageous move that meant a lot to the international gay community. See Thompson, J. 2018/ Deputy headmaster praised in Zimbabwe for declaring he is gay. *Sunday Times*. 25 September 2018. [Online]. Available at: https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-09-25-deputy-headmaster-praised-in-zimbabwe-for-declaring-he-is-gay/.

In many ways, Madanhire's, Mungoshi's and Huchu's texts draw attention to the merits and demerits of outing. It is important to note that in all the cases outing happens accidentally and often with disastrous consequences on family relations and the safety of the gay characters. In *If the Wind Blew*, although the discovery of Hebrew's same-sex sexuality marks the end of his marriage to Isis, it allows him to boldly assert his sexual preference (Madanhire, 1996: 96). In "Of Lovers and Wives", the discovery of Chasi and Peter's same-sex relationship leads to Shamiso and Chasi being shunned by relatives on both sides of the family. There are also hints that Peter's sudden death at the end of the story could have been a matter of suicide (Leroux, 2019). However, Chasi and Peter become more at liberty to express their sexual preferences once they realise that Shamiso is now aware of their relationship. Peter even goes to the extent of defending same-sex desire against Shamiso's claim that such a desire is unnatural. In *The Hairdresser of Harare*, the outing of Dumi has disastrous consequences as he is not only ostracised by his family but also leads him to be beaten by Minister M_'s secret agents. Yet, as noted earlier, Dumi's outing is necessary for the transformation of Vimbai's attitude towards non-normative sexualities. Before discovering Dumi's sexual orientation, she had thought of gays as effeminate and unnatural, but after the discovery, she becomes convinced that gays look just like all other men. According to Leroux, this revelation places Dumi much above the usual "caricatural representations of a gay character" (2019: 7). In other words, the idea of outing can help to affirm the humanity of gays.

Considering the above, I argue that outing helps to break both the invisibility and the silence to which people of same-sex sexual orientation are consigned by mainstream society. It enables them to openly discuss their sexual preferences, which can be seen as a positive step towards negotiating acceptance in society. This view challenges the claim by Chitando and Manyonganise (2016) that Huchu compromises the liberating potential of his narrative by making the principal gay character (Dumi) conceal his sexuality. I follow Leroux (2019) in applauding the disclosure of Dumi's sexual orientation as a necessary step toward reclaiming his voice. However, I distance myself from Leroux's argument that Dumi's movement into exile at the end of the novel has the effect of silencing him again, leaving Vimbai to tell his story (Cf. Chitando & Manyonganise, 2016). Rather, I see Dumi's movement to the United Kingdom as an act of strategic surrender that is comparable to the flight from the site of danger by Mlalazi's protagonists in *Running with Mother* (2012).

Related to the above, in a society such as Zimbabwe where same-sex sexuality is criminalised and where conditions are not quite ripe for coalition politics, flight from danger not only becomes an act of self-preservation but also a central aspect of the politics of refusal. I suggest that Dumi's flight does not imply a renunciation of either his sexual orientation or fighting spirit; he can still pursue the struggle for sexual freedom from diasporic space in the same way Zimbabwean writers such as Tendai Huchu, Brian Chikwava and NoViolet Bulawayo continue to engage in home country politics from diasporic space. These writers have been able to capitalise on the enabling diasporic space to openly critique the excesses of the Zimbabwean government. However, I advance this argument against the observation by Koko, Monro, and Smith (2018), who write in the context of the experiences of LGBTI immigrants in South Africa, that the forced migration of members of the African LGBTI community results in their exposure to a host of challenges in the host nation, including xenophobia, limited access to basic resources, and illegal migrant status.

By alluding to GALZ, a Zimbabwean-based same-sex sexual rights organisation, Huchu underscores the unity of purpose between the literary front and activist politics in crusading for the recognition of sexual minority rights. Across the world, the struggle for sexual democracy has been largely undertaken by lesbian and gay rights movements and organisations such as Persons Marginalised and Aggrieved, based in Mombasa, and African Men for Sexual Health and Rights, which is based in Johannesburg. Although these organisations vary in terms of objectives and modus operandi, they all critique compulsory heterosexuality and advocate for sexual democracy (Epprecht, 2013: 170). However, by highlighting that the activities of GALZ are underground (Huchu, 2010: 167), Huchu hints at the dangerous and restrictive environment in which the organisation operates.

Given all the narrative and characterisation strategies that Huchu deploys as means of "narrative enablement", to borrow from Lipenga (2014), it can be argued that literary art constitutes an important front in the struggle for the recognition of sexual minority rights. My discussion of narrative means deployed in the texts under study has provided the basis for me to re-assert my argument that the lived experiences of characters in marginal spaces always leave spaces for pushback and strategic surrender. It has been noted that none of the gay characters renounces their sexual identity despite being subjected to sexual prejudice and violence. That validates Standing's (2011) claim that the precariat always can respond creatively to its condition. This also validates my adoption of the metaphor of prison break

(Butler, 2010: 10) for conceptualising how Huchu's gay characters consolidate subjectivities in the immanency of homophobic violence. I also revealed that the works under study clamour for an ethic of sexuality that recognises sexual diversity as an index of social hygiene.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, I deployed Butler's (2010) notion of frames of war to explore how three Zimbabwean authors, Nevanji Madanhire, Charles Mungoshi, and Tendai Huchu, narrate same-sex sexualities, identities and relationships. The focus was on how the three writers deploy literary means to radically imagine the acceptance of persons of non-normative sexualities in Zimbabwe. Butler's idea that hegemonic groups create frames that expose certain sections of the society to "maximised precariousness" and "to violence without protection" (2010: 25–26) has helped to conceptualise how gay characters in studied texts are subjected to stigmatisation, social exclusion, and persecution without recourse to the law. Butler's suggestion that the violent frames are difficult to break informed my reading of how Mungoshi's short story ("Of Lovers and Wives") seems to reinforce Zimbabwe's cultural nationalist homophobia. Lastly, I applied Butler's metaphor of prison break (2010: 10) to conceptualise the instability and breakability of the heteronormative frame as suggested by Huchu's out-of-the-frame perspective in narrating gay subjectivities in *The Hairdresser of Harare*. In different ways, Huchu's text humanises same-sex desire and calls for the recognition of gay masculinities. Similarly, the ability of gay characters to defy heteronormative policing in an extremely homophobic environment bolstered this thesis's guiding assumption that there are spaces for pushback, refusal, and strategic surrender even in the most brutal contexts.

This chapter underlined interconnections among homophobia, misogyny, masculinity, gender, sexuality, religion, and national ideologies. The texts studied in this chapter reinforce claims made by Greenberg (1988) and Plummer and DeCecco (1999) that homophobia is not an intrinsic human tendency but a social construct that arises out of society's obsession with "boundary maintenance" (Britton, 1990) and heteronormative standards of social hygiene. Society's strategy to enforce compliance with normative order has been found to entail the use of various discursive tools to condemn same-sex sexuality as immoral, unnatural, and unlawful. In some cases, gays are framed as effeminate, which, as previous chapters showed, underlines the role of misogyny in the cultural production of precarity.

However, this chapter also revealed that the literary reimagination of the nation does not take place in a vacuum. In narrating same-sex relationships, Zimbabwean writers must reckon with numerous odds that include environmental factors such as censorship, publication politics, national ideologies, political culture, and the writers' subjective judgements. By pointing out these odds, I sought to underline how writers are not immune to the biases and stereotypes that sustain homophobia. The adoption of a within-the-frame perspective by Mungoshi (in "Of Lovers and Wives") buttressed what Fraile-Marcos (2020) sees as the ambivalent role of fictional writing in shaping the world. Thus, as Butler's notion of frames implies, writers may be challenged by the cultural frames that they set out to contest.

While artists will always devise strategies for navigating state-sanctioned censorship and publication restrictions (Zenenga, 2008), there are still bigger challenges that writers must reckon with in writing about non-normative sexualities. These include the historical mistrust between the Global South and the West, which bears on the acceptability of the Western sexual minority discourse in Africa. This polarisation is captured in terms such as "human rights imperialism" (Epprecht, 2013: 178), "homonationalism" (Puar, 2007); "white man's disease" and "white man's burden" (Hoad, 2007). This challenge is compounded by how issues of sexuality are believed in some circles to be getting too much attention at the expense of bread-and-butter issues that affect majorities (Grigg, 2002; Epprecht, 2013: 5). This has a bearing on the readership's perception of literature on same-sex desire, especially in Zimbabwe where economic hardship appears to have become endemic. Meanwhile, the dearth of literary writing on lesbianism in Zimbabwe spells the need for Zimbabwean writers to imagine same-sex sexuality beyond gay culture.

Despite the odds stacked against the mainstreaming of alternative sexual identities, desires, and relationships, there is a trend toward more openness in Africa's approach to the subject. Mark Gevisser's recent publication *The Pink Line* (2020) shows that more and more people are openly identifying themselves as queer and some of them are getting into powerful positions in political and corporate spaces from which they can actively influence society's perception of alternative sexual identities. According to Gevisser, this development is aided by increasing access to online discussion platforms. This is supported by Mateveke (2022: 33), who contends that "although Zimbabwean homophobia has generally silenced alternative voices, popular culture offers channels through which to engage publicly with that which is generally loathed

and feared". Given these views, the texts studied in this chapter went a long way in trendsetting a sexual democracy agenda that future writers need to take to another level.

CHAPTER 6

SUBVERTING MISOGYNY: THE POLITICS OF RE-ARTICULATION IN CHIGUMADZI'S *THESE BONES WILL RISE AGAIN* AND MARAIRE'S *ZENZELE: A LETTER FOR MY DAUGHTER*

> You need a story to displace a story (Taleb, 2007: xxvii).
>
> The stories that we hear, the victors are the only storytellers. If only the monkey could tell his own story. If only the bird could tell the story of its flight in the air, the tree too if it could tell its own story. The story of our life is the story of our male blood flowing in the veins but there is other blood flowing in our veins, not mentioned by those who know the names of things. To name is to live. A father never lies to his children but it does not mean that he may tell all there is to be told and to omit is to lie. (Hove, 1996: 21)

6.1 Introduction

The two epigraphs above signal the displaceability and replaceability of hegemonic narratives. This sets the stage for this chapter's exploration of how Nozipo Maraire's *Zenzele: A Letter For My Daughter* (1996) and Panashe Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again* (2018) deploy aesthetic and affective tools of 'herstorying' to challenge a parochial national memory and definition of Zimbabweanness that render women invisible. The narratives show how Zimbabwe's exclusionary political culture has been fertile ground for new forms of imagination and cultural production in the form of women-authored historical narratives (herstory). Herstory arose in opposition to (his)tory, which is male-authored and male-centred (Hitchcott,1997; Zungu *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2021). It is a form of retelling that springs from "the dislocations and disjunctures across generations and space … [that] … begins with loss" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 29). This chapter reads Maraire's and Chigumadzi's texts as herstory narratives. I draw on Adichie's "The Dangers of a Single Story" (2009) to explore how the texts reinscribe into the national narrative those "little people" considered as "cannon fodder" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 16) and to critique the single-eyed perspective of herstory. In the process, I argue that while herstory can be an effective tool for exposing the misogynistic underpinnings of masculinised national memory, it inherits the exclusionary tendencies of (his)tory in ways that oftentimes reduce it to what I call 'vengeful narration'.

While previous chapters focused on the existential strategies adopted by the precariat in different sites of displacement and dispossession, this chapter explores precarity at the level of discourse and artistic forms. I take my cue from Botha who imagines the fragility of the literary

medium through the image of Ian Hamilton Finlay's poem "The Present Order is the Disorder of the Future" (1983), which is inscribed on a weathered stone surface (2014: 2). I demonstrate that herstory and (his)tory are fragile and antagonistic discourses that seek to eliminate each other. I argue that herstory operates within an androcentric discursive tradition that is difficult to transcend and such an epistemological dilemma raises a pertinent question about the ability of herstory to leave behind the exclusionary and misogynistic tendencies of (his)tory.

To conceptualise the precariousness of both (his)tory and herstory, I draw on Adichie's TED speech "The Dangers of a Single Story" (2009) in which she underlines the damaging impact of monolithic narratives. She argues that the negative 'single stories' we construct not only displace the other but also deform our understanding of them. On how a single story is constructed, Adichie contends that if you repeatedly depict a people as "one thing" they ultimately become that. She contends that single stories are intertwined with power structures and the politics of domination that bear on how stories are told, who holds the power to tell them, when to tell them, and how many stories to tell. This resonates with Butler's (2010) notion of frames of war, which may be understood as single stories about who should live, who should die, and who should be recognised as human. This chapter imagines Zimbabwe's patriotic history as a frame of war, considering how ZANU-PF has systematically deployed it to rob women of agency and visibility.

As a remedy, Adichie advocates for a plurality of stories, arguing that "many stories matter" as they help to transcend simplistic inversions of narratives or hegemonies. She contends that writers are instrumental in the construction of stories that shape our lives. These ideas play out in Maraire's and Chigumadzi's critique of the monocentrism of Zimbabwe's patriotic history. However, Adichie also notes that "stories have been used to dispossess and to malign" as well as to "empower and to humanize". This ambivalence is central to my problematisation of the exclusionary tendencies of herstory.

My discussion builds on existing literature on herstory, nation narration, and precarity of discourse and the literary medium. I also draw on the work of gender-nation scholars such as Yuval-Davis (1997), Boehmer (2005, 2009), and McClintock (1997), who emphasise the indispensability of women in the nation-building exercise. Boehmer's (2009) notion of the 'family trope' in patriarchal nationalisms informs my reading of symbolic family genealogies in *These Bones Will Rise Again*. I also draw on studies that explore nation re-narration in the context of Vera's works (Christiansen, 2005; Toivanen, 2010; Nyambi, 2014) as they provide

a useful critical template. Also important to this chapter are studies on the masculinisation of Zimbabwe's nationalist discourse, including essays in Muchemwa and Muponde's co-edited book *Manning the Nation* (2007), and Muponde's (2004) idea of Zimbabwe as a "man-nation". These studies inform my reading of ways in which masculinised national memory has inspired the politics of re-articulation. However, there is a dearth of literature that problematises herstory and this chapter seeks to fill that gap by offering a context-specific evaluation of herstory as an interventionary discourse.

In terms of structure, the chapter has three sections. The first section (Section 6.2) draws on the idea of a single story (Adichie, 2009) to explore the role played by both powerful and disempowered groups in the construction and sustenance of structures of marginalisation in Chigumadzi's and Maraire's narratives. The subsection argues that in the texts under study both (powerful) men and women contribute to the construction and replication of single stories about women's inferiority.

The second section (Section 6.3) deploys Adichie's single story metaphor to explore how Chigumadzi's and Maraire's texts speak back to ZANU-PF's monolithic narrative about Zimbabwe. The focus is on how the texts deploy narrative means to expose the exclusionary inclinations of patriotic history and to reinscribe women and other marginalised groups into the national narrative. To that end, I invoke Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) interrelated concepts of 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia' that underline the relational existence of the self and the other and how the other is indispensable to the consolidation of the self's identity and worldview. This section argues that herstory can open vistas for envisioning an all-inclusive or polyphonic Zimbabwean community.

The last section (Section 6.4) deploys the idea of "female misogyny" (Gubar, 1994) to offer a context-specific assessment of the possibilities and limits of herstory. The section highlights the hegemonic tendencies that make herstory as toxic and fragile as the (his)tory that it sets out to contest. Overall, I argue that polyphony is not necessarily redemptive and that herstory is another single story whose liberatory potential is taxed by its inherently reactive relationship to (his)tory. I further argue that in an attempt to annihilate hegemonic tendencies, herstory can generate a vengeful re-narration that merely creates a rival centre of power.

6.2 The single story of women's inferiority

Zenzele and *These Bones Will Rise Again* are part of a counter-hegemonic literary movement that challenges the exclusion of women from sites of nation narration and knowledge production. Forming the background to Maraire's and Chigumadzi's texts is a violent political culture that the ruling ZANU-PF party has entrenched to maintain its hegemony. Among those excluded from the national community are women, non-Shona Zimbabweans, and non-ZANU-PF political parties and their supporters. Women, in particular, are systematically confined to the 'home' space, and by implication, discouraged from participating in national politics (Sachikonye, 2011). This culture of exclusion, normalised through patriotic history, political rhetoric, and legislation, has rendered the idea of a nation inapplicable to Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008; Kaulemu, 2011; Mlambo, A.S., 2013). In this section, I deploy Adichie's (2009) insights on "The Dangers of a Single Story" to explore the cultural and ideological processes at play in the deconstruction and reconstruction of single stories that have trans-historically rendered Zimbabwean women invisible. I primarily focus on how Zimbabwe's patriotic history as a single story has been deployed by the ruling ZANU-PF party to entrench a toxic patriarchal nationalism. In Butler's (2010) terms, such a nationalism serves as a frame for determining which lives are "grievable" and which ones are dispensable. This is because the ZANU-PF government has put in place a patronage system in which only those who are politically connected to it have access to life-sustaining opportunities and resources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007; Mawere, 2021).

Zenzele and *These Bones Will Rise Again* re-narrate the Zimbabwean nation by foregrounding the personal experiences of women characters. On one hand, *Zenzele* is an epistolary novel in which the writer-narrator, Mai Zenzele or Shiri, writes to her daughter (Zenzele) who is studying in America. The letter supposedly aims to cultivate Zenzele's national consciousness but also serves as a social commentary on a wide range of topical issues, including women's role in the liberation struggle, memories of childhood, patriarchal oppression, and racial prejudice. On the other hand, *These Bones Will Rise Again* reconstructs the narrative of Mbuya Nehanda, the legendary spirit medium and heroine of the First *Chimurenga*. The narrative emphasises the transgenerational nature of Nehanda's spirit as a way of challenging the way it

is seen as 'frozen'[64] in the patriotic version of Zimbabwean history. Running parallel to the narrative of Mbuya Nehanda is the story of the writer-narrator's paternal grandmother, Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi, who is also celebrated as a heroine who was able to transcend her femininity. In the autobiographical novel, Mbuya Nehanda and *Chimurenga* become symbols of timeless (feminine) resistance.

These Bones Will Rise Again criticises how ZANU-PF has reduced the official version of Zimbabwe's history to a monolithic partisan narrative. The writer-narrator argues,

> This official version of what Terence Ranger named 'patriotic history' itself draws on a tradition in which the contributions of workers', women's, urban and other movements in the 'inter-Chimurenga' years are often erased or dismissed as merely reformist precursors to the nationalist era of the '50s and '60s. In both tellings, a straightforward story of suppression and revival reduces Chimurenga to a gun and, often, to a phallocentric struggle, ignoring the complex ways in which Africans did more than act out a false consciousness, but subverted and negotiated with the colonial state, continuously drawing on Chimurenga's intergenerational spirit to make and remake themselves after the military and spiritual conquest of the 1890s. (Chigumadzi, 2018: 27)

Here, Chigumadzi underlines how patriotic history has been used to project a narrow conception of the *Chimurenga* fighting spirit so that only those who carried guns qualify as heroes (Mamvura, Muwati & Mutasa, 2018). Zimbabwean women are marginalised from the war narrative and deprived of heroic status because they are not regarded as "sons of the soil" in a context where fighting for freedom is classified as a masculine role (Parpart, 2007: 108-109). Essentially, patriotic history has recast history so that non-military nation-building efforts become insignificant, while its reduction of the liberation war to "a phallocentric struggle" exposes its misogynistic underpinnings. Muponde also brings out the viciousness of patriotic history in the following passage:

> It is a virulent, narrowed down version of Zimbabwean history, oversimplified and made rigid by its reliance on dualisms and binaries of insider/outsider, indigene/stranger, landed/landless, authentic/inauthentic, patriotic/sellout. The net effect of operating these binaries is the institution of othering as a permanent

[64] The idea of a frozen image, whose origin is attributed to Yvonne Vera's novel *Nehanda* (1993), derives from a visual image of Mbuya Nehanda's spirit medium in captivity. The frozen image has inspired both imaginative and critical work.

> condition of political and cultural life where 'difference' translates unproblematically into 'foe'. (Muponde, 2004: 176)

Like Chigumadzi, Muponde highlights how patriotic history is underwritten by selective memory, erasure, distortion, and violence, which is further supported by Muchemwa (2005), who argues that in Zimbabwe the act of remembering is gendered, monopolised, and central to the construction of national identity. Similar claims have been made by Ranger (2005) who describes patriotic history as a product of selective memory on the part of those who transcribed it. Nyambi (2014) bolsters these claims in his study of how Vera subverts masculinised nation narration in *The Stone Virgins* (2002).

The link between patriotic history and misogyny is embedded in ZANU-PF's deployment of Mbuya Nehanda's narrative. The centrality of the narrative in the *Chimurenga* rhetoric creates the farcical impression that ZANU-PF recognises the role of women in anti-colonial struggles. As Chigumadzi reveals, Mbuya Nehanda's spirit only plays a symbolic role as a political rallying point in the three *Chimurenga* struggles to which the country's history has been reduced. This is because in the official version of Zimbabwean history the frozen image of Mbuya Nehanda is limited "to the British colonial encounter as if she is only a spirit of yesterday" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 98). Perhaps nowhere else is ZANU-PF's appropriation of the narrative of Mbuya Nehanda more blatantly expressed than when Mugabe, during a campaign rally in Mashonaland Central Province on 10 July 2013, said: "I heard Tsvangirai was campaigning in Mashonaland Central. Does he not know that this is Mbuya Nehanda's province?" (cited in Tendi, 2018: 964). Mugabe's statement implies that opposition political parties do not have the right to associate themselves with Mbuya Nehanda. Yet, as already intimated, the references to Mbuya Nehanda are acts of mere tokenism meant to project the impression that the ZANU-PF government recognises the role of women in nation-building projects (Mamvura *et al.*, 2018; Mawere, 2022). This is reinforced by Mamvura *et al.* who argue that "out of the several thousands of women who were actively involved in the liberation struggle, only Mbuya Nehanda is memorialised through street naming". However, they note that the street named after her is "narrow and short in relation to the other roads that bear the names of male figures of the struggle that are commemorated through street naming" (Mamvura *et al.*, 2018: 435–36).

As Chigumadzi notes, the privileged and convenient version of Mbuya Nehanda is intertwined with a pro-ZANU-PF nationalist narrative in which the party's military wing (ZANLA)

(narrowly imagined as Shona and male) is touted as the country's sole liberator from colonial rule. In its single story about the nation and *Chimurenga*, ZANU-PF's displaces the female figure. Chigumadzi explains how the Nehanda narrative has been appropriated by ZANU-PF for political expediency:

> Mbuya Nehanda is variously exceptionalised and abstracted into a symbolic object of history, masculinised, domesticated as "Mother of the Nation" and when she is most troubling, or it is most politically useful, she is supplanted, and usurped by new national spiritual figures such as Gushungo, President Robert Mugabe. (Chigumadzi, 2017: 14)

It is interesting to note that the usurpation and contestation have continued with the example of Grace Mugabe, who presented herself as a medium of Mbuya Nehanda at the height of her ill-fated struggle to succeed her husband as the leader of ZANU-PF. Interestingly, on 25 May 2021, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the ultimate winner in this contestation, erected a giant and revolving statue of Mbuya Nehanda, which also challenged the frozen image trope popularised by Vera's *Nehanda* (1993).

The figuration of Mbuya Nehanda as 'Mother of the Nation' invokes what Boehmer (2009) calls the family trope in the postcolonial imagination of the nation, where the nation is conceived of as a family unit with a father as its head. This imagining of the nation through the prism of family genealogies is also theorised by Muchemwa and Muponde who explore, in the context of Zimbabwe, how the privileging of fatherhood has resulted in "the overmanning of the nation" (Muchemwa & Muponde, 2007: xx).

Boehmer suggests that the popular image of "the woman-as-nation" (2009: 23) merely serves to entrench a "patriarchal nationalism" that confines women to the private domain. On a similar note, Muchemwa and Muponde hint at the dangers of ZANU-PF's imagination of the nation as a patriarchal family unit when they observe that "fatherhood is related to the performance of hyper-masculinity associated with violence, domination, and biological siring that does not have moral and social legitimacy" (2007: xvii). Here, Muchemwa and Muponde also imply that patriarchal nationalism is a single story that is founded on violence. This is reinforced by Boehmer (2005: 29), who avers that national agency as exercised through citizenship and leadership is a masculine privilege despite the symbolic value attached to women through the term 'motherland'.

The counterfeit privileging of Mbuya Nehanda has continued to play out in ZANU-PF's patriarchal nationalism. The 'heroine subject' is invariably invoked in post-independence Zimbabwe to feed into ZANU-PF's imagination of Zimbabwe as a family and, by extension, to perpetuate the "sexualised and gendered identities and binaries that sustain, authorise and legitimise Zimbabwe's patriarchal nation-craft" (Mawere, 2021: 1). According to Mawere, the post-2000 period has seen an increasing number of "national heroines" being buried at the National Heroes Acre in Harare, including Johanna Nkomo, Julia Tukai Zvobgo, Ruth Chinamano, and Sunny Ntombiyelanga Takawira, all of whom were spouses of ZANU-PF elites. Considering that only one woman, Sally Mugabe, had been buried at the national shrine before 2000 (in February 1992), this surge in the conferment of heroine status to politically connected women is interpreted by Mawere as part of a patriarchal nationalistic imperative to address a gap in symbolic mothering of the nation. However, Goredema and Chigora (2009, cited in Mawere, 2021) aver that this selective recognition of heroine status leaves out about 10 000 female combatants of the Second *Chimurenga* and points to a violent ideology of 'femocracy'. They define femocracy as "an ideology which believes that in order for women to rise in the political arena they have to be linked to men in political positions" (Goredema & Chigora, 2009: 76, cited in Mawere, 2021: 6). The heroine subject, including Mbuya Nehanda, is therefore merely an instrument in the service of ZANU-PF's patriarchal nationalism; it perpetuates the story of women's inferiority as condensed in the national family trope that privileges fatherhood.

Chigumadzi shows that ZANU-PF's narrow definition of *Chimurenga* has produced the Orwellian animal farm syndrome where ZANU-PF and its supporters get preferential treatment through the party's patronage system. That has marginalised ethnic and political minorities and, in the words of Kaulemu (2011: ix), led to "some people [being] understood to be more equal than others". Chigumadzi hints at the dangers of patriotic history when she accuses it of having committed "a grave narrative injustice" (2018: 111) by normalising differential access to power and national resources. She writes,

> In time it became clear that in this 'unified' Zimbabwe, some people were more Zimbabwean than others. Mbuya Nehanda's image was used to serve new and old ideas about who really belongs to and fought for Zimbabwe. If Zimbabwe is the spirit-nation exclusively belonging to Shona ancestors such as Nehanda and Kaguvi, then it follows that their Shona descendants are the true owners of the land. If Mbuya Nehanda authorises a liberation narrative where Shona people are the key protagonists of anti-colonial resistance, the Shona-led First Chimurenga of 1896–97 towers over the Ndebele 1893 and 1896 wars. In this history, the Second

> Chimurenga was won by the Shona-dominated ZANU guerrillas with little real contribution from ZAPU's largely Ndebele-speaking military wing, meaning that independence really belongs to Shona people because they fought hardest for it. (Chigumadzi, 2018: 99)

In this passage, Chigumadzi brings attention to the cracks in the post-independence imagining of Zimbabwean nationhood. The construction of a monologic story of the nation has meant an ethnonationalist rendition of history that erases both the anti-colonial struggles of ethnic minorities and their ancestral spirits.

Zenzele narrates the dangers of monolithic narratives in the context of colonial and neo-colonial violence against gender and racial minorities. Set in both colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe, Maraire's epistolary narrative underlines interconnections between racial and gender prejudice in terms of how they feed into single stories about the other. The novel alludes to how white Rhodesians capitalised on the ideological function of a single story in two ways: first, to project a saviour image of themselves, and second, to erase everything that made the black other human. The second scenario is exemplified in the following passage that details how the Rhodesian government deployed state media to project a negative image of guerrilla fighters as terrorists during the Second *Chimurenga*:

> The newspapers warned everyone to be on the alert for terrorists who were trying to destabilize the country, but they published not a word about the battles that raged daily in the bush. No ink wasted on the tanks and troops that overran whole villages, killing our cattle, massacring our children. No one heard of the schoolgirls who were raped, the bushfires that the Rhodesian forces set alight to smoke out the "terrorist savages", and the homes of Africans that were razed to a few sticks of charcoal. (Maraire, 1996: 135)

The reportage captured above was meant to reduce the efforts of guerrilla combatants to acts of thoughtless violence in order to justify heavy-handed measures against both the guerrilla fighters and civilians suspected to be sympathetic towards them.

Similarly, the portrayal of Sister Africa's father as a terrorist by the white apartheid regime of South Africa is meant to besmirch his perception by the blacks who consider him to be an avid pan-Africanist lawyer and freedom fighter (Maraire, 1996: 101). The apartheid state and the black people had competing stories about African freedom fighters. These textual details underscore how a people gets violently displaced when its story is told by an outsider (Adichie, 2009), which Maraire aptly captures through the statement: "Until the lion learns to write, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter" (1996: 78–79). The hunter-hunted binary denotes a

conflictual context characterised by uneven power relations, which Maraire contextualises through the Manichean discourse in which the state media portrays British colonialists (Cecil John Rhodes and his British South Africa Company) as discoverers who "had wrought from the jungle the civilisation that was Rhodesia", while black guerrilla fighters are portrayed as "barbaric, bloodthirsty black anarchists" (Maraire, 1996: 135). The function of erasure in white colonialists' construction of blackness in the novel can be explained in terms of Butler's (2010) notion of frames of war, which explains how media tools are conveniently deployed by powerful states to regulate the public's perception of the targeted other (cf. Sontag, 1973).

The examples above underscore the centrality of media tools in the ideological construction of hegemonic narratives. In *These Bones Will Rise Again*, the allusion to how Wilbur Smith's novel *The Sunbird* (1972) rewrites the history of Great Zimbabwe monuments by attributing their construction to the Phoenicians of Carthage (Chigumadzi, 2018: 24–25) shows how books can be deployed to displace the other by 'unwriting' its history. Smith's novel feeds into Europeans' prejudiced underestimation of Bantu capabilities, which resonates with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1992) assertion that writing was one of the major ideological tools that Europeans used to appropriate and displace African cultures and history. In *Zenzele*, Shiri's advocacy for local knowledges (and condemnation of Western education), summed up in her statement "the village is our library" (Maraire, 1996: 7), is predicated on her understanding of how Western knowledge has historically served to entrench and replicate the West's supremacist ideology. This dovetails with Adichie's (2009) reference to the way she was saved from internalising the West's story about Africa as a dark continent by reading the works of African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye.

The statement by Zenzele's father that "until we begin to put our pen to paper, we historically do not exist" (Maraire, 1996: 79) highlights the power of writing as a way of saving a people from erasure. Elsewhere in his autobiography Mutambara (2017) asserts the power of writing when he takes a swipe at some African leaders who seem to lack a writing culture. It appears, however, that Mutambara specifically refers to Robert Mugabe as Africa has a history of statesmen writing against European imperialist violence, including Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Mwalimu Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, and Kenneth Kaunda.

Zenzele also underlines how hegemonic narratives are intricately connected to prejudice and ignorance about the other. The novel shows that racial prejudice is so institutionalised that it sometimes manifests itself in seemingly innocuous forms. For instance, Zenzele's father

alludes to an incident that transpired during his university days in New York when the chairperson of the African Studies Department, a white anthropologist from California, delivered a speech about Africa in which she referred to the continent as a land of drums. Her conflation of Africa with drums enraged African students who felt that the chairperson's definition of their continent was grossly reductive and racist (Maraire, 1996: 74). On her part, the white lady was shocked by the students' reaction because she had only meant to make a genuine compliment about Africa. Similarly, Shiri alludes to an occasion when she was embarrassed by an old Polish woman who approached her to make an offer for a housemaid job (ibid.: 83). The old lady had assumed that every black woman would readily accept such an offer. Both incidents bolster Adichie's (2009) assertion that people's perceptions about the other are shaped by the stories that they have continually heard about them, which oftentimes are based on subjective judgements rather than rational thinking.

Related to the above, Maraire's novel also shows the role of limited understanding in the naturalisation of the other's alterity. In their patronising manner, most Rhodesian whites thought of their actions towards their black servants as acts of benevolence. In the following passage, the writer-narrator's cousin Tinawo Muti describes the moral blindness of her white employers:

> They really felt that it was their duty to protect me. They really believed that I was happy to sleep in that stinking hovel that they provided as my compound. It never really occurred to them that my back might ache from lying on the hard, cold cement floor, covered by one of their old blankets with moth holes and cigarette burns and patches of old yellow stains as a bed. In their minds, I was content to bathe cramped in a corner, crouched in a bucket, shivering as the cold water splashed over my body on frosty June mornings. They saw me as a domesticated animal no better than their dog. (Maraire, 1996: 159)

In this passage, Tinawo suggests that while othering is a function of the self's conscious hostility, sometimes it stems from ignorance about the sensibilities of the other. In the case of whites, that ignorance is a function of a historically situated mental conditioning to the Darwinist discourse of racial profiling that has constructed a single story about Africans as an inferior race. The whites and the blacks in the novel are separated by an epistemological gap that renders them mutually exclusive entities. The fact that Tinawo's white employers do not realise the psychological violence embedded in their seemingly benign acts towards employees evokes Gilligan's (2000) argument that perpetrators of violence do not always realise the violence of their actions. This evokes how the Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith

wrongly thought he was being gracious towards blacks when he behaved like "a father taking responsibility for his under-age children" (Kaulemu, 2011: 14).

Maraire's foregrounding of the white Rhodesians' story about blacks provides context for understanding the workings of gender prejudice and men's monologic narrative of women's weakness and failure. Western imperialism and the patriarchal ideology are both masculine projects (Morrell & Swart, 2005; Mbembe, 2001). Therefore, by juxtaposing the racial and gender narratives, Maraire not only underlines the "double displacement" of Third World women under patriarchy and colonialism (Spivak, 1988) but also brings attention to intersectionalities that underwrite the women's marginalisation. For example, in *Zenzele*, the silencing of women is an interplay of several factors that include heteropatriarchal policing and Christianity. The writer-narrator's cousin Rudo epitomises the silent suffering that is sanctioned by Christian stoicism as she patiently bears the daily abuses from a husband that she believes God has chosen for her (Maraire, 1996: 173). Rudo's giving birth to a baby boy who is both deaf and blind can be read as symbolic of the voicelessness that Christian stoicism and patriarchal culture enforce upon many African women. Rudo's situation bolsters Rakoczy's (2004: 29) contention that Christianity is a patriarchal religion that is instrumental in the construction of a reductive narrative about women. It also shows the primacy of belief system in the production of "subjected and practised bodies" (Foucault, 2005[1979]: 104).

Maraire's and Chigumadzi's narratives also demonstrate how marginalised social groups become complicit in sustaining hegemonic narratives. Foucault's (1979) and Mbembe's (2001) theorisations of the mechanisms of power production and its maintenance help shed light on how disempowered groups unwittingly help sustain hegemonic narratives in Maraire's and Chigumadzi's texts. According to Foucault (2005[1979]: 102), the mechanism of power production ensures that those who do not have it are disciplined into "objects of knowledge" who then become complicit in their subjugation. Mbembe (2001) theorises this scenario in the context of the postcolonial state (which he calls the *commandement*). He proposes that the persistence of oppression and violence in the *commandement* is a function of a master code, an institutionalised common sense designed to legitimate and perpetuate the state's hegemony. The master code is so institutionalised that it is neither negotiable nor easy to "depart from or challenge". Nevertheless, Mbembe avers that the ruled can ultimately rise above the restrictions of the master code (Mbembe, 2001: 103–111). Both Foucault and Mbembe reinforce Louis Althusser's argument in "Ideology and State Apparatuses" (1970 [2010]) that all hegemonic

political systems shape the mental culture of their human subjects in ways that make them complicit in reproducing oppressive systems.

In *These Bones Will Rise Again*, Chigumadzi castigates opposition political parties and movements, including the MDC, Pastor Evan Mawarire's #ThisFlag Movement, and Promise Mkwananzi's Tajamuka/Sesijikile, for passively allowing ZANU-PF to appropriate the *Chimurenga* legacy. According to Chigumadzi, these political outfits, also left out of the dominant narrative of the nation, promote ZANU-PF's interests by not proving to the electorate that *Chimurenga* is an intergenerational spirit that is neither exclusive to ZANU-PF nor reducible to gun-toting (Chigumadzi, 2018: 109). Chigumadzi knows that these oppositional political organisations are male-dominated like ZANU-PF but realises the opportunities for renewal and 'multivoicing' that come with integration with other marginalised voices. In other words, she is subtly calling for the forging of solidarity alliances as a strategy for subverting ZANU-PF's monolithic nationalist discourse.

Chigumadzi also castigates what comes out as women-to-women misogyny when Zimbabwean women became part of the crowds that denigrated former President Robert Mugabe's wife Grace Mugabe in November 2017. By participating in singing "*Hatidi kutongwa nehure*" (We don't want to be ruled by a prostitute; Chigumadzi, 2018: 130), Zimbabwean women pandered to the sexist mentality that allows the word 'prostitute' to be selectively applied to women while condoning men's sexual excesses. Grace had attracted the tag of a prostitute for cheating on her first husband and getting into an extra-marital relationship with Mugabe, who was then married to the former First Lady Sally Hayfron Mugabe (Chigumadzi, 2018: 126). Although Mugabe was equally culpable in this case of infidelity, his faults, including misgoverning the country, were attributed to the influence of Grace who was seen as "a cruel stepmother" and a failed mother of the nation (ibid.: 124). Ironically, Grace also plays the ZANU-PF misogynistic card by accusing former Vice President Joyce Mujuru of indecent dressing at a political rally.[65] In so doing, Chigumadzi tells us, Grace "invoked old nationalist ideas of prostituting women to discredit the liberation war veteran" (ibid.: 127). Grace's attitude towards Mujuru shows how misogyny is so subtly embedded in ZANU-PF's political culture that even women

[65] On many other occasions Grace Mugabe accused Joyce Mujuru of being a witch.

politicians have internalised it because it is the only political culture that Zimbabwean women have known.

The denigration of Grace Mugabe is rooted in a misogynistic tradition that confines women to the domestic space, which, in the Shona cosmology, is enshrined in the axiom *musha mukadzi* (the place of a woman is in the home). Chigumadzi observes that the labelling of Grace Mugabe as a prostitute is consistent with a colonial tradition that saw free-spirited (especially urban) women as prostitutes. That tradition has persisted in the present day where it serves "to discredit female politicians" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 103). According to Yuval-Davis, patriarchal policing entails normalising "strict cultural codes of what it is to be a 'proper woman' [that] are often developed to keep women in this inferior power position" (1997: 59). Considering this, Grace Mugabe's chief offence is cherishing political ambitions in a male space, "the more than decades-long political arena of father and sons" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 24). The sharp contrast between Grace as the 'evil' stepmother and Sally as the "unassuming, soft-spoken" and modest first wife (ibid.: 124–125) encapsulates how the Zimbabwean society reacts to the rise of the female politician.

Reinforcing the claims above, in his reading of *These Bones Will Rise Again*, Ncube (2020) argues that Zimbabwe's political culture is modelled after the patriarchal family structure in a way that makes it difficult for women to stray into the space of national politics without losing their dignity. This situation perpetuates women's underrepresentation in the political space, which, according to Nekoei and Sinn (2021: 2), "is not just one of the most enduring aspects of gender discrimination; [but] also influences subsequent generations' ambition and self-esteem". In her essay "Mai Mujuru: Father of the Nation?" (2007), Christiansen highlights the difficulties faced by women with political ambitions in Zimbabwe's androcentric political culture. The net effect of women-to-women misogyny is to perpetuate an androcentric political culture that prevents women from telling their stories.

The role of women in perpetuating misogyny is not peculiar to Zimbabwe. For example, Vickey and Everbach (2018), who explore the persistence of misogyny in American popular discourse and media platforms, show that American women helped to perpetuate misogyny by enhancing the electoral victory of former United States President Donald J. Trump in 2016 despite glaring evidence of his misogynistic tendencies. Also, in a comparative analysis of the misogyny of Donald Trump and former South African President Jacob Zuma, Graham (2020) observes that only a few women protested the sexist conduct of the charismatic Jacob Zuma.

Similarly, when Zungu *et al.* (2014) interviewed several South African women, they were disturbed to find that most of the stories they told were based on the stories of prominent men. This in effect helped re-entrench men's hegemony. Such paradoxes bolster Banet-Weiser's (2019) view that misogyny is difficult to eradicate because even women appear to have naturalised the single story of their inferiority. Also, the everywhereness of women-to-women misogyny not only shows the hegemonization of androcentric political culture at a global level but also signals the immensity of the task that feminists and herstory writers must shoulder the world over.

Zenzele also demonstrates how women perpetuate the monolithic narrative about their inferiority by internalising the patriarchal ideology. The writer-narrator (Shiri) alludes to how in the past she had willingly accepted her position within the institution of patriarchal motherhood and had realised her sense of completion through meeting "society's expectations and [her] duties as a woman" (Maraire, 1996: 37). She tells us,

> I did not weep over the starving in Ethiopia, the refugees in Mozambique, the students of Soweto, nor did it ever occur to me to lend my fury to a march against rape and sexual violence. I signed no appeals to politicians; I did not sit on cold pavements, with fingers frozen and my toes numb, to denounce neocolonialist foreign domination. (Maraire, 1996: 3–4)

Here, Shiri captures the mentality of many African women who appear to be more concerned with the tangible realities of poverty than with concerns that are seemingly divorced from their everyday lives. In her earlier self, Shiri had inherited her mother's patriarchal definition of the good submissive and persevering wife. Such wives are represented elsewhere by Mama Agnes in Novuyo Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018), Onai in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (1996), Kauna in Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2004) and Mai Manyanga in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018). In her novel *Rutendo: The Chief's Granddaughter* (2018), Colette Mutangadura writes about women who "walked blindly through life, happy to have their husbands and brothers lead the way" (Mutangadura, 2018: 10). Although the behaviour of Mutangadura's women could be seen as a strategy to control men, which evokes Marita's advice to Janifa (in Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*) that the best way to control men is to make them falsely think that they are in charge (Hove, 1990: 28–29), it smacks of a self-destructive stoicism that is generally touted as a noble attribute for African mothers. Interestingly, the doctrine of stoicism resonates with the strategy of non-violence for which

eminent figures such as Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Booker T. Washington are celebrated.

The way Shiri inherited the "silent industriousness" (Maraire, 1996: 40) of her mother shows how elder women may serve as conduits for the transmission of the story of defeat and suffering to their daughters through the 'motherline', a term coined by the Anglo-American Jungian psychologist Naomi Lowinsky (1992) to explain how a particular sensibility is passed from foremothers through mothers to their daughters.[66] This process of socialisation of girl children into patriarchal gender roles invokes Butler's (1990) concept of "gender performativity" which states that gendered cultural dispositions derive from ritualised repetition. Adichie appositely explains how gender performativity is intertwined with women's internalisation of an inferiority complex:

> If we do something over and over again, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over again, it becomes normal. If only boys are made class monitors, then at some point we will all think, even if unconsciously, that the class monitor has to be a boy. If we keep seeing only men as heads of corporations, it starts to seem 'natural' that only men should be heads of corporations. (Adichie, 2014: 8)

Gender performativity has served to perpetuate masculinism and misogyny in different cultural contexts. For instance, Gayatri Spivak (1995) deploys the term 'ethical choice' in the context of the Indian tradition of widow immolation (*sati*) to explain how subaltern women not only suffer from external gender-based oppression but also from their internalisation of that oppression. The notion of ethical choice is transposable to how some women characters in Zimbabwean literature, including Onai's mother in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Mai Manyanga in Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018), have passively accepted the story of their inferiority.

That said, Maraire's and Chigumadzi's narratives emphasise the link between precarity and the (in)ability of disempowered groups to tell their own stories. This in turn reinforces Adichie's (2009) argument that the construction of a single story is tied up with power politics and that a people gets displaced when its story is told by an outsider. This subsection has demonstrated

[66] The idea of the motherline is, however, generally deployed in a positive sense to explain how each generation of women situates its struggles within those of its female ancestors. See, Abbey, S. 2010. Motherline. In: A. O'Reilly (ed). *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, p. 845.

that the experience of precarity sometimes causes marginalised groups to tell the story of the oppressor, which forestalls the politics of refusal.

The next section focuses on narrative strategies deployed by Maraire and Chigumadzi to contest the single story about women's inferiority, especially as sustained by ZANU-PF's monolithic nationalist narrative.

6.3 Towards a polyphonic national identity and history

Zenzele and *These Bones Will Rise Again* belong to a growing body of literature that re-narrates the nation from a feminist perspective. Such texts include fictional narratives such as Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993) and Novuyo Tshuma's *House of Stone* (2018); women-authored political autobiographies such as Fay Chung's *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2007) and Judith Garfield Todd's *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (2007); compilations of women's oral narratives such as Irene Staunton's *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990); and filmic texts such as *The Flame* (1996), directed by Ingrid Sinclair. These texts speak back to what Nyambi (2014: 2) describes as a "politically abused history" in a bid to reinscribe marginalised voices into the national narrative. The power of each text as a communicative act gains traction through intertextual connections that make each text, as Kristeva would say, "constructed as a mosaic of quotations [and] the absorption and transformation of another" (1982: 76). At a symbolic level, this intertextuality resonates with Adichie's call for many stories, which arguably informs Chigumadzi's and Maraire's narratives.

It is also enlightening to think of Chigumadzi's and Maraire's call for multivocality, both in how Zimbabweanness should be defined and how its nationalist history should be transcribed, in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) concepts of polyphony and heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) underlines the relational existence of the self and the other and how the other is indispensable to the consolidation of the self's identity and worldview. Bakhtin (1984) uses the term 'polyphony', derived from the discourse of music, to explain how every text consists of a multiplicity of voices that may be seen as different viewpoints. This multivoicing is also captured by the term heteroglossia, which explains how each text enjoins a multiplicity of constituent grammatical and semantic units drawn from an already existing corpus. It should be noted, however, that Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and heteroglossia should not be romanticised, especially considering how multi-party democracy, which is an expression of multivocality, has generally failed in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Considering that herstory seeks to achieve its goals through subversion (Hitchcott, 1997; Zungu *et al.*, 2014), Maraire's and Chigumadzi's narratives mobilise subversive elements at thematic, stylistic, and paratextual levels. Thematically, they resuscitate the microhistories of marginalised persons and social groups or the "little people, let alone little women" who do not exist in national history save as "cannon fodder" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 11, 16). In delineating her focus, Chigumadzi specifies from the outset that she is not interested in the narratives of 'Big Men' such as Cecil John Rhodes, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, and Morgan Tsvangirai. At a paratextual level, Chigumadzi reinforces her preoccupation with 'little women' by dedicating the novel to her paternal grandmother: "Kuna Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi nee Dzumbira. Ndima yenyu makapedza" (Dear Grandmother Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi nee Dzumbira. You accomplished your mission). This paratext recognises Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi as an achiever in a nation where women of her social stature would not make it into the nationalist history of achievement. Likewise, Maraire focuses, among other things, on the history-making exploits of unsung heroines such as Tinawo Muti, Mbuya, Sister Africa, and the writer-narrator's sister Linda who are excluded from the dominant state narrative. This evokes Yvonne Vera's description of her writing as "the biographies of unknown women [and] our national history" (Vera, cited in Bryce, 2002: 223). Making little women the locus of narration is therefore one way in which Maraire and Chigumadzi subvert patriotic history's silencing of women's voices.

Maraire's and Chigumadzi's texts also assert their counter-hegemonic thrust through the choice of genre and narrative situation. The epistolary form adopted in *Zenzele* has been considered a transgressive mode of writing (Altman, 1982) that is originally a female space (Trouille, 1991). Both texts are autobiographical and autodiegetic in that the writers are also narrating and experiencing selves. Thus, autodiegetic narration fuses the roles of the actual writer and the narrating voice, which is an exercise of agency twice over as the writer-narrator becomes both the composer and the teller of the narrative. In that way, the novels espouse the concept of self-representation that, according to Nekoei and Sinn (2021), defines herstory.

Zenzele and *These Bones Will Rise Again* also defy conventional understandings of what constitutes autobiographical writing by refusing to make the writer the sole object of narration. According to Hitchcott (1997), autobiographical works traditionally emphasise the primacy of the author as subject, narrator, and protagonist of the text, which does not apply to African women's autobiographies that arise in a literary tradition and cultural context where the

collective is privileged over the individual. That is, in African women's autobiographies the experiences of individual characters mirror collective experiences of marginalisation. By contrast, male-authored (political) autobiographies often make the writer-narrator the text's locus and end conventionally with "the subject's achievement of a vocation" (Dodd, cited in Boehmer, 2009: 68). This can be true of political autobiographies such as Albert Luthuli's *Let My People Go* (1962), Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* (1946), Arthur Mutambara's *In Search of the Elusive Zimbabwean Dream: An Autobiography of Thought Leadership* (2017), and Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* (2001).

Male discourses are also assumed to be generally linear while feminist writing is associated with breaks of sequence (Homans, cited in Keen, 2003: 86). This is true about both *Zenzele* and *These Bones Will Rise Again*. As Boehmer (2009: 32) argues, "if men occupied the dimension of time – linear, future-directed, associated with change and progress – women presided over the static dimension of space – the past, tradition, nature". Therefore, when Chigumadzi begins her narrative with a focus on the military coup of November 2017, only to retrace her steps to details of the First *Chimurenga* in the 1890s, she flouts the notion of narrative sequence in a way that reinforces what Mbembe (2001) sees as the inherent interconnectedness of pasts, presents, and futures. The same can be said about *Zenzele* whose plot advances through a fusion of present and past events, which is a "disordering technique (anachrony) of beginning in the middle of the action, and using flashback to fill in the prior events" (Keen, 2003: 81). As I intimated in Section 3.3, in my exploration of Vera's politico-aesthetic departures, the disordering technique amounts to a transgressive manipulation of the plot to resist the narrative linearity that, as Miller (1981) claims, feminist critics associate with male writing.

According to narratology scholar Keen (2003: 57), "feminist and multicultural critics place a priority on recovering and hearing the voices of those who may have been silenced or ignored in the past". Accordingly, in their advocacy for plurality, *Zenzele* and *These Bones Will Rise Again* fuse different narrative voices to create an impression of heteroglossia. In *Zenzele*, sometimes the writer-narrator confines her own experiences to the background to give narrative space to the experiences of other characters such as Tinawo and Sister Africa. In *These Bones Will Rise Again*, the narrating voice also frequently retreats to the background to pave the way to a non-gendered interpretive voice, during which times the narrative reads somewhat like a sociological academic treatise. An interpretive narrator goes beyond merely retelling events by

offering insightful analyses of those events. Such a narrative choice is necessitated by Chigumadzi's preoccupation with exposing what she sees as historical untruths about Mbuya Nehanda and *Chimurenga* narratives. It is also interesting how the last five pages of *These Bones Will Rise Again* show a shift from the first-person singular 'I' to the first-person plural 'we' (Chigumadzi, 2018: 146–150). The shift privileges the collective over the singular. The 'we' is non-gendered, implying that the writer-narrator has stepped out of her female body to adopt a more objective gender-neutral voice. It can be argued, therefore, that both novels consciously deploy politico-aesthetic tools to make a clarion call for a polyphonic nationalist history.

Zenzele and *These Bones Will Rise Again* challenge misogyny by redefining history and womanhood from a gynocentric perspective. This reconstruction exercise is premised on the disposability and makeability of history, which maintains that histories are unstable discursive constructs (Koselleck, 2004). Given this, Chigumadzi likens the fluidity of history to that of water (Chigumadzi, 2018: 28), while in Maraire's novel the writer-narrator (Shiri) underlines this fluidity by highlighting the arbitrariness that underwrites the construction of history. Shiri observes that "history is simply the events as seen by a particular group, usually the ones with the mightiest pens and the most indelible ink" (Maraire, 1996: 79). Therefore, both Maraire and Chigumadzi emphasise the subjectivity and fragile nature of hegemonic historical accounts. This in turn provides context for both Chigumadzi and Maraire to radically reimagine the nation from the perspective of women's microhistories.

Chigumadzi contests ZANU-PF's attempt to freeze and periodize Zimbabwean history according to the following three *Chimurenga* phases: the Shona-Ndebele uprisings of the late 1890s, the armed struggle of the 1970s that culminated in the attainment of political independence in 1980, and the Land Reform Programme of the early 2000s. Chigumadzi further demystifies the claim that ZANU-PF is the sole liberator of the country, a concern that other women-authored narratives such as Judith Todd's autobiography *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* and Novuyo Tshuma's novel *House of Stone* (2018) grapple with. In her re-narration of the First and the Second *Chimurenga*, Chigumadzi strategically juxtaposes the anti-colonial efforts of the Shona and the Ndebele people in ways that suggest that the two ethnic groups equally participated in the nationalist struggles. For example, she places the Shona term '*Chimurenga*' against its isiNdebele equivalent '*Umvukela*' in successive sentences and juxtaposes the 1966 battle of Chinhoyi (led by Shona guerrilla fighters affiliated

to ZANU-PF) against the 1967 Hwange Game Reserve battle (led by ZAPU's military wing ZIPRA) (Chigumadzi, 2018: 13–14). Chigumadzi also suggests that the Ndebele people's anti-colonial revolts preceded those of the Shona (ibid.: 48–49). By retrieving these history-making efforts of Ndebele men, Chigumadzi transcends both her gender and ethnic positionality (as she is Shona) in a way that lends an impression of objectivity to her narrative.

Chigumadzi's recasting of nationalist events forms the background against which she reconstructs the image of Mbuya Nehanda and redefines *Chimurenga*. To project Mbuya Nehanda as an ageless model of feminine resistance, Chigumadzi argues that "spirit possession […] is an exercise in timelessness" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 150). This challenges ZANU-PF's fixation of Mbuya Nehanda in the past, reinforcing the titular words 'these bones will rise again', which are believed to have been spoken by Mbuya Nehanda's spirit medium on the day of her hanging by the British in 1897. The words bear overtones of defiance that underwrite the novel. Chigumadzi contends that,

> Mbuya Nehanda, however, troubles the gendered temporality of patriarchal nationalisms that requires women be the objects of history and repositories of a stable past. If national narrative strategies have sought to fix Nehanda into a particular moment of past resistance, she continues to move through history rendering the nation's gendered temporality untenable. (Chigumadzi, 2017: 13)

In this reconstructed image, Mbuya Nehanda becomes a living spirit that continues to inspire Zimbabwean women. According to Chigumadzi, Mbuya Nehanda is synonymous with *Chimurenga*, which "has been the intergenerational spirit of African self-liberation" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 150). In *Zenzele*, the idea of self-liberation is encapsulated in the name 'Zenzele' which means 'do it yourself' in isiZulu.

Chigumadzi suggests that women ancestors play a significant role in transmitting feminine sensibilities to the living. She, therefore, believes that the chaos in the physical world results from people's failure to listen to the voices of ancestral spirits such as those of Mbuya Nehanda and Mbuya Chigumadzi:

> In this moment of great upheaval, who has time to listen? I have to still the world around me. There is much confusion and much noise, so I struggle to hear the bones of Mbuya Nehanda and Mbuya Chigumadzi rattling in my heart. I have to still myself, make myself steady, so I can listen, so I can hear what these spirits have to say. (Chigumadzi, 2018: 17)

In this passage, which evokes how the Old Man in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* conceptualises cultural death in terms of people's failure to "stop and listen" to the sound of the drum (Mungoshi, 1975: 1), Chigumadzi suggests that the spirit of resistance (*Chimurenga*) is intergenerationally transmitted among women. She also challenges the inferiorisation of women by highlighting the equality of men and women in the spiritual realm, which in the Shona cosmology represents a higher order of life (Gombe, 1986).

Chigumadzi redefines *Chimurenga* in a way that resonates with other modes of resistance that are not recognised in the hegemonic version of Zimbabwe's nationalist history. She says,

> The spirit of Chimurenga long precedes ZANU-PF and it will long outlive it. Chimurenga transcends time and space, belonging to our ancestors, our grandmothers, our mothers, ourselves and to our daughters and granddaughters. (Chigumadzi, 2018: 111)

This gynocentric redefinition of *Chimurenga* recognises the nation-building efforts of many silenced players in nationalist history. Such efforts include anti-colonial struggles such as "the 1945 Railway Workers' Strike and the 1948 General Strike" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 51. Cf. Nkomo, 2001) and the daily struggles of women such as Shiri and Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi who supported the armed struggle as caregivers.

Chigumadzi's redefinition of *Chimurenga* thus deprivileges the view that patriotic history has reduced the anti-colonial war to gun-toting (Muchemwa, 2005; Parpart, 2007). Similarly, in *Zenzele*, Shiri suggests to her ex-guerrilla sister (Linda) that fighting from the rear is in no way less important than touting the gun:

> The bush is not for me. I wage my own insignificant, small struggles from day to day. They mean little to anyone but me, it's true. But my door is always open and my pots are always full for you and your friends if you need anything. (Maraire, 1996: 169)

Thus, Shiri underlines the indispensable role played by women who were fighting from the rear. This sensibility informs works such as Irene Staunton's *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990) and Shereen Essof's *SheMurenga: The Zimbabwe Women's Movement 1995–2000* (2013) that reinscribe women into the liberation war narrative. Such works bolster the Chinese Communist Mao Tse Tung's description of the symbiotic relationship between guerrilla fighters and the masses in terms of the relationship of the fish and the water, where the masses are the water

and the armed combatants are the fish. Contrary to this view, patriotic history has created a strange scenario in which the fish thrives without or outside water.

By redefining Mbuya Nehanda and *Chimurenga*, Chigumadzi reorients understandings of heroism (which currently applies only to the ZANU-PF elite)[67] and by extension resituates African women within the discourse of nationhood. Zenzele's question, "Mama, what do you think it means to be an African woman" (Maraire, 1996: 38) marks a significant turning point in Shiri's perception of the position of the African woman in society. Shiri realises that the identity of an African woman is constantly shifting and that the number of African women who embody the patriarchal norm of "silent industriousness" is dwindling due to urbanity, changing modes of production and consumption habits, and women's increasing participation in public spaces. This shift means that African womanhood is dynamic and cannot continue to be defined in terms of the single story of inferiority. My reading of Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) in Section 3.4 highlighted how Zimbabwean mothers are venturing into public spaces as community leaders, 'mamapreneurs', and formal employees.

Through exposure to her daughter's libertarian thinking, Shiri develops a Pan-African feminist consciousness that makes her reject her mother's silent industriousness as an identity marker for the African woman. Rather, she redefines the African woman as an embodiment of resistance modelled after iconic symbols such as Mbuya Nehanda, Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and the Soweto school girls. Shiri has come to realise that African womanhood is a complex and heterogeneous identity category that is understood differently by the elite and the downtrodden women (Maraire, 1996: 45). This understanding rejects the single misogynistic story about women that denies them individuality and agency (Stalker, 2001).

Unlike her mother and grandmother, Zenzele is endowed with "the gift of the third eye" that enables her to "see what others cannot". She embodies the African woman who has "the ability to create the world that [she wishes] to live in" (Maraire, 1996: 170). On her part, Shiri lacks the self-assertiveness of her daughter but has come to realise that the African woman can make

[67] In Zimbabwe, heroism is reduced to military heroism. As a result, most of the people whose bodies are interred at the National Heroes Acre in Harare were either liberation fighters or ZANU PF functionaries. Oftentimes, there have been public outcries when non-ZANU PF icons were denied burial at the national shrine. The most one can receive for heroic exploits performed outside ZANU PF circles is a state-assisted funeral. That was the case, for example, when the founder and president of the Movement for Democratic Change Morgan Tsvangirai died in 2018. To date, the few Zimbabwean women to whom the hero status has been conferred are those who were connected to ZANU PF elites (Mawere, 2021).

herself and that "knots can be untied, chains can be broken, walls can be smashed, and doors can be pushed open" for her (ibid.). Shiri has also come to realise that there are many ways of being heroic, as attested by her words: "It is true that I have not fought. My name shall never appear on the roster of famous battles […]. But I have loved, and surely this is enough" (ibid.: 192–93). Here, Shiri reinforces the argument, made earlier, that heroism can be performed outside maleness and military contexts. While Shiri's pronouncements suggest that she is contented with her own story playing second fiddle to the grand narrative, as she takes stock of her life at the end of the novel, she sees herself as a heroine due to the love she has given out and the sacrifices she has made for the betterment of others.

Maraire's and Chigumadzi's narrative strategy also entails disrupting gender borders as a way of contesting what Hooper (2001) calls "dichotomous thinking" on gender. According to Hooper, women gain access to male-dominated spaces by adopting masculine attributes. This idea of female masculinity, attributed to Halberstam (2005, 2010), implies that masculinities are independent of the male body (Connell, 1995; Beynon, 2002; Muchemwa & Muponde, 2007). In *Zenzele*, female masculinity is exemplified by women characters such as Linda and Tinawo who join the male-dominated liberation war space as guerrilla fighters. The *Second Chimurenga* offered an opportunity for Zimbabwean women to venture into the military space where they were able to redefine themselves and expose the arbitrariness of the gendered division of roles that relegate women to domesticity (Ngoshi, 2013; Gwarinda, 2016). In the following passage Maraire gives a romanticised image of the female combatants:

> They were women of a new generation who wore trousers like men and could aim just as steady. They were women who killed. They were fit and strong, running through the bush brandishing AK-47s and machine guns. These were women who crept into the village in the wee hours and sat by the fireside along with the male comrades, their firearms resting beside them, leading us in singing revolutionary songs. On their backs, they carried not runny-nosed babies but the hope of a different generation in the form of rounds of ammunition, maps, codes, and supplies to fuel the battle that ultimately was to lead us to independence. They were as foreign to our traditional image of women as Eskimos. They were a product of the armed struggle. These women, too, fashioned their own identity. They were feared and admired, for in battle it was rumoured the women could be the fiercest of all. The Rhodesian troops called them "bobcats" because the Shona women were as fierce as lions. (Maraire, 1996: 168)

In the passage above, Maraire emphasises aspects of the female combatants' behaviour that are inconsistent with patriarchal understandings of femininity, which is aptly captured by the imagery of women carrying "runny-nosed babies" (ibid.) to elevate the female combatants. As

my previous chapters reveal, the idea of gender transgression is a motif in postcolonial feminist literature (Tyagi, 2014; Gagiano, 2015), exemplified elsewhere by the way the aunts of the Sigauke family in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) have access to male privileges such as the authority to deliberate on family matters. Such women may be said to have a share in what Connell (1995) calls the "patriarchal dividend", the privilege that naturally comes with being a man in a patriarchal society.

Besides the female combatants, Maraire romanticises Zenzele and Sister Africa (daughter to an American woman and a Nigerian father), endowing them with larger-than-life mental capabilities to invert the inferiorisation of women in patriarchal discourses. Zenzele, for example, is endowed with "sharp wits" that make her "internationally renowned lawyer" and father "*vulnerable*" (Maraire, 1996: 4, my emphasis). The goal here is to deflate male ego as embodied by Zenzele's father. Likewise, Maraire endows Sister Africa with a pan-Africanist vision that is depicted as comparable to that of "Du Bois and other African-American visionaries" (ibid.: 96). Confronted with a dark past, Sister Africa manages to reinvent herself against all odds, which makes Shiri describe her as a woman who "was in search of her own world and in the process created it" (ibid.: 99). By giving much narrative attention to the sheroic experiences of Sister Africa, Maraire symbolically rewrites the male-dominated pan-Africanist history from a feminist perspective.

In *These Bones Will Rise Again*, romanticisation colours the portrayal of Mbuya Lilian Chigumadzi, whom the writer-narrator elevates to the same level as Mbuya Nehanda. This is evident in such statements as "I seek guidance from these mbuyas who have led men and women in ways big and small, ahead of their time, defiant of the body's limits" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 68). In this statement, the two women's leadership qualities and ability to transcend gender restrictions are equated. These romanticised portrayals, which in previous chapters I show to be a defining feature of counter-hegemonic writing, are aimed at counterpoising the glorification of male luminaries such as Robert Mugabe, Herbert Chitepo, and Josiah Tongogara that populate Zimbabwe's nationalist historiography.

In *Zenzele*, Shiri's concern with decolonial politics, as attested by her advocacy for African knowledge systems and critique of "Western sophistication" and its postcolonial symptoms of "acquisition, imitation, and a paucity of imagination" (Maraire, 1996: 14, 17), emanates from a historical mistrust between Africa and the West. By immersing herself in the subject of decoloniality, Shiri enters a male-dominated discursive terrain. Nevertheless, the decolonial

agenda is no outlier to herstory considering the masculine nature of colonialism and patriarchy (Mbembe, 2001; Morrell & Swart, 2005) and how institutions continue to bear on the lives of Global South women (Spivak, 1988; Tyagi, 2014).

As postcolonial feminist herstory narratives, Maraire's and Chigumadzi's works castigate many other oppressive patriarchal traditions. Zenzele, for example, criticises the issue of bride price (*lobola*) for the way it confers undue authority on men to evaluate women's worth in monetary terms. She also interrogates the unjust law system that turns a blind eye on men's sexist behaviours towards women (Maraire, 1996: 35), which Chigumadzi demonstrates in *These Bones Will Rise Again* when society condones Robert Mugabe's sexual excesses while condemning the First Lady Grace Mugabe for snatching Mugabe from his first wife.

In consonance with Banet-Weiser's (2019) contention that herstory is an expression of confidence, Maraire's and Chigumadzi's works radiate many possibilities for women. The last three pages of *These Bones Will Rise Again* project the vision of a new Zimbabwe woven through a combination of parallelism and poetic prose. The phrases "to imagine" and "to reimagine" are used repeatedly and they function like a magic wand or abracadabra for breaking the chains that have held women in captivity for centuries. The two phrases become key to the expression of the author's vision of a "new way of being" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 149). The symbolic shift in narrative voice from the singular 'I' to the plural 'we' in these last pages seems to spell a sense of arriving, the fruition of what Appadurai calls "the process of we-making" and the "mobilisation of feelings of we-ness" (2006: 59). Parallels can be drawn between this optimistic ending and the endings of David Mungoshi's *The Fading Sun* (2009) and Taban Lo Liyong's *The Colour of Hope* (2010) that promise an egalitarian African society.

Chigumadzi's narrative further symbolically suggests the possibility of a better world for women through the image of Robert Mugabe's washed-out and shrivelled body during and after his forced resignation from his thirty-seven-year reign in November 2017. Mugabe's failing body becomes a metaphor for the instability of masculinities as, according to Connell, masculinity is traditionally tied up with the male body and "the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when performance cannot be sustained" (1995: 54). In step with this view, Mugabe's frail-looking body spells a crisis of masculinity, especially if we consider that age and physique are central to the discourse of masculinity (Beynon, 2002: 10). According to Muchemwa and Muponde (2007), the hope of an alternative Zimbabwean society lies in the crisis of masculinity. However, the violent

transfer of power from Mugabe to his lieutenant Emmerson Mnangagwa in November 2017 evokes the concept of the "hegemonic masculine bloc", which states that "hegemonic masculinity is capable of transforming itself in order to adapt to the specificities of new historical conjunctures" (Demetriou, 2001: 355). This means that hegemonic masculinities are self-renewing and therefore hard to eradicate.

In *Zenzele*, the possibility of women's emancipation is symbolically implied in the private space that the writer-narrator and her sister created as young girls under the bridge (Maraire, 1996: 21–22). This space of women's autonomy evokes Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which advocates for the creation of space(s) in which women can nurture their sensibilities and capabilities. The hope for gender equality is also implied in women's changing perceptions about their role and status in society as exemplified by Shiri's ideological shift from her earlier conservative thinking to a radical questioning of the status quo. This shift, ignited by her conflictual interaction with Zenzele, parallels Mother's transformation due to her daughter's (Martha) radical feminist thinking in Dangarembga's play *She No Longer Weeps*. Such attitudinal changes signal the possibility of a positive change in gender relations, and by extension, the inclusion of women in sites of knowledge production and nation narration.

This section explored ways in which Chigumadzi's and Maraire's narratives attempt to reinscribe women and other marginalised social groups into the Zimbabwean community and nationalist history. In the process, the section emphasised the power of gendered exclusion to inspire politics of refusal through herstory. The next section evaluates the possibilities and limits of herstory as a tool for fighting misogyny and masculinised memory.

6.4 Problematizing herstory

In her reading of Vera's short story collection *Why don't you carve other animals* (1992), Toivanen (2010) contends that the text "engages in the project of re-narrating the nation from a viewpoint which is sensitive to differences *without being driven by exclusionary motives*" (Toivanen, 2010: 82, my emphasis). It appears, however, that an act of nation re-narration that is free from bias is an unattainable ideal in counter-discourse such as herstory. Herstory writers, for example, operate within and in opposition to androcentric culture and tend to deploy the same strategies of erasure, distortion, and selective memory that shore up hegemonic phallocentric discourses. As Nyambi observes in his reading of Vera's fictionalisation of

history in *The Stone Virgins* (2002), reconstructions of history from a counter-hegemonic perspective are "a subjective undertaking not without political implications" (2014: 1). These contending assertions, which gesture at the ambivalences that herstory is fraught with, frame my context-specific exploration of the limits of herstory as a tool for subverting misogyny and for reimagining a 'heteroglossic' Zimbabwean society. I suggest that there is need for much ingenuity on the part of herstory writers as herstory's reliance on subversion and inversion often reduces it to a vengeful narration that unwittingly entrenches misogyny.

To demonstrate the precariousness of herstory, I draw on Susan Gubar's (1994) concept of 'feminist misogyny'. The oxymoron (feminist misogyny) exposes glaring contradictions in the history of feminist consciousness and activism. Gubar cites cases of feminist misogyny in the works of leading scholars such as Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Denise Riley, and Donna Haraway. She, however, narrows her focus to the works of Mary Wollstonecraft which, she argues, "associates the feminine with weakness, childishness, deceitfulness, cunning, superficiality, an overvaluation of love, frivolity, dilettantism, irrationality, flattery, servility, prostitution, coquetry, sentimentality, ignorance, indolence, intolerance, slavish conformity, fickle passion, despotism, bigotry, and a spaniel-like affection" (Gubar, 1994: 456). Gubar claims that the contradictions embedded in Wollstonecraft's work, which continue to prevail in feminist discourses, can be traced back to eighteenth-century patriarchal discourse that saw women in utilitarian terms as men's assets. The idea of feminist misogyny is useful to explain textual instances where herstory seems to be endorsing the patriarchal master code, to borrow from Mbembe (2010).

It appears the celebration of women's achievements in *Zenzele* and *These Bones Will Rise Again* cannot be complete without the corresponding denigration of some male characters. This is evident, for instance, in Chigumadzi's comparative analysis of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi's images in the following passage:

> On the right, Sekuru Kaguvi *stands awkwardly* apart from the wall, his back bent, arms slightly akimbo. He *appears wary*, perhaps *contemplating his eventual capitulation*: agreeing to being baptised and named Dismus – the thief saved by Jesus. On the left, Mbuya Nehanda leans against the wall, *her hands clasped firmly in front of her*. She *appears resolute, defiant*, her eyes narrowed into an *oppositional gaze*, refusing to accept responsibility for the murder of that troublesome European the Africans knew as Kunyaira. (Chigumadzi, 2018: 69–70, my emphasis)

This description, based on a famous picture in an "African Heritage" textbook prescribed for the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate course, consciously projects Mbuya Nehanda's spirit medium as more resolute and valiant than Sekuru Kaguvi, who is reduced to a coward.[68] Chigumadzi's negative depiction of Sekuru Kaguvi is coloured by a myth that has its origins in white-authored narratives that black male writers and historians later appropriated (Vambe, 2011). The further appropriation of that narrative by Chigumadzi underlines how herstory appropriates the tools of (his)tory to its advantage.

However, if Chigumadzi's portrayal is read out of context the question that arises is why should the reconstruction of Mbuya Nehanda's image necessarily be at the expense of Sekuru Kaguvi? While 'anti-masculinist' discourses work through inversion and subversion (Aronowitz, 1995: 320), writers of herstory may need to reconsider the serving efficacy of this fighting-fire-with-fire approach that reduces potentially powerful writing to a vengeful narration that creates a similar problem of stereotypes.

The danger posed by vengeful narration can be explained in terms of what Banet-Weiser (2019) describes as the inherently "antagonistic relationship" between feminism and misogyny, where each appropriates the "narrative of injury" and seeks to eliminate the other. According to Banet-Weiser, misogyny tends to increase in step with the expansion of feminist consciousness that compels men to respond aggressively to the erosion of their hegemony. Similarly, Gubar argues that "the histories of feminism and misogyny have been (sometimes shockingly) dialogic" (1994: 454). This means that the radicalism in herstory's fight for gender equity might culminate in the creation of a rival centre of power that only perpetuates gender polarisation. Perhaps it is true, as Gilligan (2000: 12) argues, that oftentimes "the attempt to achieve and maintain justice, or to undo or prevent injustice, is the one and only universal cause of violence". This spells a daunting challenge for herstory.

In *Zenzele*, the urge to apotheosise female combatants raises two challenges. The first challenge is that by describing the female guerrillas as "women of a new generation who wore trousers like men and could aim just as steady" (Maraire, 1996: 168), Maraire problematically makes

[68] Chigumadzi's negative portrayal of Sekuru Kaguvi could have been influenced by an oral narrative that tells of how Sekuru Kaguvi had agreed to become a Christian convert. The same narrative tells of Mbuya Nehanda's refusal to relinquish her traditional religion. Ironically, the narrative alludes to how white colonialists derogatorily described Mbuya as a witch, which Chigumadzi deliberately omits. See Vambe, M. T. 2011. Postcolonial Shona Fiction of Zimbabwe. *Journal of Literary Studies,* 27(3): 5–20.

masculine standards the benchmark for recognition rather than negation. The privileging of female masculinity is problematic considering that herstory is predicated on fighting masculinism (Zungu *et al.*, 2014; Welch *et al.*, 2021). Besides, scholars such as Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000), Lyons (2004), and Manyonganise (2015) indicate that the story of superwomen combatants is a myth, arguing that (male) revolutionary leaders not only grudgingly accepted women combatants but also relegated those recruited to the traditionally feminine roles of cooking, cleaning, and information transmission. The second challenge is that the romanticisation of female combatants by Maraire occludes grave truths about the rampant sexual exploitation of female combatants by their male counterparts (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000; Manyonganise, 2015). Many texts depict the liberation struggle as a site of (sexual) abuse of women, including the female combatants who were systematically silenced for the sake of the struggle's continuity. Such texts include Fay Chung's *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2007), Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again* (1986), Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997), the film *Flame* (directed by Ingrid Sinclair in 1996), as well as Shona novels such as Mordekai Hamutyinei's *Ndikandei Mugehena* ('Throw me into Hell') (1988), and Ray Choto's *Vavariro* ('Aims') (1990). Considering *Zenzele*'s unmistakably counter-hegemonic thrust, one would have expected the novel to be more vocal on patriotic history's silence on the abuse of female combatants. However, Nyambi's (2014: 3) contention that history can be twisted to make it useful helps justify Maraire's conscious distortion of history.

Similarly, by devoting much narrative space to the reconstruction of Mbuya Nehanda's image, Chigumadzi unwittingly promotes ZANU-PF's single story that marginalises other spirit mediums that played a role in the anti-colonial wars. Patriotic history elevated Mbuya Nehanda to the status of a national spirit medium against claims that she was no more than a localised spirit medium among the Zezuru people of the present-day Mazowe area (Ranger, 1967). Her elevation had the effect of eclipsing prominent spirit mediums from other parts of the country where Nehanda was barely known (ibid.). Vambe (1972, cited in Chigumadzi, 2017: 7) claims that Sekuru Kaguvi is believed to have played a more central role in the First *Chimurenga* than Mbuya Nehanda. In her novel, Chigumadzi notes that the Ndebele people had their spirit mediums who led them in the anti-colonial wars of the 1890s. Nevertheless, like ZANU-PF, she privileges Mbuya Nehanda by making her the locus of her text. Her account of Mbuya Nehanda is therefore only functionally (not qualitatively) different from the one projected by patriotic history.

Another critical issue concerning herstory is its reliance on male-authored history to which it has an oppositional relationship. Besides the fact that it is male-generated, this history "relies on documentary evidence but the process of production and preserving documents is often owned and controlled by powerful groups" (Muchemwa, 2005: 196). Because the history of herstory in Zimbabwe is comparatively brief, some women writers such as Judith Garfield Todd and Fay Chung rely on personal experience to write herstory through the autobiography genre. Others, such as Irene Staunton (in *Mothers of the Revolution*, 1990), rely on oral cultures, using the interview method to extract stories from underprivileged women who are believed to have significantly contributed to the anti-colonial struggle. The importance of oral archives is underlined by Isabel Hofmeyr who argues that oral literature is grounded in lived realities and demands "scholars to lift their eyes from the page [so as] to confront context as a very material reality" (1993: 181).

Chigumadzi is aware of the challenges at hand when she sets out to reconstruct the story of Mbuya Nehanda, looking for "answers that are not Cecil John Rhodes, Ian Smith, Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe, Morgan Tsvangirai or Emmerson Mnangagwa, or any other Big men in the history of the nation" (Chigumadzi, 2018: 11). She knows that it is because of such Big Men that the country has produced an asymmetrical self-serving history. She, therefore, embarks on a field trip to the Dande and Mazowe areas in the Mashonaland Province of Zimbabwe where Charwe Nyakasikana, the popular medium of Mbuya Nehanda's spirit, is believed to have come from. She conducts her research through interviews with people who she believes were connected to the spirit medium. From the outset, this is a difficult mission considering that the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda is believed to have inhabited different bodies at different times (Charumbira, 2013). It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that Chigumadzi is not satisfied with her search results; she discovers that there have been times when different persons have simultaneously claimed to be possessed by the Nehanda spirit. She concludes that the truth regarding the Nehanda narrative is very elusive, which resonates with Charumbira's (2013) observation that there have been several versions from different sources, both oral and written, of the story of Mbuya Nehanda so that fact and fiction have merged. Chigumadzi admits that she got "frustrated and even exasperated by the many meandering and often contradictory histories of Nehanda" that she extracted from the people that she consulted (2018: 97–98). One of her prospective interviewees, Mai Chikara, who is a widow of Sekuru Chipfene who travelled with Mbuya Nehanda during the war, declines to share information about Mbuya Nehanda in the absence of ZANU-PF officials (ibid.: 92). Mai Chikara's refusal to comply

underscores how ZANU-PF has appropriated both the oral and the written accounts of Mbuya Nehanda, which compromises the validity and reliability of Chigumadzi's research results.

Chigumadzi's failed attempt to extract a clear-cut account of Mbuya Nehanda supports Hofmeyr's (1993) conclusions about the possibilities and limits of oral archives as a source of historical data. Hofmeyr explores the dynamics of oral storytelling (as a literary mode) and the influence of literacy on oral culture in the context of a black chiefdom located in the Northern Province of South Africa. Her study, carried out just before the end of the Apartheid regime, entails analysing responses made by both the locals and the Boers regarding a historical event that happened in the chiefdom in 1854. Hofmeyr finds out that the locals' oral accounts were coloured by bits and pieces drawn from the Boers' written mythology. According to Hofmeyr, the locals' appropriation of parts of the Boer narrative not only underscores the complex relationship between oral culture and written narratives but also deflates the myth that oral storytelling is an untainted source of historical truth. The way oral culture is infiltrated by Afrikaner historiography in Hofmeyr's case study parallels the complex relationship between oral archives and patriotic history on the Nehanda question. In short, oral archives are a fragile source of historical truth, which tends to put herstory in a critical epistemological dilemma.

Given the above, herstory, like all counter-hegemonic discourses, operates within a strictly regulated narrative space. Women's efforts to re-narrate the nation must transcend the patriarchal state's manipulation of the literary imagination. As observed by Nyambi (2016), ZANU-PF deploys policing strategies on artistic production and often uses coercion (especially on writers) to politicise literary production. This has become more marked in the post-2000 era where writers were coerced to endorse "the state-resuscitated anti-colonialist nationalism" (Nyambi, 2016: 232) ushered in by the Land Reform Programme, known as the Third *Chimurenga*. Nyambi cites Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* (2010), David Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* ('Even if you laugh at us, we now have our land back') (2008), Olley Maruma's *Coming Home* (2007), and Nyaradzo Mtizira's (2008) *The Chimurenga Protocol* as examples of literary texts that "brazenly declare their political sympathies for the state and its narrative of the problematic present" (ibid.: 220). Muponde and Primorac (2005; xv) suggest that state policing of creative writing is endemic to Zimbabwe as "the contemporary official demands for patriotic behaviour and writing are not a sudden eruption". Thus, besides having to reckon with enduring androcentric culture both inside and outside state institutions, herstory must also transcend oppositional writing from pro-state authors.

Considering the value of herstory in the reimagining of nations (Hitchcott, 1997; Zungu *et al.*, 2014), one would wish that it maintains its principal goal of advocating for plurality in the production of national memory and identity. I propose that African herstory can transcend the temptation to create a rival centre of power by focusing on how to integrate male and female voices. This can be achieved by eschewing the radical aspects of its feminist imagination and embracing what Nnaemeka (2003: 361) calls the "politics of negotiation" rooted in Africana womanism. This ideal situation demands that both men and women writers learn to transcend gender bias in the way suggested by Virginia Woolf:

> It is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way to speak consciously as a woman. And fatal is no figure of speech; for anything with that conscious bias is doomed to death. It ceases to be fertilised. Brilliant and effective, powerful and masterly, as it may appear for a day or two, it must wither at nightfall; it cannot grow in the minds of others. Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. (Woolf, 2010 [1929]: 1029).

At a glance, it can be argued that we have already seen the practicality of Woolf's recommendations through male feminist literary imagination and theoretical practice. There is a proliferation of male-authored African novels that critique misogyny and celebrate women's achievements in ways that show that existing gender practices are an "epistemological inheritance" that can be discursively altered (Butler, 1990: 184). These works include Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), Chenjerai Hove's *Bones* (1990), Taban Lo Liyong's *The Colour of Hope* (2010) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* (1989). The imperative to integrate male and female voices is premised on the understanding that "masculinist practices and disciplines are seen as handicapped by operating with only half of human experience" (Hooper, 2001: 49). Such an understanding can productively reorient herstory.

However, Woolf's recommendations above are too theoretical as she makes gross assumptions about men's and women's thinking. What she refers to as "perfect fullness" is an integrative approach to writing that demands the synchronisation of men's and women's sensibilities, aspirations and thought systems. Both Woolf and Hooper underestimate how the transgenerational performance of masculinities and femininities continues to bear on imaginative and theoretical practice. According to Hartsock (1997), men's and women's

imagination and mental cultures are intricately connected to their bodies, and in the case of women, the biological processes peculiar to their bodies, such as menstruation, pregnancy, gestation, childbirth, and lactation, have a strong impact on their lived experiences and sensibilities. She adds that inherent bodily borders between men and women not only impact their thinking but also render it infeasible to synchronise that thinking. These biological and historical factors cast their shadow on the way Chigumadzi's and Maraire's narratives adopt a reactive and antagonistic stance to Zimbabwe's androcentric discursive tradition.

Given all the claims above, herstory thrives in patriarchal cultural contexts that continue to bear on its tone and the extent to which its objectives can be achieved. The major challenges faced by Zimbabwean herstory writers include the need to transcend the grip of a trans-historic patriarchal ideology, and the challenge of using male-generated historical accounts in the process of nation narration. Although herstory writers could do with personal experiences and oral archives, the latter is sometimes unreliable (Hofmeyr, 1993). This is attested by the failure of Chigumadzi's attempt to reconstruct the narrative of Mbuya Nehanda from oral archives. This section reinforced Banet-Weiser's (2019) claim that women-centred writing needs to be less aggressive in its approach toward masculinism. I propose that herstory, which is rooted in the politics of negotiation and integration of different voices, male, female or otherwise, is more likely to alleviate misogyny and produce a non-gendered nation re-narration.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, I read Maraire's *Zenzele* and Chigumadzi's *These Bones Will Rise Again* to explore how the texts deploy herstory politico-aesthetic tools to challenge androcentric nation narration and patriarchal imagining of nationhood. I argued that the texts fulfil the principal goal of women-centred nation narration to reinscribe the gendered subaltern into the national community (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Boehmer, 2005). My reading of the function of herstory underlined how women's transgenerational experience of marginalisation inspires politics of refusal, which underscores the paradoxical power of precarity (Standing, 2011; Botha, 2014; During, 2015). Adichie's (2009) notion of the "dangers of a single story" was useful in conceptualising the discursive production of patriarchal nationalism that displaces women from sites of history-making and nation narration. Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) notions of heteroglossia and polyphony also helped frame my reading of how selected texts call for an all-inclusive national identity and narrative.

Like previous chapters, Chapter 6 reinforced the thesis's assumption that precarity is culturally produced at the intersections of violence and gendered identity. To that end, I used Maraire's and Chigumadzi's texts to demonstrate that misogyny underwrites the politics of belonging, with particular attention to how patriotic history and heteropatriarchal policing are responsible for the production of cultural and biophysical sites of violence.

In their call for a polyphonic imagination of nationhood, the novels studied in this chapter deploy a wide range of narrative strategies, including resuscitating the micronarratives of women and other marginalised groups such as the Ndebele ethnic minority. Both texts fuse narrative perspectives to symbolically call for harmony between majorities and minorities in a way that invokes the view that "majorities need minorities in order to exist" (Appadurai, 2006: 50). In the process, the texts open utopian possibilities for women and other disempowered groups. However, as my reading demonstrated, polyphony and heteroglossia are not necessarily revolutionary and should not be romanticised as a solution to the problem of single stories. The chapter revealed that what herstory writers imagine as polyphonic or heteroglossic is a binary political imagination that excludes a third space that lies outside masculinity and femininity, such as queer identities.

The chapter proposed that herstory needs to (re)situate itself within the tradition of negotiation politics for it to offer non-essentialist historical accounts.[69] While the need to eradicate misogyny is imperative, herstory faces the danger of unwittingly creating a rival centre of power instead of easing gender polarisation. That is, an aggressive feminist consciousness is likely to further entrench misogyny **(**Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016), or more aptly, what Gubar (1994) describes as feminist misogyny. As the chapter revealed, another major challenge faced by herstory writers is the somehow inescapable reliance on mostly male-generated

[69] Recent publications by Zimbabwean women writers show that women's existential struggles can be fought in non-aggressive ways and alongside the larger national struggles such as Black people's fight against imperialist aggression. These works include Petina Gappah's *Out of Darkness, Shining Light* (2019); Irene Sabatini's *An Act of Defiance* (2020); NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* (2022); and Siphiwe Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* and *The History of Man* (2020). These works are trendsetting a new tone in the politics of re-articulation. For example, Ndlovu's *The History of Man* places Black women's attempts to reclaim their dignity within the postcolonial theme of deconstructing white supremacism. Bulawayo's *Glory* allegorizes the post-Mugabe era through the use of animal characters. In her review of the novel, Violet Kupersmith says, "There are no men or women in 'Glory'; there is no personhood at all, only "males" and "females" […]. By taking humans out of the equation, Bulawayo eliminates the hierarchies that their presence would impose." See, Kupersmith, V. "NoViolet Bulawayo Allegorizes the Aftermath of Robert Mugabe." *The New York Times*, 6 March 2022. Available at: NoViolet Bulawayo Allegorizes the Aftermath of Robert Mugabe - The New York Times (nytimes.com). Thus, these newer texts, signal a new direction in nation narration that has the capacity to redeem.

historical archives. While oral archives are an alternative, they are often coloured by hegemonic narratives (Hofmeyr, 1993) and this was found to make herstory a precarious discourse.

Despite the challenges highlighted above, Maraire's and Chigumadzi's works re-assert the role of gynocentric literature in de-gendering nation narration and exposing cultural practices that entrench and sustain precarity. In that way, the writers buttress the contention that "[writers are] important in building democratic potentials from below, and in destabilising powerfully established structures of mental authoritarianism" (Kaarsholm, 2005: 4). In other words, the texts underline the potential of language to create new ways of being. Maraire's and Chigumadzi's novels can therefore be read as part of the African anti-masculinist arsenal that, according to Boehmer (2009), has proliferated in the past two decades in response to a rapid expansion of women nation-gender theorists.

Finally, this chapter buttressed Koselleck's (2004) assertion that history is makeable and disposable, which is reinforced by Ndlovu-Gatsheni's claim that "nations [and] heroes are not pre-existing entities but are imagined and created" (2007: 74). Thus, Maraire's and Chigumadzi's preoccupation with reinventing nationalist history and national identity is predicated on the understanding that what is often called national is nothing but a monologic projection of the personal ideals of the ruling party elite that are imposed on the people through mantras such as the *Chimurenga*.

CHAPTER 7
POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF PRECARIOUS AESTHETICS

This thesis examined ways in which selected Zimbabwean literary texts deploy a precarious aesthetic to expand an understanding of the cultural production and deconstruction of precarity. Specifically, the thesis explored pushback strategies adopted by the precariat in various sites of marginalisation and how those efforts reorient understandings of human disposability. The overarching postulation is that precarity arises at the intersections of gendered identities and institutionalised forms of violence. I explored forms of violence as prejudices that mushroom from culturally produced Manichean definitions of masculinity and femininity, human and subhuman, normal and abnormal. The research surfaced the emergence and sustenance of structures of marginalisation and the implications that (dis)connections among such structures have for a new grammar with which to talk about violence.

The study deployed Western-based theorisations of precarity to address local textual nuances and environmental specificities. Recontextualizing Butler's (2010) concept of the frames of war was particularly useful in my exploration of the dynamics of disempowerment and social exclusion in a Zimbabwean context. Butler's contention that in some contexts "one cannot break out of the frame" informed my examination of how precaritising ideologies often appear to be unassailable, while her metaphor of prison break (2010: 10) framed my discussion of how oppressive cultural frames can be challenged. The latter dovetailed with the view of precarity as a creative force (Standing, 2011; Botha, 2014; During, 2015). In the process, the thesis showed that precarity discourses are complementary and in a constant process of becoming.

In sundry ways and with various degrees of success, depending on the site of displacement, the *precariat* in studied literary texts demonstrates that disabling cultural frames can be challenged. In turn, this weaponisation of vulnerability becomes part of a long history of African resilience that, as Guyer (2018: 441) observes, stretches back to the Trans-Atlantic slave era. Variations in refusal strategies adopted by the precariat reflect (dis)connections and complexities in the way marginalised individuals and social groups respond to their existential circumstances. Most of the studied texts show how refusal politics is often driven by a shared sense of insecurity among differently marginalised individuals.

The thesis also highlighted the messiness of the politics of refusal. In some cases, characters in different precarious positionalities are blind to their shared vulnerability, and therefore, miss

opportunities for forging support networks. For instance, in *The Book of Memory* (2015), the homophobia of the albino protagonist (Memory) towards her gay white benefactor (Lloyd), demonstrates how people in different marginal locations may not always realise the homogeneity of their circumstances and what that sameness implies in terms of socio-political capital. Yet, as Siebers (2017: 119) argues from a disability studies perspective, "a deaf person may speak for a blind person in a political debate because both people understand the social location of disability" and what it means to be corporeally different. The study also pointed out obstacles to forging intragroup solidarities, as attested by how (as Chigumadzi demonstrates in *These Bones Will Rise Again*, 2018) women's internalisation of "gendered imaginaries of power" (Christiansen, 2007: 89) creates women-to-women misogyny that prevents women from supporting the political ambitions of other women. In a different vein, literary texts sometimes fail to transcend the violent cultural frames they set out to undo. Also, counter-hegemonic approaches may merely promote, rather than alleviate, polarisation between dominant and marginalised groups. For instance, while seemingly advocating for multivoicing or polyphony in the construction of national history and identity, Chigumadzi's and Maraire's autobiographical narratives display hegemonic underpinnings that reduce herstory to what I term poetics of vengeful narration.

The thesis calls for a context-based understanding of precarity that accommodates a wide range of existential insecurities. I argue that if the defining features of the precariat are uncertainty and "the four A's – anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation" (Standing, 2011: 19), then the meaning of precarity must be context-specific. Precarity results as much from the sense of insecurity spawned by the ongoing casualisation of labour in the more monetised economies of the Global North (Bourdieu, 1988; Standing, 2011, 2014) as it does from the challenges faced by African economic refugees in diasporic spaces, or from the enduring effects of colonialism and postcolonial civil conflicts in Africa. Even within the African continent, the meaning of precarity necessarily needs to be space-bound due to cultural differences and variations in patterns of disablement and displacement from one nation-state to another.

The primacy of gendered identities in the cultural production and replication of precarity became evident from this study. Prejudices that precipitate othering tendencies are intricately tied to misconceptions around masculinity and femininity, where the former is associated with power and mobility while the latter is conflated with inferiority and immobility (cf. Connell, 1995). In different ways, thesis chapters showed that misogyny, the fear and hatred of

femininity, is the principal explanation for what appears to be a close connection between maleness and violent behaviour. For example, when looked at from a masculinities perspective, *Gukurahundi* violence (explored in Chapter 2) becomes a contest of masculinities in which Robert Mugabe unmans his political rival Joshua Nkomo who is often projected as "a coward" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: 77). Accordingly, the *Gukurahundi* operation is portrayed in Mlalazi's and Tshuma's novels as manned by the military which, as Whitehead and Barret (2001) contend, is the ultimate expression of masculine power. Looking at *Gukurahundi* from this perspective points at hierarchies within masculinities and how the system of gendered identities emasculates some men. Similarly, the institution of motherhood is precaritised by a historically situated gendered division of labour that relegates women to childbearing roles. The society also genders dermatological and sexual difference, and homophobia sometimes expresses itself through the suppression of gay masculinities (discussed in Chapter 4). Similarly, third-generation feminist narratives explored in this thesis are a literary response to the gendering of Zimbabwean history and national identity. Therefore, it can be concluded that misogyny underwrites the cultural production of precarity.

Precarity is further tied up with prejudicial framing of ideologically constructed difference. The studied texts revealed that understandings of Zimbabweanness continue to be gendered, ethnicized, racialised, sexualised, and partisan, in contravention of the national constitution that calls for the "recognition of the equality of all human beings" (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013 [2018]: 1.3.f). Difference was understood as nonconformity to normative standards of what it means to be fully human, where, in the context of Zimbabwe's problematic patriotic and cultural nationalist narrative, full humanity implies being an able-bodied and heterosexual black male who is also Shona and pro-ZANU-PF. Drawing on Douglas's (1966) reflections on the notions of 'dirt' and hygiene, the study revealed that the morbid desire to eliminate difference is predicated on an obsession with boundary maintenance and systems of differentiation that include gender, pigmentation, sexuality, political affiliation, race, and ethnicity. I argued that the obsession with social hygiene is intertwined with the politics of belonging and accounts for discrepancies in life chances and access to resources. This poses fundamental questions about the purpose of government, especially as it appears from studied literary texts that the Zimbabwean government has reneged on its obligation to ensure an equitable, non-gendered and non-politicised distribution of national resources and to protect vulnerable social groups such as ethnic minorities, women, PWA, and people of same-sex orientation.

Related to the above, the thesis established that in a society where, to borrow from Muponde (2004: 176), "difference translates unproblematically into 'foe'," the vicious framing of difference creates disabling identities that often make it difficult for persons marked by difference to embrace their condition as a political rallying point. This is exemplified in *The Book of Memory* (2015) by Memory's aversion to Lameck who shares her dermatological condition. This study clearly showed that the anathematisation of difference reflects the precariousness of hegemonic identities. Heterosexual men's anti-gay sentiments, for instance, were revealed to stem from a deep-rooted fear of being unmanned by other men (cf. Kimmel, 2001: 266–67)).

This thesis was driven by the claim that a cross-section of Zimbabwean writers deploys a precarious aesthetic to reimagine the nation through exposing, contesting and de-gendering cultural practices that entrench and sustain precarity. Accordingly, studied texts were read as literary interventions into existential challenges faced by sections of the Zimbabwean population, situating such challenges within regional, continental, and global precarity discourses. The texts deploy various narrative strategies to write the precariat into being, including exposing the arbitrariness of the process of difference construction; affirming the full humanity of persons marked by difference; appealing to the audience to reorient its perceptions about difference; beckoning the precariat to see itself as part of mainstream society; showing that all gendered identities are fragile social constructs; and de-gendering narrative space to reorient national consciousness, memory, and identity.

However, the thesis also hinted at the inherent limitations of the precarious aesthetic as a tool for negotiating belonging for marginalised peoples. Firstly, the aesthetic works primarily through emotional appeal to compel us, or as Butler (2004: 151) would say, to recognise "the human at the limits of what we can know, what we can hear, what we can see, what we can sense". It would, however, be naïve to expect that the development of such an ethical philosophy would be solely based on the reading of literary works. Emotional appeals are also not likely to have much impact on those who benefit from oppressive systems. Secondly, anti-masculinist writing tends to gravitate toward what Jackson and Scott (2002: 17) see as a "biological foundationalism of the sex/gender distinction". For example, the privileging of female masculinity in *Zenzele* (explored in Chapter 6) paradoxically endorses masculinism; as a subculture, female masculinities derive their currency from mainstream masculinities (Halberstam, 2005). Also, as shown in Chapters 2 and 6, counter-hegemonic writing tends to

construct grand narratives that are as monolithic and exclusionary as the dominant narratives. It was shown, for instance, how in their repackaging of the *Gukurahundi* narrative Mlalazi and Tshuma emphasise the ethnic factor in ways that sustain the existing polarisation between the Shona and the Ndebele. Hence, I follow Muponde in arguing for new national literature that situates itself in "the postnational moment, […] that space and time when the nation-state 'no longer matters', even fleetingly and imaginatively, and has no positive political and cultural significance to those it constitutes as its subjects" (2015: 142). Arguably, such a postnational aesthetic has a greater capacity to meaningfully reimagine the nation, though no politico-aesthetic regime can accommodate all the numerous micro-stories that remain untold in each society.

In light of the above limitations of precarious aesthetics, I propose that there is an urgent need, at the level of imaginative and theoretical practice, for a new grammar with which to talk about difference in non-essentialist ways. I argue that the ultimate abolition of prejudice will not be complete without a language revolution as prejudices arise and thrive in language, embedded in such derogatory labels as *chirema* (a person with disability), *mubvakure* (foreigner),[70] *mubvandiripo* (a child that a woman brings to her second husband), and *ngochani* (a person of homosexual orientation). Artists, therefore, need to go beyond making appeals for the tolerance of difference and deploy their epistemic privilege to spearhead a terminological revolution that will usher in a new and non-toxic vocabulary. Such a revolution is already in motion as there is a burgeoning narrative trend toward depicting characters that refuse to be oppressed by demeaning labels, including Livingstone Stanley Tikiti who, in Gloria Ndlovu's *The Theory of Flight* (2018), defeats the dehumanising name-calling for PWA by earning himself the *nom de guerre* 'Golide de Gumede', which translates to "fields of gold" (Ndlovu, 2018: 22). Similarly, in Muponde's memoir, *The Scandalous Times of a Book Louse* (2021), a crippled female character (Dhiningu) rises beyond her impairment and repurposes it as a source of terror that hedges her belongings against thieving villagers.[71] In both texts, the authors cautiously skirt

[70] A wide semantic field has emerged around the term 'foreigner', which has become a catchphrase for politics of exclusion at local, regional and global levels. Such exclusionary tendencies, denoting new forms of nationalism, recently played out in mantras such as Donald Trump's "America first", South Africa's "Operation Dudula" (which means 'force out' or 'knock down' in isiZulu), and Zimbabwe's "*Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo*" (a country is built by its owners). While in the case of America and South Africa, the term 'foreigner' strictly refers to non-citizens, in Zimbabwe it has also come to mean non-Shona citizens and opposition political parties that are framed (by the ruling ZANU PF Party) as sell-outs who pander to Western interests.

[71] Similar repurposing of derogatory terms can be seen in the way Black Americans have taken over the term 'Niggar', which have overtones of racial prejudice, and reloaded it with a new meaning. When used or repackaged

the pejorative labels that ableist society would readily deploy to name the forms of difference represented by Tikiti and Dhiningu.

In pursuit of its objective to expand debating space on the subject of precarity, the thesis revealed that precarity is a broad subject with social, biological, political, economic, and aesthetic dimensions. In turn, this capaciousness offers limitless research possibilities in many areas, including ecological precarity in the immanence of climate change, the impact of neoliberal austerity in the post-Covid 19 era, and suppression of lesbian subcultures. Also, considering Zimbabwe's current economic crisis that has spanned over two decades, it might be interesting to explore the intersections of economic disprivilege and cultural disablement.

by Black Americans themselves, the term has become an innocuous identity marker, but it has the potency to disarm and endanger any outsider who dares to use it publicly.

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