

The Re-membering of Literary Bodies in the Zimbabwean Classroom

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Abstract

This article explores ways in which literary and physical bodies are interlinked in a high-school English literature classroom in Zimbabwe. In this study, twenty-four Grade 12 learners, who are conceptualised as living human bodies closely connected through intergenerational memory, responded to an indigenous literary body, the set novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2006) by Valerie Tagwira. The learners' responses were in the form of poems and symbolic poem-drawings. Participants created their own literary bodies, which reflect and re-member their individual and intergenerational experiences of the set text and of literature in general. Importantly, these multimodal literary bodies of learner "re-memberings" represent the interplay among embodied intergenerational experience, the set text as a literary body, and the discussion of the findings as a body of interpretive work.

Keywords: classroom literature; high school learners; literary perceptions; literary bodies; re-membering literature; Zimbabwean high schools;
The Uncertainty of Hope

Introduction

The broader study from which this article stems focused on Zimbabwean learners' and teachers' perceptions of the subtextual themes of a set text, namely *The Uncertainty of Hope*, by Valerie Tagwira (2006).¹ This article focuses on responses to and perceptions of the set text among twenty-four Grade 12 learners in a Literature in English class, as revealed in their poems and symbolic poem-drawings. These arts-based responses reveal their experiences of intergenerational memory, which is closely related to their socio-political environment and the themes and characters of the set text. This article conceptualises the re-membering of literary bodies in the Zimbabwean classroom by discussing the intergenerational intertwining of the set novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, and the findings from the learners' arts-based artefacts (the learners' poems and drawings). These artefacts connect or re-member the learners' life worlds with that of the prescribed text.

Re-membering refers to the multimodal experiencing of literature through reader-response approaches. Furthermore, a literary text is conceptualised as a body consisting of linguistic features and visual, emotional, tactile, gestural, aural, and spatial representations of the past in the present (Genis 2020, 2–3). Indigenous literature, of which *The Uncertainty of Hope* forms part, provides a space where the ancestors as representations of memory are re-membered (Newfield and Bozalek 2019, 37, 52) and remembered (Gunner 1995, 19–20) or conjured in current spaces (Genis 2021).²

The high school selected for the study was purposely selected as the research site. It is a peri-urban government boarding school accommodating both sexes, located in the Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe at the periphery of the Harare Metropolitan province. The learners (1 450 based on 2019 figures) are drawn from various provinces of the country and from the local farming community. They come from diverse socio-cultural contexts and speak various indigenous languages, like Shona and Ndebele. The school's official languages are English and Shona.

Theoretical Framework

In this article, re-membering refers to the multimodal construction of literary bodies of meaning by the learner participants in response to the set text, *The Uncertainty of Hope* by Valerie Tagwira (2006). The learners' literary bodies or artefacts include their poems and poem-drawings. These literary bodies are fleshed out or re-membered through intergenerational memory and trauma, language and symbols, and the specific cultural

1 This article is based on a doctoral study carried out by Flora Dewa under supervision of Gerhard Genis; see Dewa (2021).

2 In this article, indigenous literature is considered as text that is constructed and re-membered through the life-worlds of indigenous peoples—Zimbabweans in this context.

context. These elements interact to reconstruct, remember, and re-member the learners' individual and collective perceptions of the text (Genis 2019; Genis 2020).

This theoretical conceptualisation of literary bodies is grounded in Carl Gustav Jung's reading of communal memory and archetypes. Jung holds that the unconscious is part of "the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors" (1963, 234); it represents "the collectivity of the dead [and living souls]" (233–34). Therefore, all bodies—past and present, dead and living—are part of the "collective spirit" (116–17). Consequently, to Jung, writing is a spiritual conjuring of memory and of the ancestors (232–33). These are represented or re-membered through primordial images or archetypes that find expression in literature in the form of a collective "daemon, [...] human being, or [...] process" (Jung [1967] 2003, 94). This collective, intergenerational experiencing of literature is also conceptualised as the Bodily (literary language, archetypes, and form), the Inner Bodily (intergenerational memory construction, the unconscious, and the "collective spirit" or ancestral world), and the Outer Bodily (cultural and historical context) (Genis 2019). Therefore, for the purposes of this article, the conceptualisation of literary bodies represents a confluence of language and symbols, memory and trauma, and the socio-cultural and historical environments. The findings are discussed through this conceptual lens, which is also referred to as the "poetic bodies" construct (Genis 2020).

These literary or poetic bodies are re-membered and analysed as indigenous bodies in this article. Indigeneity is a fluid construct dependent on context: "Rather than an embodied essence, indigeneity then becomes a site of memory and of struggle, an ongoing commitment, a fluid performative identity under continual negotiation" (Mavhiza and Prozesky 2020, 4). Therefore, these malleable literary bodies, which include indigenous literature and storytelling, are embodiments of the collective cultural and psychological consciousness and knowledges of southern Africa (Genis 2019, 60–61). Indigeneity as Indigenous Knowledge is "knowledge production [that] is always intergenerational and multidirectional across time and space" (Manathunga et al. 2020, 14). The ancestral world (the past) forms part of the living world in the present and future (Mda 2000). This cyclic nature of memory, space, and time is re-membered in indigenous poetry and literature (Genis 2018). The Zimbabwean participants of this study are inheritors of this cyclic embodiment of memory. This links closely to the Shona concept of Hunhu, or Ubuntu in a South African context. Hunhu/Ubuntu is conceptualised as an African value system of humanness or being human: a worldview characterised by the values of sharing, compassion, communalism, and related predispositions (Khoza 2005) and the capacity to express interconnectedness, common humanity, and communal responsibility (Nussbaum 2003).

In this article, literary bodies are constructed through a reader-response approach, which Jung (1963, 232–33) refers to as "the haunting" and Newfield and Bozalek (2019, 37) as a "hauntology". Constructing literary bodies is therefore both a bodily and spiritual re-membering of the past in the present. The indigenous literary body is a living

animistic trace with a soul and memory (Lo Liyong 2018). Similarly, the reader-response approach asserts that a literary text comes alive through the reader's active participation and interaction (Kashikar 2018; Rosenblatt 1978, 23). These interpretations of the text are ingrained in readers' shared historical and cultural milieus (Fish 1972; Rosenblatt 1982).

These literary bodies are multisensory constructs. The re-membering and experiencing of literature also represents a "multi-semiotic assemblage" of artefacts that mirrors identity formation, including the linguistic, spatial, tactile, visual, and gestural modes (Newfield and Maungedzo 2006, 77): In Newfield and Maungedzo's (2006) intervention, learners designed a multi-semiotic cloth to represent their learning in the English classroom, which included poetry. These multimodal images are socially and culturally shaped resources for meaning-making (Kress 2000, 155; Kress 2009).

The artefacts (poems and poem-drawings) of the learners are consequently analysed as indigenous literary bodies representing multimodal re-memberings of intergenerational memory triggered by reader responses to the novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* within the Zimbabwean classroom space.

Methodology

The methodological approach in this study included participatory arts-based methodologies. Arts-based research is "a process that uses the expressive qualities of [artistic] form to convey meaning" (Barone and Eisner 2012, xii) and pursue understanding (Gioia 2014). The employment of arts-based methods is supported by Newfield and Maungedzo's (2006, 77) observation that "meaning-making takes place in a range of modes, such as the visual, actional, sonic, gestural and verbal, and in the multimodal integration of a range of modes, rather than in language only". In this study, the multimodal approach takes the form of the learners' individually crafted poems and the poem-drawings of symbols in response to their interaction with the novel. Given indicates that arts-based social research involves the "communication of subjective realities and the vigorous interrogation of a common-sensical way" of understanding society (2008, 30). It also augments and creates multiple meanings of the data. Thus, the employment of arts-based methods was deemed appropriate for this study, which is anchored in the interpretive paradigm that observes the existence of multiple realities (Okeke and Van Wyk 2015).

The learner participants responded to the text, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, based on their previous exposure to this text in the classroom. The learners were not coached on the themes of the set text. Consequently, the responses discussed in the next section are based on the learners' own subjective interpretations. The learners wrote their poems and designed their poem-drawings, in which they poetically and symbolically expressed their views and understanding of the set text. This approach allowed for a multimodal embodiment of their own literary bodies. The learners re-membered their perceptions

of the text through the Bodily construct. The verbal images in their poems were remembered in their symbolic-visual poem-drawings: the linguistic, visual, gestural, symbolic, and spatial multi-modes provided a rich embodiment of their intergenerational archetypes. Language, memory, and context were thus integrated in their arts-based artefacts.

The process consisted of the following steps:

Step 1: Learners wrote poems that illustrated how they felt about and perceived the prescribed text. Learners had to consider the themes, characters, setting, and plot of the text while planning their poems.

Step 2: Learners had to identify all the themes, topics, or aspects in their poems and draw a picture or symbol that represented these. These poems and poem-drawings were based on the learners' personal understanding of the prescribed text.

Step 3: Participating learners were interviewed and attended focus group discussions. During these face-to-face interactions, learners explained the meaning and perceptions of their poems and poem-drawings.

The next section discusses the main themes in the novel to which the learners responded. This text forms an intertextual link to the learners' creation of their literary bodies according to their perceptions of the novel.

The Literary Bodies

The Set Text

The Uncertainty of Hope (Tagwira 2006) is set in post-independence Zimbabwe and falls within the genre of "post-2000 Zimbabwean literature" (Nyambi 2013, 3). The novel represents the lived experiences and resilience of ordinary people who negotiate, respond to, and cope with the main political crisis and with various micro-crises stimulated by it (Mlambo, Kangira, and Smit 2015, 50). It mainly centres on the lives of ordinary women and "portrays female victimhood in the context of a failing postcolonial state" (Mangena 2017, 56). The novel addresses the experiences of women entangled in precarious economic and political circumstances.

The novel presents the life of a female protagonist, Onai Moyo, a market trader who lives in Mbare, a crowded, high-density suburb in Harare, and her friend Katy Nguni, a fellow market trader and a forex dealer. Onai is married to Gari, an abusive, irresponsible philanderer and drunkard who neglects his family. Onai plays many different roles: that of wife, mother, breadwinner, and "ordinary Zimbabwean living in the harsh times of 2005, when hyperinflation, queues for scarce commodities, and the

deadly effects of the misguided Operation Murambatsvina³ colour the hopelessness of a once prosperous nation” (Machirori 2015). Gari denies Onai the opportunity to seek formal employment. She has three children to fend for under very harsh economic circumstances, characterised by a dwindling economy, price hikes, shortages of basic commodities, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a collapsing healthcare system, and urban squalor.

After the death of her husband, Onai is expected to marry Gari’s brother, Toro. She refuses, which results in her and her children leaving the family home. She endures homelessness, along with many other Zimbabweans who are displaced victims of the government-sponsored Operation Murambatsvina of 2005. Most Mbare residents who were displaced during the operation were relocated to over-crowded dwellings and many migrated to neighbouring countries, including South Africa. Onai and her children settle at her mother’s rural home, after which she returns to Harare to reassert herself despite the adversities she faces. Through her representation of the poor people of Mbare, Tagwira exposes the plight of a wide cross-section of Zimbabwe’s people who were affected by factors such as Operation Murambatsvina, hyperinflation, and overall economic distress.

As the protagonist negotiates her circumstances in both the private and public spheres, Tagwira presents and develops important themes. Like much of postcolonial African literature, the text explores the changes experienced by former colonies in the fields of culture, politics, and religion and reflects on the present state of post-independence and its challenges (Altijani and Omer 2019). One of the major challenges of post-independence Zimbabwe represented in the novel is the aspect of human migration. This was driven by the post-2000 “dysfunctional economy, dwindling job opportunities, and incessant shortages of basic consumer goods” (Nyambi 2014a, 3). As reflected by the novel, “the most visible manifestation of the Zimbabwean crisis was a wave of outmigration from the country” (Chiumbu and Musemwa 2012, xiv). People left the country, mostly in search of better opportunities and “better lives”, while some were forced to leave due to the Murambatsvina removals. Both those who left the country and those whom they left behind felt psychologically and physically displaced.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Hannah tells Onai that her husband left for South Africa after the demolitions and that she herself plans to relocate to the rural areas: “I no longer have the strength for this [...] I’m homeless, I have no money, and my child has stopped going to school” (Tagwira 2006, 211). Hannah feels that she no longer belongs; she is

3 Operation Murambatsvina was launched by the Zimbabwean government in May 2005 as a programme of evictions and the demolition of unauthorised housing, together with actions against informal traders, throughout Zimbabwe’s urban areas. Out of a population of approximately 12.7 million people, the United Nations estimates that the operation rendered 570 000 people homeless, deprived 98 000 people of their direct livelihood, and directly or indirectly affected 2.4 million people (Tibaijuka 2005).

physically and psychologically traumatised by the triple loss of a husband, a home, and an income after the demolition of her Mbare market stall. Her condition sums up the general physical and psychological experiences of those who live through Zimbabwe's social and economic collapse, which include the victims of migration.

The novel also addresses class differentiation in Zimbabwe, a product of the policy of separate development implemented by the colonial Rhodesian administration. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe, like many other ex-colonies, “inherited a racially determined socio-economic system”; the British Rhodesian administration had established “separate schools, clinics, hospitals, and other social amenities for whites and blacks” (Makumbe 2011, 1). The suburbs that had been created for blacks, including Mbare, became home to most blacks who migrated to the cities after independence. In the novel, this class differentiation is evident in Mbare's overcrowdedness, its sewage-infested roads, and its inadequate infrastructure when compared to Belvedere and Borrowdale, suburbs characterised by affluence. The portrayal of Mbare in the novel highlights poverty, squalor, and neglect, issues which pervade the writer's portrayal of the post-independence economic situation of Zimbabwe. Tagwira evocatively describes Onai's poverty through symbols and images of wretchedness: “a black and white television set is her most prized possession”, her home is secured by a “rickety metal gate”, her blankets are threadbare, and a “wobbly, lopsided wooden table serves as eating-place” (2006, 1). Elsewhere in the text, children are described walking to school barefoot in ragged uniforms. This class gap is even evident in the issue of queueing—the poor have to stand in queues for even the most basic necessities, like bread. The country is marred by economic challenges, but a person's vulnerability to these challenges is relative to their class.

The novel also explores the theme of disillusionment and corruption. Those in authority are not living up to the people's expectations and have sacrificed national duty for the sake of personal enrichment. The text presents the post-independence era in Zimbabwe as one characterised by greed and incompetence on the part of politicians and government officials. This particular type of failure by politicians after independence has been vividly captured in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2001, 166):

Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty, and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie.

Like many other African citizens after independence, the characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* realise that independence has ushered in new challenges: individualism, poverty, corruption, dictatorship, greed, negligence, and disillusionment. Qualities such as these are embodied in Nzou, the corrupt police commissioner who tarnishes the reputation of the police force through public misconduct. He enriches himself and

selfishly embezzles public resources. This immorality among those in authority signals the brokenness of the cultural cohesion, fostered by Hunhu/Ubuntu, that drove the war of independence. The destabilisation of Hunhu is represented as starting from the top (represented by Nzou) and cascading down to the poor citizens, who live in abject poverty. For the poor, poverty erodes cohesion and Hunhu/Ubuntu because they have little or nothing to share.

Through the experiences of female characters, the novel addresses the theme of patriarchy and the cultural stereotypes associated with it. Cultural codes of conduct create gender stereotypes such as female passivity, helplessness, dependency, and subservience, which are part of the socialisation of a purportedly “true” African wife (Chitando 2015; Nyambi 2014b). The female dependency stereotype drives the oppressive attitudes of men like Gari, who blocks all possibilities of formal employment for Onai, so that she remains a housewife. The assertion by Toro and Chipo that Onai must marry Gari’s brother, lest she bring other men into the family home, betrays a culturally driven concept that women cannot succeed in life without men. In the novel women also exhibit certain stereotypical attitudes amongst themselves. For example, Onai is contemptuous of Emily during her visits to the hospital, as Onai has no faith in Emily’s capabilities as a medical doctor. Historically, some occupations were classified by gender, and some were strictly considered a male preserve, a scenario which has remained entrenched in patriarchal societies like Zimbabwe (Mangena 2017).

In Chitando’s view, *The Uncertainty of Hope* challenges negative depictions of women in Zimbabwean literature “as helpless victims of patriarchy” (2015, 216). The women in the novel are proactive and self-assured, and they have gravitas: Emily is a patriotic, capable, confident, reliable, responsible, and competent doctor, and Faith is a law student at the University of Zimbabwe. Both these women are in professions that are considered male preserves. Tagwira seeks to break the cultural stereotypes imposed on women in patriarchal societies by presenting Onai as an embodiment of female struggle. Her “journey to self-actuality is a model journey for the struggle of women against patriarchal oppression” (Nyambi 2014b, 41).

The novel also addresses gender-based violence and abuse of both women and children. Onai suffers various forms of violence in her marriage, which is characterised by physical assault and psychological violence. Naidoo (2016) observes a cyclical nature in Onai’s domestic life: “She knew the routine well enough [...] there was always hell to pay” (Tagwira 2006, 9). Onai has to conform to the conservative society’s conditioning, according to which she is expected to repress her distress and anxiety.

In this section, we have identified and discussed the thematic concerns of the set text, incorporating the views of literary critics’ desk analyses of the text. The next section considers the learners’ perceptions of these themes.

The Learners' Poems and Poem-Drawings

Through their poems and poem-drawings, the learners revealed their perceptions and interpretations of the set text. Learners alluded to the theme of individualism in the text, as in, for instance, Fanty's⁴ poem, titled "The Pendulum":

The pendulum is on authority
After swinging from the minority
Who now live lives of catastrophe
For all they can do now is become epitomes of luck
Fingers crossed, but doors locked by those on the spot
Like little larks they peer
In queues, for bills, pills and for food
To make it through its blood being thicker than water
Or the money muscle will have to make a way, otherwise
Even the Almighty, seems only to stare
For when the pendulum is on authority
Even saints will perish
Let's see how luck prevails
Even to those with tusks

Fanty explained the poem as follows:

[The] proverb "blood is thicker than water" means that the minor people have to be related to those in authority if they are to succeed, which is corruption. "Money muscle" ... I used alliteration to emphasise the power of money in people's lives. (Fanty.L.12:3)

Fanty's poem-drawing (Figure 1) reinforces the theme of a corrupted form of Hunhu, a concern in the novel. Fanty explained that the natural sideways movement of the pendulum depicts equal access to opportunities in society. She indicated that the unnatural interruption of the pendulum's oscillation in the second picture reflects corruption and unfair access to wealth by those in authority.

The second stanza of Kuku's poem also alludes to corruption among those in positions of authority:

Instead of providing the people with a solution
All they ever do is lead the corruption
What is this? An Elephant so huge
Cannot offer the little ones protection.

4 Culturally neutral pseudonyms are used.

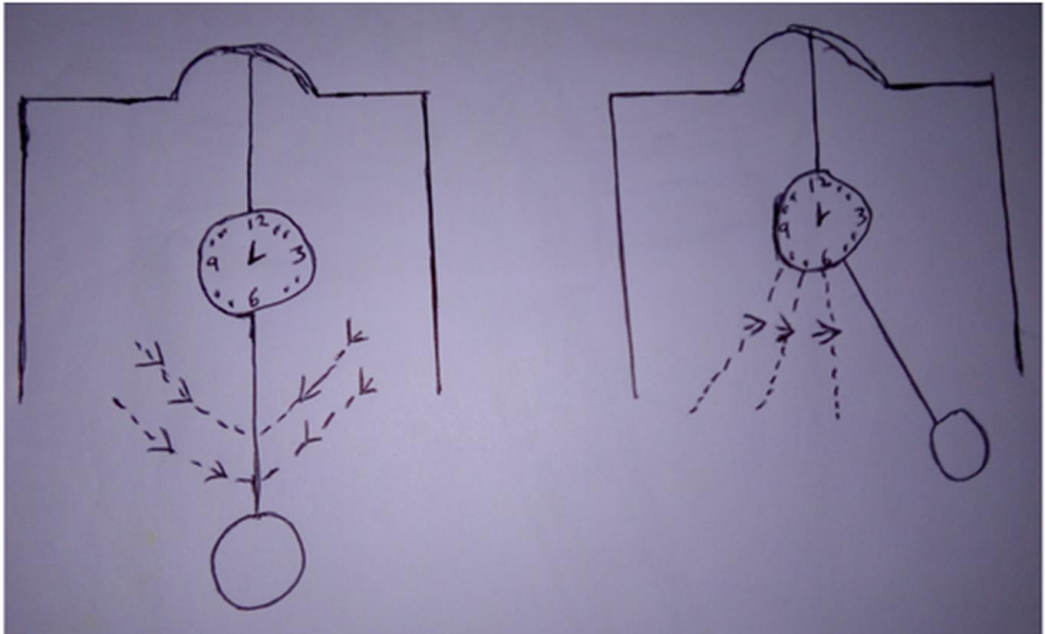


Figure 1: Fanty’s pendulum drawing

Kuku commented on this stanza as follows:

In the second stanza, I refer to people who are in authority but do not help those in need. “An elephant so huge ...”; I am referring to Mr. Nzou, he has the authority, and he has the power but cannot offer the little ones protection. He is using that as an advantage to gain whatever he wants. (Kuku.L.12:28)

The second stanza of Tatata’s poem, “Surviving in a Suffocating Economy”, presents the theme of the oppression of women:

In such a society, the downtrodden are women.
 Marriage, a suffocating place,
 as it is like an octopus that won’t let go once it grabs,
 with women being treated like animals, enduring the pain.

Tatata explained:

[The] second stanza brings out that women are oppressed, being looked down upon by the society. [The] theme of marriage ... marriage is an oppressive institution for women, as women are being forced by their husbands and the society [which is] patriarchal; women should remain under their husbands. There is involvement of illegal activities to survive, which is only for those who have sharp minds that can find ways to survive. (Tatata.L.12:6)

Kartel's poem-drawing (Figure 2) also reveals the oppression of women in the text, which she metaphorises as the image of yoked cows:

On the drawing, I have two thin cows on a yoke. Energy ... There are cows because in the text there are a lot of women who are taking more responsibilities than men. They are carrying a heavy yoke, which is burdensome considering they are very thin ... [the] yoke symbolises the problems of the society, especially oppressed/yoked women. The burning sun symbolises the economic drought ... especially women and children suffering long queues ... Dry grass and very poor soils represent hopelessness with life ... death. Withering plants symbolise the draining of energy through many struggles, especially for women ... Instead of Gari taking responsibility for the family, we see Onai at the centre of things ... During the economic drought, Onai has to run up and down to feed the family. (Kartel.L.12:17)

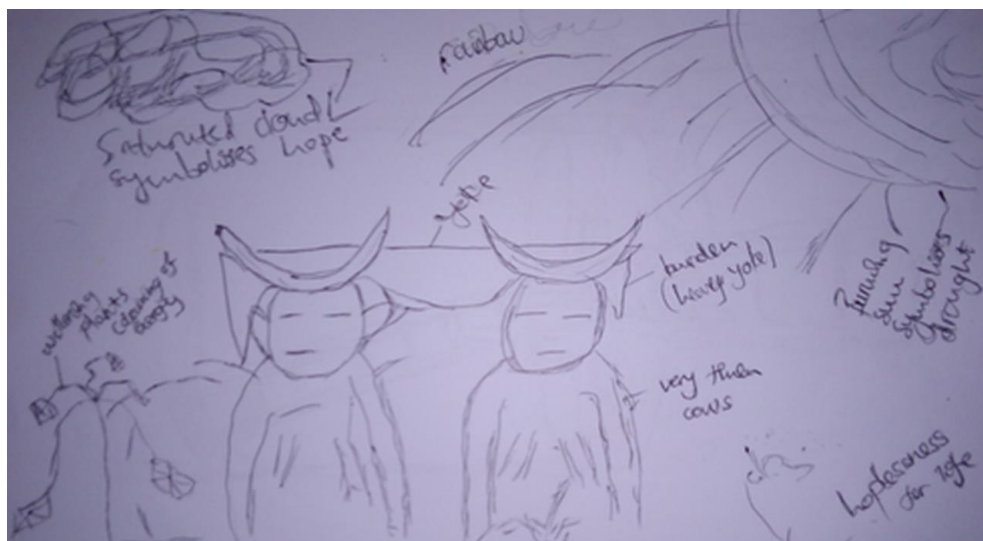


Figure 2: Kartel's poem-drawing

Ahab's poem and poem-drawing (Figure 3) mirror the poverty and oppression experienced by women in the text, as represented by the main character, Onai:

I felt his fist hit me hard like a hammer,
 He was drunk and blamed me for everything.
 I felt weak like a baby,
 that I couldn't even defend my innocent soul.

Come to think of my small business ...
 The cruel police officers were coming to chase us
 away from the center,
 Yet from a day's peanuts one could not
 even buy a loaf of bread, then the hospital
 bill for my injuries was another pain in the neck.



Figure 3: Ahab's poem-drawing

Ahab explained:

The poem is about Onai, and the woman in the drawing is Onai with a deformed face. The face is showing the abuse that she faces from Gari, her husband. The deformation of the face [links] with the first stanza of my poem, reflecting the abuse she was going through. The drawing also shows a basket and some vegetables in it. This reflects Onai's way of survival, as a vendor ... The tattered dress shows that Onai is suffering ... In the drawing, the sun is rising and it's a sign of hope because in the text we see that as Onai looks at the Humpty-dumpty clock, she is encouraged, she develops hope for a better future ... Clouds symbolise that Onai's life is dark. It is not a good life; that is why I drew the cloud, lightning, and the moon. Just resembling that there is no light in Onai's life, but then the sun is rising, and it shows that there is going to be hope. (Ahab.L.12:15)

Vy's poem-drawing of a woman trapped in a bottle (Figure 4) alludes to the limitations experienced by women in the novel and the inequality between men and women in all socio-economic spaces. She stated:

The bottle has a broad base and a narrow top. The narrow top symbolises how the number of women who leave the bottle is very limited and how at the base of the bottle, it is very broad ... There are lots of women who are suffocated in the bottle ... there is the man at the top of the bottle, showing how men are there to suppress women. They lock up women in the bottle to the extent that they are unable to leave the bottle, or they cannot move out of the bottle. Women struggle to move out of the bottle, except for a few ... There is also a ladder that's in the bottle. It's more like a bridge between men and women, to signify that if there is a woman that is determined and courageous enough to leave the bottle, they have got a chance to, and to get to the level where men are. The bottle is made of glass; therefore, it can be broken [similar to relationships]. (Vy.L.12:20)



Figure 4: Vy's poem-drawing

Tatata's poem-drawing of a plant growing in an arid landscape (Figure 5) refers to the hardships faced by most of the characters in the novel. She described it thus:

My drawing is made up of the sun, the plant, a fallen leaf, the water table, and the mountains ... The plant is symbolising the human beings in the society and we can see the withering leaves symbolising the failures of the people in the society, such as Onai, who tries to do the dressmaking course but Gari refuses ... Failure [of] the plant roots to reach the water table is metaphorical in the sense that the plant stands for human beings in the society, and the unreachable water table shows that probably the people in society are away from life, and they die, as evidenced by falling leaves, which signify the deaths of Gari and Sheila. The burning sun symbolises the economic meltdown, and since water is far below, the people are suffocating in the economic meltdown and with no hope of living in such a society. (Tatata.L.12:4)



Figure 5: Tatata's poem-drawing

The first stanza of Miracle’s poem, “A Long Night”, also reflects the suffering experienced by women in the novel and their endurance and patience in their long wait for change:

A flower in a bed of thorns,
Pierced and pierced,
Pierced inside and out by thorns.
Wounds all over its petals,
Its strength outgrown by fear,
The flower shivered day and night.

Miracle explained:

A Long Night—the title means [the] long suffering Onai had, with almost three-quarters of her life being of suffering. The problems in the marriage are hurting her, problems outside her marriage like death and the economic hardships. The flower is representing Onai in a bad marriage. “The flower shivered day and night”: Onai is scared but her friend helps her to withstand her fear, but the problems outgrow her strengths. (Miracle.L.12:31)

The tree in Kuku’s poem-drawing (Figure 6) is almost uprooted by a strong wind, which also alludes to the myriad of socio-economic adversities faced by the people in the text, especially the poor.



Figure 6: Kuku’s poem-drawing

Kuku explained:

It is all about how people are suffering due to economic hardships, especially poverty. The tree is symbolising the society. The wind, which is pushing the tree to the side, is representing the economic hardships. The economic hardships are pushing people to do what they do not want to do; that's why the tree branches have been swayed to the side. The little flowers growing on the hard earth represent people surviving in the hard economic situation and that there is hope to overcome the hardships. The falling leaves represent some people who are failing to adjust to some economic situations, so they die or leave the country. The falling leaves that are succumbing to the pressure of the wind, [that] are flying off and falling to the hard ground, can also include those people becoming immoral due to the economic pressure and those who are leaving their country. (Kuku, L.12:28)

The third and fourth stanzas of Zee's poem, "Bewilderment", address the theme of confusion and loss of sense of direction as characteristic of postcolonial Zimbabwe:

Life here is tasty for a few and murder for a group
And survival has become the definition of greediness.
Where is the sky in upside-down land?
Seems I have seen that rotten fruit since the world begun
Life has changed in so many ways

But KNOWLEDGE brings a silver lining, the sun is on the rise
Means to look beyond perspective
Faith is the bird that feeds the light,
When dawn is still dark
We'll camp out tonight beneath the bright starlight
Life has changed in so many ways

She indicated:

I chose the title "Bewilderment" because the post-colonial era in Zim seems to be in a lot of confusion. People who are supposed to be helping others are the sources of suffering of others. It is also supported by [the] rhetoric[al] question in my poem: "Where is the sky in upside-down land?" There is no sense of direction in the society. Also, the people's lives have changed in so many ways, which shows further confusion. The people in *The Uncertainty of Hope* have to change their daily routine[s] to suit ... the dying economy. "KNOWLEDGE brings a silver lining": the people of Mbare have hope that education will change their fortunes, as evidenced through Katy and John educating Faith up to university level. (Zee.L.12:12)

Zee explained that her poem-symbol (Figure 7) represents selfishness, individualism, and corruption:

The Snowman represents the privileged people ... who are cold and unhelpful to society. [A] snowman is associated with happiness in the festive season. It is made up of ice and

is cold. There are these groups who are supposed to deliver [to] other groups, but they are cold and turning a blind eye; he has closed eyes. [From a] new perspective, on the mountainous horizon one can see ... the sun rising, and it is melting the snowman, giving way to these hands, which are reaching out for help. In other words, fighting against corruption through education—that's why I drew the hands reaching out for help. We notice that after the sun has risen the snowman will melt, providing water to the promised land, showing opportunities and potential after the sun has risen. I am linking the sun with knowledge. (Zee.L.12:13)



Figure 7: Zee's poem-drawing

Hassan's poem-drawing of a large tree devoured by a raging fire (Figure 8) reflects the disintegration of traditional cultural values and the destabilisation of Hunhu/Ubuntu as a result of the spread of individualistic and Westernised values:

My drawing is a large tree that has no roots and [is] surrounded by a strong fire. The rootlessness represents the directionless Zimbabwean society, which has lost its morality. Nowadays we have moral corruption whereby the people decide to do things which would not be normal if we [had been looking] at it ten years back. Husbands cheat on their wives too much and there is much promiscuity, greed, and selfishness, which I

liken to the huge fire in my drawing. Nowadays people don't really care; they care about money and about how everything they encounter will benefit them personally. There are high cases of crime, robberies and burglaries. (Hassan.L.12:34)



Figure 8: Hassan's poem-drawing

The next section integrates these arts-based responses with the themes in the novel. This is done through the conceptualisation of literary bodies.

Re-membering Literary Bodies

The learners, as living human bodies, interacted with the literary body (the set text) through language (their poems and poem-drawings). The arts-based artefacts they created constitute literary bodies that reveal rich interpretations of literature. The learners' poetic and graphic representations contain their subjective interpretations and re-membering of the plot, characters, and themes of the set text. Importantly, Flora Dewa, one of the authors of this article, shares the learners' literary-historical traditions.

The interpretation or re-membering of the findings has therefore been conducted through literary bodies that carry similar cultural-historical memories.

Hassan, Zee, and Fanty attested to the breakdown of cultural cohesion in the novel, which they mirrored through graphic descriptions of growing individualism. Both their poems and poem-drawings carry lucid lamentations about the negative cultural and socio-cultural change portrayed by the novel. The learners' poems and poem-drawings point to the disintegration and corruption of Hunhu/Ubuntu, as they express nostalgia for Hunhu. There is a general allusion to selfish individualism due to Westernisation, which the learners describe as having eroded the principles and values of Hunhu/Ubuntu, which include love, family unity, sisterhood/brotherhood, solidarity, generosity, and care. Zee and Fanty referred to the emergence of two separate classes—the rich and the poor—which reveals unequal access to resources and privileges. Zee's snowman metaphor illustrates the selfish detachment of the rich from the poor majority. In her illustration, the snowman remains standing while the majority are drowning. The scenario is akin to that of the novel, where a few rich people live in luxury and affluence in Belvedere and the majority are crowded into Mbare. The snowman, which is a Western symbol of winter holidays and Christmas celebrations, embodies the rich, who detach themselves from the poor, thereby mocking the collectivism fostered by Hunhu/Ubuntu. The snowman, just like the rich in the novel, represents a cold, individualistic Western worldview that disregards cultural and social obligations. As propounded by Fish's (1972) and Rosenblatt's (1982) reader-response approach, the participants' interpretations of the set text were located in their collective historical and cultural environment, thereby reflecting the fact that their personally created literary bodies harbour their intergenerational experiences of the set text.

The learners' poem-drawings also re-member the cyclic nature of existence through Hunhu, which integrates the communal ancestral world with that of the living (Genis 2018). Fanty's poem supports her depiction of the swinging pendulum as the natural ebb and flow of Hunhu existing among people who support each other, whereas the pendulum unnaturally frozen to one side represents economic greed and corruption, which have undermined and corrupted the ancestral principle of Hunhu. The rhythmic, semi-circular movement of the pendulum in Fanty's drawing signifies the African indigenous circular concept of existence, which identifies life as a circle through which, and in which, the living and the dead harmoniously co-exist, and the ancestors live among their progeny. The community is linked with the ancestral world through communal time, space, and action (Genis 2020, 6; Newfield and Bozalek 2019). The unnaturally frozen pendulum represents linear movement and motionlessness, both of which are opposed to Ubuntu/Hunhu. The frozen pendulum could also represent social and economic inertia in Zimbabwe due to societal challenges—like the perennial queues, which Fanty refers to in her poem, where people spend hours waiting for scarce commodities. Fanty's use of a symbol that illustrates the African indigenous circular concept of existence reveals that learners identify with their respective communities, and that the knowledge they bring into the classroom is culturally

specific (Mawere 2015). These symbols therefore re-member the learners' life worlds in relation to the prescribed text.

The literary bodies created by Kartel, Hassan, Miracle, Kuku, and Tatata employ nature and cultural metaphors and images to illustrate their understanding of the set text. Cultural representations form part of the collective heritage of African communities and are traditionally employed in indigenous praise poetry (Genis 2020, 4). The nature symbols used connect learners with their indigenous literary modes and African Indigenous Knowledge.

Kartel's use of the yoked cow symbol reveals her awareness of the cultural value and importance of cattle, particularly cows. In the Zimbabwean cultural milieu, cows are important for provision of food and nutrition, as well as calf-bearing and subsequent herd expansion; they are therefore a symbol of wealth. Cattle are also used in religious ceremonies to placate the ancestors. In Zimbabwean culture the yoke is associated with bulls (oxen or *madhonzwa*), which perform laborious agricultural tasks. Kartel's symbol of yoked cows is thus an attempt to express the unfair treatment of women in the domestic space. Being yoked takes away their freedom and represents them as pathetic and not deserving of redemption.

The shattering of the Zimbabwean socio-cultural body is evident in Hassan's drawing. Hassan re-members this in a metaphor that emphasises violent destruction. His drawing consists of a tree engulfed by a raging fire, signifying the destruction of the family and cultural bodies by moral corruption in the set text and in society. The large and rootless tree, whose falling leaves are being consumed by a raging fire, could signify the cultural and moral emptiness that characterises critical institutions in Zimbabwe, such as social institutions (for example, marriage) and political bodies. Those in governance lack moral accountability, as evidenced by the corruption, bribery, cheating, and the embezzlement of public resources that characterise the police service in the novel. Nzou, a police commissioner, lacks moral accountability—a sign of a morally rootless state. Hassan emphasised the lack of respect for the marriage institution, which is evident in the text through Gari's extramarital affairs. Hassan viewed the set text as a testimony of the compromised morality that threatens the country's cultural base, which is symbolised by the large tree.

Kuku also makes use of a destructive nature metaphor. His tree sways precariously in a strong wind and is losing many of its leaves. The falling leaves could signify detachment and migration, which pervade the novel. In the set text, many Zimbabweans leave the country because of economic and political challenges, such as the Murambatsvina displacements, which are represented by the strong gale in Kuku's drawing. Socio-economic symptoms cause an anorexic and psychologically disturbed Zimbabwean body. This thinning or falling away of body parts is metaphorically re-membered as trees being consumed by fire and wind and by the shedding of leaves, as evidenced in Hassan's and Kuku's drawings.

Zee revealed that her understanding of the set text centres on the theme of labour migration (*Wenera*). The first stanza of her poem, “Bewilderment”, articulates the exodus of people from Zimbabwe in search of better opportunities in other countries. Her poem alludes to the anxieties caused by labour migration, especially loneliness, emptiness, and disruptive changes that unsettle people’s daily lives. The four-stanza poem is marked by a chorus line—“Life has changed in so many ways”—which concludes each of the four stanzas. This allusion to change is fused with a strong sense of confusion, loss, and nostalgia, which is conveyed through the poem’s title, “Bewilderment”. The confusion is echoed by the rhetorical question, “Where is the sky in upside-down land?” This question reveals a troubled mind and a wounded psyche, in desperate search of solutions. Zee’s description of the land as “upside-down land” reveals the confusion that characterises the lives of Zimbabweans. Her interpretation of the text portrays an emotional psyche that is saturated by nostalgia, anxiety, misery, and yearning (Taheri and Biriya 2013). These feelings dominate and fracture the psychological body. Zee’s poem describes the emotional torture inflicted by migration, which affects both the migrant, like Tariro in the set text, who experiences the harshness of diaspora, and those who remain behind, such as Katy and the wives and children of the men who work in South Africa.

The learners’ interpretation of the text’s representation of a patriarchal society that relegates women’s bodies to objects echoes Spivak’s (1995) emphasis on the marginalisation, manipulation, and underestimation of women by men (Roy 2008). The learners view women as confined, entrapped, and without freedom of choice, a proposition also put forward by Mangena (2017), who describes women’s choices in patriarchal societies, including Zimbabwe, as circumscribed. Vy’s bottle symbolises the entrapment of women’s bodies and the limited opportunities accessible to them. The woman in her drawing is confined to a bottle with a narrow neck. This emphasises her entrapment. The rest of the sealed-off bottle could imply that many women require personal willpower to escape their confinement. The ladder leads those who have the agency to self-liberate to the narrow neck of the bottle and the possibility of escape. The man outside the bottle is in a position to help the woman escape. Vy’s poem-drawing seems to allude to Onai’s long entrapment, her personal efforts to liberate herself, and her release from confinement in poverty with the help of a man, Tapiwa. Vy’s interpretation is shared by Naidoo (2016, 166), who observes that the plot of *The Uncertainty of Hope* suggests that women cannot fully liberate themselves in patriarchal societies; instead, they require men’s assistance, as the latter are better positioned to effect change.

Sexed bodies are therefore a recurring theme in both the learners’ and the novel’s literary bodies. The learners regarded the set text as an effort by the writer, Valerie Tagwira, to re-define and re-member these sexed bodies within Zimbabwean society. They viewed the education of women as a liberating factor and a source of autonomy and agency, especially for women in the set text. Zee’s poem foregrounds education as a liberating tool for both women and society. She alludes to the possibility of a brighter

future through education when she highlights the word “knowledge” in upper case in the line, “But KNOWLEDGE brings a silver lining”. She explains that the people of Mbare hope to liberate themselves through education, as evidenced in John and Katy providing support for Faith to attend university. The line “Faith is the bird that feeds the light, when dawn is still dark” creates wordplay involving Faith, the educated character in the novel, who brings hope through a new dawn. Vy’s poem, titled “The Bottle”, also makes reference to the few women in the novel who have access to opportunities such as education and who escape female entrapment. Their interpretations suggest that the writer’s representation of female prototypes such as Faith and Emily in the text “show[s] that it is possible for women to engage in gainful thinking, without fear or prejudice” (Chitando 2015, 217).

The learners therefore employed nature metaphors to re-member the liberation of the oppressed socio-economic bodies in the text, as evidenced in Zee’s rising sun (a new dawn) and images of free-flying birds. The learners interpreted the novel as foregrounding women as agents of resilience and hope. Tatata’s plant growing in hard ground serves as a symbol of socio-economic progress despite adversity. In spite of its unfavourable circumstances, the plant is able to fight for its survival, similar to the poor characters living in Mbare in the novel. The undergrowth surviving in the hard earth represents people surviving the challenging economic situation and shows that there is hope.

The learners’ literary bodies also represent the themes of the literary text through drawings of people. Ahab’s poem and poem-drawing present Onai as a poor woman, recklessly abused and neglected by her husband, but with the willpower to single-handedly raise children through vending. Ahab’s drawing reveals Onai as a physically torn victim of violent physical abuse with an undying tenacity. Ahab also draws on nature metaphors in his poem-drawing of Onai to complement the imagery: a half-moon behind dark clouds signifies the volatility of her circumstances. In spite of all the adversities, Onai refuses to give in to helplessness and improves her circumstances. This is represented by the rising (and smiling) sun at the top of the drawing. Naidoo (2016) describes Onai as threatened by both domestic and public spaces that form a collective force of psychological violence against women. However, Onai emerges as a wounded victor and a model of resilience.

Similarly, through nature metaphors, Miracle’s poem reflects women’s suffering and their resilience and patience. Her poem, titled “A Long Night”, depicts women’s situation in the novel and in Zimbabwe as a long night that eventually turns into dawn when they unite to change their dark circumstances. The night imagery alludes to a condition of darkness, suffering, and uncertainty. The “long night” could also refer to the endless socio-economic challenges that characterise Zimbabwe, some of which date back to the colonial period. The evocative diction and imagery employed in the poem—for example, the “pierced flower” imagery—represent women as delicate, neglected, and abused. The flower pierced inside and out suggests the psychological (inner) and

physical (outer) torture of women. The repetition of the word “pierced” emphasises the violence experienced by women, particularly by Onai. Just like the flower, Onai is psychologically and physically wounded. She has many sleepless nights during which she stares at the Humpty-Dumpty clock on the wall, which symbolises the passage of time and her long wait for change.

Importantly, the learners’ multimodal literary bodies represent re-membered reader responses to the literary body of the set text, *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Their perceptions of the text created an intertextual link with the text’s themes, the plot, and the characters’ concerns. These themes and concerns are intergenerationally shared by the learners and the characters in the novel. The poems and poem-drawings carry the learners’ embodied literary responses to and perceptions of the novel, which are intergenerationally construed in a post-independence Zimbabwean context. In the learners re-remembering or constructing these new literary bodies, there is a close connection between the poetic language and symbolic drawings produced by the learners in response to the literary text, their individual and collective memory construction, and their socio-political environment. These new literary bodies form an intertextual web of textual themes from *The Uncertainty of Hope* and the learners’ perceptions of the text, as reflected in their own literary creations or artefacts (poems and poem-drawings).

The learners’ poems and drawings have psychoanalytical significance, as the poetic symbols and archetypes constitute their explicit representation of their psychological perceptions of the set text (Jung [1967] 2003, 81, 92–94, 113). The imaginative acts of poetry writing and drawing serve as conduits through which these psychological images and archetypes are released and made conscious (Jung [1967] 2003, 94). Therefore, the poems and poem-drawings—the learners’ poetic bodies—manifest the learners’ perceptions of the set text and evoke individual and collective memories.

Conclusion

This study argues that the learners’ literary bodies represent and re-member the interplay among embodied intergenerational experiences, the set text as literary body, and the discussion of the findings as a body of interpretive work. The learners’ literary bodies (poems and poem-drawings) reflect their individuality and the subjective nature of literary analysis and response. Consequently, the poems and poem-drawings disclose individual and authentic responses to the literary text. However, the literary “re-memberings” are also shaped by the learners’ cultural-historical context.

These individually and collectively embodied reader responses enrich the classroom learning experience. Through poetry and drawings, the learners represented or re-membered their individual experiences and perceptions of the novel in a multimodal way, subsequently producing a multimodal response to the novel. These modes, such as images, are socially and culturally shaped resources for meaning-making (Kress 2000, 155; Kress 2009). Therefore, the learners’ poems and symbols are not isolated from

their socio-cultural and intergenerational literary heritage. Importantly, their poems and symbols consciously or subconsciously reflect various archetypes and experiences of Zimbabwean society, to which they belong.

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