

**SOCIETY WRIT LARGE: THE VISION OF THREE
ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN WRITERS**

By

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Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Abstract	iv
Introduction	
1.1 Aim, Methodology and Proposition	1
1.1.1 Aim of Study	1
1.1.2 Research Method	1
1.1.3 Proposition	8
1.2 Outline of Chapters	9
Chapter One	
1.1 A background to Zimbabwean writing in English	11
Figure 1:1 Map between pages 15 and 16	
1.2 The emergence of black women writers in Zimbabwe	48
1.3 Summary of the thrust of this dissertation	55
Chapter Two	
Tsitsi Dangarembga	
<i>Nervous Conditions</i>	57
Chapter Three	
Yvonne Vera	
<i>Why Don't You Carve Other Animals</i>	93
Chapter Four	
Freedom Nyamubaya	
<i>Dusk of Dawn</i>	128
Conclusion	162
Bibliography	168

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Abstract

This study explores the social ‘vision’ of three Shona women writers vis-à-vis their Zimbabwean society, attempting to ascertain whether this vision is entrenched in the post-independence context or has been shaped by the whole canvas of colonization and its impact on Shona society. For this purpose, Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Yvonne Vera’s *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and Freedom Nyamubaya’s *Dusk of Dawn* (1995) have been selected to explore the representation of Zimbabwean society in different artistic genres.

The approach is mainly socio-historical, examining the selected texts in the context of Zimbabwean history and paying attention to how the socio-political dynamics in both colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe influence the creative output of Zimbabwean writers, in general, and of the selected writers, in particular. In addition, this study refers to other aspects of literary theory, especially African feminist theories, since all three writers discuss the plight of black African women.

This study consists of four chapters arranged according to the historical period in which the texts are set, which coincides with publication date. Chapter One provides a general background to Zimbabwean writing in English to root the study in the socio-historical experiences of the country. This chapter thus considers the works of both white and black writers. Chapter Two discusses *Nervous Conditions*, critiquing it as a women’s narrative in a social realist mode, because it portrays the social and political forces as significant

shapers of human lives. Chapter Three analyzes *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* as a text in the fabulist mode, which re-imagines cultural and literary politics. Nyamubaya's poetry, discussed in Chapter Four, is autobiographical and ideological. It revisits the Zimbabwean liberation war, situating it within both the private and national spheres, and arguing that such a standpoint emanates from Nyamubaya's need to make sense of her own experiences during the war and in post-independence Zimbabwe.

In conclusion, the study summarizes the major findings of the research, analyzing these against the background to Zimbabwean writing in English given in Chapter One.

Key terms: Autobiography. Fabulism. Feminist literary representation. Ideology. Post-independence. Rhodesia/Zimbabwean society. Socio-historical context. Social realism. The Shona experience.

Introduction

1.1 Aim, Methodology and Proposition

1.1.1 Aim of Study

The study seeks to investigate the social ‘vision’ or view of three Zimbabwean Shona women writers vis-à-vis their society. It also attempts to determine whether the vision of black women writers in Zimbabwe is rooted in the post-independence context alone and to what extent it has been influenced by the forces of colonialism and their impact on the lives of the black population.

1.1.2 Research Method

In order to achieve these two aims and in line with the chosen methodology, the investigation is carried out through a close analysis of three selected texts: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Yvonne Vera’s collection of short stories *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* (1992) and Freedom Nyamubaya’s poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* (1994). The perspective is thus that of three Shona women, all ultimately feminist but distinctive (Dangarembga’s fictional mode is essentially social realist and mimetic; Vera’s is closer to fabulist; and Nyamubaya’s is stridently autobiographical and ideological).

Dangarembga’s narrative is in the social realist mode, because it projects the social, political and economic forces as significant shapers of human lives. The lives of

characters in *Nervous Conditions* are presented as dialectically linked to the social, political and economic dynamics in colonial Rhodesian society of the 1960s. The power of such writing, Sarah Christie *et al.* (1980:99) argue, comes from knowledge and a deep concern for social and political change. The project of social realist writing, as Christie *et al.* (*ibid*) further suggest, is to bring injustice and moral outrage to public attention and, as such, it is by intention a critical protest against unjust societal structures. This is the objective of *Nervous Conditions*, which inverts both colonial and indigenous patriarchal structures of oppression by presenting the status quo as eminently reversible. Fabulism, a term coined by R Scholes, as Christie *et al.* (1980:162) observe, is a technique which frees the narrative act from the demands of objective presentation. Works in the fabulist mode attempt to enter and reconstruct existing socio-historical records in an inventive way. This is Vera's major undertaking in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, where she creatively reimagines her society's history and gender relations to create a new 'reality'. Nyamubaya's poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* is both autobiographical and ideological. It is informed by the ideology of the Zimbabwean liberation war and the author's experiences in that struggle. Writing after independence, she revisits the war and the ideology of social justice that underpinned it to make sense of both her past experiences and the post-independence order which is a culmination of the struggle. Thus, Nyamubaya's creative consciousness, as her poetic vision suggests, revolves around the war as a historical event in Zimbabwe and its aftermath.

Although published within a mere six years of one another, the selected texts span three decades of Zimbabwean history – from the early 1960s to the 1990s. These turbulent

years embrace the breakaway from the colonizing power – Britain – and the consequent isolation of the country, through to the use of black consciousness, to civil war. These aspects are discussed more fully in the chapters that follow. Politically, this period saw a shift in power from a white elite, to power sharing to an independent majority black government. But, socially, power remained in the hands of the patriarchy; and it is this power that all three texts interrogate and indeed challenge.

The approach used is therefore qualitative. Leedy (1997:104), quoting Creswell, defines a qualitative study as an ‘inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words...’. A qualitative approach, which is also referred to as interpretive, naturalistic, constructivist, or positivist, is a broadly based methodology, which encompasses several research methodologies. For this particular study, the grounded theory methodology, which is one of the underpinnings of a qualitative study, is employed. This methodology, which is principally deductive, is termed ‘grounded’ because, as Leedy (1997:63) notes, theory or an hypothesis is developed from the data available. In other words, both the proposition for this study and the deductions made derive from a comparative study of the ‘vision’ or viewpoints of the three chosen writers as deduced from the study of the selected texts.

In this current project, with the selected primary texts acting as the data to be analyzed, the material is interpreted during the course of the research and is compared and contrasted in the conclusion to highlight both common and disparate trends. Strauss and Corbin (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:274) observe that a grounded theory methodology is

premised on this interpretive and comparative approach where the researcher does not believe it adequate merely to report what has been observed during the course of the research, but assumes the responsibility of interpreting what has been observed or read. As this research is literary based, the vision(s) expressed in the selected primary texts of the chosen women writers is/are not only commented upon, but also critiqued in the context of the socio-historical reality from which they spring.

Strauss and Corbin (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:280) note that theories or hypotheses are embedded in “history”, and so historical epochs, eras and moments are to be taken into account in the creation, judgment, revision, and reformulation of hypotheses. In this present study, the selected texts are read in conjunction with a fairly broad study of sociological and historical texts as secondary material so as to root the authors and their texts, as far as is possible, in the society from which they emanate.

Because of its centrality to this study, the term ‘society’ is defined in Chapter One, and for this purpose sociologists Arnold Hauser (1982), Alan Sinfield (1983) and Merriam Webster (2004) are used. From a sociological perspective, they outline the complexities of the term, depending on the context in which it is employed. This study builds on these sociologists’ insights and adopts the concept of ‘society’ that best suits this project.

The historical works consulted in this study are mainly those which dwell specifically on the history of Zimbabwe. Geoff Hill’s *The Battle for Zimbabwe* (2003) is a text which traces Zimbabwean history from the pre-colonial years of the early nineteenth century

right up to the twenty-first century. Although Hill is a journalist, and not a historian, the scope of his text encompasses historical landmarks such as the Ndebele migration into Zimbabwe, the first war of liberation in 1896 (first *Chimurenga*), the Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] (on 11 November 1965, under the leadership of Ian Smith, the Rhodesian government declared itself independent from Britain, the colonial power), the liberation struggle and post-independence period in Zimbabwe. The text's significance to this study lies in the way it underlines that socio-economic dynamics in Zimbabwe's history have always corresponded to the political climate. Because of this importance, Hill's text is used alongside historian Martin Meredith's *Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe* (2002) in Chapter One, to highlight the complexities of Zimbabwean society, and to explain why the initial efforts for a new constitution in Rhodesia in 1961 failed and the reactions of both Blacks and Whites to this proposal. These sentiments are crucial in evaluating the outlook of the literary works that immediately followed this period, especially those by black people. In Chapter Four, Hill's text is used to interpret and contextualize the euphoria and enthusiasm that was shown by some citizens (including some writers) during Zimbabwe's early years of independence. *An Ill-Fated People* (1972), by Lawrence Vambe, is a seminal autobiographical work which gives a critical exposé of the impact of Christianity on the Shona people, colonial education and the mood with which Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] was met by Blacks in Rhodesia. Vambe's sentiments towards the developments of his time in Rhodesia are key to Chapter One, where the study attempts to find the link between black people's education and their writing, and

the nexus between the political atmosphere of the time and the tone of black writing in English.

Terence Ranger's text, *Are We Not Also Men?* (1995) is also used in Chapter One as a historical text. Ranger recounts the racial boundaries in Rhodesia, focusing on the different physical spaces in which Blacks and Whites existed. The relevance of Ranger's text to this study lies in the fact that the race topic that he discusses is one of the major concerns of black Zimbabwean writing in English, which authors, such as Stanlake Samkange (1975) and Yvonne Vera (1992), treat as a historical fact in colonial Rhodesia. As a result, it is necessary to have this historical backing in discussing the chosen theme.

Also consulted in this study are secondary texts which focus specifically on Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, an event which forms the basis of many black Zimbabwean fictional narratives, including the three texts explored in this study. Norma Kriger in her article 'Popular Struggles in Zimbabwe's War of National Liberation' in (Kaarsholm, 1991), asserts that black Zimbabwean women participated in the liberation struggle for the purpose of improving their domestic lives. This perception is challenged towards the end of Chapter One in the debate on whether black women's oppression is a result of indigenous patriarchy's chauvinism or whether it is a new phenomenon which was brought by white imperialists. Kriger's hypothesis is used to interrogate the determining factor(s) of black Zimbabwean women writers' artistic vision(s). David Lan's *Guns & Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985) is referred to in Chapter Four, so as to provide a context in which to analyze those of Nyamubaya's poems which suggest

that female ex-combatants are ostracized and marginalized in post-independence Zimbabwe. Lan's text gives a socio-historical perspective to the war and argues that the perceptions on female ex-combatants during and after the war have always been culturally determined. Thus, his text offers insight into the concerns raised in Nyamubaya's poetry.

Another invaluable secondary text used in this study is Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth* (1968). Although Fanon wrote from a psychiatrist's perspective, basing his observations on the plight of the colonized in Algeria, his book can be easily applied to colonial contexts elsewhere. The text discusses violence, the question of the colonized's culture and identity, colonial education and nationalism among others – subjects which African historians and fiction writers still grapple with today. As a result, some of the observations and conclusions that Fanon makes relate to the 'wretched of the earth' in Rhodesia, and, as such, the text is used in the analysis of the colonial landscape in Rhodesia and how this environment corresponds to or differs from Fanon's observations. This approach forms part of the critique of *Nervous Conditions* (discussed in Chapter Two), the proem of which identifies the provenance of the novel's title as Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to *The Wretched of The Earth*. Thus, the centrality of *The Wretched of The Earth* to Chapter Two does not only lie in it being a springboard into Dangarembga's novel, but in the way in which the latter can be compared to and contrasted with Fanon's thesis of violence as a therapy for the condition(s) of the colonized.

In addition to a socio-historical approach, theories of African literature by critics, such as Chidi Amuta, are also utilized. Amuta's thesis (1989) is crucial in as far as it underlines the relationship between literature and history. His view is of particular pertinence to Chapter One, where the study discusses society and its complexities and how they are inter-linked with the production of literature. Feminist literary critics, such as Molar-Ogundipe Leslie and Rudo Gaidzanwa (1985), are also used in the analysis of the primary works to find out how the selected writers' vision(s) correspond to or differ from feminist perspectives on the continent.

1.1.3 Proposition

The proposition is that an exploration of the three chosen Shona women writers – spanning three different genres – will reveal a number of common concerns, principal among which is an intimate involvement in and commitment to the betterment of women's position in society. These women emerge from the margins of their society where, at one stage, they were subjugated by both colonialism and the indigenous patriarchy. Their writing thus confronts problems pertaining to their double oppression. It is this underdog status that gives their writing a distinctive slant advocating a revision of existing socio-political structures in post-war Zimbabwe. Characteristic traits are therefore a social point of view, a desire for redress, commitment, and a post-liberation war perspective (although the last aspect is less prominent in Dangarembga's text).

1.2 Outline of Chapters

The study is divided into four chapters and, as already noted, it engages three different artistic genres (novel, short stories and poetry) to find out how Zimbabwean society is represented through various modes of artistic representations. The chapters are arranged according to the historical period in which the texts are set, which happens to coincide with their chronology of publication. Chapter One, in line with the grounded theory methodology, provides a general background to Zimbabwean writing in English, its history, themes and the conditions which gave rise to the direction it has taken. This roots the study itself in the socio-historical experiences of the country at different stages in its history. In addition, this chapter discusses the general characteristics of both the writings of white Rhodesians and black ‘Rhodesians’ and, where necessary, comparisons between them are made. Chapter Two examines Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions* and the vision it proffers of the social, political and economic conditions of the period that the narrative engages in. Because this text has been extensively critiqued, the chapter necessarily includes a fairly extensive literature survey.

In Chapter Three, Yvonne Vera’s collection of short stories *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* is analyzed using the same socio-historical criteria as for *Nervous Conditions*. However, as the short stories have received less critical attention than Dangarembga’s novel or Vera’s novels, the analysis is essentially original. The short stories are not only set in the war period of the 1970s which follows immediately the setting of Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, but they partially develop some of the themes explored in *Nervous Conditions* as will become evident in this particular chapter.

Chapter Four focuses on Freedom Nyamubaya's poetry in *Dusk of Dawn*, which examines the war period and the post-independence era in Zimbabwe – a more recent stage in the history of Zimbabwe than the periods engaged by the other two texts considered in this study. This text has received no critical attention so, again, the analysis breaks new ground, hopefully adding to the critical debate on recent writing by women in Zimbabwe and, more particularly, by Shona women.

The study concludes with a presentation of the findings made in Chapters Two, Three and Four, which are then analyzed in the context of the general background to Zimbabwean writing in English given in Chapter One. In this section, a comparative approach is used in which properties and concepts embedded in the data analyzed during the research are brought together in order to reveal the 'principal' characteristics of the three chosen black Zimbabwean women writing in English.

Chapter One

1.1 A background to Zimbabwean writing in English

Literature as a product of human creativity is partially conditioned by socio-historical processes. The reason why literature can be viewed in this way, as critic Chidi Amuta (1989:79) has observed, is that the writer is a member of society and one who incarnates the society's structural and ideological 'inflections'. The writer, like other social beings, is exposed to socio-historical pressures and therefore any meaningful reading of his/her work should situate it within the milieu from which the writer's artistic vision springs. For this reason, the following three chapters include a discussion of the relevant contexts. Amuta (1989:81) further asserts that because of the inseparability between the writer and his/her society, the writer is a producer within a specific socio-historical context who changes reality (socio-historical experiences which form the raw materials for a writer's work) by compelling an imaginative understanding to it. Conveyed in another way, Amuta proposes that the writer is the conduit through which and through whom socio-historical experiences enter a fictional narrative, and the literary product that he/she creates is in itself informed by society's realities. This socio-historical perception of literature, which is also adopted in this present study, argues that a meaningful comprehension of writers and their works can only be gained within the context of their particular society, if literature is seen as an interpretation and evaluation of perceived possibilities in the real world (Sinfield, 1983:1). The caveat, here, is important as it points to texts written in a realist, fabulist or socialist realist mode, where the first is dependent on a mimetic approach and the last on an ideological underpinning to the representation

of society. Fabulism, by contrast, relies more on conscious fiction-making than on verisimilitude, as intimated in the Introduction to this study.

To serve the purpose of this study, it is crucial to first point out what is implied by ‘society’ in this study; then to describe the socio-historical context more fully; and thereafter to show that these writers are, themselves, emanations of their societies, that is, to discuss the ways in which these works and their authors are reflections of and reflect on the society from which they emanate. Various writers who occupy different spaces in both colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe are considered in terms of these exemplifications in order to provide a broad-based literary response to socio-historical events in Rhodesian/Zimbabwean society.

The term ‘society’ is problematic because it does not refer to one specific thing; its meaning varies not only according to the various contexts in which it is employed, but also from one discipline to another. Merriam Webster (2004), for example, defines society as ‘a voluntary association of individuals for common ends’ or ‘a community, nation, or broad grouping of people having common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests’ (<http://www.bushcountry.org/news/mar-news-032404-turner-myth-society.htm>). In both these definitions, the salient feature of the term ‘society’ is its emphasis on a group of people with something in common; and, as Sean Turner (<http://www.bushcountry.org/news/mar-news-0324404-turner-myth-society.htm>) rightly observes, this is where the term becomes problematic, in that it does not take cognizance of individuals in that group who are capable of making decisions on their own and acting

on them freely. However, adopting this central notion of a group or collective that underlies the definition of ‘society’, one can argue that nations (by virtue of being organized around national experience, common laws and institutions) are also collective entities, and can therefore be seen as societies, albeit hybridized societies. In this study, therefore, the classification of the Zimbabwean nation as a society rests on the shared experience of currently being under one independent, central government, rather than part of the earlier federal system imposed by the colonizing power. Nonetheless, this classification needs further elaboration, because it implies that society is a homogeneous entity.

Society, as Alan Sinfield (1983:3) notes, is neither monolithic nor static; it is composed of diverse groups whose interests, opportunities and attitudes interact in complex ways in accordance with their relative power at different points, an aspect explored by Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions*, Yvonne Vera in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* and Freedom Nyamubaya in *Dusk of Dawn*. Each of these writers challenges the power structures in her own inimitable way. As indicated in the introduction, each of the three adopts a fictional mode and approach that best express her social vision depending on her experiences and place in the Zimbabwean society.

So society, because of its heterogeneity in composition, which constitutes factors like culture, ethnicity, gender, race, ideology, and so on, is bound to be perceived differently by the individuals who emanate from it. In the case of the current study, what is now known as Zimbabwe has always been composed of different people. As far back as the

1830s, prior to colonialism which began in the late nineteenth century, there were various ethnic groups. Among the major indigenous ethnic groups in Zimbabwe are Shona-speaking people, who constitute the majority of the population and are believed to have occupied the country from as early as the fifteenth century (Zhuwarara, 2001:11). The Shona are made up of small tribal groups, such as the Karanga, Zezuru, Ndau, and others. Nehanda, the spirit medium who led the Shona in the first war against colonial hegemony in the late 1890s is from this ethnic group. Then, there are also the Ndebele-speaking people who emigrated from Zululand in the 1830s, led by Mzilikazi who later became their king. They settled in the west of the country – present day Matebeleland (Mutunhu, 1976:39). At the close of the nineteenth century they numbered around one hundred and seventy-five thousand. After the Shona, they are the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe. By 1931, black people of all ethnic groups in Rhodesia were estimated at one million, and during the 1950s, the black population had risen to about three million (Meredith, 2002:115). Prior to colonialism, the Ndebele were organized around the Zulu system in which all males were enrolled in military regiments at an early age and lived in villages reserved exclusively for each unit (Hill, 2003:36). Because of their military organization, it is sometimes argued that they raided their Shona neighbours for cattle, grain and women. But the extent to which the social, economic and political structure of the Ndebele revolved around raiding is a point of contention among historians. Unlike the Ndebele, the Shona were farmers who depended on the land for survival. It was the Shona, Hill (2003:45) observes, with their crops of maize and rice, who sold food to white settlers at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the feverish pegging of farms by the early white settlers, there was little agricultural production on the acquired

farms at that time, because white farmers were blighted by difficulties such as drought, locusts, rinderpest, and a shortage of labour, equipment and transport (Meredith, 2002:113). There are also other ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, such as the Shangaan and the Kalanga, but these constitute an insignificant number of the population, such that their influence on the socio-politics of the country has been minimal. (For a detailed distribution of indigenous ethnic groups in Zimbabwe see map overleaf).

The Whites who settled in the country towards the end of nineteenth century are also heterogeneous in composition – there are those of British origin, others emigrated from South Africa and some are from Portugal. It is with the arrival of the Pioneer Column – a group of men sent by Cecil Rhodes consisting of around four hundred and ninety men – in September 1890 that what is now called Zimbabwe became colonized. After their arrival, they started taking the land that had belonged to the Shona who had inhabited the country for centuries. The subject of land alienation is a major motif in black Zimbabwean fictional narratives. Various writers, such as Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi and Solomon Mutsaers write about the issue from different perspectives. Yvonne Vera is also preoccupied with the same theme in some of her short stories discussed in Chapter Three. In 1896, the white population stood at five thousand, and by 1931 it had increased to about forty-eight thousand (Meredith, 2002:115).

In the context of writing for instance, the writer's creative output is influenced by these general differences and so his/her artistic representation of society tends to reflect cultural norms and might also reflect his/her social standing. For this reason, the next three

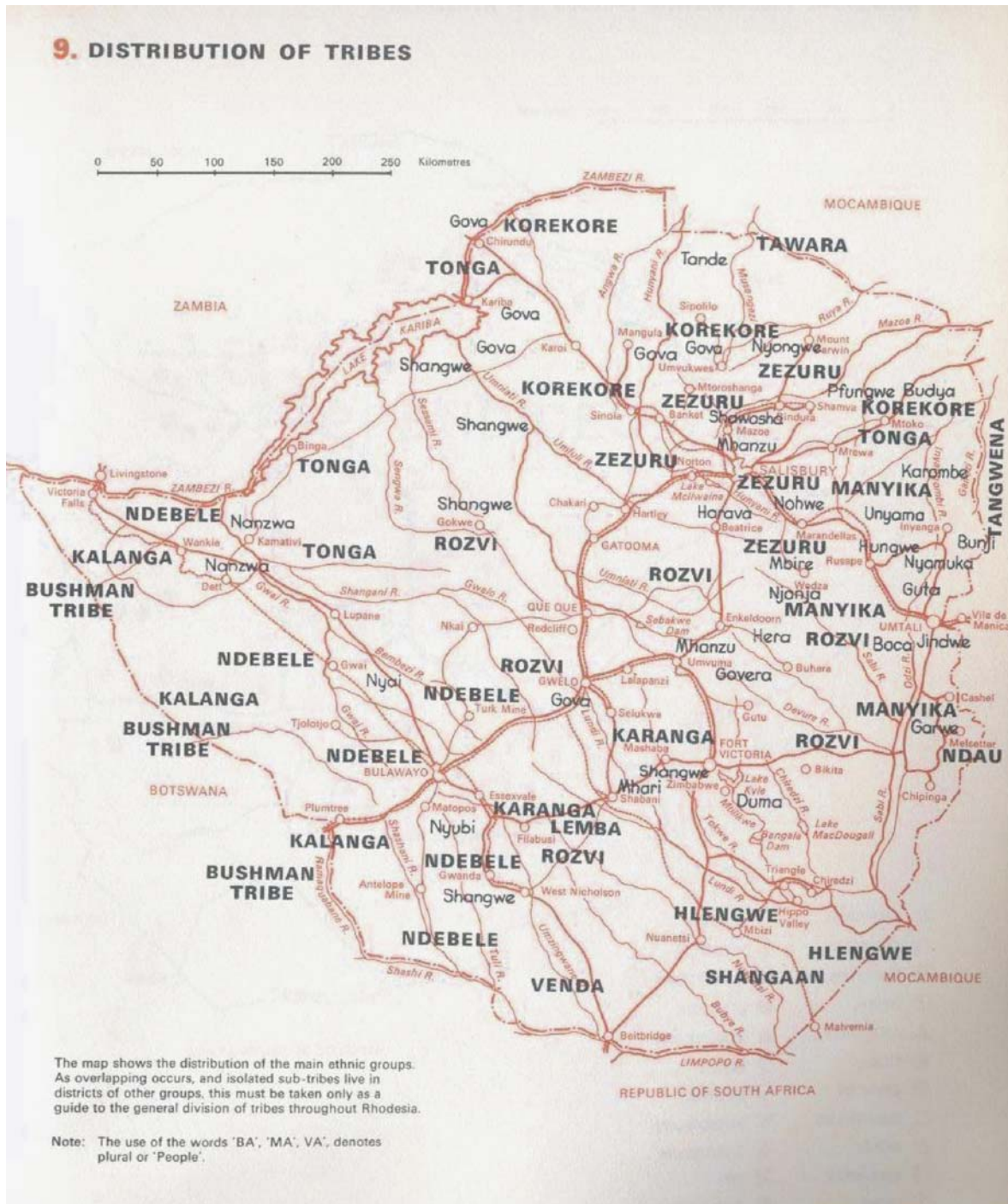


Fig. 1.1: Map showing distribution of indigenous ethnic groups in Zimbabwe.

Source: *Encyclopedia Rhodesia* p.406

chapters begin with a brief biography of the chosen writers. Despite the complexity of the pluralism and individuality which underlie society, it should be argued, as Arnold Hauser (1982:40) does, that society is the only form in which something like individual existence can be conceived, and it is only through their interaction within society that individuals try to make sense of it.

In highlighting the relationship between the writer and his/her society, a number of writers and the historical periods they belong to are used in order to reflect the different groups that constitute Zimbabwean society and to provide a frame of reference for the discussion of aspects of society that each of the chosen writers foregrounds.

The first group to be considered, although not the main focus of this study, are white Rhodesian women writers, whose writing predates that of black writers, both male and female. Some salient features of their writing are briefly examined against the socio-historical reality which formed the context of their Rhodesian society of the time, after first clarifying the relation between writer and writing, or in Amuta's terms, between mediator and literary product.

Amuta (1989:84) argues that a contextual perception of a literary work discourages a monolithic and monographic interpretation of the work or the individual writer, because no literary work is "born alone". In this respect, criticism of a literary work has to move towards a perception in which it is informed by the issues in the history of society. Amuta (*ibid.*) pertinently notes that context involves elements, such as the philosophical and

aesthetic traditions within which the work is created, as well as its paradigmatic relationship with other works in the same tradition or in preceding traditions. In the case of white Rhodesian women writers, it is perhaps useful to perceive the context of their literary production in the light of Anthony Chennells's (1982:xii-xiii) observation that the majority of these women writers who wrote about Rhodesia did so from abroad. The reason for this, according to Chennells (1982:xii), is that these writers, like the other white settlers who called themselves Rhodesians, had a number of transient characteristics; they had immigrated from Britain to Rhodesia, had settled temporarily and had returned to their mother country. As a result of this literal distance, which was an important feature of the white Rhodesian society, women writers, such as Gertrude Page, Cynthia Stockley and Jane England, and even some white male Rhodesian writers, imagine the Rhodesian society they portray in their fictional accounts as visitors who are detached from the social conditions that their art seeks to describe. Because of this tenuous link between themselves as mediating subjects and the socio-historical experiences they mediate, their abilities to explore new alternatives and the complexities of Rhodesian society are likewise limited (Chennells, 1982:xiii). Their writing thus remains part of the larger white Rhodesian literary discourse on the colony which, in the main, articulates the imperialists' motives while marginalizing the colonized. A brief look at some of the motifs which characterize their works affirms this assertion.

Like their Southern and East African counterparts, white Rhodesian women writers tended to affirm white supremacy and superiority over their fellow Blacks in their early works and this finds expression in the exploration of the issue of miscegenation in

numerous narratives. Writers like Gertrude Page and Jane England, who explore this theme, manifest their own British society's popular ideology by abhorring this practice, considering it as a taint of what Chennells (1982:400) calls the exotic image of white Rhodesians. For example, England in *Skyline* (1929), as Chennells (*ibid.*) notes, passes no judgment on white women who smother the coloured children they have produced, but condemns the Blacks, who fathered these children, as rapists. The woman in the novel who marries a man whom she believes to be white has a coloured child which she kills. She makes a pact with her husband: 'I would tell no-one. But never, must his family be carried on through him' (England, 1929:76). This stance is at once ironic and appalling, but can perhaps be viewed as an extreme aspect of white Rhodesian nationalism, which did not allow its citizens much leeway as far as making alternative choices was concerned.

In contrast to this perspective, which sought to advance white nationalism in Rhodesia by promoting popular ideas of the dominant members of the society, of centre versus margin, is Doris Lessing, who – like Sarah Gertrude Millin (in South Africa), writing from the 'inside' – satirizes her own white Rhodesian society (see Chennells, 1982:xviii). Lessing uses the injustices of Rhodesian society to inform the scope of her literary works which undermine some of the pretensions of other white Rhodesian writers. Perhaps this is because Lessing was brought up on a farm in Rhodesia and so comprehended the complexities of her society, whereas Page and England were immigrants or outsiders with little real understanding of the 'other' and no real commitment to their host society. It should be pointed out that in Lessing's works, unlike in those of the majority of her

Rhodesian counterparts, black characters are seen to be playing more important roles than being mere servants. In *The Grass is Singing* (1958), for instance, the relationship between Mary and her servant Moses is portrayed as more than the customary master-servant relationship warranted by the imperatives of the then white Rhodesian society. Mary feels attracted to Moses, but she has to subvert this feeling and the result is a form of an inner neurotic tension.

He [Moses] said easily, familiarly, “Why is Madame afraid of me?”

She said half-hysterically, in a high-pitched voice, laughing nervously: “Don’t be ridiculous. I am not afraid of you.” She spoke as she might have done to a white man, with whom she was flirting a little. As she heard the words come from her mouth, and saw the expression on the man’s face, she nearly fainted. (Lessing, 1958:205)

What is evident here is Mary’s conscious stifling of her natural feelings which in the race-conscious white Rhodesian society in the novel are considered ‘unnatural’. It is the suppression of these inner feelings which culminates in a form of neurotic tension within her. Mary’s psychological tension is thus a reflection of the tension within white Rhodesian society of that time, which emanates from societal pretensions, and the potential implosion these can cause.

When Moses kills Mary, for instance, the white Rhodesian society in the novel simplistically reduces the incident to ordinary murder, for it is stereotypically understood that when Blacks murder it is only for robbery. At Moses’s trial, it is believed that ‘the native had murdered Mary Turner while drunk, in search of money and jewellery’ (35). This belief makes manifest the limited number of ways in which the white members of Rhodesian society were prepared to view Blacks. Lessing’s narrative thus undermines the

white Rhodesian society it portrays in that it foregrounds what the society seeks to subvert: intercultural and interracial attraction and the consequent personal dilemmas. The differing perceptions of Lessing and her counterparts in looking at the Rhodesian society in the mid-twentieth century and prior to the declaration of independence (discussed more fully later in this study) demonstrate that in as much as writers are products of similar societies, the way they wrestle with historically and socially conditioned phenomena depends on the individual rather than the communal voice. Equally important is the fact that the writers' transformation of socio-historical experiences into fiction is not done 'innocently'. There are inevitably certain motives and interests behind each representation.

What this very brief examination of early white Rhodesian women writers attempts to show, is that race is another important classification of society and that it was then, and possibly still is important in shaping a writer's ideology and perception of society as well as his/her writing.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, there is a dramatic shift in the focus of white Rhodesian women writers. They diverge from the mainly social concerns seen in the works of the early and mid-twentieth century to the political tension in Rhodesia with a specific concentration on the war of the late 1960s and 1970s. Once again, their narratives are generally biased towards the Rhodesian government's goal of preserving colonial rule in the country, and like their male counterparts, such as Daniel Carney (1969) and Michael Hartmann (1973), they vilify black nationalists as sanguinary savages fighting against a

civilized world. Emily Dibb's use of the wartime cliché of 'children being lured across the border with promises of education' (Chennells in Ngwabi Bhebhe and Terence Ranger, 1996:128) in her *Spotted Soldiers* (1978), for example, underpins white Rhodesian discourse about the war which denies that black nationalism had the strength and appeal to make people join it voluntarily.

However, Meredith Cutlack's *Blood Running South* (1972) is distinct from this general thrust of white Rhodesian writing about the war in that it presents the Rhodesian army as composed of white mercenaries from South Africa and Portugal. The narrative thus subverts the image of those who fight on the colonial government's side as people with great moral integrity and, as such, it vitiates the colonial ideology in Rhodesia. For this, the novel was banned in Rhodesia (Chennells, 1996:118). Cutlack's vision in this novel is closely related to Gordon Davis's in his novel *Hold My Hand I'm Dying* (1967) which reveals an awareness of the political implications of the UDI for the black population and why Blacks had to engage in a guerilla war against the Establishment. Nonetheless, despite Cutlack's inversion of the colonial army's image, the novel remains closely linked to the mainstream white Rhodesian writing because it casts Blacks as incapable of acting effectively without Whites directing them. In the novel, it is the white man McNeil, who organizes the guerillas who fight and defeat the mercenary organization ASPRO (*op. cit.*:119), and this subscribes to the colonial ideology of white supremacy which is overtly emphasized in novels, such as Daniel Carney's *Whispering Death* (1969).

Before examining some of the distinct and conspicuous features of black Zimbabwean women writing in English, it is important to indicate that the first English literary works by black women appeared in 1984, four years after Zimbabwe's independence from colonial rule. Prior to the emergence of black women's writing, however, Blacks in Rhodesia had already published a fairly large corpus of works in English, some of which were published in the late 1960s. While black Zimbabwean women's writing in English can be called an independent discourse in its own right in as far as its response to social issues and its grappling with problems that beset black women, in particular, is unique, it still remains part of the larger body of black Zimbabwean writing in English which burgeoned more than a decade earlier.

This claim requires further elucidation because, as it stands, it appears arbitrarily to alienate black Zimbabwean women writing in English from the white Rhodesian women, examined briefly earlier. A study of the texts suggests that apart from sharing the same gender with their white Rhodesian counterparts, black Zimbabwean women, in general, and black Zimbabwean women writers, in particular (whether Shona or Ndebele), did not have much in common with their white counterparts. The two groups emerge from two different ideological spaces in society: one which is predicated on the myth of white superiority over Blacks, and the other, of the marginalized other – the underdog in colonial relations as well as within their own culture. It becomes apparent, therefore, that black Zimbabwean women writers, like their male counterparts, emerge from the margins, a space to which the racial 'other' was condemned in the colonial situation. However, while Blacks were generally condemned to the margins prior to Independence,

the way various groups fared differs, as will become evident as this study progresses. Because of the inexorable bond which exists between black Zimbabwean women writing in English and that of their menfolk, it is logical for this study to examine the general history and background of black Zimbabwean writing in English as a whole to which black Zimbabwean women writing in English is so closely linked by a common socio-historical background.

Black Zimbabwean writing in English began in the 1950s during the colonial era. Compared to other African countries, such as South Africa, Blacks in Rhodesia were late in engaging in literary activities. The problem, it seems, has its roots in the political and social atmosphere induced by the colonial authorities in Rhodesia. The colonial government, as Rino Zhuwarara (2001:17) observes, did not bother to build any schools for Blacks until 1945 – more than fifty years after colonial presence in the country. This left the missionaries alone with the responsibility of educating Blacks, but their schools could not cope with the entire population, which numbered about nine hundred thousand in 1924. To compound the problems Blacks had in accessing education was the quality of education received by those who entered school. Zhuwarara (*ibid.*) argues that until the 1950s and 1960s the missionaries emphasized vocational training for Blacks, who were taught carpentry and building skills. This kind of education, which was aimed at creating “products” who could not criticize the injustices of colonialism, failed to produce Blacks who could (or would) engage in serious literary activities. This context also clarifies why the likes of Stanlake Samkange, Lawrence Vambe and Ndabaningi Sithole – pioneers of black Zimbabwean writing in English – furthered their education abroad.

The rise of black Zimbabwean writing in English coincided with two important periods in the country's history: the Federal era and the period from the Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] in 1965 to independence in 1980. These two events had a significant impact on black people's writing in Rhodesia as will become evident in this study. From the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s, the colony of Southern Rhodesia was part of a federation, which encompassed Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia) and Nyasaland (present day Malawi). The Federal government had its parliament and federal capital in Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. However, the three countries maintained different territorial governments. The Federation was big and economically viable. Its economy was boosted by industries in Southern Rhodesia, copper mining in Northern Rhodesia and tea and coffee production in Nyasaland. The Federation was attractive to Blacks, because one of its founding principles was the inclusion of Blacks in business and society as equal partners. In fact, representatives of black people such as Joshua Nkomo attended the 1953 conference held in London to form the Federation (Hill, 2003:52). At that time, some educated Blacks saw the Federation as the beginning of promising times for Blacks.

Early writers like Stanlake Samkange responded to this socio-political reality through works which celebrated this potential unity between black Rhodesians and white Rhodesians. In Samkange's *On Trial for my Country* (1966), the first published English novel by a black person in Southern Rhodesia, Lobengula the Ndebele King, one of the principal characters, makes the following statement:

I am a friend of whitemen. I am opening my country to them and I hope in years to come that lasting friendship and advantageous intercourse will be established between us. I have to thank your Excellency very much for the friendship you have shown to me and to the Amandebele nation in

forwarding information and advice of so great importance to me and to them, and hoping that friendship between the Amandebele and the British people will never be interrupted but increase as our intercourse becomes more general and frequent. (Samkange, 1966:22)

This utterance downplays the historical fact that the Whites used underhand means to occupy present-day Zimbabwe; it also comes from an unlikely source, Lobengula who, in history, is a victim of Rhodes's treachery. Nonetheless, the important aspect is that it is designed by Samkange to capture society's general optimism in the country's future during the Federal period.

Although published in 1966, a year after UDI which brought about a change of mood, the novel was certainly conceived during the hopeful years of the Federation. In *On Trial for my Country*, Samkange tries to work within the non-racial politics which were made possible by the Federation (Kahari in Ahluwalia & Nursey-Bray, 1997:51), for the 'trial' in the title refers to two spiritual trials: in one, Rhodes is tried in his father's church in England, while in the other, the Ndebele king, Lobengula, is tried by his father Mzilikazi, the founder of the Ndebele nation. Rhodes is being tried for the dishonesty with which he obtained the charter which gave his Company a right in British law to occupy what was called Rhodesia after its so-called founder, but is now known as Zimbabwe. Lobengula, in turn, is being tried for allowing himself to be tricked by Rhodes, and for not using armed resistance against the occupiers when Rhodes's intentions became clear. In the novel, Samkange allows both the motives of the imperialist Rhodes and those of the Ndebele king to be taken seriously. Moreover, in the end, as the title suggests, both men are portrayed as having some right to call the country their own (Kahari in Ahluwalia &

Nursey-Bray, 1997:51). By validating both Rhodes's and Lobengula's claims to the country, Samkange's narrative is one of compromise. More importantly, in terms of the present project, he captures the spirit of the Federation era in which Rhodesia potentially belonged to both its black and white citizens. This hope and the illusion of a non-racial society, depicted in *On Trial for my Country*, however, dissipated shortly after the collapse of the Federation and slowly gave way to despair among the black citizenry of Rhodesia. Underlining the interrelation between writer and literary product, this change in the political atmosphere finds expression in the writings by Blacks which followed thereafter.

Although the Federation can be called a period of optimism, this did not stop black nationalists from the three federal territories from agitating for independence. With the British government having granted independence to Ghana in 1957, Nigeria in 1960 and Tanzania in 1961, nationalist leaders in the Federation wanted an end to colonial rule. In 1961, the British government made proposals for a new constitution in Rhodesia that would include a bill of rights, wider black franchise and special clauses protecting non-white Rhodesians (Meredith, 2002:28). Black people's representatives at that time, Ndabaningi Sithole and Joshua Nkomo, initially accepted the constitution, but later rejected it after their supporters accused them of not gaining enough concessions for black people. On the other side of the political divide, some white Rhodesians like Ian Smith, who was minister in the then government, resigned in protest against the constitution which reduced privileges of white Rhodesians. These hard-liners formed their own political party, The Rhodesian Front, which won elections in 1962. They

swiftly introduced new laws which banned black nationalist parties and incarcerated their leaders. In 1963 the British government granted independence to Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia; this saw an end to the Federation. Southern Rhodesia was not given independence status because the white settlers were unwilling to give power to blacks. Instead, on 11 November 1965, Ian Smith, who had become prime minister, illegally declared Rhodesia independent by announcing UDI, defying the British government which wanted power to be given to Blacks.

Smith's actions had a ripple effect. Hopes of any possibility of partnership between Blacks and Whites were eroded. The Blacks felt betrayed by the British government which they thought had not done enough to stop Smith from declaring UDI. They perceived UDI as a mechanism by the Rhodesian Front to ensconce itself in power while excluding Blacks from the politics of the country. The international community imposed sanctions on Rhodesia, which isolated all its citizens (black and white) from cultural developments elsewhere. More importantly, sanctions isolated black 'Rhodesians' from nationalist developments on the continent and in the rest of the world, effectively containing aspirations towards independence. Black people found themselves confined to a social milieu in which they had to endure life in a more or less marooned and beleaguered cultural environment (Zhuwarara, 2001:23). Not unnaturally, black writers soon began to express their dismay at the action taken by the Rhodesian Front government of Ian Smith. In his quasi-autobiographical account *An Ill-Fated People* (1972:123), for example, Lawrence Vambe expresses his anger at the fall of the Federation and the advent of the UDI:

How strange that this very act of powerless indifference should be repeated seventy years later by a much better informed British Government and a Socialist one at that. I sincerely believe that had the Imperial Government firmly stepped in and insisted on remaining in control of the country until full African participation in the government of Southern Rhodesia was realized, the present UDI tragedy would have been rendered impossible. I should like to think that, had this happened, present black and white Rhodesians would be living in a country that we could be proud of, offering every citizen humanity, equality, freedom and prosperity. We should then all have remembered Rhodes as a great man.

What needs to be underlined in Vambe's statement is the word 'tragedy' used here as an adjective to sum up black people's sentiments towards the UDI. That the UDI was indeed a tragic event for Blacks is explained by the liberation war which started in 1966 as a response to this decision by the Rhodesian Front government.

It was within this mood of increasing discontentment among Blacks with political developments in Rhodesia that early English literary works by black writers appeared. The importance of both the Federation and the UDI to this study is that they are the milieu in which black writers composed and published their works during the colonial era. In fact, much of black writing in Rhodesia is a direct or indirect response to these events. Flora Veit-Wild (1992b:7) classifies black Zimbabwean writers born before 1940 as the first generation, and those who were born in the 1940s and 1950s as the second generation. Veit-Wild uses the term 'generation' to refer to writers whose creative output might have been shaped by specific social, political and educational experiences of their time. For example, she argues that the writing of the first generation was shaped by the rural upbringing of these writers in the Rhodesia of the 1920s and 1930s, while the works of the second generation were informed by the rapid industrialization and urbanization

going on in the country after the Second World War. Veit-Wild downplays the fact that literary works by black writers during colonialism were written within fourteen years of each other, and most of them as already stated respond to the same socio-political events in Rhodesia. Furthermore, her categorizations on their own are not adequate in analyzing black Zimbabwean writing in English because they tend to lump the writers together and overlook the importance of individual experiences as a catalyst for literary creativity. Thus, in chapters Two, Three and Four where the texts of three selected women writers are discussed, personal backgrounds and individual experiences are taken into consideration as already intimated. Nonetheless, this chapter invokes these categorizations to highlight some certain general traits inherent in the works of the older generation which are absent in the narratives of the younger generation and vice versa.

While the first generation of black writers expresses dismay at the UDI, one can argue that they indeed sympathize with Western forces, such as Christianity. Samkange's *The Mourned One* (1975) and Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* (already mentioned) offer a multi-faceted approach to Western forces and how they affected Blacks. In the latter text, which pillories both colonialism and the UDI in Rhodesia, Vambe acknowledges the role played by Christian churches in educating Blacks when the colonial government was reluctant to spend money on the education of Blacks (Palmer & Birch, 1992:34). Vambe (1972:236) thus commends the missionaries as follows:

But I believe that without the efforts of the Missions, which have from the beginning accepted the responsibility of educating the Africans as a sine qua non of their religious enterprise in Southern Rhodesia, we should have been left to languish in illiteracy and ignorance altogether; and had that happened we should have been incapable of seeing through the clever

political frauds that successive Rhodesian Governments have contrived in order to gain minority independence.

As already indicated, contrary to the government's indifference towards black people's education, Christian missionaries (from as early as 1896) embarked on the education of Blacks, a policy for which they were often criticized by the white settler government, but which earned them widespread gratitude from black people. This is where Veit-Wild's generational categorizations come in handy, because the specific socio-political circumstances during this generation of writers' childhood years made them look up to the Christian missionaries for the early education in their lives. However, the missionaries themselves were not exempt from more subtle racial presuppositions. This is why works, such as Samkange's *The Mourned One* and Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People*, are on the one hand highly sympathetic towards Christianity, and on the other condemnatory of missionaries. By contrast, as becomes clear in the discussion in the next chapter, Dangarembga interrogates the impact of this Christian education on black society. So, while Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* catalogues forced labour, irrational taxation of black Rhodesians by settlers, and their displacement when a large mission station was built, the work is still relatively mild in its condemnation of Western forces. However, as already intimated, the sympathetic stance of Samkange and Vambe in their works can be traced back to the Federation years, as Vambe's (1992b:106) statement in an interview with Veit-Wild shows:

I knew that one day if we kept the Federation together, the black people in all the three territories would be the political majority, and if that happened they would be able to get independence and we would inherit a very big state which was highly economically viable. So all my talks, my writing and my public pronouncements were geared to the fact that we could keep the Federation going together.

In the context of this present study, what is important is not simply the confidence or optimism revealed in this interview, but the open acknowledgement of the symbiosis of ideology and creativity that it foregrounds. Likewise, when Vambe's attitude towards the political situation in Rhodesia changed with the fall of the Federation and Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence, he also aptly expresses the apparent change in the stance of black Rhodesian writers during this early period of Zimbabwean writing:

The whites were no longer preaching the policy of partnership. They were on their own and they wanted white supremacy. Naked white supremacy for a thousand years, as Smith said. It was under UDI. I said, "What kind of people are these?" I was very bitter. Definitely. (Veit-Wild, 1992b:106)

Vambe's sentiments find a ready echo in Stanlake Samkange's novel *The Mourned One*. The novel criticizes the white Rhodesian society for betraying the hope that black people had of working together with Whites in a partnership. The main character Muchemwa, who grew up under the impression that he was equal to Whites, feels betrayed at the end of the novel when he is sentenced to death on a trumped-up charge of raping a white woman. As the narrative clearly shows, Muchemwa is innocent of rape, but he is found lying on the woman's bed. Muchemwa's crime is that he has infringed the boundary on which Whites could claim superiority over Blacks. By having a close relationship with a white woman, Muchemwa is elevating himself to the status of his white masters in Rhodesia, thereby breaking out of the colonial space of a subaltern. Samkange deploys Muchemwa's incident to highlight the idea that the white Rhodesian society was being woefully spurious when it spoke of partnership and equality with Blacks. Unfortunately, Muchemwa only realizes this when he is awaiting execution:

Why have I been sentenced to death? Is it not because even missionaries feel that no black man should as much as lie on a white woman's bed? Who was the main witness against me in my trial. Was it not a missionary? Why? Because the missionary only wants me to be his brother in Christ and not his brother-in-law. He only wants to sing and preach about Christianity on Sundays, not to practise it. In matters of colour he considers himself a white man first and a Christian second. (Samkange, 1975:145)

The text does little to polemicize interracial viewpoints although, interestingly, it does so with personal interracial relationships. It becomes patently obvious in this text, that the white Rhodesian society's notion of partnership with Blacks was not always sincere as evinced by the segregatory and separatist tendencies of the Whites, who maintained different spaces for black people and white people. According to historian Terence Ranger (1995:82), public places labelled 'Whites only' were a reality in colonial Rhodesia. In the context of Rhodesian politics, Muchemwa's plight at the end of the novel suggests that there is no way that Whites can countenance sharing power with people they shun on a social level.

The change in the direction of black people's writing soon after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (1965) shows that society is not static, as already discussed. Every period in a society's history is characterized by its own upheavals. The new consciousness of black people, which found expression in literary works, such as Samkange's aforementioned novel *The Mourned One*, was triggered by the new ideological ground set by Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front as rulers of colonial Rhodesia. It is in this vein, that Amuta's (1989:81) thesis argues that African history is the primary condition for the existence and understanding of modern African literature

especially since the contact with the West. Notwithstanding an awareness of Amuta's tendency toward a monolithic Pan Africanism, history itself does catalogue social upheavals which, in turn, form the crux of much African literature, but especially that written by black Africans whose stance is almost inevitably reactive to colonialism and its legacy.

Since the dawn of history, the colonized have been subjected to numerous processes, which have been aimed at effectively keeping them subjugated. This was done to ensure the colonial system's 'smooth' functioning. In most cases, the colonialists have undervalued the traditions and cultural norms of their underlings (aspects that would have until then bound the colonized together and given them a communal identity) as a way of promoting a new and, for the colonized, unstable reality that they put in place. Under such circumstances, as Elleke Boehmer (1995:168) argues, the major challenge of the writers of the colonized cultures is how they express their own marginalized identity and articulate their rejection of the new order. In Rhodesia, quite a number of the pioneers of black Zimbabwean writing in English used the genre of the historical novel as a vehicle for reclaiming their people's past and establishing their identity. Concerning this mode of representation by the first generation of black Zimbabwean writers in English, Kahari (in Bindella & Davis, 1993:20) notes that this kind of writing, which was biographical, historical and political was concerned with the dissemination of historical facts as presented by authors countering those by white settlers. It deserves mentioning that although the historical novel was a popular genre with the first generation of Zimbabwean writers, the regeneration of black people's culture as a motif is also

discussed by the younger generation of writers that follows. Freedom Nyamubaya in some of her poems, for example, as will become apparent in Chapter Four of this study, attempts to re-link black people with their past prior to colonialism. The difference is that Nyamubaya writes in a post-independence context, where she is mobilizing the formerly colonized against neo-colonial forces. Historical novels by the first generation writers such as Solomon Mutswairo's *Maondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978) and Stanlake Samkange's *The Mourned One* (already discussed) are set in the pre-colonial past where authors juxtapose Western forces with pre-colonial society. *The Mourned One*, for example, specifically juxtaposes the Christian world and colonial administration with pre-colonial African society to highlight the notion that black people's past was not as despicable as it is sometimes portrayed. This stance is in line with that of the negritude movement in West Africa and the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa.

Frantz Fanon (1968:169) is therefore apt when he contends that colonialism, by some kind of perverted logic, turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. In a way, Samkange's narrative *The Mourned One* reconstructs the black people's past to counter the colonizer's theory of pre-colonial savagery and barbarism. Mutswairo in his *Maondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* (1978) captures the strong resistance of black Africans as they tried to hold on to the land which they believed had historically belonged to their ancestors. At the time when Mutswairo published *Maondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe*, the war for Zimbabwean independence was at its zenith, and therefore his invocation of black people's early resistance to colonial subjugation appears to be a well-timed inspiration to spur Blacks on in the struggle for independence. This was necessary,

for much of white Rhodesian discourse about the war, as Chennells (in Bhebhe and Ranger, 1996:104) notes, invariably cast black nationalism as doomed, and those who fought in it as simplistically demonized as savages. It is only a few white Rhodesian novelists like Gordon Davis who in his novel *Hold My Hand I am Dying* (1967) (already mentioned) displays an awareness of the strength and seriousness of black nationalism and the realistic threat it had on white Rhodesian privilege.

Early works by the first generation of black Zimbabwean writers are therefore, almost inevitably concerned with the search for black identity, which was seen to have been eroded by colonialism. According to Rino Zhuwarara (2001:12), quoting Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the writers of this generation try to resume the broken dialogue with the gods of their people and thus provide a relatively authentic cultural base from which present generations can face the future. For these writers, it should be noted, a historical novel is not a fortuitous product of artistic creativity. Most of them spent their childhood years in rural areas, where they were regaled with the history of their ancestors from the rich oral tradition of the Shona. Their celebration of black people and their culture, and simultaneous subversion of the privileging of colonial culture is a 'natural' way of recuperating the pre-colonial culture of black people; hence the incorporation of historical black heroes like Mapondera and Lobengula, who are symbolic figures of resistance to colonial acquiescence. The historical novel, as a mode of artistic representation, has therefore been concerned with psychological emancipation so as to promote black consciousness in resistance to oppressive forces. While this is an important aspect of writing by the first generation of black Zimbabwean male writers, the

writers of this generation, like those of the generations which followed, cannot be perceived in terms of homogeneity, because they have different styles and visions in their attempts to reclaim black people's past.

And while the first generation of Zimbabwean writers used autobiographical and historical texts to reconstruct black people's past and more particularly that of Shona history, as already noted, the second generation of writers who followed engaged mainly in contemporary issues in their imaginative fiction. These writers matured after the repressive Unilateral Declaration of Independence had eroded the optimism of the Federation era, as already stated. The experiences of this generation in a Rhodesia that was a pariah state after the UDI have made a marked impression on black writing. Dambudzo Marechera (in Veit-Wild and Schade, 1988:6), a prominent writer of this generation, attributes his creative stimuli to his own experiences and the brutalized humanity of those among whom he grew up in Rhodesia during the UDI:

They ranged from the few owners of grocery stores right through primary school teachers, priests, deranged leaders of fringe/esoteric religions, housewives, nannies, road-diggers, factory workers, shop assistants, caddies, builders, pickpockets, psychos, pimps, demoralised widows, professional con-men, whores, hungry but earnest schoolboys, hungry but-soon-to-be-pregnant schoolgirls, and of course, informers, the BSAP, the police reservists, the TMB ghetto police, the District Commissioner and his asserted pompous assistants and clerks, the haughty and rather banal Asian shopkeepers, the white schoolgirls in their exclusive schools, the white schoolboys who'd beat us too when we foraged among the dustbins of white suburbs.... This is the "they". The seething cesspit in which I grew, in which all these I am talking about went about making their lives. These are the ones who influenced me....

The squalor, different colonial spaces and the violence that Marechera exposes in this interview form the core of his novella *The House of Hunger* (1978). The degenerate

society that is so vividly described here was part of Rhodesia's implosion after the UDI, which the likes of Marechera experienced from the 1960s until the demise of colonial rule in 1980. Marechera further asserts that conditions, such as these, dialectically made him a writer while his countrymen took up guns and became freedom fighters. He calls it, 'The condition which later drove most of fellows [sic] into Mozambique to become freedom fighters and I to become a writer' (Marechera in Veit-Wild & Schade, 1988:7). Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya (2002:7) suggest that the plight of Blacks that Marechera describes here was a result of international isolation and economic recession after UDI: 'The political-economic climate over-encouraged producers of certain capital goods ... and ultimately widened the socio-economic and political divisions between whites and blacks'. These divisions are evident in Marechera's juxtaposition of the white quarters and black quarters. This motif of different social and political spaces in colonial Rhodesia for Blacks and Whites is also picked up in Vera's short stories 'Crossing Boundaries' and 'Why Don't You Carve Other Animals' in her collection *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992), discussed in Chapter Three.

The writing of the second generation was thus forged out of these aggravated political, social and economic circumstances in the country. Also important is the militant milieu in which this generation of writers began publishing their works. In the 1970s, when their works were first published, the armed struggle against white domination was gaining momentum in Rhodesia. This was a manifestation of the failure to resolve the conflict in Rhodesia through peaceful means, like the earlier attempts under the Federation. Many of the literary works by this generation of black writers offer radical views of the situation

in Rhodesia and the colonizers; and those who collaborate with them are described in openly critical terms. In Marechera's novella, *The House of Hunger* (1978:36), for example, the epithet 'bloody' is used to describe them: 'bloody whites', 'bloody missionaries' and 'bloody sell-outs', to indicate the author's unveiled anger towards the political situation in Rhodesia and the need for a thorough and complete social and political change.

While this radicalism might be explained as a consciousness born of the armed struggle which in itself is a radical means of dismantling colonial rule, the vision projected by these writers does not correspond to nationalism. Motifs of the liberation war, and the brutality of colonial rule in works, such as Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), Stanley Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980) and Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978), are a sign of the writers' strident critique of the harsh reality around them. In Marechera (1978:135), the violence unleashed by the repressive state organs is foregrounded as follows:

As I walked down to the beerhall I saw a long line of troop carriers drawn up at the gates of the township. They were all white soldiers. One of them jumped and prodded me with his rifle and demanded to see my papers.

The incident captured here was an all too familiar sight in townships for the better part of the UDI period where the Rhodesian government's armed forces operated to clamp down on black nationalism (Meredith, 2002:25). In these works, there is no gesture towards the possibility of coexistence between Blacks and Whites because the Rhodesian Front government's intolerance of black nationalism had eroded this possibility. Although these works are openly critical of the Rhodesian government's hostility towards black people's

clamour for independence, the writers are not sentimental about the cause of the Blacks. They examine the prevailing social malaise without idealizing the cause of black people, as seen in works such as *Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe* from the first generation. Their writing critiques the politics of the day, but does not look at it through a nationalist lens. At the same time, there is a condemnation of colonialism and the spiritual depravity it metes out on individuals. The main characters of writers such as Mungoshi, Nyamfukudza and Marechera are aware of the plight of their society, but they lack conviction to participate in nationalist politics to end colonial rule. As a result, they are embodiments of their society's contradictory history. In Mungoshi's novel, *Waiting For The Rain*, for example, the hero Lucifer remains aloof in so far as he does not take part in the emerging nationalism, and when confronted with the hardships endured by his people in their marginalized Tribal Trust Lands of Manyene, his response is to lament being born among a people whose existence is a manifestation of the degraded 'other' under colonialism. He escapes to Europe for solace:

I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere – of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and I never shall and if ever I leave this place, I am not going to come back. It is the failure's junk heap.... I have been born here but is that a crime? That is only a biological and geographical error. I can change that. ... Must I live with what I no longer believe in? (Mungoshi, 1975:162)

Lucifer's attitude towards the problems besetting his people is that of a spectator, and in the novel's context, this can be interpreted as a reflection of the vacuity of the colonial education he received. With his colonial education, he still lacks the penetrating perception as to why his home in particular, and country at large, has become 'failure's junk heap' to the majority of his race.

Like Lucifer, Sam in Nyamfukudza's novel *The Non-Believer's Journey* is an individualist who, although aware of the dehumanization wrought by colonialism, is somehow uncommitted to the liberation struggle. As a black person with a considerable colonial education, Sam has benefited from the colonial system and so he owes his individual success to the colonial masters. It is those who are less educated, who have been marginalized by colonialism, who see the benefit of fighting. That is why Sam is angry with his father when he is told that his younger brother has joined the nationalists:

So you were going to wait until he had left and use his fees for something else, or would you have sent them back to me? You call yourself a father, sitting there watching your family steadily being wiped out. When did you start taking this sort of interest in politics? (Nyamfukudza, 1980:98)

One can argue that, in the second generation of Zimbabwean writers' responses to the social and historical reality in the country, there is a shift from national interest to the championing of individual freedom. Dambudzo Marechera (in Veit-Wild & Schade, 1988: Proem), for instance, writes:

I am against everything
Against war and those against
War. Against whatever diminishes
Th' individual's blind impulse.

As this excerpt suggests, Marechera is a writer who refuses to identify himself with any form of ideology or movement that seeks a definitive compartmentalization of individuals. Black nationalism in Rhodesia, for instance, was one such movement which, although it emerged in dialectical opposition to colonial oppression, did not cater for individual freedom. The nationalists were organized along rigid party structures largely

predicated on Marxist-Leninist doctrines (Moore in Bhebhe & Ranger, 1995:75). It is this kind of regimentation which for Marechera compromises the individual's freedom. So, for Marechera, black nationalism is not the answer to an individual's freedom that is quashed by colonialism, as his character Philip's paranoia of nationalists in *The House of Hunger* (1978:59) testifies:

There is white shit in our leaders and white shit in our dreams and white shit in our history and white shit on our hands in everything we build or pray for. Even if that was okay there is still sell-outs and informers and stuck-up students and get-rich fast bastards and live-now-think-later punks who are just as bad, man. Just as bad as white shit.

Marechera's writing is sometimes perceived as anarchic and nihilistic (see, for example, Zhuwarara, 2001:207-208) because it destabilizes all notions of society's organization and existing movements without proposing new structures. Rino Zhuwarara (2001:129) perceives this unsentimental representation of black nationalism in this generation of Zimbabwean writers as accruing from the paradoxical situation they found themselves in which, on the one hand, called for patriotism and commitment while, on the other hand, it revealed the consciousness that the outcome of the liberation struggle would be far from ideal. Sam, in *The Non-Believer's Journey*, for instance, strives for individual freedom which is being choked by both the nationalist cause and colonialism. If commitment to freedom leads to a lack of it, then the struggle for its attainment should be ignored; hence Marechera's (Veit-Wild & Schade, 1988: Proem) contempt for 'whatever diminishes th[e] individual's blind impulse'. The lack of commitment to the national cause in the works of second generation writers is also made apparent by Chivaura (in Chivaura & Mararike, 1998:108), who notes that:

The titles of the imaginative works in which the Zimbabwean fictional characters appear...sound vapid, with mangled visions celebrating defeat and acquiescence to European enslavement and hypnotism.

However, Chivaura's perception that literature should pander to nationalism oversimplifies literature to being merely a mouthpiece for popular ideas which, in some instances, are even propagandistic. Chivaura's line of thought should be faulted again for its failure to take cognizance of the realities in Rhodesia during the mid and late 1970s when these works were written. The likes of Marechera and Nyamfukudza do not celebrate acquiescence to colonialism, but rather, they try to explore new alternatives, which were not possible under both the colonial and nationalist governments in Rhodesia.

Writing by blacks in Rhodesia was also conditioned by the censorship which became part of the state apparatus to repress critical and independent thought. In this respect, one finds that the very processes through which literature is produced and distributed in society influences the way writers have to recycle socio-historical experiences. Under colonialism, as Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:6) explain, the production of literature is monopolized by the ruling class:

The institution of "Literature" in the colony is under the direct control of the imperial ruling class who alone license the acceptable form and permit the publication and distribution of the resulting work. So, texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective.

In the context of Rhodesian writing, as Veit-Wild (1992b:74) notes, the Literature Bureau (a literary body created under colonialism ostensibly to promote writing by Blacks) censored their works:

Although at the beginning it had primarily to guide the emerging literature further along the course it was already taking, the Literature Bureau always had a double function. On the one hand, it played a very important role in promoting vernacular writing and providing the means for its development. On the other, it had been established in order to prevent the emergence of critical political literature. These two sides were always closely connected....

Some proponents of Marxist literary criticism postulate that colonial governments operate on two levels in oppressing the colonized (Althusser, 1977:143). The colonial authorities use Repressive State Apparatus, that is, brute force, which is manifested in the heavily armed police force and the army (see earlier quotation from Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, 1978:135). In addition to the Repressive State Apparatus, the colonial authorities make use of Ideological State Apparatus, implemented through institutions which impart ideas, such as churches, schools, universities and literature produced in the colony under colonial sanction. The two apparatuses work in tandem, supporting one another in subduing the colonized. In Rhodesia, the Literature Bureau complemented or supplemented the armed forces, by churning out unimaginative literature which did not challenge the injustices of colonialism. Literary works that made racial discrimination and other political imbalances their subject matter were never published in Rhodesia (nor has anti-government literature subsequently been allowed). This is why the works of Stanley Nyamfukudza (*The Non-Believer's Journey*), of Mungoshi (*Coming of the Dry Season*), of Marechera (*The House of Hunger*) and of many others were not published in Rhodesia. Works which were politically 'offensive' were either written in exile and published out of the country or they were written within the country and were not published until after independence.

Before examining Zimbabwean writing in English after independence, it is necessary to take a brief look at the nature of the Zimbabwean society as it entered independence. Independence was attained not as a result of military victory on the part of nationalists, but as a result of the Lancaster House Conference of 1979 which paved way for the 1980 elections which were eventually won by ZANU PF, one of the major nationalist parties. The various nationalist parties had tried to unseat the colonial government through military means, but without any success, and the Rhodesian government had tried to quell guerrilla attacks without much success either. One can argue that the Lancaster House Conference was a compromise reached because the antagonistic sides had realized that no side could completely win the war, which had gone on since the late 1960s. During the 1980 elections, the nationalist parties which had fought the colonial government from different sides, contested the elections from different camps. This was a sign of differences among black people, which are made manifest in the divisions within nationalist leadership on the eve of independence. Any assessment of black people's perceptions of independence and its meaning should take cognizance of this fact. One can therefore note that the advent of independence was an occurrence received with mixed feelings which corresponded to the ideologies and political inclinations which made it necessary for Blacks to fight separately in the first place. In terms of literary creativity, works in post-independence Zimbabwe echo these sentiments in as far as they embody diverse perceptions towards independence and the period after it, as becomes evident in the discussion that follows. Equally important is the fact that post-independence Zimbabwe witnessed an unprecedented increase in the volume of literary works and the ascendancy of black women, writing in the English medium.

In the light of the differences in the Zimbabwean society intimated above, Zimbabwean writing after independence assumes both optimistic and pessimistic attitudes towards independence. The optimistic vein is evinced in the works of writers such as Edmund Chipamaunga in his novel *A Fighter For Freedom* (1983) and Garikai Mutasa in the novel *The Contact* (1985). In Mutasa's *The Contact*, the liberation struggle is celebrated in retrospect, and that is an indirect way of celebrating the gains brought by independence. In the narrative, the guerrilla fighters score victory after victory against the Rhodesian forces in most of the battles they fight. Then the advent of independence is idealized as follows:

‘Like wind. Like the air. Happiness spreading throughout the country. Ululations and drinking ... All over the country. That morning there was dancing in the streets of Salisbury ... The day was awash with formerly banned songs now venting their anger in freedom. (Mutasa, 1985:123)

The idealistic and enthusiastic portrayal of the war and the subsequent independence in the works of Chipamaunga and Mutasa run parallel to the pessimism and cynicism towards independence evident in those works of Nyamfukudza and Marechera which were published during the same period. This is testified by the thrust of Nyamfukudza's collection of short stories *Aftermaths* (1983) and Marechera's *Mindblast* (1984), a collection of plays, poetry and short stories. In the case of Nyamfukudza and Marechera, their skepticism towards pre-independence nationalist politics is translated to post-independence nationalist government. The following excerpt from Marechera's *Mindblast* is critical of independence:

Then she was gone. I was once more alone. Thinking: I have just met the matter of this book, her and him. The haus des hungers of Harare. Her, him, me. The rotting minced meat underneath the tablecloth of political slogans. And I thought of all the hundreds of unemployed youths – boys

and girls – whose everyday was spent leaning against a wall or a streetlamp, playing pinball or the jukebox in some weird but cheap restaurant, or just sitting out the hours in a warehouse bar hoping something or someone would turn up and maybe the drink would flow... Is it a wonder that occasionally they freak out in vandalism, hellish hallucinations which they act out on the passer-by. Their lives are a blank; the only model Zimbabwe offers them is that of crude and corrupt capitalism: cars, videos, a suburban house, a telephone, a wife, a mistress, a name in society.... (153-154)

Here, Marechera forcefully foregrounds the aberrations of post-independence Zimbabwean society which manifest a socio-political reality that contradicts the ideology on which the war was fought. Post-independence is presented as a vacuous era characterized by ennui for those who are denied access to the country's resources. He suggests that a society which embodies such injustices can only create escapists who find solace in violence and drugs.

Writers like Shimmer Chinodya in his monumental novel *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Freedom Nyamubaya in her two volumes of poetry *On The Road Again* (1986) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1994) are even more explicit than Marechera in registering the disappointment that followed the failure of independence to bring any meaningful change to the lives of some Zimbabweans. They effectively juxtapose the struggle for independence with the disillusionment in post-independence Zimbabwe as a way of showing that the reality of independence does not justify the degree of commitment and sacrifice made during the struggle. In Nyamubaya's poetry, discussed more fully in Chapter Four of this dissertation, the situation is viewed in simple terms of what is morally right and morally wrong. Ultimately, in Nyamubaya's perception, post-independence leadership is little different from the colonial government of yesteryear; it perpetuates the status of Blacks

as marginalized people, doomed to struggle endlessly. The following extract from the title poem ‘On The Road Again’ highlights this thrust:

A student in the morning,
A teacher midmorning,
A builder at noon,
A slave in the afternoon,
A dog at dinner:
A combatant the rest of my life.

School has holidays
Workers have days off,
Slaves one hour to eat and rest,
But struggles go on and on.
Still on the road, an endless journey. (1986:34)

Here, the closing lines, in particular, coupled with the emphasis on the multiple roles played out in the opening stanza, reinforce the title, underlining the monotony of the never-ending struggle for survival.

A number of other writers, such as Gonzo Musengezi (1984), George Mujajati (1993) and Charles Samupindi (1993), foreground the frustrations of post-independence by portraying an ‘Animal Farm’-like situation where greed overtakes the goals of a revolution as the following extract from Mujajati’s novel *Victory* (1993:117) shows:

Zuze suddenly found himself within a crowd. The crowd was just as hungry and angry as the thousands of people within it. The crowd was singing angry war songs. Songs of hunger. Songs of anger. Songs of hope and crushed hopes. Zuze decided to stop running for a while. So he sat down and listened. A voice pregnant with anger began to speak; cutting through the wind with the ruthless courage of the executioner’s blade cutting through yet another condemned soul. “Is this what our sons and daughters died for?”

“No!” the crowd roared thunderously.

“Did our sons and daughters die so that we die empty-handed with nothing except crushed hopes flowing in our veins?”

“Where is the land that our sons died for?” There was no answer. “Are these the things that they promised us before we voted for them? This hunger, this suffering... this incurable poverty... Is that what they promised us before elections?”

“No!” the crowd roared.

It is important to note that Mujajati’s discourse on the injustices in post-independence Zimbabwe does not only end in highlighting people’s disillusionment like Marechera in *Mindblast*, but it also prescribes that the downtrodden should take the initiative and fight the post-independence leadership, and it is only through action that they can escape from their marginalized status. That the novel ends with the downtrodden questioning the morality of their leaders and organizing themselves in a violent uprising against their oppressors, highlights Mujajati’s socialist realist vision which portrays the status quo as eminently changeable. It is only with the consciousness of their plight that they themselves, as the oppressed, can transform their society. Mujajati’s major achievement in this novel is the way he so ably foregrounds the new social and economic classes in post-independence Zimbabwean society and the nature of class struggles that emerge to characterize society.

1.2 The emergence of black women writers in Zimbabwe

As already stated, apart from seeing an increase in literary production, the independence era in Zimbabwe also saw the ascendancy of women, writing in English. For the purpose of this present study, therefore, it is important to explore the relationship between the advent of independence and the emergence of black women’s writing. In this regard, as already stated, this study attempts to determine whether the vision of black women writers in Zimbabwe is entrenched in the post-independence context alone or whether it

has been shaped by the whole canvas of colonialism and its legacy as it affects black people in general.

Until after independence in Zimbabwe, literary works in English by black writers were written by men and, save for a few works such as Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, the focus of these works is biased towards the plight of the colonized Blacks rather than gender relations in the family and in society. This political thrust of black 'Rhodesian' writing in English with its themes of race relations and the liberation war had effectively sidelined black women and their social experiences in society and, as such, women's stories had remained largely untold until 1984. However, it is pertinent to indicate that the discourse on domestic relations had already been explored many years earlier by white women writers as outlined in Chapter One. Their narratives mainly revolved on the 'taboo' of miscegenation and its impact on white women's marriages. It is only in rare cases, as in Doris Lessing's novel *The Grass is Singing* (1958), discussed earlier, that an intimate gender relationship which cuts across racial barriers – more than the master-servant relationship prescribed by colonialism – is extensively explored. In this vein, black women's engagement of the subject of domestic relations is not new, but a mere resuscitation of a theme which had been explored years before. This segment of the chapter argues that black women's writing in Zimbabwe took off as a response to black women's experiences, which were not told or which were told inauthentically where male writers tried to render them in their creative writing. For example, Yvonne Vera's text, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* is a woman's series of stories. In it, Vera presents her society as it is seen through the eyes of women. She does this by mainly using women

narrators, thus privileging women's responses to socio-political events. This aspect becomes apparent in the discussion of Vera's text in Chapter Three of this study. The initial absence of women writers, who could recount women's stories, has its roots in the social reality experienced by women. In some cases, the dominant patriarchal culture barred women from participating in literary activities.

In an interview with Veit-Wild (1992a:101), for example, one black Zimbabwean woman writer – Ketinah Muringaniza – points out how some members of the patriarchy and publishers formed a counterproductive alliance, detrimental to women's writing: 'My first manuscript was complete when my husband burnt it saying I wasn't giving him due attention'. Julia Lwanda, another woman writer interviewed by Veit-Wild (*op. cit.*:102), laments:

Being a Shona woman writer, Shona men tend to regard women's ideas, writings or literary attempts as not worthwhile for public digestion. This might be the reason I hesitated sending some of my early manuscripts.

The responses of the two women highlight the absence of a platform for black women to express themselves; they also serve to show how the writers are emanations of the very society in which they exist. Apart from indicating the plight of the silenced voices of women, the responses suggest that the mere act of writing places black women outside acceptable cultural spaces where their voices should only be heard in the domestic arena. These responses of domestic/marital duties and inadequacy also form part of an ongoing debate in African feminism, which locates the oppression and silencing of black African women in two distinct places. Katherine Frank (in Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1987:15) notes that

this debate is on whether male chauvinism and sexism are an original phenomenon of [black] African society or whether it came with white imperialism.

Barbara Makhalisa's collection of short stories, *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984), for instance, appears to go along with the first proposition in that it looks at the plight of black Zimbabwean women at the hands of a post-independence government whose conduct is informed by traditional African patriarchal values, as the following passage from the short story 'Different Values' shows:

I don't want to be caught in the snares of this notorious crackdown on suspected prostitutes. – Well its no longer a free for all world you know. We live in men's world, and have to toe the line. – Yes, but do women commit the so-called crime on their own? – My *baas* and madam were discussing the issue yesterday, and I heard them say many advanced countries have tried to stamp out prostitution and have not really achieved abounding success. – Yes, well, I agree, but then the way it was done leaves one with a sour taste in the mouth. Imagine yourself window-shopping at about 7.00 in the evening, or going to catch a bus to visit your Auntie and you suddenly find yourself surrounded and turned from your way into a dreary truck, and the following day you are in Mushumbi Pools.

No, no, no, they were randomly picking up every woman they came across, guilty or innocent – and were not listening to explanations. (Makhalisa, 1984:63)

Here, there is evidence that the stimulus for Makhalisa's vision in these short stories is not informed by colonial experiences alone. The telephone conversation of the two women conveys the fears of women in Zimbabwe who apart from being silenced are caught up in sexist and restrictive laws which limit the movement of women. The excerpt from Makhalisa's short story was certainly informed by an alarming operation carried out by the post-independence Zimbabwean government in October 1983, in which the army and the police were deployed on the streets in cities to arrest women walking alone at

night. The reason behind this was to curb prostitution. While the operation was ostensibly to clamp down on prostitution, it was a result of the anxieties of post-independence Zimbabwean patriarchy who wanted to restrict the movement of women and condemn them to the domestic space in line with traditional African patriarchal thinking and its notions of decency. Makhalisa is therefore interrogating the premise of this line of thought which violates women's freedom, for as Ruth Weiss (1986:124) argues, the operation resulted in women locking themselves indoors for fear of being arrested. Makhalisa's short stories project black Zimbabwean women's situation in the light of what Paulina Palmer (1989:70) calls the problematic position of the female protagonist trapped in the grasp of patriarchal institutions and the attempts she makes to struggle free. Palmer's perception rests on the thesis that once structures of male domination are in place they become ubiquitous. The incident of women getting arrested in post-independence Zimbabwe under the pretext of suppressing prostitution is deployed by Makhalisa in her short story to highlight the underdog status that women occupy in the context of their own black African society. In this respect, Makhalisa is challenging the post-independence Zimbabwean society to revise its values. Supporting Makhalisa's vision in these short stories is Norma Kriger's (in Kaarsholm, 1991:139) hypothesis, which argues that Zimbabwean women's participation in the war against colonialism was a well-calculated opportunistic move which seized the liberation struggle to try to improve women's domestic lives. This opinion also has resonance in some of Nyamubaya's poetry (1994), who herself is a former fighter in Zimbabwe's liberation war. Those of Nyamubaya's poems which focus on women, locate their plight within their society's indigenous structures. This aspect of Nyamubaya's writing is discussed in

Chapter Four. The perceptions of both Makhalisa and Nyamubaya about the condition and status of black Zimbabwean women imply that black women's writing in Zimbabwe rose out of the need to invert structures of indigenous patriarchal domination. The interconnectedness of the two writers is crucial to this study, because it highlights the common underdog status occupied by women in post-independence Zimbabwe and how this position informs their writing.

In contrast to Makhalisa's and Nyamubaya's vision are black Zimbabwean women writers like Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera who situate black women's problems within both colonialism and the domineering African patriarchy. Their fiction attempts to trace points of intersection between these two aspects and by so doing they give voice to women's experiences under both forms of oppression. Yvonne Vera, in her works *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) (discussed more fully in Chapter Three of this study), *Without a Name* (1994) and *Under the Tongue* (1997), situates black women's problems within both their experiences of colonialism and their own society. Tsitsi Dangarembga, in her novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) (discussed in the next chapter of this study), also examines women's experiences within the complexities caused by interaction of African culture and Western influences. Some male writers, such as Chenjerai Hove in his novel *Bones* (1988), portray black women defying both traditional patriarchal laws and colonial laws which infringe on their independence. In the Zimbabwean context, the strength of this kind of vision is that it shows that while indigenous patriarchal structures subdued women, colonialism was a fact which also compromised their position. The various perspectives emanating from black Zimbabwean

women about their society reflect that, in as much as popular societal character might lay down basic conditions of existence, artistic creation is conditioned by the location of the writer in the time and space of that society, as Arnold Hauser argues (1982:94). Hauser (*ibid.*) rightly declares that, ‘The production of works of art depends as a socio-historical process on a number of diverse factors. It is determined by nature and culture, geography and race, time and place, biology and psychology, and economic and social class’.

The character of black Zimbabwean women writing in English manifests diverse shades of feminism, and that feminism is socially constructed. Black Zimbabwean women writers advocate change in social and political structures so that these structures reflect the right to independence for every citizen of the Zimbabwean society. Dangarembga’s text, for example, makes this the thrust of her narrative about four women:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert to itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began. (Dangarembga, 1988:204)

This advocacy for the revision of societal structures and interrogation of the status quo which is intimated by the narrator becomes clear in the discussion in Chapter Two of this study.

Although there are differences in the responses of black Zimbabwean women writers to the socio-political dynamics of their society, what is crucial, as Ogun-dipe-Leslie (in

Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1989:7) suggests, is this ability to react through writing, which manifests that African women have always wanted to speak out, decrying the injustices meted out on them by patriarchal prejudices and colonialism. In this respect, the role of literature, and the act of producing it for black women writers in Zimbabwe becomes one of self-expression, self-definition and self-discovery, by correcting these misrepresentations.

1.3 Summary of the thrust of this dissertation

As already mentioned in the Introduction, this study focuses on the vision of three black Zimbabwean women writers vis-à-vis the Zimbabwean society: Tsitsi Dangarembga, Yvonne Vera and Freedom Nyamubaya. Three different artistic genres have been chosen (Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* [1988], Vera's collection of short stories, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* [1992] and Nyamubaya's poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* [1994] to explore the ways in which Zimbabwean society is represented through various artistic modes. These three women writers have been selected partly because of the relative paucity in critical attention which looks at women's writing from a broader perspective than within the narrow framework of their gender. The selected writers also offer different perspectives on the Zimbabwean society at large and on issues pertaining women in particular, thereby revealing the plurality which underlies society. A socio-historical approach which is used in reading these texts immerses the selected writers and their works within the social, political and economic dynamics from which they emerge. For this purpose, short biographical backgrounds of each writer are given at the beginning of each chapter. In addition to a socio-historical approach, this study also

refers to other aspects of literary theory, particularly African feminist theories, given that all the writers explore issues pertaining to black African women.

Chapter Two

Tsitsi Dangarembga

Nervous Conditions

The discussion in the preceding chapter has revealed that black Shona women writers write from the margins of their Zimbabwean society. They write as a group struggling to disrupt patriarchal oppression and colonial stereotypes about black women. Much of black women's writing in Zimbabwe is therefore a discourse which gives voice to women in a society that has suffered from colonialism, on the one hand, and from the grip of the all-pervasive and domineering indigenous patriarchal structures, on the other. This relationship between women's writing and their status in society reveals that the very act of writing by women therefore makes them authors of their own history and frees them from being merely objects of male authoring. In line with the historical chronology this study follows, this chapter examines how Tsitsi Dangarembga, through her novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988), articulates the way in which the colonized (black people in general) and black women, in particular, negotiate the problems formed by the interface of colonialism and the values of the patriarchal controlled Shona society, and reveals her social realist vision of society (discussed in the Introduction to this study) in relation to these factors.

The title of the novel *Nervous Conditions* identifies as its source Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968). In his introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre asserts that, 'The status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among colonized people *with their consent*' (Fanon, 1968:17). It is an historical phenomenon that at some point in the colonial process, the colonized are attracted to or at least seek empowerment within the new order which colonialism has made available. This paradoxical relationship of the colonized to colonialism informs Fanon's (1968:41) thesis. Fanon suggests that when the native is confronted with the colonial order of things she/he finds herself/himself in a permanent state of tension. This tension accrues from the contradictory effects of attraction and repulsion that the colonial world has on its victims. The settler's world, as Fanon (1968:41) proceeds to explain, is a hostile one which spurns the native, but at the same time the native finds it enviable. If contradiction and ambiguity underpin the native's relationship with colonialism, the result is confusion, that is, the Sartrian 'nervous condition'.

Black African writing in English has foregrounded Fanon's argument by producing characters like Lucifer in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for The Rain* (1975), and Jean Marie Medza in Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1964). Both display various levels of tension emanating from their contact with the colonial world. And, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* continues this theme by interrogating the root causes of this nervousness. Like Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (discussed in Chapter One of this study) or her short story 'Winter in July', Dangarembga's text is an insider's response to

socio-political reality in Zimbabwe, but this time the point of view is that of post-independence second class citizen (to borrow a term from Buchi Emecheta).

Although *Nervous Conditions* explores aspects of the trauma that Fanon attributes to the colonized's experience of the colonial world, it is a post-colonial narrative, published in 1988, eight years after Zimbabwe's independence from Britain. As such, it was born out of a different socio-political milieu from some post-colonial texts which were written during the era of active colonial rule in Africa and can be easily accommodated in Fanon's thesis which is based on the colonized's experiences of colonialism in the 1950s. Dangarembga's text was published a year after the historic Unity Accord signed between two political parties ZANU PF and ZAPU to end a new civil war which had ravaged western Zimbabwe from early independence (Hill, 2003:84). Although this agreement determined the future of the whole nation, women, as Maurice Vambe (2003) rightly observes, were conspicuous by their absence from the middle of the male politicians who negotiated for the Accord (<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/zimbabwe/mtvambe6.html>). This absence of women from major political events of their country is suggestive of the new 'nervous conditions' which women experience due to their marginalization from the core of their country's socio-political decisions. It is against this political backdrop that Vambe (*ibid.*) perceives *Nervous Conditions* as a crucial political intervention aimed at revising the marginal roles which women have been assigned under colonialism and continue to perform in the new dispensation of independence.

Although the socio-political milieu highlighted above foregrounds the exclusion of women from political discourses in post-independence, the scope of the narrative, as is evidenced in the subsequent pages of this chapter, moves back to colonial hierarchies and the classical hierarchies of power which subjugate women in the name of culture. Because of the retrospective stance it takes in order to interrogate the past, Rosemary Gray (1995:28) calls the text post-modernist because it “‘doubles back’ in ethos to the turn of the [twentieth] century to appropriate and imitate a missionary past in which Britain is portrayed as the metropolitan ‘other’ which impinges on the African ‘self’”. But as Gray further notes, this conception is undermined by the structure of the novel, which is in the form of Bildungsroman, thus making it modernist. This eclectic nature of *Nervous Conditions* can be attributed to the post-independence milieu in which it was composed, where, according to Vambe (2003), there is no unisonant view in narrating the nation, but rather new and competing voices which emerge to problematize the post-independence society (<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/zimbabwe/gender/mtvambe3.html>).

This, in turn, reveals the complexity of the narrative in as far as it seeks to accommodate contending discourses, such as the impact of the missionary endeavour, acculturation and its impact on African society, oppression of women in Shona society, and the entry into adulthood of its principal character and narrator, Tambudzai. Consequently, Anthony Chennells (in Ngara, 1996:61) sums up *Nervous Conditions* as a text which employs women’s narratives as well as the dialectical processes put in motion by Europe’s initiatives and Africa’s responses, to explore various states of tension in Africans.

Rosemary Moyana's (in Jones, 1996:25) feminist reading of the novel analyzes it within the politics of gender where men and women are portrayed as antagonistic towards each other within the confines of their socio-political spaces. As the argument which follows attempts to show, the novel thus goes beyond the level of Sartre's 'nervous conditions' of the native under colonialism, to one where it interrogates the structures of the colonized's indigenous culture.

The narrative, *Nervous Conditions*, shows the indigenous Shona patriarchal society as responsible for aggravating the permanent tension in women, comparing this to the way in which colonialism unleashes nervousness on its victims. This is made possible by the retrospective point of view. The Shona patriarchal society that Dangarembga explores perpetuates the oppression of women who, like the native under colonialism, are treated as underdogs in their own society. The novel therefore locates oppression in both colonialism and in the Shona patriarchal system, and it is in this context as already noted, that it clearly makes a divergence from Fanon's simpler view in that it points to multiple factors, rather than a single factor, as responsible for tensions within different social groups of Africans. Dangarembga's aim in moulding such a narrative is to inscript the politics of the private sphere – issues of women's emancipation and dilemmas – which are not treated in-depth in those narratives which are strictly modelled on Sartre's notion of 'nervous conditions'. Therefore, Dangarembga's stance towards these factors as they plague the colonial Rhodesian society she captures in her novel are looked at closely, and her work, like the other works under examination in the subsequent chapters of this

research, is approached from a socio-historical standpoint. For this reason, the writers' own backgrounds seem pertinent and Dangarembga's is outlined briefly below.

Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Eastern Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) in 1959. She is a child of the first generation of educated blacks in Zimbabwe. Both her parents had Master's degrees from England. At the age of two she moved with her parents to England where they were studying. Dangarembga calls English her first language because when she returned from England in 1965, she had forgotten most of the Shona she had learnt early in her life, and English continued to be used throughout her education. Upon her return to Rhodesia, she attended a mission school in Mutare and completed her secondary education at an American convent school in Zimbabwe. In 1977 she returned to England to study medicine at Cambridge, but after three years she left and came back to Zimbabwe where she successfully completed a degree in psychology at the University of Zimbabwe. Here, she became involved with the Drama Club where she wrote and staged three plays: *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), *The Lost of the Soil*, and *The Third One*. The last two were never published. Nonetheless, Dangarembga's most prominent publication to date is her famed and award-winning novel, *Nervous Conditions*, which is also the first full-length English novel by a black Zimbabwean woman. The novel is thus groundbreaking in the context of black Zimbabwean women's writing and so central to this present study.

When Tsitsi Dangarembga began her writing, 'The writers in Zimbabwe were ... basically men at the time,' as she concedes in an interview with Jane Wilkinson (1990:196). 'And

so I really didn't see that the situation would be remedied unless some woman sat down and wrote something, so that's what I did!' So, for Dangarembga, writing is at once reactive and proactive. It protests against socio-historical injustice, aligning itself with the postcolonial enterprise of writing back, while at the same time being a positive and forceful act of putting across the women's voices and their point of view in post-independence Zimbabwe. It is interesting to note, however, that when Dangarembga is writing she is communicating to an amorphous audience, and therefore her writing is not targeted at any particular group or section of society. 'I want to make sure any passerby could stop and listen to the story' (Wilkinson, 1990:192). So, while *Nervous Conditions* is partly woman's narrative, as mentioned earlier, it does not have women in particular as the target audience, but rather society at large.

Nervous Conditions is a layered narrative which engages various forms of tensions which plague the colonized blacks of the Rhodesia of the 1960s. The focus of the novel is broached early by the (so nearly autobiographical) protagonist and narrator Tambudzai Sigauke:

For though the event of my brother's passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion – Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (Dangarembga, 1988:1)

It is thus essentially a story about four women and their struggles in an independent, but not yet free African society. While characters like Nhamo and Babamukuru are in the story, their presence only aids in revealing the lives of these women. The 'entrapment', 'rebellion' and 'escape' do not only suggest the oppressive context in which women

exist, but also reveal the complexity of the novel and its multimodal approach. For example, Tambu's mother's entrapment, which she accepts is rooted in tribal tradition; Maiguru's, which she too accepts (however reluctantly), in spite of her education, after trying to escape by leaving Babamukuru, is integral to the patriarchal hegemony; Aunt Lucia and Tambu rebel against both tribal and patriarchal strictures and both 'escape'. Nyasha's rebellion allows only partial 'escape' because it results in a Western psychosomatic disease. These aspects set the multifaceted storyline in motion by providing the inevitable struggles to be encountered.

Set in the Rhodesia of the 1950s to early 1970s, the novel spans important historical periods in the history of Zimbabwe. Although it is not explicit in its handling of political detail, the novel makes reference to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI], and the beginning of the liberation war, both discussed in Chapter One of this study. These references are made in passing, and as Charles Sugnet (in Obioma Nnaemeka, 1997:34) notes, 'There appear ... to be only three direct references to these events in the novel, and they are brief and passing ones...'. The novel thus makes little reference to important events, such as the UDI and the politics of Black nationalism at the time, because the issues of women's emancipation are not only of utmost importance, but are perennial and also predate these events. Thus, Dangarembga's narrative strategy is to allow the central storyline (just mentioned) to take precedence over 'real' time.

The novel centres on its protagonist and narrator Tambudzai Sigauke who is determined to acquire a Western education as a way of emancipating herself from the traditional

restrictions which normally condemn women to domestic chores such as cooking for their husbands, washing and procreation. Tambu's own father, Jeremiah, aptly manifests his society's engrained belief as to what Shona women should do in life. When Tambu complains that she wants to go to school just like her brother Nhamo, the father says:

“Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it's nothing,” he reassured me, with his usual ability to jump whichever way was easiest. “Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.” (15)

Jeremiah's statement indicates his lack of understanding for Tambu's aspirations. From his point of view, her aspirations are an aberration from the 'normal' age-old role of women cooking and cleaning for their husbands. So, as a woman, Tambu's destiny is at home. Thus, Shona patriarchal society traditionally reduces the role its women have to play in life to one of basics. Jeremiah as a product of his society's chauvinism attempts to circumscribe the life of his daughter to what is acceptable and deemed decent for an ordinary African woman in society. The life that Jeremiah envisages for his daughter reveals the different spaces that exist for men and women in the Shona society and that the novel captures. The patriarchal society, like the world of colonialism, is characterized by divisions (women's sphere and men's sphere). These are used as social prohibitions to prevent women from entering the man's world of privilege. The perception that Tambu's father holds as to what women should do and what they should not indicates the gender role stereotyping which is at the core of traditional Shona patriarchal society.

This suggests that women should be content with domesticity, which always condemns them to the background where they are forever in the shadow of men. This tendency is

not only displayed by poorly educated rural men like Jeremiah, but Dangarembga points to its omnipresence in Shona society, and this is the target of her satire. So, even educated men like Babamukuru, who is Tambu's uncle and principal of the Mission School, is shown to be incapable of imagining a society beyond this practice which circumscribes what women may achieve in life. This is doubly ironic as both he and his wife Maiguru have Master's degrees. It is this oversimplified view of life and its limitations that Tambudzai seeks to escape.

Throughout the novel, Tambu's journey is a quest for education to escape from what Paulina Palmer (1989:14) calls 'the private sphere of sexual relations and family life which debars the entry of women into public life of professional work and political struggle'. Tambu believes that this escape can be attained through Western education and, somewhat paradoxically, her role model is Maiguru: 'I decided it was better to be like Maiguru who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood' (16). Of course, what Tambu has not realized at this point is that Maiguru too has been heavily crushed by the burden of womanhood in spite of her education. In the light of Western education as an emancipatory tool, Caroline Rooney (in Abdulrazak Gurnah, 1995:134) points out that, ironically, Tambu is in pursuit of 'nervous conditions' in as far as Western education brings contradictions and inner conflicts into play. This dilemma of the colonized black person is evidenced if one looks at characters like Babamukuru and Nyasha who are in danger of being torn asunder by the interface of Shona cultural values and Western education. It is on this note that Anthony Chennells (in Emmanuel Ngara, 1996:65) pertinently argues that the novel also raises the question as to whether there is

greater possibility of independence in the space colonialism has opened than within the classic hierarchies whose power colonialism has denied.

Tambu does get herself into school through her market gardening enterprise, but not without the patriarchal and chauvinistic social forces attempting to deter her. Ironically, Tambu's mother, a woman who is a defeated victim of what Tambu seeks to escape, also discourages her daughter's endeavours:

I think my mother admired my tenacity, and also felt sorry for me because of it. She began to prepare me for disappointment long before I would have been forced to face up to it. To prepare me she began to discourage me. "And do you think you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can of it. There is nothing else to be done." I wanted support, I wanted encouragement; warnings if necessary, but constructive ones...Ceasing to pay attention to her, I sought solidarity with Nhamo instead, but he could not help because he was going to school. (20)

Tambu's situation does not only depict what it means to be a woman in a Shona society, but also reveals the disadvantage associated with being a girl child. This is made obvious through the way the girl child is socialized at an early age to a life of submissiveness to male dominance, to a life as object instead of agent. For example, in Tambu's case, this is apparent when only Nhamo is sent to school because of lack of funds. The satire targets the tradition that within the mores of Shona society it is believed to be only 'natural' for Nhamo to be sent to school, because as a potential patriarch, who should become another Babamukuru, it is presumed that the future of the family rests on him. So the reaction of Tambu's mother towards her daughter's project to get herself into school illustrates the engrained stereotypical view that there are some things which are not meant for women:

‘Let her see for herself that some things cannot be done’ (17). The noun ‘things’ implies breaking out of the unnamable domestic yoke. In this respect and in the context of women’s liberation, the role played by Tambu’s mother typifies the negative or compliant action of traditional motherhood. Feminists view this role as a tool of the patriarchy in that it plays into the socializing of children into rigid gender roles, thus perpetuating the positions of male dominance and female subordination (Palmer, 1989:96). However, although the mother does encourage her daughter to capitulate to her burden, as Palmer suggests, this is not out of malice; she herself has been socialized into a subservient role in the same way that boys like Nhamo were also subjected to psychological and cultural pressures which resulted in their playing their patriarchal roles at a tender age.

Society’s uneasiness with women transcending what it has prescribed for them is displayed by Nhamo’s sabotage of his sister’s entrepreneurial endeavours when he steals mealies from Tambu’s field. Her father, too, tries to thwart her efforts. Jeremiah’s vain attempt to confiscate the money Tambu receives for her efforts is informed by his stereotypical perception that education of women is not important and, as such, his actions are a bid to retain control over his daughter who has proved that she does not fit within the stereotypical image of cooking and growing vegetables. However, Dangarembga portrays Tambu as a character who transforms this traditional role of subjugating women for her own benefit, because traditionally in Shona society crops are normally grown for subsistence and not for the market. This in turn reveals Tambu’s straddling of two societies – her own Shona society and the Western world of the cash

economy. Tambu's success is also a humiliation to her father in that it emasculates him by exposing him as a lazy patriarch who cannot fend for his own family by engaging in hard work. Jeremiah's children are out of school because the provider for the extended family, Babamukuru, is in England where he is studying.

A further example of Dangarembga's problemization of social norms can be seen in the role of Mr Matimba. While some members of the patriarchy are a disruptive force to Tambu's goals, the success of her project is made possible by another member of the patriarchy – Mr Matimba. It is he who takes Tambu to Umtali where she gets the money, and again, he is the one who resists Jeremiah's efforts to confiscate Tambu's money. Mr Matimba is used here as a contrasting image or foil to other patriarchs to deliberately undermine the monolithic view of Shona men as oppressive and insensitive to women's problems, thereby highlighting the pluralistic thinking within the patriarchy itself. By presenting Mr Matimba as a positive male alternative to Jeremiah, Takesure, Nhamo and Babamukuru, Dangarembga suggests that African patriarchal attitudes cannot be excused because of their sense of emasculation under colonialism. Instead, Mr Matimba's actions suggest that men themselves have a choice in their interaction with women of their society and that they should be held personally accountable for the oppression to which they subject these women. Dangarembga's construction of Mr Matimba reveals her as a womanist who supports the view that men should help women if they are to succeed, instead of oppressing them and sabotaging their efforts.

Within the context of the patriarchal codes of Tambu's society, it is therefore only after the death of her brother Nhamo and in the absence of any other male child in her family that she is perceived as qualified for education at Babamukuru's Mission school. Tambu's journey from the rural home to the mission is reminiscent of Lucifer's in Charles Mungoshi's novel *Waiting For the Rain*. Tambu sees the journey as an escape from her poverty in a similar way to that in which Lucifer sees his departure from his home and village when he leaves in the missionary's car. While both Tambu and Lucifer escape from the squalor that characterizes their homes, Lucifer's situation is not as difficult as that of Tambu, because he is a member of the patriarchy, which is shown to be partly responsible for the unbearable poverty women find themselves trapped in. This physical journey can also be contrasted with those undertaken by black heroines in African-American literature. The difference lies in the fact that journeys by black heroines in African-American literature are seldom physical; they usually take the form of a state of mind. This is true of Toni Morrison's Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* (1993), for example, whose mind is at rest at the end of the novel because she is psychologically satisfied that she has achieved her goal of getting blue eyes.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's maturity and enrichment are reached through both a physical journey and a psychological one. Both journeys entail learning and growth towards maturity for the character. Dangarembga shows how the physical journey leads to maturity and spiritual fulfilment. This is displayed in the fact that Tambu's journey to the Mission does not result in her acquiring academic knowledge alone but knowledge of the world as well. It is a journey through life where she is enriched in the process, by

learning to understand herself, those around her and the larger scope of the political, economic and social situation prevailing in a national context. In line with the conventional Bildungsroman, she attains a certain level of personal maturity in the process. Once at the Mission school, she becomes exposed to the social and political situation prevalent in the colony of Rhodesia. Tambu's new consciousness which comes with her new environment at the Mission school is revealed by her ability to question some things she could not have questioned before. For example, she rationally quizzes the logic of being bridesmaid at her parents' white wedding, a wedding which questions her legitimacy as daughter since it implies that her parents have been living in sin for all the years they have been married under customary law.

Tambu's development takes place in the context of the men and women around her. These women, her mother, Aunt Maiguru, Nyasha, and Aunt Lucia play an important role in Tambu's journey towards her goal of independence. In their different struggles, each offers Tambu a rich environment from which to draw in the maturation process. The different lives and experiences of each of the women around her are lessons for Tambu. Tambu's relationship with her cousin Nyasha, for example, is both fulfilling and enriching. The two have grown to an understanding that as girl children in the patriarchal controlled Sigauke family they share a common plight and as a result they realize their importance to each other. In this relationship, they nourish each other with emotional strength in the face of the domineering patriarchy, which in their extended family has Babamukuru as the leader. Their mutual dependence is evidenced when Tambu feels vulnerable in the absence of her cousin. 'Nyasha was something unique and necessary for

me. I did not like to spend too long without talking to her...’ (151). In as much as Nyasha forms an integral part in the building of Tambu’s personality, Tambu has a similar influence on Nyasha’s life. Nyasha degenerates into a nervous breakdown after Tambu has left the Mission school for the Sacred Heart Convent School. Nyasha stresses this point on the eve of Tambu’s departure to her new school:

It was better... when you were here because we could laugh about it, so it looked silly and funny and we could carry on that way. But now that you’re going, there won’t be anyone to laugh with. It won’t be funny any more. We’ll take the things much too seriously. (190)

The relationship between Tambu and Nyasha can be interpreted as some form of sisterhood built out of the need to cope with the spiritual and psychological stress that women as underdogs in a patriarchal society are subjected to. When Tambu gets punished for refusing to yield to Babamukuru’s demand that she witness her parents’ wedding, Nyasha helps her with the laundry. In the same way, after Nyasha has quarrelled with Babamukuru, Tambu shares the same bed with her as a sign of solidarity. Elleke Boehmer perceives their relationship as a lesbian one, but this is far-fetched because in Shona society it is not unusual for people of the same sex to share a bed. Rather, through the act of sharing a bed and talking about their problems, Tambu and Nyasha are able to cope with difficulties affecting them as young women. The point is worth making that Dangarembga displays a vision which projects African women as victims of patriarchal oppression irrespective of their differences. Implicit in the relationship between Tambu and Nyasha is the suggestion that the solution to the injustices women are subjected lies in them seeking unity and solidarity in sisterhood. As bell hooks (2000:153) argues, there can be no mass-based feminist movement to end sexist oppression without a united front – women must take the initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity. For bell hooks,

a prerequisite for women to change and transform society as a whole is eliminating the barriers that separate women. In *Nervous Conditions* these boundaries are obvious when Maiguru refuses to support other women during the *dare*.

Although Tambu's development and growth can be attributed to the women who are immediately around her when she struggles for her personal independence, it is important to acknowledge her grandmother's contribution in creating a base on which Tambu anchors her struggle. The oral lessons she gives to Tambu about the history of her family and her country prove to be an invaluable asset to Tambu later in life. The wisdom Tambu receives from her grandmother provides her with a wide spectrum from which to draw ideas which later enable her to confront her problems. It is this knowledge which makes her remain lucid compared to her cousin Nyasha, who is overwhelmed by what oppresses her. The grandmother's oral lessons to Tambu fill the gap in Tambu's mind left out by colonial education at school. This gap makes itself visible in Nyasha whose head is 'full of loose connections that are always sparking' (74). The grandmother is therefore an alternative source of education and her history lessons are a counter discourse to the one-sided colonial education, where the African's past is synonymous with ignorance, savagery and barbarism. By underscoring the influence that the grandmother's lessons continue to have on Tambu, Dangarembga undercuts Tambu's earlier perception which locates women's freedom in Western education alone. In fact, Tambu later realizes on her own that Maiguru, who has a considerable Western education, is not a symbol of women's freedom. In this regard, therefore, an African woman who seeks emancipation

in Western education alone is doomed because it has its own limitations which do not equip her to confront her immediate problems.

By creating five central female characters who occupy different experiential, educational, cultural and class positions Dangarembga enables herself to highlight the varied and interesting ideological perspectives through which black African women respond to oppressive forces that confront them, be they of colonial or traditional Shona culture in origin. By celebrating these differences in women and exploring them, the novel seeks to reverse the unnatural homogeneous classification of women which is a result of oppressive situations or their image as a 'historical artefact' as Charles Sugnet (in Obioma Nnaemeka, 1997:38) calls it. The Shona patriarchal society looks down upon women in terms of homogeneity in as far as their inferiority to men is concerned and also in terms of their basic role in society. Babamukuru with all his education refuses to see women in any other role other than as obedient wives. This is the image he has in mind for his daughter Nyasha and his niece Tambu whom he sent to school so that they might grow into decent marriageable women. The notion of a decent woman that Babamukuru subscribes to is informed by both his background as a Shona patriarch and the Victorian ideas he has assimilated from his missionary education.

Here, Dangarembga exposes the collusion between the Protestant Church's notion of women and the Shona patriarchal society's view of women. This factor affirms Ania Loomba's (1998:222) suggestion that despite their other differences, and despite their contests over native women, colonial and indigenous patriarchies often collaborated to

keep women ‘in their place’. Women therefore found themselves confronted with the double yoke of patriarchy and colonialism.

While the narrative is about Tambu’s coming of age, it also unmasks what is at the base of Shona society. It ridicules some of Shona society’s entrenched values pertaining gender and female sexuality. Shona society seems ill at ease with the sexuality of women and it is not prepared to recognize it. It is not accommodating to single women. Unmarried women are not regarded with dignity, and being unmarried for a woman in Shona society is tantamount to being condemned to either whoredom or the practice of witchcraft. Moreover, being unmarried, or so society suggests, engenders looseness and prostitution. Rudo Gaidzanwa (1985:65) explains why:

Their society views single women as unfulfilled and a hazard to established marriages.... This explains why most single women with little or no skills and education opt for marriage, even if those marriages are unsatisfactory....

By ‘their society’ Gaidzanwa indicates the pervasive influence of the Shona patriarchy, which controls society. Tambu’s aunt Lucia cannot be fully accepted by her immediate family and that of Babamukuru because she fails to satisfy the image of a decent married woman. She is called a prostitute and even branded a witch because she refuses to be under a man’s jurisdiction, a position that would ensure her acceptability to society. Here is how some people in Lucia’s society view her:

...they clapped their hands in horror and shook their heads. “But look at that Lucia! Ha! There is nothing of a woman there. She sleeps with anybody and everybody, but she hasn’t borne a single child yet. She’s bewitched. More likely she’s a witch herself.” Thus poor Lucia was indicted for both her barrenness and her witchery.... (126)

Similarly, Nyasha, like Lucia, is called a whore by her own father because she challenges male subjugation. Caroline Rooney (in Abdulrazak Gurnah, 1995:136) argues that such women are ‘prostitutes’ because they do not give up on their desires, which are not subject to the desires of men. If Lucia is a prostitute because she is not married, it is because marriage, which in this context is used to define decent women, is oppressive and therefore not attractive to women who value their independence. But, because of the stigma which goes along with being unmarried, women like Tambu’s mother who cannot stand the derision and mockery from society end up giving themselves up to empty marriages. Consequently, once a woman, in the case of someone like Tambu’s mother, has been impregnated by a man she has to marry him. Tambu’s mother complains about the apparent vacuity of her marriage with Jeremiah, whom she refers to as an ‘old dog’ (153), a signifier of Jeremiah’s distasteful ways. In this novel, those women who stay unmarried are not only symbols of non-conformity, but they also hold a status of their own which engenders their independence. This is what Lucia represents so well in the novel. Women like Lucia are not obscured by the shadow of their husbands as is the case with Maiguru and Tambu’s mother. The Shona patriarchal society is not prepared to view women as entities but as appendages of men, something which is only possible when a woman is married. Dangarembga’s portrayal of Lucia is informed by the inflexibility of Shona society’s values and the restricted choices open to women in deciding the course of their lives. This affirms Rudo Gaidzanwa’s (1985:11-12) assertion that:

Women who have no husbands and children are usually those who have refused to marry, have been unsuccessful in maintaining marriages, widows, single or jilted women. Some of these women are depicted as beautiful and sexually attractive. Their beauty is used as an explanation for the failure of their marriages. Men are pardoned and largely condoned

from responsibility for explaining or consorting with them against social expectation because these women are bewitching and irresistible.

In *Nervous Conditions*, both Takesure and Jeremiah are not really blamed for consorting with Lucia because her image as an eccentric witch has been accepted. It seems that Babamukuru's inactivity at Takesure's condemnation of Lucia as a witch endorses this image. So Takesure and Jeremiah portray themselves as hapless victims who have fallen prey to the whims and wiles of the evil Lucia, hence Jeremiah's suggestion of a traditional cleansing ceremony. Babamukuru's subscription to the idea of a cleansing ceremony, albeit a Christian one, underscores the perception that Lucia is an evil woman; and so to make the family of his brother immune to her, there has to be a white wedding. The wedding can thus be interpreted as a protective mechanism against the wiles of Lucia. Nonetheless, Babamukuru's insistence on the ceremony exposes the paradox of a black patriarch himself caught in the double bind of a colonized mind.

While Lucia is an unfortunate woman who is made an outcast by society because she challenges what is socially 'acceptable', there are those women who conform to societal norms, albeit at a high price. As already intimated in the discussion of the white wedding, Dangarembga uses marriage as a central trope to interrogate the subjugation of women in her society. Both Maiguru and Tambu's mother are portrayed as women who choose to endure married life, who are afraid of shaking the status quo. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:210) terms such women 'The Married Incorporated'. Maiguru and Tambu's mother are shown to be socially accepted because they satisfy the society's expectations of womanhood by becoming approximations of their husbands. The parallel situations of

Maiguru and Tambu's mother highlight how Shona society defines marriage. Dangarembga makes a statement that as long as society still views marriage as an institution where women should be adjuncts of men then the acquisition of Western education as a liberation tool is not useful. Despite her education, Maiguru finds herself trapped within the Shona patriarchal society's conservatism which relegates married women to the status of minors before their husbands. Marriage is thus shown to be a social system that exposes the paradox of a society which does not allow gender equality and which reflects the colonial relations within which the novel is set. The way Maiguru has to remain within marriage for the sake of a good image mirrors the way Babamukuru has to continue paying homage to the missionaries for his survival despite what he has to endure.

Marriage, as reflected in this novel which, in turn, reflects the social mores of some aspects of Shona culture, is cast as a test of endurance where there is no comfort or bliss. Maiguru is in a serious state of tension as a result of the imposing personality of her husband who, in turn, has been withered by the broader system of colonialism prevalent in Rhodesia, on the one hand, but elevated by his own culture, on the other. In front of her husband, Maiguru is self-effacing and behaves like a small child and is eager to please him. The fact that Maiguru does not own herself but is now slave to the institution of marriage is conveyed by the way she works for the whole extended family on family functions. In Shona culture Maiguru, as the most senior wife in the Sigauke family, has to be at the forefront on such events and generally she has to behave in a way that preserves cultural norms and values so that her juniors like Lucia and Tambu's mother can follow

in her footsteps. So if, on one hand, Babamukuru has to be domineering as head of the extended family Maiguru, on the other, has to be meek and submissive. This explains why Maiguru cannot be seen to lead a rebellion against the patriarchy and as Tambu the narrator aptly puts it, Maiguru is entrapped (1).

The climax of Maiguru's haplessness as a result of her marriage in the society that Dangarembga explores is reached at the discovery that Maiguru cannot use her own salary the way she wishes (101). The twisted logic behind this is that as Babamukuru paid the bride price for Maiguru, she belongs to him and his family and so too do her earnings. Bearing this in mind, one could argue that Maiguru is literally 'bought' by Babamukuru. In an extract bordering on burlesque, Babamukuru is exalted to the status of a demi-god and his generosity is seen as oceanic. It is also he who is given the limelight, as their homecoming from England reveals:

Babamukuru stepped inside, followed by a retinue of grandfathers, uncles and brothers. Various paternal aunts, who could join them by virtue of their patriarchal status and were not too shy to do so, mingled with the men. Behind them danced female relatives of the lower strata. Maiguru entered last and alone, except for her two children, smiling quietly and inconspicuously. (37)

Foregrounding the mores of her society, Maiguru is 'last and alone'; she has to be content with her unacknowledged and obscure status in the extended family. All that she can do is to wistfully long for what she could have achieved had she not been married:

When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while things I could have been, the things I could have done if-if-if things were-different-But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me no one thinks of the things I have given up. (101-102)

Maiguru makes this utterance while ‘staring wistfully through the verandah’s arches to the mountains and beyond’ (101). This is a sign that she suppresses her desire to rebel, because she is well aware that freedom is beyond her reach.

The juxtaposition of these two extracts points to the author’s use of near parody, on the one hand, and poignant irony, on the other. This poignancy is also reflected in the marriage of Tambu’s mother who, as already alluded to, is likewise a victim in the marital relationship. Her problem is not that of being married to an imposing husband who is a true incarnation of patriarchal values, but of having an emasculated, lazy and irresponsible patriarch for a husband. Like Maiguru, she has to ‘choose between self and security’ (101). Ironically, in both cases, security is not seen in terms of material benefits (Maiguru has her own job whereas Tambu’s mother is married to one who makes no provision for his family) but, as has already been mentioned, it is in terms of a woman’s marital status in society, whether she is educated or not. Both Maiguru and Tambu’s mother who choose to stick to their marriages for the sake of so-called security reinforce the attitudes of their oppressors, for their stance seems to imply that women’s totality lies in their relationship to men. Dangarembga underlines this social norm by not naming Jeremiah’s wife. Tambu’s mother is thus the archetypal traditional wife.

It should be mentioned, however, that although Dangarembga foregrounds the stifling and oppressive side of married life for women, she is not dismissing the institution of marriage. Rather, she implies that as an institution its codes have to be revised to allow dynamism which is an undeniable aspect of other societal structures. To further illustrate

that Dangarembga's narrative is not dismissive of marriage is the fact that Maiguru tries to leave Babamukuru, but she comes back (as already mentioned). Dangarembga realistically acknowledges that, in fighting for their place in society, women should not discard men. This notion aligns itself with African feminism as defined by Ogun-dipe-Leslie (1994:228):

African feminism... must include issues around the woman's body, her person, her immediate family, her society, her nation, her continent and their locations within the international economic order because those realities in the international economic order determine African politics and their impact on the women.

In this regard, writing within the social realist mode, Dangarembga shows that marriage is not the sole cause of women's problems, because in a patriarchal society the influence of patriarchy pervades all institutions. And yet, the paradox is that Dangarembga suggests that the true wisdom of traditional society lies with the grandmother, that is, within the matriarchy itself (18).

As already noted, the narrative is not only about the plight of women under the domineering Shona patriarchal society, but also about the dilemma of the black people under colonial rule. While the business of 'womanhood' has its own peculiar problems, being a black person under colonialism is equally cumbersome. Babamukuru too suffers from a serious nervous condition. He is the conduit through which foreign values flow to the rest of the Sigauke family. To make his dilemma worse, as the head of the family he has to fulfil the traditional role a person of his stature is expected to play at the same time, without undermining the values of his missionary masters. He has to remain a 'good munt' (200); and in colonial discourse and relations this means unquestioning

subservience to the colonial system. ‘Goodness’ under colonialism is achieved at a price of self-immolation, for Babamukuru is a self-conscious individual who is apparently uneasy with his anglicized anorexic daughter, Nyasha, who does not fit in with either the image of a Christian woman or that of a decent African woman. When looking at his daughter, he seems to have the society in mind, and is worried about what people would say. He fails to accept that his daughter is ill and this exposes Babamukuru’s shallowness which is revealed by his failure to realize that Nyasha was acculturated in England. That is, although she is black, her values are those of a white person. Babamukuru is thus convinced when the white psychiatrist says Nyasha is ‘making a scene’:

But the psychiatrist said that Nyasha could not be ill, that Africans did not suffer in the way we had described. She was making a scene. We should take her home and be firm with her. This was not a sensible thing to say in front of my uncle, who found the words vastly reassuring and considered going back to Umtali at once, turning a deaf ear to Nyasha when she begged to see an African psychiatrist. (201)

From the fact that both Babamukuru and the psychiatrist, with all their education, accept that psychiatric disorders are only ailments of Whites, one can deduce an acceptance of the colonialist racist thinking which perceives difference in the physiology of Blacks and Whites. This of course is used to rationalize segregationist policies and racial prejudices; and here Dangarembga’s thrust is clearly satiric. Babamukuru’s education is thus revealed for its inadequacy; it is an education that cannot question, but embraces the status quo, warped as it is. Babamukuru is puritanical in the way he conducts himself and the way he conducts his official duties. His situation mirrors the artificial roles which Africans have to play under colonialism. He is an incarnation of colonialism’s “puppet king” and reflects its disastrous effects on black Africans. On the other hand, he is a

traditional African patriarch as defined by the role he has to play in the family. His personality thus becomes an axis on which all the other characters in the novel rotate, epitomizing Sartre's (in Fanon, 1968:17) contention that the existence of the native under colonialism is characterized by permanent psychological tension.

The novel therefore not only examines the plight of four women but also the dilemma of the Shona patriarchy under colonialism. The Shona patriarchy is presented as pathetic, more hapless even than the women it oppresses, albeit without realizing its dilemma. That is to be expected, for those like Nhamo and Babamukuru, 'nervous conditions' were literally imposed on them with their consent; and as Fanon (1968:36) rightly observes, such characters see nothing wrong with their situation, and consequently they will only think of redeeming themselves and those around them once they are able to realize their plight. Babamukuru, Jeremiah and Takesure are shown as incapable of realizing their victim status. They too are trapped within the racial politics of Rhodesia which kills the soul and spirit of the individual.

Dangarembga underlines the complexity of her society under a double yoke. Jeremiah, for instance, is a negation of traditional patriarchy; his irresponsibility and endless grovelling before Babamukuru emasculates him. He is thus an appendage of his brother for he cannot think and make decisions on his own, as is expected of him as a father. For example, he accepts the white wedding (already discussed) because it has been proposed by Babamukuru who in the Sigauke family represents both the colonizers' and Shona patriarchal values. Here, one finds the recurrent theme in Zimbabwean literature and

African literature as well where legitimacy or acceptability is measured through the colonial lens because the colonizer's code of ethics has overtaken the African custom.

Rino Zhuwarara aptly (2001:248) describes Jeremiah as follows:

... Jeremiah, like Babamukuru, is a character who has been shaped by the colonial circumstances of his upbringing as well as by his patriarchal society. He is a lazy, never do well African who is not only unfaithful to his wife but also irresponsible in so far as carrying out his domestic duties is concerned.

Somewhat paradoxically and unexpectedly, the plight of the African under colonialism is best summed up by Nyasha, herself one of its most obvious victims:

Do you see what they've done? They've taken us away. Lucia. Takesure. All of us. They have deprived you of you, him of him, ourselves of each other. We're grovelling. Lucia for a job, Jeremiah for money. Daddy grovels to them. We grovel to him. (200)

Nyasha delineates the view that colonialism is a hierarchy of power underpinned by its victims who are grateful for benefits which come from those who are at the top. The missionaries control Babamukuru because of such benefits, and Babamukuru in turn maintains his grip on 'rebels' such as Lucia who look up to him for survival in the colonial economy, as well as dependants, such as Jeremiah and Takesure. Colonialism is therefore presented as a hierarchy of oppression and it is no wonder that Tambu's mother supposes that Babamukuru must be paying a great price for all the benefits that he is receiving from the colonial system. In this regard, Charles Sugnet's (in Obioma Nnaemeka, 1997:37) argument that women may paradoxically be better off in terms of the price they pay because they are less assimilated to the hegemonic system is only partially correct. In the novel, however, Babamukuru is portrayed as the direct conduit

through which colonial values flow to the extended family in the form of benefits for which the less privileged like Jeremiah and Lucia have to grovel.

The novel penetrates the very foundations of the Shona patriarchal society. While the various levels of oppression are explored, the novel does not excuse the African from scrutiny for some of the social injustices. Nor does it downplay the role women play in conniving with the patriarchy to oppress fellow women.

In this respect, the narrative brings into perspective the intricacies of patriarchal rule. At face value patriarchal rule appears to be a system in which women do not participate, but underneath, it has women (and men) who act as its props, ironically oppressing their own kind. This nature of the Shona patriarchal system is explained by the fact that in Shona culture every woman is considered a “man” in her patrilineal home and therefore is viewed as superior to all the women who are married into her patrilineal home. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga illustrates this aspect of Shona patriarchal rule through Tete Gladys whose position is different from that of all the women in the family. Because of her status as a female patriarch, Tete Gladys can attend family meetings which do not include other women like Maiguru and Tambu’s mother who have been married into the Sigauke family. However, the obvious irony is that Tete Gladys is subjected to the same treatment as Maiguru and Tambu’s mother when she is at her husband’s home. It is pertinent to note at this point that the very composition of the patriarchal system in Shona culture makes it difficult for women to be united in one common spirit against it. Nonetheless, Dangarembga’s inclusion of women as

participants in the patriarchal system playing gender roles of men further testifies to the contradictions of a society that still insists on using gender to marginalize its women.

Like colonialism, the patriarchal system alienates the people it rules. In the case of the Sigauke family, Lucia is not summoned to the court where the central figure in the case is herself. By virtue of his patriarchal status, Takesure is given the honour of being part of the proceedings hence his affixing of the blame on Lucia because she is not there to defend herself. In this context, women find themselves doubly alienated; they are victims of both colonialism and injustices spawning from their own patriarchal society which in this novel is headed by Babamukuru who demands to be obeyed always. Challenging him is tantamount to opposing God as the following extract illustrates:

Babamukuru could not leave me alone. “Tambudzai,” he returned to warn me, “I am telling you! If you do not go to the wedding, you are saying you no longer want to live here. I am the head of this house. Anyone who defies my authority is an evil thing in this house, bent on destroying what I have made.” (167)

Babamukuru’s invocation of evil to describe those who oppose his authority smacks of the early missionaries’ demonization and vilification of those Blacks who questioned their teachings. As a result of this intolerance, he is a blinkered individual as his determination to force a white wedding on his younger brother Jeremiah and his wife despite its ludicrousness manifests. Ania Loomba (1998:220) explains this domineering character of men under colonialism in relation to women’s writing:

If strengthening of patriarchy within the family became one way for colonised men to assert their otherwise eroded power, women’s writings often testify to the confusion and pain that accompanied these enormous changes.

Nyasha, Babamukuru's daughter, experiences a nervous breakdown because he demands unquestioning obedience without trying to understand what is really bothering her. This character is another trope employed by the writer to interrogate the intricacies of traditional Shona culture under colonialism.

In the character of Babamukuru, Dangarembga shows the divided consciousness that is evident in most educated African characters in Zimbabwean fiction in English. While they have roles to play in their ancestral homes, they simultaneously have to continue paying homage to the missionaries who are responsible for their education and prosperity in a western sense. The two worlds, the traditional and the western world (which is incarnated in the missionaries, both at Babamukuru's Mission school and at Sacred Heart Catholic Convent which Tambu later attends) entrap Babamukuru. He is a pawn who has been shaped into a self-conscious individual by the forces around him, and these are the forces which are 'writ large' in the novel. In Babamukuru's character Dangarembga illustrates the interaction between colonialism and the patriarchal system in destroying the "soul" of an individual. Rino Zhuwarara (2001:247) sums up Babamukuru's dilemma as follows:

He remains a person who cannot think through the contradictions that characterise his life. For instance, he is a Christian who, in the name of his dead mother, proposes a Christian wedding for Jeremiah and his wife as a way of appeasing her allegedly troubled spirit – thus mixing the so-called pagan and the Christian without noticing the contradiction. Equally he clings to his position as head of the extended African family as well as that of headmaster at the mission school and remains blind to the authoritarian role that he is playing in his own family.

However, as the preceding argument has shown, his situation is more complex than this extract suggests.

Related to Babamukuru's dilemma, are Nyasha and Nhamo who have also been affected negatively by Western education and values in their own ways. Thus acculturation becomes another trope through which Dangarembga explores conflicts within her society. Nyasha's situation, for example, is compounded by her underdog status as a young woman who is at the bottom of her society's hierarchy on the one hand, and also a victim of the western forces which her society is grappling with on the other. She functions as an extreme example of women's plight for emancipation for the culmination is anorexia nervosa which degenerates into a nervous breakdown. Nyasha seems to be aware of the cause of her plight for she shreds to pieces history textbooks as symbols of colonialism being forced upon colonial victims. While Nyasha's shredding of the books is a violent rejection of colonial history and lies, unlike Tambu, the history she rejects leaves her with nothing, because she did not receive Grandmother's oral history lessons which are a counter discourse to colonial education.

By contrast, Nhamo's situation is different; he willingly imbibes everything western and (reminiscent of Dangarembga's own dilemma) he claims that he can no longer speak his mother tongue. He has thus lost not only the values of his own people, who disregard him because he can no longer communicate with them, but also his "native" identity. The stranger that Nhamo has become after going to the mission is foregrounded as follows:

The more time Nhamo spent at Babamukuru's, the more aphasic he became.... My mother was alarmed. She knew that the mission was a

Christian place. Nevertheless she maintained that the people there were ordinary people. She thought that someone on the mission was bewitching her son.... (53)

‘Bewitching’ is perhaps the apt metaphor to sum up the brainwashing effects of colonial education on its recipients. Nhamo, like Charles Mungoshi’s character Lucifer in the novel *Waiting For The Rain* (1975), has decided to detach himself from his own people and their values because he perceives them as backward. After being to the mission school Nhamo claims he is no longer Jeremiah’s son (48). Franz Fanon (1968:36) explains how colonial education creates such personalities: ‘The colonialist ... hammered into the native’s mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought’. Typically Nhamo’s assumed aphasia and dissociation with his family is an attempt to destroy any link with his values, for a language carries values. However, this is a futile and frustrating exercise because the colonial masters will never accept him as one of their own. In the short story ‘Black Skin What Masks’ in Marechera’s *The House of Hunger* (1978), for example, the narrator’s friend ends up in a lunatic asylum after slashing his wrists because the Whites never considered him as one of their own despite his efforts. Nhamo’s situation is therefore another case study in African literature which demonstrates Sartre’s assertion that the colonized is an accomplice in the imposition of the state of nervousness on his personality by the colonizer. It is in this situation, where the colonized reinforces the colonizer’s attitudes, that the colonized is condemned to a psychological disorder.

While this catalogue of disastrous effects that Western education has on Africans is not new to African literature, here it leads to a very important factor that the novel explores. Western education alone is not adequate as a tool for the emancipation of women in particular and Blacks in general. Maiguru's character effectively demonstrates how the possession of a Western education alone can easily be withered by the oppressive tendencies of patriarchal society. At the same time, being uneducated is a serious handicap, because one cannot counteract the forces that plague society. For example, besides being militant and practical, Lucia's critical thinking still remains a painfully slow process for her. She is still narrow and shallow in her outlook and so remains ineffective in shaking the foundations of the patriarchal society and challenging the more sophisticated colonialism which exists on a national scale. The answer therefore seems to lie in Tambu who is presented as having acquired the positive aspects of both worlds. She has a strong personality (which is lacking in Maiguru despite her education). Tambu survives because she is anchored in her culture (what Nyasha lacks); and she is educated (what Lucia strives for). Also, unlike her brother Nhamo, she makes sure she does not forget where she comes from. She does this literally throughout the novel by straddling both homestead and Mission. She has systematically chosen things from both worlds, so it is Tambu's hybridity which enables her to succeed where others, such as Nyasha and Maiguru have failed.

Dangarembga's is a powerful message: if women are to realize their aspirations they require as a matter of necessity to possess the qualities revealed in Tambu who understands the nature of her needs and goals at the same time as displaying an

awareness of the nature of her society. It can be argued that by creating different women characters in her novel, Dangarembga is exploring different discourses of feminism, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each. In the end, the result is Tambu whose character is a hybrid of the positive aspects of all the other women in the novel. Tambu's personality does not only show the way in which women can and should wage their struggles, but unlike the majority of heroes in Zimbabwean literature, she is neither confused nor lost in the mire of what oppresses her. Both the patriarchal system and colonialism fail to break Tambu. Because of her ability to add the positive aspects of colonialism to the positive aspects of the Shona culture, Rino Zhuwarara (2001:257-258) describes Tambu thus:

One can argue that the Tambudzai who emerges at the end of the narrative is a complex individual who has emerged from being a disadvantaged and easily overlooked girl-child from a patriarchal family to one who becomes emotionally rich and intellectually sophisticated; a person who is not only able to look back on her African past and understand it with all its contradictions and limitations as an insider of the African family but one who does not allow the limitations of that past to disable her as she confronts the larger world created by the settlers. Rather, she is able to build on the strengths of that past while at the same time seeking a meaningful accommodation with colonial modernity.

Because of her resilient personality, Tambu thus possesses what both the African woman might need in combating oppression and also what the African man like Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions*, Lucifer in *Waiting For The Rain* and Lakunle in Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* need so that they do not lose direction in the face of cultural imperialism.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be discerned that Dangarembga's view of society is complex; rooted in its social realist mode, it is more balanced than that of

contemporaneous black male writers who tend to see society and societal issues as clear-cut binaries.

Chapter Three

Yvonne Vera

Why Don't You Carve Other Animals

In Chapter Two, Dangarembga's social realist novel *Nervous Conditions* has been analyzed revealing her intimate view as she delineates the very real socio-political and historical dilemmas confronting her society. She portrays these dilemmas largely within the private spheres, and as such, she deliberately stops her narrative in 1972 when the much-publicized Zimbabwean war of independence was still confined to a few areas in the country. The novel at once contradicts Fanon's (1968:27) concept of violence as a tool to humanize the colonized in that it looks at other possibilities, such as education, as a means through which colonial victims can redeem themselves of their plight. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988:155), although the narrator does mention the war of liberation which began in the late 1960s in passing (when she says 'I was not concerned that freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists'), there is little other evidence of the war as the informing political context to the novel. This deliberate subversion of violence is, as previously stated, due to the fact that *Nervous Conditions* is a woman's narrative which prioritizes issues of women's emancipation and personal dilemmas rather than the politics of the time.

If for Dangarembga the private sphere and personal dilemmas are of central importance, Yvonne Vera in her collection of short stories *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (1992) – the text under study in this chapter – situates the dilemmas of her society in both private and public spheres. Her authorial mode is that of the fabulist, as noted in the Introduction to this study. This is evident in the majority of her short stories which, although based on the Zimbabwean war of independence in the 1970s – the second *Chimurenga* – a war largely waged by Blacks in the then Rhodesia against colonial oppression, re-imagine this war from the point of view of the creative artist rather than active participant reflecting back on her experience, as is the case with Freedom Nyamubaya (discussed in the next chapter). In the short stories, the war is not only an attempt by the colonized to redefine themselves in their own terms, but it is dialectically linked to how those caught in it relate to each other. In this way, the short stories are preoccupied with that stage of colonialism in Zimbabwe's history which follows immediately after that explored in *Nervous Conditions* and, as such, they have been selected for study in this dissertation at the expense of Vera's more justly celebrated novels because of this particular link. Through her short stories, as this chapter shows, Vera re-imagines both cultural and literary history.

In Chapter Four, as will become apparent, Nyamubaya situates the problems of her society within both the personal and national space. She revisits the second *Chimurenga* and rewrites it deliberately from a woman's perspective and her vision shifts between the liberation war experience and post war Zimbabwe, with an interrogation of post-

independence socio-political situation. This overview is designed to highlight the major distinctive thrusts of the three selected women writers' works.

Born in 1964, in what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the late Yvonne Vera is arguably one of the most prolific black Zimbabwean women writers writing in English. Although she was born in Bulawayo, a city dominated by Ndebele people, Vera comes from the Shona ethnic group. She was educated at secondary schools in Bulawayo after which she trained as a teacher of English at Hillside College before enrolling at York University, Toronto, Canada, to study creative writing. There too she gained her Honours, Master's and a doctoral degrees in English literature. After finishing her doctorate in 1995, she worked as a writer in residence at Trent University in Canada. Vera's first publication is her collection of short stories *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* in 1992. This was followed by the five novels: *Nehanda* (1993), *Without a Name* (1994), *Under the Tongue* (1997), *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Vera also edited *Opening Spaces* (2000), a collection of short stories by African women writers. She won the Zimbabwe Publisher's Literary Award in 1995 and the Commonwealth Writers prize in 1997 for the best book in the Africa region for her novels *Without a Name* and *Under the Tongue*, respectively.

Much of the literary criticism directed towards Vera's corpus so far tends to focus more on her novels than short stories. This is probably because her novels are perceived as unique among the bulk of narratives that have emerged from Zimbabwe to date. Some critics have likened Vera to Dambudzo Marechera in as far as she destabilizes

conventional narrative forms and reorders language to capture subjects such as rape, incest and infanticide (taboo subjects in the Shona society she comes from) which her characters experience and grapple with within the socio-political contexts from which they emerge. Kizito Muchemwa (2002:3) argues that Vera participates in strategies of disjuncture and disorientation (acknowledged signs of modernism and post colonialism) in order to evolve narrative techniques which re-inscribe women's identities and recover their oppressed discourse – that is, she recovers and re-inscripts the female voice in the national narratives. In *Under the Tongue* and *Without a Name* for instance, as Meg Samuelson (2002:15) notes, silence is perceived as an authentic response to the trauma of national and colonial rape. This technique, as Lizzy Attree (2002:63) notes, provides a new way of seeing and understanding society.

However, what strikes historian Terence Ranger (2002:205) about Vera's novels more than their iconoclastic narrative structure is that they are narratives born out of history. For Ranger this means that they are not narratives of history. Ranger builds his opinion on the perception that Vera's characters have been victims of the 'real' history – so her stories feature grand narratives of history in order to undermine such a totalizing view. He argues that Vera's novels are about what people actually endured and, as such, they transcend reality by confronting it. The need for alternative ways of perceiving history is couched in Vera's (2001:1) statement: 'A woman writer must have an imagination that is plain stubborn, that can invent new gods and banish ineffectual ones'. In her novel *Nehanda*, for instance, Vera reworks the myth of Nehanda a female figure who has been appropriated by male nationalists and whose image has been transformed into a male

instrument of power. In *Nehanda*, she creates a woman protagonist who defies definition through gender dichotomies to counter nationalist discourses which cast Nehanda as merely a political figure. That way, she underlines the role of women in determining the course of Zimbabwean history and succeeds in making a place for them in the collective memory of Zimbabwe's history. So this new and nourishing history is only created after the revision of society's history.

While many critics focus on Vera's novels as sources of her subversion and revisionary vision (see Khombe Mangwanda [1999], Ranka Primorac [2002] and Violet Lunga [2002]), her first work to embody what was later to become Vera's trademark is her short stories collection *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* in as far as it is a challenging call for both transformation and diversity. The aim in this collection seems to be that of exploring new alternatives which can possibly reveal how the Zimbabwean society has erred in its memory of history (Vera, 2000:2).

Why Don't You Carve Other Animals consists of fifteen short stories of different lengths. Nonetheless, in this chapter it is only those stories that best foreground Vera's project of re-imagining her society that are analyzed. Generally, the characters in this anthology begin to interrogate the reality of their existence; for example, the female characters question and transgress both urban cultural and colonial spaces as a way of redefining themselves and reordering their society. Like Dangarembga, Vera renders her country's history from a woman's perspective, and the omniscient narrators in most of these stories are women. The majority of the short stories are written in lyrical prose and they project

Vera's social vision and her interpretation of her society's history as she attempts to capture the anxieties and tensions of a people caught in the contradictions of its history. While her short stories are born out of the grand narratives of history, the collection undermines the grand narratives because it is a series of micro-narratives which emphasize the plurality of history, thus making it post-modernist. However, the point has to be made that *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* is also an archetypal post colonial text, less sophisticated than Vera's novels and at times obsessed with anti-colonial rhetoric. The following extract from the short story 'The Bordered Road' makes the point:

Beside a drainage ditch some boys set throwing sticks into the running water. After watching in intense concentration, they leapt in unison, each claiming his stick had won the race. They threw in more pieces of wood which they claimed were ships and "discovered" various places. One of them shouted he had discovered the Victoria Falls as he saw his canoe plunge down over a large log that lay across the running water. The others felt bitter and claimed the textbook at school said that David Livingstone was the only man to have discovered the falls ... The boy felt angry and insisted on his discovery, saying there was nothing wrong with discovering the falls again.... (Vera, 1992:62)

The incident is witnessed by the narrator as she is on a protest march to town. The characters in the scene are young boys who play what appears to be an innocent game, when in fact they are satirizing colonial history for privileging Whites for having discovered major landmark features on the African continent. The young boy's insistence that there is nothing wrong in discovering Victoria Falls again is a way of rejecting such history. What is important here, is that the incident runs parallel to the agenda of those marching in protest against the working conditions under colonialism as if to remind them that their plight has its roots in the misrepresented history of their country which

privileges the colonizer. Thus, the incident is designed to conscientize those who are on an economic march of colonial misrepresentations of history which also have to be rejected. With such a consciousness the protestors can transform their march into a complete struggle against colonialism. It is by deliberately bringing in the distortions in colonial history, to a story which focuses on the strike of bus drivers that Vera's anti-colonial stance can be seen. Thus post-colonial texts reject colonial history and its misrepresentations because they conceive that history as the locus of exploitative colonial relations.

Perhaps a useful starting point in approaching the collection *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* is to examine the title story itself 'Why Don't You Carve Other Animals', and how it is related to the rest of the stories. Although among the shortest stories in the collection, 'Why Don't You Carve Other Animals' best encapsulates Vera's project of re-imagining her society which is also evident in most of the stories. Through the two artists (the painter and the carver – both aspects of the authorial personae of Vera's fellow women writers) and their works, the story delineates racial struggles, stereotypes and societal boundaries – central issues in the Rhodesian society of the 1970s. The story is narrated in the form of a fable, and it captures the cause and nature of the ongoing war which is overtly referred to in other short stories in this collection, such as 'Shelling Peanuts' and 'It is Hard To Live Alone'. In 'Why Don't You Carve Other Animals', the ongoing war is presented as both a racial one and materialistic one as subtly alluded to through the struggle between the carved figures of the giraffe and the elephant. The

fighting between the two animals, which can be perceived as allegoric of the real fighting in the country, is portrayed as follows:

The elephant has ruled the forest for a long time, he is older than the forest, but the giraffe extends his neck and struts above the trees, as though the forest belonged to him. He eats the topmost leaves, while the elephant spends the day rolling in the mud. Do you not find this interesting? The struggle between the elephant and the giraffe, to eat the topmost leaves in the forest?...The giraffe walks proudly, majestically, because of the beautiful tapestry that he carries on his back. That is what the struggle is all about. Otherwise they are equals, the elephant has his long tusk to reach the leaves and the giraffe has his long neck. (72-73)

Metaphorically, the struggle between the elephant and the giraffe, with their comparable strengths, enacts the struggle between Blacks and Whites to control the resources in Rhodesia as stories, such as ‘Crossing Boundaries’, overtly foreground. Significant in ‘Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals’ is Vera’s subversion of the conventional metaphor of the king of the jungle (the lion). This effectively suggests that neither Whites nor Blacks have any inherent superiority in the struggle for power, and thus undermines the usually inflated figure and status of the colonizer in fiction.

In this sense, the story deconstructs colonial constructed stereotypes which, as Victor De Waal (1990:19) notes, were used as rationalizations for racial discrimination in Rhodesia. Thus, Vera’s project of re-imagining her society’s history is evident not only here, but also in a considerable number of short stories in this volume. In ‘Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals’, this intention is manifested through the carver and the painter whose art attacks monolithic perceptions of society. The two artists are presented as products of a warped society, but through their art they interrogate the ‘reality’ around them. In other words, what Vera suggests is that the imaginations of the two artists have been forged in

a society which attempts to stunt and stifle imagination and creativity, but they, like Vera herself refuse to toe the conventional line. This is satirically conveyed by the awkward short neck of the giraffe, a symbol of stultification. In this respect, the much-debated topic of the function of the artist and his/her art in society is brought into perspective. The carver's frenzied carving of giraffes and elephants that are not lifelike and run counter to nature symbolizes an active creative imagination, his ability to look at other forms of reality – that is, to 'invent new gods' as Vera would put it. The two are re-imagining the reality in front of them which they do not like. The ploy of these two 'stubborn' artists producing art forms that reflect the actuality of their dysfunctional society is underlined through the carver's transformational act:

The carver borrows some paint and puts yellow and black spots on the giraffe with the short neck.... But when he has finished applying the dots, the paint runs down the sides of the animal, and it looks like a zebra. (73)

If this story is read as an allegory of the struggle between Blacks and Whites in Rhodesia, then the giraffe with a short neck is perhaps another way in which Vera employs fabulism. This way, she frees her story from the demands of objective presentation, so as to strip the colonizers of their self-constructed invincibility, thus exposing their vulnerability, for there is really nothing majestic about the carver's striped giraffe. The story thus blurs physical differences between the animals to disrupt colonial binaries of black and white as if to underline the notion that both the colonizer and the colonized are equally vulnerable creatures who are at the mercy of the war which they have started and in which they participate. This is a deliberate way through which Vera imaginatively undermines the codified ways of perceiving colonial relations. The blurring of the

physical differences between the giraffe and the elephant is also testimony that Vera does not maintain one particular stance throughout the collection of short stories.

The different perspectives that *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* offers of colonialism, war and racial relations in Rhodesia manifests the different visions that the other stories in this collection offer on these subjects. If one considers the various angles from which the stories narrate the Rhodesian society of the 1970s, *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* is aptly the title of the whole collection because it offers the possibility of looking at forms of reality other than those customarily presented by the male writers in Zimbabwe. This point is also made apparent by the fact that the stories in this collection were published in 1992, twelve years after Zimbabwe's independence; and so they offer a retrospective view of society as a way of debunking some of the stereotypes which have calcified within it and therefore continue to have a negative impact even after independence. Rather than simply indicting white Rhodesians, Vera subtly reduces their stature, effectively throwing the emphasis on a shared humanity and so pointing the way to healing – not through politics, but through a creative review of historico-political stereotyping of the colonialist.

In as much as some stories capture the historical fact that the struggle is between Blacks and Whites, others, such as 'Ancestral Links', show that the fighting is not premised on such simple divisions, but rather it is more complex and calls for new perceptions, highlighting the limitations of using race alone to explain the problems in Rhodesia. This idea also applies to gender boundaries which are likewise shown to be undermined by

Vera when women abrogate both colonial and cultural spaces and wage war alongside men as shown in ‘Shelling Peanuts’ or when they challenge men as in the short story ‘Getting a Permit’. The following extract from ‘Getting a Permit’ underlines this assertion:

“You just make children on your own? Did your husband leave you because you are a bad woman?” The other men in the room laugh.

“I kicked him out. He was a drunkard,” she says, looking the man straight in the eye, as though the comment relates somehow also to him. She seems to be saying, “Either you give me the pass or you refuse, but don’t take all day about it.”

The policeman stamps the pass and gives it to her. It is only a piece of paper. (69)

In exploring the colonial situation and relations that characterize it, Vera projects a vision which goes beyond racial boundaries. She looks at both the colonizer and the black subaltern. In the opening story ‘Crossing Boundaries’, for example, colonial relations are closely examined. The boundaries of the title imply the colonial boundaries which govern the conduct of the colonized and the colonizer in relation to one another. These boundaries are also physical, as suggested by satirically charged place names, such as the ‘Africans-Only hospital’ (71) in the title story. Such demarcations typify the dichotomies created by colonialism whereby there are two distinct spaces for the colonizer and the colonized. These boundaries denigrate and dehumanize both the colonized and the colonizer who try to live with the artificial identities which accompany these colonial constructed definitions.

In this anthology of short stories, colonialism is thus portrayed as a two-way system, the inconsistencies of which negatively affect both sides. In ‘Crossing Boundaries’, this paradoxical situation is reflected in the way in which James, the black servant, relates to his colonial masters, Charles Jones and his wife, Nora. The relationship is governed by racial stereotypes revealed principally in the attitudes that both the colonized and the colonizer have towards each other, and which both work to uphold. The artificiality of the resulting relations is presented in the following way:

James spoke as if opening a wound, cautiously and painfully. The moment had gathered, and if he let it pass, it could not be recovered easily. But there was again the prolonged compelling silence in which they were both suspended and lost. They were in an uncomfortable rhythm of their annoyance, and of their distressing circumstances. They were separated by an irresolvable territorial struggle which was articulated in the gaps and silences netted in half-formed gestures, in half-focused glances. They each heard the future thunder messages in the air around them, and the sky opened like a calabash, pouring cleansing water through the lattices of their fear. A whip cracked above, wrapping painfully around their exiled souls. And what had he spoken? What?

“There is something I would like to ask for ... madam.”

His face gave nothing away. (1)

Unlike Sartre, who in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of The Earth* focuses on the inner tension of the colonized alone, Vera is flexible in as far as she exposes how in the almost diametrically different spaces, the condition of the colonizer and the colonized mirror each other. Vera, like Lessing in *The Grass is Singing* (1958), subverts the image of a happy ‘madam’ to reveal how Nora is caught up in the tension of colonial race relations and that she is also a reflection of alienation and inner tension, which characterizes the existence of the colonized. However, although James and Nora are typecast, Vera shows the healing power of nature intervening to ease their unnatural

tensions (themselves reminiscent of, but different from those in *Nervous Conditions*) and differences which suppress normal relations, as it does in the case of umfundisi Kumalo and the white farmer, Jarvis, in Alan Paton's novel *Cry, The Beloved Country*, suggesting that their attitudes towards each other are social constructs, and so alterable.

Vera thus perceives colonialism as a system with far reaching ramifications and contradictions, the nature of which does not permit a monolithic view of it. She re-imagines power relations under colonialism and imaginatively revises the grand narratives of both fiction and history which perceive the experiences of Blacks under colonialism in terms of totality. As victims of the system they live in and manifestations of dehumanization, the colonized are also complicit in the cycle of violence. In the short story 'Ancestral Links', the contradictions of the colonial enterprise are revealed when Blacks who themselves are the primary targets of colonialism take part in perpetrating violence. The extent to which the minds of these Blacks have been affected in an unexpected way is portrayed as follows:

Another soldier climbed down from the top of the bus carrying a large chicken, shouted an insult to catch everyone's attention, then cut off the strings that were tied round the chicken's legs. It started running across the road into the bush but he cocked his gun and shot it. It ran around wildly then fell into the middle of the road. No one moved or responded. (82)

Here, Vera creatively disrupts the polarization of the ongoing war on black and white and the discourse of violence.

In the short story 'Getting a Permit', the way Africans have been conditioned by the system which they serve is evinced by the neo-colonial bureaucrat whose body language

is a reflection of the alienation and tension in his inner self: ‘It is my turn. I smile blankly at the officer. The man’s steely eyes feel as though they would bore a hole into mine but I maintain the gaze and tell my story’ (69). What is revealed here is some form of ‘nervous condition’ reminiscent of Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions*, whose self-conscious personality to some extent epitomizes the straitjacketing nature of the colonial system he serves.

Linked to this sense of alienation, which ensues from the conflicting forces of colonial existence, is the condition of the exile in which both the colonized and the colonizer find themselves. On the part of the black African, this exile is a result of the historic act in which black people were dispossessed of their lands and condemned to live on the fringes of white owned farms and semi-arid lands. To explain the exile of the Whites, Vera invokes the stereotype that the colonizers find the African bush threatening because they are not used to it. These concerns are also captured in ‘Crossing Boundaries’ and ‘The Shoemaker’.

In ‘Crossing Boundaries’, Nora finds the ‘African nights disquietingly silent with a thick darkness’ (10). ‘Darkness’ and ‘silence’ are terms which form part of the colonizers’ discourse on the continent they refer to as ‘untamed’ to signify the absence of Western civilization. Such stereotypes were used by Whites to rationalize colonialism. White Rhodesian writers, like Gordon Davis who in his novel *Hold My Hand I am Dying* (1968) has articulated the threat caused by the ‘untamed’, provide a ready echo to Nora’s fears. However, her nervousness could be part of her consciousness that the raging war waged

by the ‘untamed’, which in these short stories is metonymically represented by the physical colonial space occupied by the Blacks, is aimed at driving her off the African land she occupies. In the same story, James’s father, who is an incarnation of the humiliating status that colonialism accords the colonized, is just as restless as Nora, because he is struggling to come to terms with his condition as an exiled person in his own land. The plight of the old man is portrayed as follows:

His legs now infirm, the old man remembered the migration of his people from one part of the country to the other, a forced movement across the land which symbolized the loss of their link with the soil, a journey that was a revoking of their connectedness, their belonging. (4)

The material loss of the Africans is translated to a spiritual loss too, because for them, the land is not an economic commodity, but also a source of spiritual solace where the ancestors reside. In a way, therefore, land dispossession for black Africans was spiritually denigrating since it uprooted them from their source of cultural strength which for generations had linked them to their ancestors and had given them a distinct identity. What is important, however, is the vision that Vera projects, which shows how the experiences of two sides, customarily in binary opposition, are a reflection of each other.

The ironies of history make themselves apparent in Vera’s short stories. Knowledge of one’s history can provide one with an identity during times of denigration, but it can also, paradoxically, be a form of entrapment. The positive side of one’s awareness of one’s past is highlighted in the short story ‘The Shoemaker’. The shoemaker, who is now confined to town – a colonial construction – because of the war in his ancestral rural

home, maintains his link with his roots by reminiscing about the past before his village was destroyed by war.

The shoemaker had not inconvenienced himself with a curtain. When his privacy mattered, he put an old newspaper against the pane. And that was only when he went away for a few days, to visit his relatives in the country. To do that he lay on the small creaky bed in the dark, and travelled through his mind. He always arrived. He boasted to the women of his ability to travel in this way. It was easier than digging up graves, he said. His relatives had died in the war. (31-32)

Apart from keeping him in touch with his roots, the gory memories of his village being destroyed plague him endlessly and leave him listless. The white settlers, on the other hand, try vainly to keep in touch with their roots in Europe by reproducing whatever they can of Europe through art. In 'Crossing Boundaries', for instance, we are told that:

Mrs Jones made a little England out of Nora, led by her own sense of self-preservation. Through her daughter, she explored the frustrated desires of her exiled ambitions. She made sure her daughter learnt ballet, listened to classical music, and read poetry. Nora's first poem, which was about the Queen, was praised by her mother. (11)

In both cases, the black person and the white person are afflicted by a nostalgic wistfulness which is a result of their awareness of history and their position in it. What Vera implies is that the colonial present is an aberration and consequently there is no way that those who are caught in it can relate to their past in a spontaneous and natural manner. Ironically, however, it is this awareness of one's history which gives all who are caught within war and colonialism a shred of their identity. The ongoing war of liberation which seeks to revise the past is a result of this awareness of history.

While Vera's short stories reflect a strong sense of history, they also display a deliberately ambivalent stance towards that history; it can have mixed effects; and knowledge of it does not necessarily solve one's practical problems. In some instances, knowledge of history can become some form of neurosis which entraps individuals.

Charles in 'Crossing Boundaries' illustrates this feature in Vera's writing:

It was necessary to belong, not to feel like an intruder. Through the Great Trek his grandparents had traversed the land, bisecting its vast landscape. They had brought every kopje and every hill under their vision, heard its wild echo surround them with life, and they had named its birds and animals. They had found a language to cement their discovery, and their initiation, that was also their baptism. ... The ordeal had strengthened their people, their race, and taught them they could survive any situation in which their will was tested. (15-16)

Charles, driven by his own knowledge of his people's past, which he draws from the colonial bank of history which casts Whites in the colonies as brave men of the frontier, is obdurate in his refusal to escape from his farm to the city. Rather, it is this false sense of history premised on how they had 'tamed' the wilderness (as their naming of the flora and fauna supposes) and the myth of the all-conquering pioneer they gloried in, which gave white Rhodesians a false sense of security in the face of the threat posed by the liberation war. In the same way that Charles's awareness of history prevents him from a rational interpretation of what is going on around him, Grandpa in 'Ancestral Links' is also a victim of the same situation. Despite the raging war in the rural areas, Grandpa wants to run away from his exile in the city. "If anything happens to me I would like to go back. That is my solace" (49). The obvious irony is that there is no longer any solace that the rural areas can provide, because the countryside is now a source of danger as a result of the war. However, one cannot ignore the desperate note that tinges Grandpa's

utterance, which reflects that he and his people have been spiritually dislocated by their historical experiences. The dilemma that Vera captures here is that black Africans are continuously beckoned by their ancestral homes, but the everyday reality of Zimbabwe at war does not permit them to return. Vera's re-imagination of her country's history and past thus shows the extent to which that past can be both an asset and a liability.

In this respect, some of the short stories interrogate history under colonialism and the question of who has the authority to make history under such a dispensation. In 'Crossing Boundaries', for instance, Charles believes that: "There is no truth except the one we allow. The natives cannot shape our history, how we behave, or how we shall decide" (21). That the natives have been relegated to the status of objects of history is symbolized by how they are renamed as part of the conquered land for the convenience of the colonizer (14). What is evidenced here by Charles is the fact that colonialism is shown to silence all other discourses which seek alternatives – other forms of reality – than that 'truth' which it allows. In 'Crossing Boundaries', this is also replayed by Nora, whose homogenizing of Blacks as untrustworthy (14) testifies to the perceived rigid 'reality' under colonialism. Building on this view, Fanon (1968:39-40) is therefore apt when he notes that 'The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: "This land was created by us", he is the unceasing cause: "If we leave, all is lost and the country will go back to the Middle Ages."' Conspicuous here is the colonizer's omission to mention the sacrifice and labour of black Africans in the building of the country. This notion of history subverts the colonized's history, while superimposing the colonizer's experiences on the African past. In colonial discourse, this

past is synonymous with barbarism and savagery. If the colonizers privilege themselves as the sole source and makers of history in the colony, then it is necessary for them, as Fanon (1968:40) goes on to explain, to constantly refer to the history of their mother country, and not the history of the country, which they plunder. At the level of an individual, this attitude is displayed by Nora in ‘Crossing Boundaries’. Her paintings depict an English landscape and scenery. And, in a larger colonial context, the same attitude is evidenced in the short story ‘Getting a Permit’ through the portrait of the smiling Queen of England, hanging from the wall of the colonial administration office (65). This portrait could suggest the colonialists’ attempt to naturalize their position in the colony, their desire to give the impression that history in the colonized country began with their arrival, or the colonialists’ desire to maintain links with a European past. However, what is important to note in this story is how Vera invokes colonial symbols of power, the majority of which had long gone when the stories were published, to suggest the continued influence of the colonial past and its vestiges in post-independence Zimbabwe. As mentioned earlier, this places her text firmly in the post-colonial tradition which endorses anti-colonial rhetoric despite the official departure of the imperial power.

While the colonizer’s history eclipses the colonized’s in that it is written about and exhibited in public places in these stories, Vera shows that the colonized have a way of keeping their unsung history alive. In ‘Crossing Boundaries’, for example, the old man’s silent reminiscing about his people’s past runs parallel with both Nora and Charles’s notion of history and, as such, it represents the externalized discourse of the racial other. In this case, the old man’s silence, as in *Under the Tongue*, is not only a way of coming

to terms with the trauma of history's injustices, but in this short story it is also a narrative technique – a juxtaposition which undermines the official narratives of history. Furthermore, the pervasive war in this collection is testimony that the colonized do have a past; and the war authorizes them to author this history as its subjects, since their waging of it is an indication of their refusal to be swallowed by the already existing discourses of history. Vera deploys the liberation war as a fact of Zimbabwean history to challenge the colonial concept of polarity, which was characteristic of colonial rule, and foreground another reality which has long been denied by the colonizers. In their thesis on post-colonial literatures Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:33-34) underline the point that post-colonial writers subvert the hierarchical order that informs the notion of 'governor and governed, ruler and ruled' as a way of disrupting the colonizer's notion of history. Such binaries condemn the colonized to the periphery of the colonial discourses of history.

Vera equates the engulfing war with changing societal relations. This especially affects the status of women. Being part of the ongoing war effectively differentiates these women characters from those who feature in Dangarembga's narrative *Nervous Conditions*; and this calls for the inclusion of this historical event and how it interacts with other realities, such as colonialism and patriarchy in shaping the experiences of the women in these stories. Concerning women's contribution and involvement in the war and other political activities aimed at liberation, Vera here too refuses to fall within the mainstream of male authored Zimbabwean literature about war. Like exceptional novelists, such as Chenjerai Hove in *Bones* (1988) and Shimmer Chinodya in *Harvest of*

Thorns (1989), Vera breaks her own society's stereotypes, by acknowledging women's contribution towards the attainment of independence.

Until the emergence of serious black women writers, such as Nyamubaya, Vera and Dangarembga, the Zimbabwean literary scene was mainly dominated by men (as argued in Chapter One of this study) and so the paucity of literary works that acknowledge women's contribution at the battlefield can be understood in the light of Eldred Durosimi Jones's (1987:2) suggestion that male writers are either unable or unwilling to present woman in her totality, and therefore tend to resort to stereotypes.

In the short story 'Shelling Peanuts', Vera challenges the embedded stereotypes which suggest that women only contributed to nationalist struggles in Africa in a marginal way. In the bulk of writing by males, women are cast in the role of sexual objects for the soldiers at the battlefield, or as carriers of ammunition and other war supplies. Vera's stories reflect a comparable treatment of female roles to those seen earlier in Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972) where they are portrayed as soldiers involved in active combat. In 'Shelling Peanuts', perceptions which exclude women from active fighting are revised by the creative dramatization of what is going on at the battlefield. The scene features a game enacted by a group of children:

"We need to start again. We need more people to make the game exciting. Let us call the girls to join us, then we can have two teams."

"Girls don't know how to fight and they cry if you push them. I don't think we should call the girls into our team."

"Not all girls cry if you push them. Rebecca doesn't cry. Let's call her, then there will be four of us."

"My mother told me that some women have also gone to fight and that they hold big guns and fight beside the men. I have seen pictures of dead

women who have been killed by the soldiers in *The African Times*. My uncle shows them to us. This means we must call the girls to join us.” (37-38)

In their innocence, the playing children at once articulate and interrogate the jaundiced view that society has towards women and, at the same time, capture the way in which even children are seduced into accepting certain societal beliefs. In the above extract, femaleness is associated with weakness, and maleness with strength; hence the boys’ initial suggestion that girls cannot play war games. Rebecca’s participation is thus a symbolic act, which demonstrates that women have the ability to work outside culturally defined spaces. Vera’s underlying message is that some of the already existing cultural definitions of women are restrictive to their potential and so they should be revised. It is only after giving Rebecca a chance to participate in their game that the boys begin to interrogate their own gendered perceptions and those of their society. In the context of Zimbabwean writing, it is only when such perceptions are imaginatively revised that the writers’ discourses about war can recognize women’s active participation in Zimbabwe’s war of liberation. Tanya Lyons (1999:8) describes this stereotype of women as follows:

It is also notable that a discussion of women as fighters is mostly absent from the discourse about war by both male and female writers. Women’s stories have been told, but mainly within the context of women’s issues rather than of war. This is significant when we are seeking to represent the voices of women in the discourse about war. Such a gender view simplifies a complex situation, because women are present in the stories of war but they are mainly represented by men, as biologically determined and socially constructed wives, mothers, or sisters.

Although Lyons’s assertion stresses that maleness and femaleness are socially constructed gender roles and therefore a person has to fit within the expectations of his or her gender as defined by society, elsewhere in Africa – notably in Chinua Achebe’s *Girls*

at *War and Other Stories* (already mentioned) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1994), and Elechi Amadi's *Estrangement* (1986) – the role of women at war other than as mothers, sisters and wives has been extensively explored. By contrast to Lyons's point, Ogundipe-Leslie (in Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1987:9) argues that the association of femaleness with weakness is a fiction invented by men, assented to by women untrained in the rigours of logical thought or unconscious of the advantages to be gained by compliance to masculine fantasies. It can be further argued that since the association of weakness with femininity is socially constructed, a society which is controlled by patriarchy consequently refuses to acknowledge women who do not fit into this category. To accept women's ability to do more than that which is defined by society would upset the neatly arranged gender roles in society. Vera's project is thus creatively revisionary.

In the short story 'It is Hard to Live Alone', Vera again looks at women's contribution towards the ongoing war from a perspective that aligns itself with her West African counterparts. She raises the fundamental question of who sustains the fighting? This short story highlights the fact that women are the backbone of the struggle even though the means through which they contribute is often overlooked. From a woman's perspective, Vera shows that their status as the mothers of those who fight is very important. Here, Vera echoes Olive Schreiner's argument (in Titlestead & Maxwell-Mahon, 1988:68) concerning women's contribution towards war where she says:

Our relation to war is far more intimate, personal, and indissoluble.... Men have made boomerangs, bows, swords, or guns with which to destroy one another; we have made the men who destroyed and were destroyed! We

have in all ages produced at an enormous cost, the primal munition of war, without which no other would exist.

In ‘It is Hard to Live Alone’, women’s contribution towards the war as mothers of those who fight is brought out through MaDube:

Women are the backbone of this struggle. If people like you are barren because they are afraid what shall be the result of that? Let life flow through you, my child. We need sons to take the places of those whose bodies lie without proper burial. Our sons shall be the ones to continue with the struggle, for who knows how long it will be. It was never the case when our ancestors lived that the death of young men came before that of old incapacitated men. We must purify the blood flowing on the land with fresh milk springing from our breasts. We must fill the land with the innocence and joy of young ones. It is our task as women and mothers. (44-45)

The point should be made that Schreiner and Vera have different perceptions of motherhood as reflected in the two quotations above. Schreiner sardonically points to the irony that women bear children who become the ‘primal munition of war’, that is, the destroyers, and so are intimately involved in perpetrating the cyclic pattern of violence! Vera, by contrast, sees procreation as a social necessity for the continuation of the liberation struggle, but also ultimately to redeem the species through the ‘innocence and joy’ of young blood. However, both effectively affirm the role of women as mothers in order to underscore the endurance and sacrifices that go with motherhood during difficult times, such as the war, but Vera’s idealism counterpoints Schreiner’s fatalism.

By presenting motherhood in this light, Vera seeks to reverse the negative image which is usually associated with it. In Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, some aspects of motherhood are cast in a negative light, for instance, weakening the woman’s body:

Now, this kind of work was women's work, and of the thirteen women there, my mother and Lucia were incapacitated a little, but nevertheless to some extent, by pregnancy. (Dangarembga, 1988:133)

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (in Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1987:6) likewise argues that the image of mother leads to a perceived limitation of a woman's potential in society. While Vera acknowledges some of the shortcomings of motherhood in some of her short stories, she also underlines the pride that women sometimes take in that status, not because they have succumbed to patriarchal stereotypes, but because they understand what motherhood means and entails: 'the fresh milk springing from [their] breasts' is mankind's only hope of redemption. In short stories like 'It is Hard to Live Alone', motherhood is presented in the light of what Paulina Palmer (1989:96) calls a 'source of pleasure and ambiguous power'. This is the power which emanates from women's awareness, that once they are mothers, they cannot be deprived of that status and claim to the children they have given birth to. This is a source of comfort especially in societies in which women have no material possessions to speak of.

Vera's short stories thus cast women in various images and in different situations in society. These images range from mothers, wives, and fighters to victims trapped within the war which is rocking the whole society. The period of Zimbabwe's liberation war was a time of many anxieties for women. Some parted with children and husbands who went to join the war, and the result was an unbalanced society where women were left alone to attend to their extended families. The fears of women left alone are captured by Irene Staunton in her introduction to *Mothers of the Revolution* (1990:xi):

Not unnaturally, several common preoccupations and themes emerge from these stories, such as fear. Fear for the lives of their children who had gone to join the struggle; fear for the survival of their homes and their children who had remained behind; fear of “contacts” between the freedom fighters and the Rhodesian security forces; fear of the soldiers, fear of sell-outs. There is also again and again, a remarkable sense of persistence and acceptance: acceptance of war and the consequences of war, of situations over which they had no control....

Vera is conscious of this phenomenon as her foregrounding of the image of women as single mothers and subversion of the image of wives suggests. In stories ‘It Is Hard to Live Alone’ and ‘Whose Baby Is It?’ the narrators explore the socio-economic impact of the war on women who were left behind. In ‘It Is Hard to Live Alone’, MaMoyo highlights the plight of single mothers as follows: “In fact if I don’t manage to sell anything today my son will not be able to attend school tomorrow. His fees are due” (42). In the short story ‘Whose Baby Is It?’ Vera points to the vulnerability of women who are single stemming from their inability to sustain the children they have given birth to. Here, Vera points to one of society’s most pressing problems where some women even end up throwing their babies away: “They found a baby in the garbage bin, behind the store” (58). It is however MaSibanda who captures how the war deprives women of relationships: “I don’t have a man. It is hard to live alone. I wish I had a man in the house. It is so tough to be a woman and be on your own” (43). This dialogue between women is what Grace Okereke (in Mary Kolawole, 1998:143) calls a dialogue of interpersonal relationships, domestic life and private spheres, a technique which is used by women writers to advance women’s issues in their works without necessarily losing touch with other themes, such as politics and war which concern the whole society.

Although Vera highlights the problems of women in the absence of men, she does not imply that women are dependent on men. Rather, it is in the absence of the domineering patriarchy that women characters realize their full potential and strength by playing roles that are traditionally a preserve of men. By playing such roles and coping with the demands of their circumstances, they prove the invalidity of stereotypical cultural representation of women. This subversion of the image of women as mothers deconstructs fixed perceptions of womanhood so as to show that womanhood is not definitive, but rather it exists in dialectical relationship with historical exigencies.

In the same way Vera debunks certain myths about African women during the war and colonial era, she also dispels some fixed perceptions which have become stereotypical of the African women's 'opposite', the white women. The belief that white women are privileged under colonialism is popular among the colonized. This perception seems to be mainly premised on the material possessions at the disposal of white women, as described by Mineke Schipper (in Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1987:41):

In the colonial situation, a woman who would have been an insignificant person in Europe, doing her own housekeeping and taking care of her own children, is granted unprecedented opportunities to exercise power over one or more subordinates. Power which is too easily misused as the African novels about the colonial period show.

In contrast, for Ruth Weiss (1986:62), the superiority of the white woman to her black counterparts lies in the colonial hierarchies of power where Weiss proposes that white Rhodesian women were only second class citizens in relation to their men, but very much first class in relation to the Blacks. In Vera's short stories however, this 'guaranteed'

second class status of white women is undermined in the narrative ‘Crossing Boundaries’ where neither material comfort nor the very organization of the colonial hierarchy is sufficient to give the white woman the happiness she desires. In Vera’s artistic vision, the white woman is only ‘happy’ in terms of colonial pretensions, but otherwise her condition is comparable to, if not worse than that of black women in terms of independence. This is so because white women are victims of their overprotective patriarchy which seeks to guard its status as the dominant class. Charles’s attitude towards his wife Nora testifies to this:

Nora’s husband told her to keep the curtains on her windows closed, though she wanted the light to wake her.

“The natives will see you undress.”

He warned her desperately. She sensed in his voice none of the desire to defend her womanhood for herself. He was concerned only with his unquestioned domination of the native. He made it sound horrible, that a native should see her body. She began to wonder if there was perhaps something unbearable about her body, something that he himself detested and thought of as he warned her of the natives. The worst threat to her dignity, to his security, that a native should see her body through the open curtains of the window, or her face in dream; her face unprepared, faceless to meet the blank faces of the natives. (10-11)

Charles’s fear and anxiety that the natives might see the naked body of his wife seems to be predicated on the ‘taboo’ of miscegenation which white Rhodesians are so conscious of, as is evidenced in their narratives about the colony (see Gertrude Page [1921] and Sheila England [1929]). However, in the context of the Manichean world of colonialism in which both the colonizer and the colonized have to exist in different spaces, if the natives were to see Nora’s body, they would be intruding into the white man’s world, thereby destabilizing the ‘order’ of colonial existence; the ‘order’ which Vera undermines through some of her short stories in this collection. Notwithstanding this fact, when read

in the light of white women's condition in the colonial context, Nora's situation demonstrates that white women together with black women are victims, and that to view the white woman simply as a privileged individual is misleading. In fact, Mineke Schipper (in Eldred Jones *et al.*, 1987:40-41) also highlights this general misconception among the colonized Blacks of thinking that the white woman is comfortable with her position in the colonial order of things. Vera's perception of gender relations under colonialism rejects fixed one-dimensional representations of both black and white women. Rather, she questions such fixations and projects a social vision which situates the problems of women in general within the context of what is going on around them. In this, she differs from Dangarembga who limits her concerns to women within a single culture.

Some of Vera's short stories also offer an insight into the war's psychological effects on those who actually fought in it, by revisiting the experiences of these combatants as Zimbabwe enters independence. The short stories 'During The Ceasefire' and 'It is Over' foreground the damaged psyches of both male and female ex-combatants who cannot relate naturally to their own societies. These stories imply that independence comes at a price as evidenced by the psychological scars left on the participants. The paradox that Vera makes apparent here is that both colonialism and decolonization are dehumanizing and this challenges Fanon's thesis that decolonization is a completely humanizing process for the colonized. In 'During the Ceasefire', the guerilla in the camp manifests this dehumanization for he cannot respond naturally to the woman who visits him in search of love and money. The guerilla has sex with the woman while clutching his gun:

He did not even touch her for half of the night. Then he woke suddenly, his gun in hand, and asked for her. The woman was indifferent to the gun which the man held lovingly. She doubted he would give her anything. She would try her luck with someone else. She heard a rumbling on the ground as the soldier entered her, his gun cradled tenderly under his right arm...He did not circle her with his arms. (90-91)

The brutalized and dehumanized personality of the freedom fighter is also explored by Freedom Nyamubaya in some of her poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* (1995) where she perceives little difference between the freedom fighters and wild animals. The message here is if the Zimbabwean society is to speak meaningfully about independence, then the shadow side of the process through which it was acquired should not be ignored. Other than returning from the war with physical wounds, the ex-fighters have also been maimed spiritually and psychologically.

Closely related to the plight of male ex-combatants is the psychological insecurity of the female ex-fighter in post-independence Zimbabwe. In 'It is Over', Chido has been changed by her experiences in the bush and when she returns home she discovers that she cannot fit into her society anymore. Chido does not know how to relate to her mother, who is likewise incapable of welcoming her daughter: 'She had stood wordlessly on the stoop and stared wordlessly at Mother, who stared blankly' (94). The distance that exists between Chido and her mother is microcosmic of the crisis that the whole society faces where its structures and mores cannot accommodate the ex-combatants.

However, what worsens Chido's alienation from her family and society is that as a woman she has broken social and cultural boundaries by engaging in 'unwomanly' acts

of fighting alongside men. In this case, Vera, like Dangarembga, locates the problems of black African women in both colonialism and traditional hierarchies as is overtly evidenced in the story 'An Unyielding Circle' where the patriarchy obdurately clings to some of its repressive attitudes towards women.

Cultural mores hold that women should be servile during interaction with men and also that violence is the only way of controlling women. 'The only way to control a woman is to beat her' (76). Implied by this statement is that women are minors in their society who can only reach maturity through exposure to violence. Dambudzo Marechera in *The House of Hunger* (1978:49-50) dramatizes violence in its various forms not only as a means of controlling women, but also as a way through which men display their masculinity and superiority over women:

The older generation too was learning. It still believed that if one did not beat up one's wife it meant that one did not love her at all. These beatings ... were always salted and peppered by the outrageous statements of the participants about the morals of either party. The most lively of them ended with the husband actually fucking-raping-his wife right there in the thick of the excited crowd. He was cursing all women to hell as he did so. And he seemed to screw her forever-he went on and on and on and on until she looked like death. When at last-the crowd licked its lips and swallowed-when at last he pulled out his penis out of her raw thing and stuffed it back into his trousers, I think she seemed to move a finger, which made us all wonder how she could have survived such a determined assault.

As the above extract shows, this violence sometimes takes the form of rape with husbands raping their wives in public as a means of demonstrating how they hold power over women. Read in the context of the ongoing war, which is supposed to change

society for the better, the tendencies of the patriarchy in ‘An Unyielding Circle’ are best explained by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994:210) argument that theoreticians of African liberation have failed to confront the issue of gender within the family or to confront the family as a site for social transformation. The theoreticians will talk about changing society, mobilizing Africa, but not about the issue of the relationship of men and women.

What becomes evident is the irony which underlies the stories in this anthology, that the change which the ongoing war should bring excludes the revision of some of society’s values. Bearing in mind this gap in nationalist politics, then, Vera seems to imply that the society’s future should perhaps not be invested in such a war. In this context, she interrogates the value of the liberation struggle itself by highlighting that the way in which it was fought mirrors gender divisions in society. In the short story ‘The Bordered Road’, the people who march to town in support of the striking bus workers walk in two distinct lines – one for women and the other for men. The omniscient narrator depicts the scene as follows:

People stuck to the edges of the road instead of walking right on it, though it was empty of traffic. They regarded the road with suspicion, as though it represented some larger oppressive thing against which they struggled. The men stuck to one side of the road and the women to the other. The black road divided them, yet kept them together. It was bitter irony to be on the wayside. Perhaps the road would disappear and stop pushing them to the fringe. Perhaps they would meet in the middle, along a different road. (63)

Linked to the gender divisions which were not challenged alongside colonialism is the meaning of independence for both men and women. In the short story, ‘Independence

Day', Vera revisits the day when Zimbabwe got its independence from Britain and depicts the culmination of the gap between nationalist politics, on the one hand, and gender politics, on the other. The story juxtaposes women's plight as Zimbabwe entered independence with the fate that awaits the whole country in the form of betrayal and disillusionment.

The man watching the screen went to the kitchen for another beer. He was going to celebrate Independence properly: with cold beer and a woman. Now it was ten minutes to midnight. She must take her clothes off. The screen flashed the ticking minutes. The prince and the new Prime Minister walked to the large flagpole in the middle of the stadium. The old flag was flapping in the air, the new one was hanging below. The man pushed the woman onto the floor. He was going into the new era in style and triumph. She opened her legs. It was midnight and the flag went out. The magic time of change. Green, yellow, white. Food, wealth, reconciliation. (29)

The incident conveys the poignant fact that in the new era of independence women are still exploited and treated as men's accoutrements as evidenced by the objectified woman with spread-eagled legs waiting to be penetrated. Vera invokes the stereotype of the passive and placid woman to foreground the vulnerability and voicelessness of women as the country celebrates a new era. The story therefore implicates nationalists for failing to carve an independence which has women on its agenda.

On a national level, the exploitation of the woman in 'Independence Day' symbolizes the fate that awaits the whole country. Independence day itself is presented as an anticlimax of all the sacrifices made as depicted by the failure of the people who have lined along the road to see the Prince who had come to hand over the country. All the cars that pass along the road have tinted windows.

The woman looked hard through the heavily tinted windows, but saw nothing. Still, everyone waved and shouted. They saw only their excited faces, intercepted among reflections of purple jacaranda blooms. Along that very road the Prince surely had passed. If they had not seen him, maybe he had seen them. (28)

It is pertinent to note the apparent symbolism that Vera makes use of to indicate that the new era does not mean the society has changed its ideas. The story ends as follows: ‘In the morning she saw miniature flags caught along the hedge: the old flag and the new’ (29). This undercuts the sacrifices made during the struggle itself because the old and the new flags indicate the interface of the old and the new ideas, where the old unprogressive ideas militate against progress symbolized by the new flag. The hollowness and emptiness that characterize post-independence Africa is likewise hinted at by Grandfather in ‘Ancestral Links’, who is cynical about the motives of those waging the nationalist struggle. He states that, ‘Those who were fighting in the bush were fighting to enter the white man’s world, not to preserve their own’ (87).

Through the genre of the short story Vera thus explores various aspects of her society from different angles. Her short stories underline the plurality of history by presenting society from various perspectives and celebrating difference emanating from the diverse voices of various characters that they engage. Thus, the short stories undermine narratives which claim to be the legitimate sources of truth in narrating the experiences of Zimbabwean society. Commenting on the ability of the short story format to offer multiple perspectives to society, Lynn Innes and Caroline Rooney (in Msiska and Hyland, 1997: 208) note that one of the advantages conferred by the short story format is

that a number of characters in different situations are introduced. In the case of black women, these characters cannot simply be singled out as representative of African womanhood, thus avoiding the limitations of homogenizing women's experiences. By astutely re-imagining her society and its problems through a fabulist lens, Vera shows that individuals have their different fears and aspirations even though they exist in an environment shaped by common experiences, such as war and colonialism.

Chapter Four

Freedom Nyamubaya

Dusk of Dawn

As has been seen by the earlier discussion in this study, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera's narratives (Chapters Two and Three respectively) focus on sequential periods of Zimbabwean history. As has been argued, the difference in historical setting accrues from the writers' own social vision(s) and the statement(s) they make about their society in their fictional representation of it. Dangarembga's social realist novel is set in the colonial Rhodesian society of the 1960s to 1972 to foreground the underlying motif of the black woman's 'condition' (to use Fanon's term) under the double yoke of colonial and patriarchal domination. Vera, on the other hand, re-imagines in the fabulist mode the dilemmas of the war of the 1970s to express her disenchantment with the social, political and economic order in post-independence Zimbabwe. In fact, some of her stories, such as 'Independence Day' in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, focus on Zimbabwe making a transition into independence and the mood that this transition was met with:

A limousine came down the street that was lined with exploding purple jacarandas. Children broke into screams, thinking it was the very important person who had come all the way from England to give them back their country. The woman watched the car drive up, and then heard the excitement die down. This was not the moment. It was just another car. (Vera, 1992:28)

Here, Vera invokes the transition into independence to make a social and political statement about the country's past and its present. This excitement which Vera ably captures may have seemed logical at that point of Zimbabwe's history, because independence in Zimbabwe was a culmination of years of protracted armed fighting between black nationalists and the white minority government. But, the extract highlights the dichotomy between euphoria and socio-political reality as it impacted on the average citizen. Vera, with the benefit of hindsight, as the last sentence – 'It was just another car' – suggests, undercuts the blind euphoria displayed in the first sentences. Geoff Hill (2003:75) argues that the initial euphoria shown by some Zimbabweans at independence was rather naïve, a typical response by a people who for close to a century under colonialism had believed that they would never rule themselves. To affirm Hill's argument are some of the early independence literary texts, such as the already mentioned Edmund Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) and Garikai Mutasa's *The Contact* (1985), which are unrealistic in their enthusiastic praise of post-independence.

The above discussion serves to introduce the mood of Freedom Nyamubaya's poetry in *Dusk of Dawn* (1995), the object of study in this chapter. Nyamubaya's anthology revisits the war experiences and engages the independence era in Zimbabwe; so the poems complete the trajectory of Zimbabwean socio-historical reality, which began with the study of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. The chronological approach in this study is designed to maintain the link in the development of three writers' visions in sequence. Since the poetry critiques a more recent stage in the history of Zimbabwe, it is the final text to be examined. And, because the focus of this research project is on the way in

which each of the chosen writers represents her society, a society which forms the catalyst for the literary product, it is again pertinent to discuss the ways in which that society has shaped its mediating subject, the writer, whose poems are clearly a product of the first-hand experience of a former freedom fighter.

Freedom Nyamubaya was born in Eastern Zimbabwe in 1958 and unlike the other two writers who are discussed in this study she was actually involved as a fighter in Zimbabwe's war of liberation. She crossed the border into Mozambique in 1975 from where she fought at the frontline. Consequently, her view of the war is at once more intimate and more realistic. It has an immediacy and a personal thrust that is lacking in some of Vera's stories such as 'It is Over' and 'During The Ceasefire' which attempt imaginatively to capture the feelings of the fighters during the war and their attempts to integrate into society after the war. Consider, for example, the following extracts which serve to illustrate first, Vera's external status and second, Nyamubaya's more intimate point of view:

A man came walking cautiously towards her in the early evening and took her into his tent in which women were not allowed to stay overnight.

She was very curious. Had he killed anyone ... had he killed any white men? What was it like to live in the bush ... did they sleep at all? But he did not say anything to her. His gaze silenced her. (Vera, 1992:90)

And,

What a peaceful world
And a beautiful sunset
I know I will never be
that innocent peasant girl again
Now that I am running around
In the jungle with guns
Expecting to kill or to be killed

If wishes were horses
I would rewind the clock to peaceful times. (Nyamubaya, 1995:51)

Vera's account of wartime experiences is essentially cerebral, based largely on conjecture as the rhetorical questions suggest, while the poignancy of lost innocence in Nyamubaya's poem reflects active participation in and lived experience of the war. As evident in the two quotations, the narrator in the first extract attempts to render the feelings of a second person (suggested by the use of third person pronouns 'he' and 'she'), whereas in the poem, it is the persona reliving her experiences in the first person singular – 'I know', 'I will never be', 'I am running around' and 'I would rewind ...'.

As an autobiographical chronicler, Nyamubaya has published two works, a collection of poetry *On the Road Again* (1986), and *Dusk of Dawn* (1995) a collection of prose and poetry. Nyamubaya's personal experiences, to a greater extent than those of Dangarembga and Vera, influence not only the way she writes but also what she writes about, as illustrated above. The few literary critics who have shown an interest in Nyamubaya's writing underline the close affinity between her writing and her experiences, especially wartime ones. Adrian Roscoe and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1992:109) call Nyamubaya's poetry 'a hero's poetry' deriving from her participation in the struggle for Zimbabwean independence. In their analysis of her poetry, they note that the freedom fighter ceases to be an aspect of the event of narration, but a subject in history, the event that is anterior to the moment of narration. It is in this respect, Amuta (1989:83) rightly argues that, 'because it [history] consists of the activities of real people

in real active roles in equally real situations, history is not only knowable but also a process resulting from human activity’.

When Nyamubaya published her first volume of poetry (1986), the personal and political independence she had joined the struggle for was already being undermined, and by 1995 when her second volume appeared, it had become obvious that Zimbabwe was taking the path of disillusionment taken by a number of African countries which had already gained their independence. In such a milieu, Nyamubaya’s perception of the writer and her role in society is best characterized in her introductory poem, ‘Introduction’ in *On The Road*

Again:

Now that I have put my gun down
For almost obvious reasons
The enemy still is here invisible
My barrel has no definite target
now
Let my hands work –
My mouth sing –
My pencil write –
About the same things my bullet
aimed at. (Nyamubaya, 1986:1)

The persona uses two disparate images: the gun and the pencil, which, nonetheless, are employed for the same purpose – to effect social and political transformation. However, after 1980 in Zimbabwe, the persona is conscious that the gun is no longer useful as a tool for reform, because the socio-political landscape has changed, and it is the creative artist who should intervene through an imaginative review of the socio-historical processes to bring about positive change in Zimbabwe. This is evident in the transition of the persona from soldier to writer. Nyamubaya thus perceives writing as a tool for social

criticism, and as Roscoe and Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1992:110) rightly observe, this places her writing in the long tradition of explicitly committed writing. In terms of Emmanuel Ngara's (1990:13) Marxist approach to Nyamubaya's poetry in *On The Road Again*, such social commitment springs from the writer's ideology – that is, the framework within which the writer's consciousness and perception of reality operates, and how it influences her vision. Ngara's Marxism is preoccupied with how the poet's ideology impacts on the communication of her social vision. For Marxists, art which fails to communicate, however important its content, is not good because, by its very nature, art must be able to speak naturally to the beholder, reader or hearer (Ngara, 1990:14). Ngara thus reaches the conclusion that Nyamubaya is an effective poet, because her use of direct language, simple images and prosaic style facilitate direct communication with the reader. The lucidity of the message is characteristic of *Dusk of Dawn* and enables Nyamubaya to communicate her social vision effectively to a wide section of society as becomes evident in the analysis of her work in this chapter. Kizito Muchemwa rightly calls Nyamubaya's poetry 'popular' because of its language, which makes it accessible to common people (<http://www.poetryinternational.org/cwolk/view/17393>).

Nonetheless, if Nyamubaya's poetry is popular, it is not entirely because of language, but also because of its thematic thrust, which encapsulates a vision of social justice that easily identifies with the downtrodden. Even before the publication of *Dusk of Dawn*, Ngara (1990:124) sums up Nyamubaya's empathy with the broad section of Zimbabwean society as follows:

Freedom Nyamubaya is so far the most authentic spokesperson of ex-combatants in Zimbabwean literature. She speaks for them, depicts their experience, defines their role in the struggle and portrays their hopes and fears. And yet she does not speak for freedom fighters only. She writes on behalf of the downtrodden, the exploited and those struggling for freedom, justice and human dignity.

The conjunction ‘And yet’ in the above extract at once indicates that Nyamubaya’s commitment to society is not parochial, but encompasses all the victims of Zimbabwe’s contradictory history. Furthermore, to mention the plight of the ex-combatants is to foreground the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans, because the lives of ex-combatants are intricately linked with those of the majority of Zimbabweans. The ex-combatants are simply ordinary Zimbabweans aligning themselves with the political ideology of the struggle. After independence, however, while the ruling elite benefited, the ex-combatants were abandoned to eke out an existence in town or on the land (Meredith, 2002: 83).

Given that some critics describe Nyamubaya’s poetry as ‘popular’, it is paradoxical that she is one of the least critiqued poets in Zimbabwe. In fact, the little criticism she has received focuses on her first volume rather than her second, and that is why this chapter concentrates on *Dusk of Dawn*, her neglected text. However, where appropriate, reference is made to *On The Road Again*, because the concerns of the two volumes naturally overlap. Equally important, is the fact that criticism on Nyamubaya’s poetry has as yet not made any real attempt to analyze her work in the context of women’s writing as has that on Vera and Dangarembga’s works. The socio-historical approach implemented in

this study affords the flexibility of engaging Nyamubaya's poetry from a variety of contexts and viewpoints in order to accommodate the breadth of its thematic scope.

Dusk of Dawn consists of two short stories and forty-one poems. For the purpose of this study, only the section that contains poetry is examined to provide the desired variety in genres representing Shona society in Zimbabwe. The poems handle a variety of socio-political issues, prominent among which are the liberation struggle and the relationships of those who fought in it, the condition of ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwe and gender relations. They also reveal a general critique of post-independence Zimbabwean society. As already noted, Nyamubaya's project seems to be to re-visit personal experience. This is not to suggest that her poems are a therapeutic purging of past experience but rather (like the trauma of a prison sentence) a revisiting in order to make sense of both the past and the present – to evaluate the sacrifices made and to assess their consequences.

In the text, the poems are thus not divided into any sections, because the poet's real-life experiences are neither ordered nor easy to rationalize. Poems preoccupied with the war of liberation are often juxtaposed with those which critique post-independence. Their interconnectedness inheres in a vision that situates post-colonial Zimbabwean society in its past experiences, experiences which continue to have a bearing on its social, political and economic affairs. Nyamubaya's retrospective stance coincidentally revises some stereotypes and myths about the war that flourished after independence. Thus, her review perceives participation in the war for Zimbabwean independence as both positive and

negative as becomes evident in the analysis of ‘When I look back’, ‘Each dawn a new beginning’, ‘Giving up’, ‘Seen enough to go sterile’, ‘Guess what’, ‘Journey and half’ and ‘Secrets’.

In the poem ‘When I look back’, the persona revisits her wartime experiences and views them as a process of maturation which left her fulfilled:

I could never have been
this happy
this bold
this knowledgeable
But most of all, the freedom that I am

That open university!
Was so open
That mathematics and physics got simplified. (19)

The positive transformation that the persona feels in herself as a consequence of her involvement in the war emanates from an awareness that the struggle is for the birth of a new nation in which the persona firmly believed. The poem mentions the dialectical relationship between education and experience as if to validate the cliché ‘experience is the best teacher’. Kizito Muchemwa (2004) rightly observes that, unlike other Zimbabwean poets, such as Marechera, Zimunya and Hove whose poetry is influenced by their university education, Nyamubaya belongs to an ‘alternative university’ that is predicated on her experiences in the struggle for social justice (<http://www.poetryinternational.org/cwolk/view/17393>). The tone of this poem also echoes part of Nelson Mandela’s autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) in which he portrays the experiences of incarceration and hardships experienced in the struggle for South African independence as some kind of university for those who were imprisoned

on Robben Island. The whole process through which one learns through experience is what is metaphorically referred to as the ‘open university’ in the poem. By implication, the persona also queries post-independence Zimbabwean leadership which is awash with university graduates, but whose book knowledge, like that of Okot p’Bitek’s Ocol in *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (1972), failed to steer the country out of its problems. The closing couplet of the poem which gives precedence to learning through experience testifies to this claim:

Now when I look back
No school can beat this one. (19)

If in ‘When I look back’ the persona perceives her experiences during the war in a completely positive light, in ‘Each dawn a new beginning’ and ‘Giving up’ she queries her decision to join the war. ‘Each dawn a new beginning’ foregrounds the tension between the ideology of the liberation struggle which urges the persona to join the war on the one hand and the persona’s intuition which discourages her on the other:

When the wind whispered ‘Don’t go’
I knew no earthquake would shake my decision
Like a possessed voodoo dancer
I received my ancestors in open arms
“Welcome to the heights of a black madness!”

Living in the same conditions with my totem?
The lions, the kudus, the antelopes many others
Alas this was the advance of the advanced
Surviving on the wild fruit like the baboons!
In silent memory I remembered the whisper
“Don’t go”

...

But my ancestors knew the damn science
The king’s death is the prince’s birth

Yesterday is today's memory
And tomorrow is today's dream. (24)

The ideology of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle was to eradicate all forms of oppression and establish a just society (Fay Chung in Bhebhe and Ranger, 1996:146), and the control it has on the persona is likened to a possessed voodoo dancer whose performance is directed by the supernatural. Although the voodoo ritual invoked here is alien to Shona culture, it is an effective parallel that highlights the strength of the appeal of the liberation struggle's ideology. In her study of spirit possession in voodoo ritual, Nadia Lovell (2002:78) notes that when spirits descend upon humans, they make them do things which are unintentional and sometimes dangerous. In the poem, the persona cannot control the intensity of the ideology of the liberation struggle which controls her and dictates her decisions; hence her overlooking of the intuition which warns her, 'Don't go'. But as the poem progresses, the persona recalls her intuition, because of the adversities she encounters as a result of yielding to the power of the ideology. However, the persona does not regret her decision, because the pervasive mood of defiance which characterizes the poem implies that she chooses to endure suffering in order to create a new dispensation which she firmly believes in. The use of opposing images in the metaphor: 'The king's death is the prince's birth' underlines the importance of determination and sacrifice for a goal – that is, the colonized have to sacrifice their lives for the birth of a new nation. This serves to justify and legitimize the persona's 'madness' of joining the war.

The vision expressed in ‘Each dawn a new beginning’ is picked up in the poem ‘Giving up’ in which the persona relates the tough choice she had to make between giving up fighting the war and remaining committed to its ideology. The persona dramatizes the difficult conditions which put her commitment on trial on one hand, and her suppression of the impulse to desert on the other:

I felt like shedding tears
But my eyes were dry
Felt like shouting
But had no voice

Wanted to scratch
without itching
It was torturing, bitter
Painful and hot
Out there!
Difficult to give up war
Especially when you volunteered. (40)

The strength of the persona’s commitment is made visible by the difficult conditions and brutalizing effects of the war, foregrounded in the words ‘torturing’, ‘bitter’, ‘painful’ and ‘hot’. Despite these conditions, however, the persona refuses to succumb to sorrow and self-pity, rather her voice sounds stoical as evinced in the lines: ‘I felt like shedding tears/But my eyes were dry’. The poem amply conveys the conscious silencing of a screaming intuition by a determined ideological commitment to the war of liberation. In ‘Each dawn a new beginning’ and ‘Giving up’, Nyamubaya’s revisiting of the war to recount the inner tensions and contradictions which characterized those who participated in it serves to highlight that joining the war was not an easy and shallow decision. Thus, she subverts white Rhodesian narratives such as Peter Stiff’s novel, *The Rain Goddess*

(1973) which portray those who joined the nationalists in the bush as unaware of what they were fighting for.

In poems such as ‘Seen enough to go sterile’, ‘Guess what’ and ‘Journey and half’, there is a dramatic shift in tone, where the personae focus completely on the grim side of the war. In these poems, Nyamubaya downplays the ideology which she uses in ‘Each dawn a new beginning’ and ‘Giving up’ as justification for participating in the war. In fact, the bulk of the poems in this collection do not glorify war and the experiences of the fighters in the bush. Life in the training camps and at the battlefield was largely degrading and distressing to the fighters. In ‘Seen enough to go sterile’, for instance, Nyamubaya recounts the dehumanization which was synonymous with the existence of guerrilla fighters in the bush:

When I think of the open dusty
Buttocks of the male comrades
With half-torn trousers
like the tail lights of baboons
You know what I mean
The sad look of the male organs
Hanging open and uninterested from behind. (27)

The portrayal of semi-naked freedom fighters, struggling to make an existence in the bush, deflates the image of freedom fighters who out of patriotic zeal are sometimes presented in impressive combat outfit. The shift is from an ideological stance to one of lived life experience. Works, such as Irene Mahamba’s (1984) novella *Woman in Struggle*, by contrast, at first romanticize the freedom fighters then juxtapose lived experience:

Mbuya was interested in the life of the guerrillas in Mozambique. They took out a copy of the latest *Zimbabwe News* which showed girls in jeans at training, girls in green camouflage marching. I looked and looked. I said “yah”, and wondered. (17-18)

Here, Mahamba interrogates the fact that, the freedom fighters, as part of an oppressed group who fought from the margins of society, depended on the goodwill of ordinary people for their welfare in the bush. Chennells (in Bhebhe and Ranger, 1996:124) criticizes white Rhodesian war literature for unrealistically presenting Rhodesian soldiers as infallible. Black Zimbabwean narratives about the same war are not always implicated in this unrealistic rendition of the war, as the above extract subtly suggests in its internalizing of newspaper pictorial. The war of the 1970s in Zimbabwe is therefore a contended historical occurrence, the conflicting discourses of which reflect the conflicting interests of the Zimbabwean society itself as well as the tension between ideology and ‘reality’.

The grim reality of Zimbabwean history, with its degraded and dehumanized personality of the freedom fighter is again foregrounded in ‘Guess what’:

Guerilla is a polite word for Gorilla
When you looked at the faces
The camouflage
The deep look
The step
The skin colour
The barracks they lived in
The only difference was the language
And a cause for being there
They were just about to become
Guess what? (44)

The persona satirically puns with the rhythmic words ‘Guerilla’ and ‘Gorilla’ to demonstrate both the similarity and narrow difference that exist between wild animals and the guerilla fighters in the bush. Nyamubaya’s juxtaposition of the two words does not suggest a deconstruction of the image of the freedom fighters in order to belittle them, but rather implies that patriotism is not a papering over of the ugly facts of history. By re-invoking such degrading scenes, Nyamubaya is not only rewriting the second *Chimurenga* history, but also seems to be subtly posing a pertinent question: Are people’s experiences in post-independence Zimbabwe worth all the dehumanization suffered?

Apart from demythologizing the conditions of the freedom fighters in the bush, Nyamubaya also purposely revisits the war in order to unmask the dehumanization the freedom fighters meted out on each other. Torture seems to have been a major tool used by the nationalists to enforce discipline and gain loyalty from the fighters in the lower ranks. Again, these abuses form part of Zimbabwean society’s hushed history. In a typically prosaic mode, which characterizes the majority of poems in this volume, the persona in 'Journey and half' expresses indignation at having to be tortured by fellow freedom fighters:

Imagine lying on your back
On an empty stomach
On top of angry biting ants
On hot dry African sand
And asked to imitate making love

Have you ever stayed awake
Hundreds of hours in one night
Crying out loudly without voice?
Asked to bark like a wild dog
Or laugh like a hyena
Beaten on your buttocks until they

turned into minced meat?

“The truth from a comrade comes from the buttocks!”

A famous interrogation slogan

It happened in the liberation camps prisons. (31)

Here, the persona captures both the anger and trauma of female freedom fighters whose voiceless cries went unheeded by their male compatriots who took their frustrations out on those who were unable ‘to fight’ back. The tone is emotional and this, coupled with the poor language usage, represents the authentic voice of a female ex-combatant, who has not enjoyed the benefits of a good education, but is desperate to tell of her painful experiences. According to the majority of women ex-combatants’ accounts about the war in *Women of Resilience* (McCartney & Musengezi, 2000), torture (mainly in the form of serious beatings) prevailed in these camps. Consider, for example, the following brief extract from Nancy Saungweme’s (2000:48) account, which authenticates Nyamubaya’s depiction in ‘Journey and half’:

What followed shocked me more. I was accused of being a spy for the Rhodesian Government. I was young, beautiful, educated and a teacher, I was told. I had no cause to leave Zimbabwe. Some of the comrades found it hard to believe that some of us who had passed O-levels and held jobs could forgo all that to fight a war. I was beaten; my buttocks hurt. Sometimes I wished I were dead. They urged me to confess that I was a spy. ... I am convinced some people confessed to things they did not do. They wanted to escape further beatings. Sometimes you would reach a point when all you wanted was to survive.

Writing after independence, Nyamubaya recalls these inhuman incidents, in order to give meaning to the violence which is frequently unleashed on those who voice concern about mainstream ideas in Zimbabwe. What she implies is that the violence in Zimbabwe

reflects how the post-independence government conducted itself in fighting the nationalist struggle.

It is also important to mention that most of Nyamubaya's poems about the war mention nothing about the colonial forces, but rather interrogate the nature of the interrelationships between the nationalists as they fought the war. Consider, for example, poems 'Osibisa' and 'Secrets' in *On The Road Again* and *Dusk of Dawn* respectively.

The following stanza from 'Osibisa' illustrates this point:

I saw them battering each other
Jumping at each other's throats
Witch hunting and rumour -mongering
Boiling jealous and burning hatred.
Osibisa, a hot camp of frustration.
That's what happens
When war wrecks off the mind. (66)

Related to this torture and violence that characterized the war camps is the status and condition of women fighters in the war, as becomes clearer in 'Secrets'. Women, as fighters, had to cope with the violence of torture coupled with rape from their male counterparts. It is however only in one poem that Nyamubaya explicitly mentions rape, and she does not even give it serious attention. Rather, her examination of this social ill is cursory and casual. That this comes from a writer like Nyamubaya is somewhat surprising, for if there is anything that tarnished the image of the liberation struggle it is the act of sexual abuse, not only of female combatants, but also of civilians. The poem 'Secrets' manifests Nyamubaya's seemingly nonchalant treatment of the subject:

Amai I wanted to write you a letter to say
I now can speak many languages
Chipo is at Osibisa pregnant

Theresa is now a commander
Anna lost her leg in the battle
They beat me the first day I arrived at Tembwe

I was raped by the security commander
Jim lost his big toe from jigger fleas
Many died at Nyadzonia from hunger
I have got a new Afrikan name now
You probably know about all these things
Last but not least I wanted to tell you
That I love you very much. (49)

Nyamubaya probably downplays the trauma associated with rape as her casual mentioning of it with other hazards of the war manifests, because she intends to highlight the appalling fact that rape itself had become a way of life like all the other problems of the war. However, Nyamubaya's major achievement is that she breaks the taboo by touching the subject of rape, a topic which women, including women ex-combatants, feel too embarrassed or too traumatized to confront.

Read in the context of post-independence Zimbabwean leadership's attitude towards women, Nyamubaya's invocation of the abuse of women fighters by their male counterparts seems to provide an answer to the question as to why women are still marginalized and abused in independent Zimbabwe. At first hand, she shows that the champions of Zimbabwean independence themselves viewed women as objects for men's pleasure. Some civilian women like Irene Moyo (in McCartney & Chiedza Musengezi, 2000:171) argue that the same power that some nationalists used during the war (the authority that enabled them to abuse women with impunity) was carried into post-independence Zimbabwe. In a film called *Flame*, which is about the Zimbabwean war of liberation (there were attempts by Zimbabwean authorities to have the film banned

because they considered it as tainting to the image of the liberation struggle), scenes of rape, sexual harassment and women combatants having sex with senior male combatants in exchange for food are foregrounded. Through her poetry, Nyamubaya bravely recounts a comparable story of the war, one which had not been publicly recounted.

In her poems which focus on post-independence Zimbabwe, Nyamubaya's thrust is dictated by aberrations such as social inequality and corruption, which scuttle the aims of the war. Poems such as 'A career for life', 'My beloved country' and 'A different kind of love', for example, are informed by the social, political and economic injustices in Zimbabwe. In 'A career for life', for instance, the persona deplors some Africans for consciously being architects of Africa's tribulations, such that the continent's plight becomes chronic. The persona tellingly asserts that:

I am a retired soldier
Not a retired revolutionary
I still walk around armed
With tools and ideas of how to grow more maize

There are still those of us
Who consciously organise and create
Africa's man-made problems and make
Our suffering a career for interested scholars (29)

The poem's effectiveness in critiquing the post-independence disillusionment in Zimbabwe rests on the semantic difference between two words 'soldier' and 'revolutionary'. During Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, the persona was both soldier and revolutionary but, with the advent of independence, which saw an end to physical combat, the role of the 'soldier' diminishes. The persona retains her revolutionary side, which is still concerned with old problems, because the post-independence situation was

not transformed to suit the demands of the new era, as is suggested by the heavily emphasized ‘armed’. The persistence of Africa’s problems, which preoccupies the persona, destroys Africa while ironically nourishing those interested in studying the causes of such problems.

In the context of another African country Mozambique, Nyamubaya asserts that Africa’s problems are man-made. She delineates the social irresponsibility of some African leaders which manifests itself in the endemic corruption and an unquenchable desire to accumulate material wealth, resulting in a destruction which is akin to a holocaust. The following extract from ‘My beloved country’, which opens dramatically with the persona spitting with disgust at her ‘stinking’ nation, is an unveiled attack on such vices:

This country stinks – Ptuu!
I spit at the windscreen of the stolen
Pajeros and Mercedes Benz
That have eaten the brains of those who know it all
Intoxicated by the poisonous corruption
As they sign death sentences for their unborn children
without reading. (59)

This poem is a vehement protest against the vices of African leadership, and its angry tone is informed by Nyamubaya’s keenness for social justice which, in turn, makes her judge her world in terms of what is morally right and wrong. The metaphors ‘eaten’ and ‘intoxicated’ convey an image of consumption, where corruption, which is referred to as ‘poisonous’, has the double negative effects of eating away the heart of society and addling the minds of those in power. A society, whose leaders’ minds have been befuddled with corruption, retains no moral stature to enable it to differentiate between

what is acceptable from what is not, as the trope ‘sign[ing] death certificates for their unborn children’ further highlights.

In an apparent frustration with post-independence African leadership, Nyamubaya attempts to redefine patriotism in ‘A different kind of love’:

Some people loved this country so much
That they died for it
Their skeletons are scattered all over Zimbabwe

The skeletons are still dying for this country
As they turn into useful manure
The survivors do not seem to love
This country at all
Now Zimbabwe is dying
On their behalf
Who loves Zimbabwe to save it from dying for us? (46)

The poem’s structure rests on the relationship between the country Zimbabwe and its citizens. The first stanza foregrounds people dying for their country, alluding to the sacrifices and patriotism shown during the country’s liberation war; and in the second stanza, this relationship is ironically inverted, and it is the country which is now ‘dying’ for its citizens. The second relationship which refers to post-independence Zimbabwe points to the pathos of the commitment made by those who died during the struggle for independence and who continue to ‘die’ under new corrupt political leadership. In ‘A different kind of love’, as in ‘My beloved country’, there are also strong suggestions that Zimbabwe is being destroyed by its leadership who, surprisingly, shared the same sentiments with the patriots who died during the war as the rhetorical question ‘Who loves Zimbabwe to save it from dying for us?’ highlights. Those who championed and fought in the nationalist struggle are challenged, because it transpires that their

contributions were not purely altruistic. Because of the fickleness of post-independence leadership, Nyamubaya challenges her society's notion of heroism, in 'Heroes':

Heroes are dead or not yet born
I have heard about a brave Mbuya Nehanda
She is dead. (50)

That the persona invokes Nehanda, a mythical and spiritual figure in Zimbabwean *Chimurenga* history, is pertinent for, to many black Zimbabweans, she is a symbol of black people's unshakable commitment in resisting colonialism. As Yvonne Vera's eponymous novel relates, Nehanda was hanged for refusing to waver in the spiritual leadership of her people during the late nineteenth century war of resistance to colonialism. Nationalists who fought in the later war of the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in the independence of Zimbabwe called upon the myth of Nehanda for spiritual guidance. Nyamubaya's invocation of Nehanda in this poem is an effective contrast with the so-called 'heroes' in post-independence Zimbabwe. This serves to demarcate the distinction between altruistic commitment, and commitment propelled by selfishness.

In the poem 'She Is Relieved She Does Not Regret' in *On The Road Again*, this insincere commitment is foregrounded in the vices of former nationalists who constitute the majority of post-independence Zimbabwean leadership.

Now comes sunshine, survival of the fittest
Each man for himself, god for us all.
Had she known life was a gamble?
Economic disability caught her at Manyene.

In hot bath and bubble, he washed himself clean
Prepared by the meek mistress, subservient and
inferior.
Washed the struggle away, brainwashing himself,
Enslaving the ignorant once again.

Maybe it's too late for her sisters,
To discover the paper tigerness in him. (36)

The irresponsibility of reneging on the ideals of the struggle which is foregrounded in this poem, particularly in the oxymoron 'paper tigerness', and the bland accusatory tone of 'Each man for himself' undermines the virtues associated with real heroism. This same mood informs Nyamubaya's end to the poem 'Heroes', which closes on a dismissive note, refusing to contemplate the fact that anyone in the leadership of post-independence Zimbabwe can be termed a hero:

Heroes are dead or not yet born
Until then you can keep the medals. (50)

Nyamubaya's poetry is also preoccupied with the place of ex-fighters in independent Zimbabwe. Like Vera in her short story 'During the Ceasefire' in *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, she points to the fact that the glamour with which the ex-fighters were welcomed immediately after the war did not last. They were soon discarded; and no one seemed to care about them, thereby suggesting that their place in the history of Zimbabwe has been all but too quickly forgotten. There is no longer any talk about their contribution, since everyone is absorbed in the fruits that accompanied *uhuru*. The contributions of war veterans have been relegated to the archives of history as the poem 'Archives' reflects:

When they came they were life
People loved and envied them
Doors would open
seats offered
They were those who were the thing

What happened to them?

Question from a wise woman
Don't you remember what happened?
They surrendered everything
Including themselves at the assembly point.

But you can read about them in the Archives
The ex-combatants. (33)

Here, the Zimbabwean society at large is implicated for forgetting to give its liberators of yesteryear their deserved place in the country's history. When armed with guns, they are deemed active makers of history; but with their disarmament they are quickly condemned to obscurity. This poem is itself caught in the fickleness and contradictions of history. In the current Zimbabwean society, the ex-combatants are at the forefront of Zimbabwean politics and they seem to make the major decisions in the running of the country. Their political actions have since removed them from the 'archives', and placed them on public 'display' and also their contribution to the liberation of the country has in recent years been vividly emphasized. The sudden change in the ex-combatants' status from obscurity to prominence is interpreted by historians, such as Martin Meredith (2002:177) as having been authored by the ruling class, not out of sincere willingness to correct the ills of the past, but for political convenience. This conception does not only imply that the exploits of the ex-combatants are only recalled when it suits the ruling class, but also that certain aspects of history are invoked, by different classes, for different purposes. This perception echoes Nyamubaya's earlier vision in the poem 'The Dog And The Hunter' (1986:8) which cynically likens the relationship between ex-combatants and post-independence Zimbabwean leaders to that of dog and hunter. The poem reads:

In scarcity, dog and master are friends,
Tied around the neck, the hunter drags him along.
In thick and dark forests, Zvichapera is loose.
Sniffing and trekking game, Zvichapera leads.

Behind trees and ditches,
Game dodges the dog.

With energy the dog sniffs,
Searching and chasing, Zvichapera plays it double;
Heading trees, and collapsing on dirty rocks
With determination, Zvichapera struggles on,
With little sympathy, the master encourages him.
Playing the rear-guard, the master wanders behind.

Once again, the two unite,
Seeming to share duties.
The hunter initiates, the dog implements,
With division of mental and manual work.

Having eaten a bone of stone
A warm welcome with wide smiles for the hunter
at home
With a big stick, the dog is beaten for stealing
meat
After a second thought bones rye [are]? thrown to
Zvichapera.
And the hunter calmly munches the juicy flesh.
From one rubbish pit to another, Zvichapera
survives.
Until the next hunt Zvichapera is neither wanted
nor fed.

The overriding message is that of the betrayal of ex-combatants in particular and Zimbabweans in general by the leadership. The hunt is a metaphor of the common ideological bond – the quest for independence from colonialism which united the freedom fighters and their leaders during the liberation struggle. However, what is disturbing and disheartening as the poem describes, is that the union dissolves when the ‘hunt’ is accomplished. From the social and political developments in post-independence Zimbabwe, therefore, the dog is a metaphor for the ex-combatants and the hunter, the ruling elite.

Related to this plight of ex-combatants in general, is the plight of female ex-combatants in Zimbabwe. The poem 'Aliens' captures how a society which is used to gender role stereotyping deliberately shuns women who have fought in the war, as is also the case with Chido in the short story 'It is Over' in Vera's *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*. In this story, Chido's mother regards her daughter with suspicion because she believes that Chido's participation in the war as a fighter has made her unsuitable for the place women have to occupy in society. David Lan (1985:212) argues that by transforming themselves into warriors, the archetypal male role, and by wandering far from their fathers' homes, with neither husbands nor chaperones, the women had achieved a dramatic break with the past. In 'Aliens', Nyamubaya depicts the outcasts that women ex-combatants have become in their own society as an outcome of their participation in the war. Society's general perception of them is portrayed as follows:

Have you heard of them?
Have you ever come across one?
I heard they are something!

They beat up their husbands
Beat up their in-laws
Have no respect for elders
Drink like fish
Smoke like chimneys
Sleep with everybody
I heard they are physically strong too.

Yes I have heard of them
One of them is my sister
The one that comes after me
And she is not like you describe
the female ex-combatant.(43)

This cataloguing of the propagandistic misconceptions, which have been accepted as true, parodies the superficial identity some sections of society quickly confer on those women

who dare to cross the boundaries of womanhood that patriarchy has set. This perception which predicates womanhood on gender roles has limitations, for there are instances when the exigencies of social and political reality require that women perform other roles which traditionally were not for them. The participation of women in the war as fighters has its roots in the colonial legislation which changed the organized roles of a pre-colonial society where men and women had specific roles to play.

Ruth Weiss (1986:43-44) contends that with industrialization in Rhodesia, the fabric of the entire society changed, for men were compelled to work in cities and on white-owned farms, and this left women to run the homesteads, playing the roles that had previously belonged to men. That way gender role divisions began to be abrogated. What matters here is how the post-independence Zimbabwean society seems to have forgotten that war is one such situation where clear-cut gender roles cannot be maintained, thereby implicating itself in the demise of its own insistence on maintaining rigid social structures. Such structures, as Nyamubaya's 'The Corrupted Innocent' in *On The Road Again* suggests, hinder progressive transformation within the society's cultural values to suit its own dynamism:

Parental indoctrination,
Organised dos and don'ts
Moslem by tradition,
Christian by education,
Bourgeois by inheritance,
Poor by parental background,
Creativity put to rest.

Conditioned to believe the non-existent,
Taught to hate filthy neighbours.
Though born as free as the wind.
The corrupted innocent. (43)

Re-visiting the female ex-combatants, who have traversed the ‘Organized dos and don’ts’, Nyamubaya places them on the margins of society to point to post struggle disillusionment. Tanya Lyons (1997:13) sums up the impact of such conceptions on the social status of female ex-fighters as follows:

Many women found it difficult to marry or stay married. At home they found men and in-laws ready to label them murderers or prostitutes, while their male comrades were deemed “heroes.” They were seen as too tough, too liberated and not good enough to be wives.

Here, Lyons suggests that the act of fighting alongside men did not elevate women’s social status, but rather, it had an unexpected backlash which worsened the marginalization and discrimination of women. Nonetheless, one needs to be cautious when examining the subject of the condition of women ex-combatants in post-independence Zimbabwean society, because the experiences of these women are so varied that no simple definitive explanation can accurately capture how they were received.

Part of Nyamubaya’s preoccupations as a writer in post-independence Zimbabwe is the regeneration of black people’s culture and identity. Immediately after independence, Zimbabwe, as Ruth Weiss (1986:102) observes, was a country exemplifying an uneasy mix of traditional and colonial values. This reality stems from the fact that colonialism did not only have a political dimension, but cultural and economic dimensions too. Meaningful decolonization therefore had to encompass all these aspects of human existence permeated by colonialism. African nationalism was generally premised on this matrix, in which political, economic and cultural recuperation had to be realized in

relation to each other, but somehow economic and cultural regeneration lagged far behind political independence as is confirmed by the economic and cultural crises evident in a number of post-independence African societies today. The attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe did not help to end capitalist values wrought by colonialism, and Zimbabwe after 1980 continues to reflect a dualism of Western values and local traditional values.

For Nyamubaya, this situation emanates from the continued presence of foreign values which are used to define Africans. These values do not only supersede African values, they threaten to make them extinct as the poem ‘Extinction’, which casts black Zimbabweans and their values as ‘endangered species’, indicates:

Everybody talks about saving
The Rhino
The Elephants
Cats and Dogs

Has anybody thought about saving the black man?
I mean us the descendants of Nyamaropa.
Mutota, Nehanda and Gandanzara
We whose performance is measured
By the British, American, Japanese and Arab standards

It may be just the colour of your skin left
Save yourself black man. (52)

The invocation of the conservation of nature does not only allude to the cultural annihilation that black Zimbabwe faces as a corollary of being exposed to foreign values. It also invokes the colonial discourse which placed Blacks side by side with nature and therefore viewed Blacks as part of the primitive. Franz Fanon (1968:33) makes the assertion that when the settler seeks to describe the native fully he describes him in

zoological terms and with reference to the bestiary. In this context of Blacks as part of the amorphous ‘primitive’, Chennells (1996:103) argues that they could be shot or preserved, exploited, developed or cherished. Since the colonizers were ‘civilized’, they had passed that primitive stage of being close to nature, and as Chennells (1996:103) goes on to argue, this enabled them to conceive the value of the primitive, hence the establishment of the nature reserves and zoos to take care of ‘endangered’ species.

The conservation motif in the poem parodies this aspect of colonial mentality and, at the same time, highlights the cultural dilemma of the African. Also to Nyamubaya’s credit, the poem’s juxtaposition of the names of great kings and personalities (Nyamaropa, Mutota, Nehanda and Gandanzara) in ancient black Zimbabwean history with foreign exotic standards re-links the Shona people with their ‘authentic’ past while satirizing the ridiculousness of measuring Africans by foreign standards. These names function as symbols of cultural authenticity and appeal to the values of black Zimbabweans. Equally important is the note on which the poem ends which places responsibility on those who have fallen victim to foreign values. The closing line (‘Save yourself black man’) seems to suggest that the conviction with which black people fought against physical colonial oppression should be translated to the fight against neo-colonialism which manifests itself in the form of the colonizers’ culture continuing to dominate the formerly colonized. The use of pronouns ‘everybody’ and ‘anybody’ indicates the pervasive influence of foreign values and how they have come to be viewed as Shona society’s perception. The whole idea of measuring black Africans by foreign standards undermines

the notion of African independence and the identity that independence confers on Africans.

While Africans are presented as endangered victims of foreign standards and values in ‘Extinction’, Nyamubaya also lays the blame squarely on the Africans’ doorstep, as the poem ‘Confusion’ highlights:

It is fashionable nowadays
To be a born again Christian

Acquired new names
Tailor made uniforms
With holy crosses on the chest
They pray sing and dance
In the temple on Sunday

On Saturdays they go back to roots
They drink the home brewed beer
They dance get possessed
By the sounds of Mbira
They all had denounced as evil on Sunday. (35)

The underlying message in this poem is that Africans who practise both Christianity as well as their own cultural values are confused. Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* differs from Nyamubaya because he argues that the victims of colonialism cannot choose between two opposing values. He suggests that their actions manifest the dualism of their historical experiences. In his own words, Sartre (Fanon, 1968:17) says: ‘Two worlds [the colonial and that of the colonized]: that makes two bewitchings; they dance all night [the colonized] and at dawn they crowd into the churches to hear mass...’.

Countering Nyamubaya and Sartre's perceptions of Africans as confused and hapless victims, respectively, one could argue that black Africans are aware that their social, political and economic environment demands dualism in their very existence. It would also be a simplistic perception of the black Africans' cultural dilemma to suggest that Africans should make a simple choice between Christianity and their traditional cultural values. For more than a century in what is currently known as Zimbabwe, the black African was a point of interaction of opposing values and therefore his/her personality in post-independence Zimbabwe can only be a reflection of this historical fact. Furthermore, the war which eventually gave birth to Zimbabwe's independence was supported by both Christians and guardians of local cultures (Lan, 1985:213). The black Africans' adoption of both sets of values is born out of their realization that neither set of values can be discarded from their lives. What Nyamubaya's poetry suggests is that the contradictory duality which is reflected in the personalities of post-independence black Africans who practise a smattering of different religions is a symptom of a troubled past, the contradictions of which return to haunt them.

These contradictions that characterize post-independence identities in Mashonaland and Manicaland mirror the political contradictions. In the poem 'Machipanda Border Post', for instance, the vacuity of independence is highlighted in the continuation of the practice of upholding colonial borders and boundaries.

Aren't you the residue that the Indian Ocean threw away
During the highest tide
The queues on the border makes one deny one's nationality
The torture and shame of the elderly woman
Whose love potion is exposed in public in search of
Undeclared goods

While those who made the borders buy their way with
thirty pieces of silver
These Africans still belong to yesterday
Continuously denying to break the chains
That stubbornly tie their hands to other people's makings. (22)

The colonial boundaries and markings, which the persona points to, reflect the colonizers' redefinition of the continent they perceived amorphous in ways that suited them. Apart from redefining the land, such boundaries redefined the inhabitants and conferred a new identity on them in as far as they were arbitrary in their demarcations. Their continuous presence in post-independence Africa therefore symbolizes the Africans' 'contentment' with physical spaces mapped out for them by their erstwhile masters. While the persona views this as a failure on the part of Zimbabwean independence in particular and the rest of African countries at large, she does not mention the extent to which decolonization can be attained without inflicting damage on those seeking it. This is probably because such boundaries cannot be dismantled without upsetting the premises on which modern nations are predicated. Africa's history is contradictory and therefore all attempts at decolonization should bear this aspect in mind. Both the cultural and political contradictions that Nyamubaya revisits in her poetry point to the dilemma that post-independence Zimbabwean society finds itself trapped in the forces of the past which threaten to nullify the goals of the revolution. What this suggests is that, as a consequence of the complications inherent in the histories of colonized nations, complete and satisfactory independence is difficult to attain.

As can be seen from the preceding discussion and analysis, Nyamubaya's revisiting of the liberation struggle, one of the major landmarks of Zimbabwe's history is an attempt

to make meaning of the war in the context of the socio-political landscape in post-independence Zimbabwe until the mid 1990s. She recounts the bitter moments of her country's history during the liberation war to convey the yawning gap between what people struggled for and what actually transpires in post-independence Zimbabwe. This stance dictates Nyamubaya's dual perspective as seen in those poems which rationalize the war as a worth cause because of its ideological inclinations, and those which are negative about the war and the independence it ushered. Nonetheless, as seen in the discussion, the general mood that pervades the poems is that of anger and this is induced by Nyamubaya's own experiences in both colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe. This further highlights the autobiographical and ideological mode in which Nyamubaya's poetry is steeped. Although both *On The Road Again* and *Dusk of Dawn* were published six and fifteen years respectively into Zimbabwe's independence most of the socio-political issues they raise are still pertinent in present day Zimbabwe, twenty-five years after independence. Thus, Nyamubaya's recollection of the liberation war, which in a way can be paralleled to Vera's re-imagining of her country's history, seeks to highlight where the ideology of the liberation struggle has been betrayed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the social vision of three selected Zimbabwean Shona women writers of the Zimbabwean society. Three different genres have been examined in this study (novel, short stories and poetry) in order to determine how Zimbabwean society has been sequentially represented by black women writers through various modes of artistic representations. In this conclusion, a comparative analysis is made in which the approach and stance that the selected women writers display towards the Zimbabwean society is critiqued against the general overview of Zimbabwean writing in English given in Chapter One. The choice of this approach has been necessitated by the need to assess the significance of the selected women writers' works to Zimbabwean literature and to the Zimbabwean society as well as in order to determine whether these several visions are convergent or divergent.

As mentioned in Chapter One of this study, writing in English by black women in Zimbabwe began to be published only after independence in 1980. This is a consequence of a number of factors, principal among which is the underdog status of black women which often precludes them from accessing basic rights, such as education and freedom of speech, which are accorded to men. The late development of black Zimbabwean women's published writing is thus a reflection of the stifled female voice which could not find expression under the double oppression of the indigenous patriarchy and colonial rule; and this gives their writing a pertinence that is different from male writing.

This difference is reflected in the selected writers' vision(s) which seek(s) socio-political redress and a reformulation of both colonial and patriarchal definitions of black womanhood which impose a narrow and constricting notion of black women. This kind of social vision is evident in the creation of protagonists, such as Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* and Chido in Vera's short story 'It is Over', who, like both Dangarembga and Vera are conscious that they have to confront cultural prejudices and restrictions directed towards women, on the other hand and socio-political pressures from colonialism and the new dilemmas which emerge in post-independence Zimbabwe, on the other. In contrast to female characters given above, male characters, such as Sam in Stanley Nyamfukudza's novel *The Non-Believer's Journey* and Lucifer in Charles Mungoshi's novel *Waiting for the Rain*, are unfettered by gender restrictions. As fictional characters, Sam and Lucifer are reflections of the imaginations of the patriarchal spokesmen (Nyamfukudza and Mungoshi); like their real life counterparts, these characters occupy a relatively privileged social and political space in their patriarchal society. Thus, the vision of the selected writers is not entrenched only in the post-independence context in which their works were published, but has also been shaped by traditional cultural practices as well as colonialism as it affected black people in general.

However, none of the three selected women writers suggests a simple formula for recovery. Each acknowledges the complexity of both the colonial and patriarchal systems they depict. Dangarembga's social realist novel portrays these dilemmas largely within the private sphere and so is less politicized than either Vera or Nyamubaya. Vera's fabulist mode situates them within both private and public spheres, prioritizing the

creative impulse in her treatment of Zimbabwean politics; and Nyamubaya's autobiographical and ideological approach situates these problems within intensely personal and national spaces. Apart from these differences in approach, all three writers provide a woman's perspective of their society. They express a genuine interest in the predicament of black women, and their writing reflects, in an immediate and direct way, how women respond to the socio-political reality around them. The selected writers thus foreground women's experiences of domesticity, education, marriage and the liberation struggle, aspects which are often subverted in the narratives of male writers.

In *Nervous Conditions*, for example, Dangarembga adopts the Bildungsroman narrative structure which she transforms by tracing the growth of a black female character Tambu instead of that of the conventional male hero in male authored narratives about maturation. In fact, the novel traces the growth of four women as Dangarembga herself acknowledges:

Quietly, unobtrusively and extremely fitfully, something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed, bringing me to this time when I can set down this story. It was a long and painful process for me, that process of expansion. It was a process whose events stretched over many years and would fill another volume, but the story I have told here, is my own story, the story of four women whom I loved, and our men, this story is how it all began (204).

The narrative voice thus shifts from that of the young female, Tambudzai, to an older Tambu, looking back retrospectively in the kind of review of growth seen in the excerpt just quoted. In *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*, Yvonne Vera also uses women narrators in the bulk of the stories, thus giving women a voice in the narration of their society's history. In addition to that, she privileges women's roles, which are sometimes

overlooked or marginalized in the representation of a patriarchal society. Nyamubaya, informed by her personal encounters as a freedom fighter, revisits the painful experiences of Zimbabwe's liberation war in some of her poems (the majority of which have female personae) and emphasizes women's active participation to voice their disenchantment with their marginalization and ostracization in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Another important feature of the selected writers' works that has emerged in this study is the consistent search for new socio-political alternatives to the existing structures. These writers use their literary vocality to invert stereotypical perceptions of black women by rewriting their society's history so as to re-image and redefine black Zimbabwean women. Vera, as stated in Chapter Three, re-imagines her society's history so as to re-inscript women into its discourses. In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu's demand to go to school breaks social boundaries and redefines her by placing her outside the acceptable cultural space. Nyamubaya also, through poems such as 'Secrets' and 'Journey and half' (discussed in Chapter Four of this study), has shown women who break restrictive cultural stereotypes by fighting for the independence of their country. Such characters, who question and break out of conventional cultural spaces, effectively dismantle fixed perceptions about women by revealing that womanhood is as diverse as society itself.

Nonetheless, as the selected texts reveal, those women, who violate societal boundaries, do so at a price. Society haunts them psychologically for upsetting its values and such characters are made to feel that they are what Dangarembga poignantly calls "unnatural daughters": those who have betrayed their society and its values. For example, Tambu in

Nervous Conditions is told ‘to curb her unnatural inclinations’ (33), because she yearns to attain an education and thus to live outside the space prescribed for women in her society. Women who have fought in the war, as in Nyamubaya’s poem ‘Aliens’, are regarded as drunkards and prostitutes, signifiers of their social unacceptability. By documenting these women’s wishes and experiences and demanding that they receive recognition for their contributions to society, the selected writers’ vision of their society is revisionary and not radical. Dangarembga’s voice, in particular, is that of a womanist, because she underlines the need for men and women to work together as seen in Mr Matimba who helps Tambu to raise school fees and in Maiguru who comes back to her husband Babamukuru after leaving him. As seen in Chapter Three, Yvonne Vera’s characters in stories, such as ‘It Is Hard to Live Alone’ and ‘Whose Baby Is it?’ bemoan the absence of their menfolk who are fighting in the war, which leaves them alone to combat their various problems. Although in Nyamubaya’s poems which deal with gender relations the focus is mainly on the experiences of female combatants both during the war and in post-independence Zimbabwe, there is no radical solution to the problems. In feminist discourse, these writers represent liberal feminism which seeks revision of some oppressive social structures rather than a complete overthrow of the existing order. This thrust is born out of their understanding of the intrinsic and unique nature of their Shona society.

It is thus the immensity and diversity of these three Shona women’s experience of marginality in society which arguably renders their writing broader and deeper in its engagement of Zimbabwean society than that of males. With the three writers examined in this study, there is an original and refreshing exploration of society where the politics

of the private sphere that is often overlooked by their male counterparts, as mentioned in Chapter One, is interwoven with national political issues such as post-independence disillusionment, colonialism and the war of liberation – the favourite subjects in male authoring. The result is an eclectic discourse that integrates various aspects of society. Thus, while the selected women’s writing has this distinctive slant, it shares some common thematic trends with the mainstream corpus of Zimbabwean writing in English that is dominated by men as indicated above.

The selected women writers’ works are therefore microcosmic of black Zimbabwean women’s writing in English in that they explore perennial issues of women’s emancipation. This is particularly so when one looks at other works such as *A Woman’s Plea* (1998), a collection of poetry by different Zimbabwean women edited by Promise Moyo; *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984), a collection of short stories by Barbara Makhalisa; and *Broken Pillars* (2000), a novel by Tambudzai Kahari. These works explore the plight of Zimbabwean women within the context of their society’s structures.

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