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Title: Counter-discourse in Zimbabwean literature

Issue Date: 2015-02-11

Counter-Discourse in Zimbabwean Literature

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
ter verdediging op woensdag 11 februari 2015
klokke 10:00 uur

door

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geboren te Mwenezi, Zimbabwe
in 1979

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Introduction

I am against silence. The books I write try to undo the silent posture African women have endured over so many decades. (Vera, as cited in Soros 2002)

I don't see that this has anything to do with history that you are researching. We have nothing to hide, but I would not expect to read our dissident problem in a history book. (Kilgore, 2009: p. 260)

If the government said inflation would go down, it was sure to rise. If they said there was a bumper harvest starvation would follow, if the government says the sky is blue, we should all look up to check. (Gappah, 2009: p. 43)

Counter-Discursive Narratives

As demonstrated by Zhuwarara, Zimbabwean fiction in general, like most literatures of the world, is responsive to and reflective of history (2001: p. 10). Major Zimbabwean writers write against both colonial oppression and the challenges of the Zimbabwean postcolony. Literary texts contribute to the public sphere and to the 'search for justice' in the aforementioned historical periods, as they often stand as subversions of dominant versions of history. As examples of 'dissident' voices, such works constitute what Lara calls 'emancipatory narratives' in that they are shaped by the various oppressions faced by the general Zimbabwean public in different chronotopes (1998).

My central aim is to understand how such dominant and emancipator versions of history are narratively created and what their relationship is. Therefore, the question that forms the basis of my thesis is 'what are the key features of Zimbabwean counter-discursive narratives in English? In view of that my thesis is based on the concept of counter-discourse. Terdiman coined the term counter-discourse 'to characterize the theory and practice of symbolic resistance' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 50). He used the term to refer to specific aspects of French literature in his seminal work *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth Century France* (1989). The term has been incorporated into postcolonial theory 'to describe the complex ways in which challenges to a dominant or established discourse (specifically those of the imperial centre) might be mounted from the periphery' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p.

50). In Zimbabwean literature, challenges to a dominant or established discourse are not just limited to those of the imperial culture, but go beyond to include challenges to the established/dominant discourse in the post-independence state, specifically nationalist, patriarchal and 'patriotic' discourses. In Zimbabwean literature, counter-discursive narratives are varied. Writing on behalf of the subaltern groups, writers invent anti-colonial, anti-nationalist, anti-'patriotic' and anti-patriarchal narratives, popularly known as feminist narratives. Put in simple terms, writers who challenge dominant discourses do it from positions of marginality/subalternity. The subaltern in this context include the colonised, women, children and subordinated masculinities (in the Zimbabwean context these include those that belong to political opposition parties). What is contested in 'dissident' narratives is 'the capacity of established discourses to ignore [...] *marginalize* and *distort*' the existence and history of the subaltern (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 50).¹ Subversion of dominant discourses is a critical aspect in resistance and/or protest literature, given that counter-discursive narratives are 'mode(s) of combat' (Terdiman, 1989: p. 11). Stated in other words, counter-discursive narratives belong to the category of protest literature. Elsewhere, the African American writer Wright posits: 'all literature is protest. You can't name a single literary work that isn't protest' (1961, as cited in Baldwin, 1998: p. 257). Wright said this in a conversation with James Baldwin, and was dismissing the art for art's sake concept as 'crap'. His proposition, though a contested one, is quite valid especially with reference to literature by members of an oppressed group in any given society. 'All those who cherish and fight for the liberation of the human spirit from all negative restraints'² fight a cultural battle through their writings (Ngugi, 1981: p. 33).

An absolute definition of protest literature may not be possible because of its fluidity. Protest literature can be defined from various theoretical standpoints. Deconstruction and Feminism are some of the useful ways of understanding different forms of protest literature. Deconstruction is based largely but not exclusively on Jacques Derrida's rereading of philosophical writings. As a revisionist theory, contestation is central to Derrida's Deconstruction theory. The revision aspect of this theory is also a key feature of counter-discourse; for counter-discursive texts are revisions of dominant discourses. Terdiman

¹ The meaning of subaltern adopted in this discussion is one adopted by Gramsci to refer to those 'groups in society who are in subject to the hegemony of the ruling class [...] and are denied access to hegemonic power' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 198).

² 'Negative restraints', in the modern sense, constitute human rights abuses.

describes re-vision as a counter-discursive act 'of looking back, seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' (1971, as cited in Widdowson, 2006: p. 491). Most counter-discursive narratives are fresh ways of reading 'old texts', but with new different insights. The idea of 'revision' demonstrates that there is an interrelationship between dominant and counter-discursive narratives. Terdiman explains the relationship as follows: 'we might thus posit something like a Newton's Law in the discursive realm: for every dominant discourse a contrary and a transgressive counter-discourse. [...] no discourse is ever a monologue' (1989: p. 65, p. 36). This relationship between counter and dominant discourses is demonstrated in this study through a discussion of how colonial, nationalist, patriarchal and 'patriotic' discourses are contested. These discourses are intertwined and their counter-discourses present interesting connections. At the beginning of a counter-discourse tradition in Zimbabwe, we have nationalists challenging the colonial writing of Zimbabwean history and culture. Democrat writers in turn challenge nationalists' glorified narrations of especially the liberation struggle, citing inadequacies and biases. Feminist writers revise the 'revised-nationalist' discourse on the liberation struggle.³ Rewriting nationalist history and culture reshapes an understanding of the nation and normally addresses insufficiency and deliberate exclusions in terms of historical and cultural representation. This chain of relationships is descriptive of counter-discourses and is because these 'are not sovereign and do not exhaust reality' (Terdiman, 1989: p. 18). In other words, the chain of counter-discursive narratives is open-ended, meaning that 'the site of counter-discourse is itself contested'- instances where 'counter-discourse struggles against both dominant and competing oppositional discourses' (White, 1990, as cited in Terdiman, 1989: p. 80).

In Feminism, protest is against patriarchy and is aimed at the promotion of gender equality. Feminism is one of the most influential political and cultural movements of the late twentieth century and mainly 'promote(s) women's autonomy'. A reading of Lara's *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere* shall be useful in the discussion of feminist narratives. She conceives feminist 'narratives of emancipation as forms of recognition' (1998). An important aspect of her approach is to show how 'women build up first their claims about becoming persons and being persons through the aesthetic sphere,

³ 'Female writers' would have been an appropriate phrase but this would mean excluding some Zimbabwean male writers (like Hove) who also take part in revisions of nationalist narrations of the liberation struggle.

by writing novels [...]'. As Lara demonstrates, narratives of emancipation create new forms of power, offering the oppressed women new ways of fighting injustices, thus transforming institutions. Feminist texts selected for this study include Vera's *Without a Name*, *The Stone Virgins*, 'It is Hard to Live Alone' and 'Crossing Boundaries', Nyamubaya's 'That Special Place', Hove's *Ancestors* and Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Nyamubaya, Vera and Tagwira contribute to the feminist debate from an insider's point of view. Hove's text represents women's exclusion yet also presents challenges associated with 'speaking for others'. The guiding question in the discussion of Hove's *Ancestors* is 'how much authority does a male writer have to talk on behalf of the subjugated woman in his narrative?' Spivak's ideas on the subaltern will be useful in my analysis of Hove's text as a feminist text.

In my discussion of feminist narratives, I shall also make use of the sociological theory of intersectionality. This theory demonstrates how 'various socially and culturally constructed categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels contributing to systematic forms of inequality'. Intersectional systems of society that bind together cultural patterns of oppression include race, gender, class and ethnicity (Collins, 2000: p. 42).

The term 'intersectionality' was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), when she discussed issues of black women's employment in the US. She was eventually invited to introduce the notion of intersectionality before a special session on the subject in Geneva during the preparatory session to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. (Yuval-Davis, 2006: p. 193)

I will use the notion of intersectionality in my discussion of Mazvita in Vera's *Without a Name*, Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and other black women characters in selected texts. Vera's Mazvita is a black poor woman labourer. In a colonial set-up, she is not just black, but also a woman as well as at the bottom of the social ladder. Her poverty cannot be separated from her being black, a labourer and a woman. Onai's victim status emanates from her poverty, being a street vendor and a woman. Like all other vendors, Onai is a victim of Murambatsvina state violence, like all other characters in Tagwira's novel. As a wife she is also a victim of her husband's abuse. Such a position is akin to the black woman's position in America especially during slavery. Nanny in

Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* refers to how, 'de nigger woman is de mule of the world' (1937). The statement means that the black woman is 'not with power, not a liberated woman (if liberation means the freedom to make choices about one's life), but a mule picking up the burdens that everyone else has thrown down and refused to carry' (Washington, 1975: p. xi).

Counter-discourse has close links to the notion of writing-back. The term writing-back was coined by Salman Rushdie in the 1980s and is a key concept in post-colonial theory (Freundt, 2012: p. 1). Postcolonial literature consists of writings by previously suppressed voices to the imperial centre, and goes beyond to re-write all other forms of dominant ideologies including patriarchal and nationalist dominations in independent states. Political, economic and cultural domination are some of the many oppressive tendencies of colonialism. The First and Second Chimurenga⁴ were the major responses to colonialism and are representative of the fight for democracy against the excesses of colonial contact. Writers took part in the liberation struggle at the level of cultural production by writing-back to the imperial centre. In chapter 1, I will discuss the problems associated with writing-back to the imperial centre with a specific reference to Negritudism.

Mbembe and Mwangi's understanding of the African postcolony informs my focus in chapters 2, 3 and 4. In *On the Postcolony* (2001), Mbembe calls for a reading of African postcolonial realities that goes beyond associations to imperialism to include self-reflection. Using the same approach in *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender and Sexuality*, Mwangi demonstrates that in the African postcolony writers depart from writing-back to the colonial centre and focus on 'local forms of oppression that are seen parallel to classical colonialism' (2009: p. 1). Texts selected for chapters 2, 3 and 4 should be understood as self-reflexive on specific historical aspects of the Zimbabwean postcolony, and particularly challenge falsification of history through biases, exclusion and 'posing truth for counter-discursive purposes' (Freundt, 2012: p. 3). In chapter 2 I will discuss how Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove 'displace and annihilate' the nationalist imagination of the liberation struggle, particularly challenging women exclusion (Terdiman, 1989: p. 12). According to Fanon,

⁴ The First Chimurenga refers to the 1896/7 Shona and Ndebele uprisings against colonialists. The Shona and the Ndebele lost the war. This war continued in the 1970s as the Second Chimurenga, which ended in 1980, marking the end of colonial rule. The Second Chimurenga is followed by a Third Chimurenga (for a detailed discussion of the Third Chimurenga, see chapter 4 of this study).

'history teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism' (1963: p. 119). Gukurahundi⁵ is a good example of the 'cracks' of the independent state that are a sign of retrogression as ZANU tends towards monopolization of power. The works selected and discussed in chapter 3 re-write state silence and lies about Gukurahundi violence. In chapter 4 I will focus on how writers re-imagine the Third Chimurenga in ways that clearly subvert the state's 'patriotic' discourse on the Third Chimurenga.

My study is also given shape and impetus by Thieme's notion of postcolonial con-texts (2001). His idea is limited to how postcolonial writers invent con-texts that interrogate and subvert colonial pre-texts. His discussion of text interaction is limited to the debate between English canonical and postcolonial texts, but in Zimbabwean literature text interaction goes beyond what Thieme suggests to include interaction of texts outside the colonial rhetoric. In chapter 2 I will discuss how Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove resituate the black woman subject into the national liberation discourse in three different but related ways. Vera in *Without a Name* rewrites land politics in the context of the liberation and demonstrates that women cannot understand land just as a cultural artefact that blacks should fight to repossess. Vera demonstrates this through Mazvita who is critical of Nyenyedzi's unquestioned attachment to land. Mazvita's position is influenced by a personal sexual violation where the land is an accomplice. Vera and Nyamubaya in 'It is Hard to Live Alone' and 'That Special Place' also destabilize the battle rear-front distinctions with specific reference to women's participation in the liberation struggle. Nyamubaya challenges the idea that the battlefield is a male preserve, and indicates that women also participated in the liberation struggle as fighters. Vera challenges the proposition that the battlefield is the most significant war location, and demonstrates that women also contributed in their domesticity. Hove and Vera also situate women-specific struggles in the context of the larger liberation struggle. My discussion in this chapter is influenced by my reading of Lyons' theorising on the place of the woman in the liberation struggle in *Guns and Guerrillas Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle* (2004). Lyons argues that black women are relegated to the margin of the liberation

⁵ 'Gukurahundi' was the code name for the Zimbabwean government's military operation against 'dissidents' in Matabeleland and Midlands in the early 1980s, which used the North-Korean trained Fifth Brigade. What the government termed 'dissidents' were actually members of ZAPU who had the potential of becoming an opposition party.

narratives because ‘most popular fiction about the war has been written by men’ (2004: p. 6). Texts selected for this chapter therefore rewrite masculine narratives of the war.

In chapter 3, the state-sponsored Gukurahundi is discussed as one of the crimes that, as Soyinka avers, ‘constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on the African continent by others’ (1999: p. xxiv). Since ethnicity is a key aspect of Gukurahundi, over and above discussing Gukurahundi narratives in the context of the counter-discourse theory, I also refer to Luraghi’s theory on ethnic identities in *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory* (2008). In Gukurahundi, emphasis on ethnic differences includes language use, political affiliation and positions of power. Besides Mbembe and Mwangi as key theorists influencing my discussion in chapter 4, I also rely on Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya’s ideas of the Third Chimurenga contained in *Redemptive or Grotesque Nationalism: Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe* (2011). Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya interpret the Third Chimurenga nationalism as grotesque: put in place by government as an emancipatory project and dismissed by voices of dissent as ‘an exhausted patriarchal model of nationalism’ (2011: p. 2). The selected texts on the Third Chimurenga discussed in chapter 4 are dissident and largely question the Third Chimurenga’s emancipatory function. Wendell’s ideas on women’s victimhood in her article ‘Oppression and Victimization: Choice and Responsibility’ (1990) and Yuval-Davis’ ‘Intersectionality and Feminist Politics’ will shape my discussion of victimhood in Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope*.

Trends in Reading Zimbabwean Literature and History

A lot has been written about Zimbabwean literature and history. My current research departs from but also complements existing literature. All critics on Zimbabwean literature agree that Zimunya’s *Those Years of Drought and Hunger: The Birth of African Literature in English in Zimbabwe*, published in 1982, remains a seminal critical work on Zimbabwean literature as it is ‘designed to function as an introductory overview’ (Primorac and Muponde 2005: p. xvi). Veit-Wild’s *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1992) ‘responded to the critical anomy of Zimunya’s work’ cited above (Vambe, 2005: p. 91). Veit-Wild does not limit herself to Zimbabwean literature in English but also discusses texts written in indigenous languages (specifically Shona and Ndebele). Wild’s sociological

approach to a study of Zimbabwean literature contains some illuminating ideas on cultural nationalist writing that I refer to in chapter 1 of this study. I also find Zhuwarara's *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* (2001) and Vambe's *African Oral Story-Telling Tradition and the Zimbabwean Novel in English* (2004) useful in my historical (and thematic) discussion of Zimbabwean counter-discursive narratives in chapter 1 of this study. Muponde and Primorac's *Versions of Zimbabwe, New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (2005) is one of the key texts on how Zimbabwean literature is related to the nation's 'history and politics' and the book reflects on the 'multiple-evaluations of Zimbabwean history' (p. xiv/xiii). I particularly find Kaarsholm's 'Coming to Terms with Violence: Literature and the Development of the Public Sphere' useful to my current study (especially chapters 2, 3 and 4). Kaarsholm focuses on how writers reflect on violence as a key aspect in 'the liberation war and the experiences of postcolonial development that have dominated the post-1980 period' (2005: p. 3). I expand on her ideas on the Third Chimurenga to include Operation Murambatsvina and introduce new texts on the debate on Gukurahundi (Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012) and Kilgore's *We are Now Zimbabweans* (2009)). Christiansen-Bull published many articles on Zimbabwean literature and what is related to my study is her reading of Vera's texts in 'Yvonne Vera: Rewriting Discourses of History and Identity in Zimbabwe' (2005) and *Tales of the Nation: Feminist Nationalism or Patriotic History? Defining National History and Identity in Zimbabwe* (2004). Her ideas are influential to my reading of especially Vera's *Without a Name* and *The Stone Virgins* as subversions of nationalist narratives on the Second Chimurenga and the silencing of Gukurahundi.

Nyambi's unpublished doctorate thesis entitled 'Nation in Crisis: Alternative Literary Representation of Zimbabwe Post-2000' is also a significant text on Zimbabwean fiction in English. His study is limited to texts written and published between 2000 and 2010, the period he describes as 'the most productive' in Zimbabwean literary history (2013: p. 33). My own study complements that but departs from it in that I include texts published before 2000 and also after 2010. Whereas we both discuss Hove and Vera in our studies, we differ in perspective and text selection. In my study I discuss Hove's *Shadows* and *Ancestors* in the context of Gukurahundi and Second Chimurenga respectively, yet Nyambi selects *Blind Moon* and discusses it alongside Chikwava's *Harare North* as 'texts which dispute Gomo's metaphoric tagging of Zimbabwean democracy as a fine madness (in his novel *A Fine Madness*)'

(2013: p. 38). Though we both deal with Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, Nyambi uses the novel 'as a launch-pad into (his) analysis of what (he) calls the 'struggle within a struggle' - the use of literature in challenging gendered narratives of the nation through inscribing female experiences of the post-2000 period into the national narrative' (2013: pp. 34-5). On the other hand I situate Vera's novel in the general context of Gukurahundi articulations, and as reflecting more on the sense of betrayal early into independence that has come to be associated with Gukurahundi violence. I also include Vera's 'It is Hard to Live Alone', 'An Unyielding Circle' and *Without a Name* and discuss these as subversions of the nationalist liberation narrative. On land discourse Nyambi identifies texts that support the 'anti-white sentiment and philosophy of the Third Chimurenga: Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* and Mtizira's *The Chimurenga Protocol*. Nyambi's discussion of Hoba's short stories (*The Trek and Other Stories*) 'centres on their complex evocation of the flip side of the land revolution 'that is occluded - not only in official narratives of the Third Chimurenga epitomized by Mugabe's book *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, but perhaps more importantly' in Maruma's *Coming Home* and Mtizira's *The Chimurenga Protocol* (2013: p. 38). In my discussion on land politics in the Third Chimurenga I differ from Nyambi in terms of relevant texts; I focus on Hoba's 'Specialisation' and Chingono's 'Minister without Portfolio'. Nyambi limits himself to the Third Chimurenga crisis (and includes texts that rewrite Gukurahundi in his analysis) and my own study broadens that and separates Gukurahundi from the Third Chimurenga crisis and also focuses on the Second Chimurenga.

Most of the literary texts selected for my thesis fictionalise and revise history (they are historical/novels and short stories), with history influencing the authors' imagination. Thus in my reading of the texts I make constantly reference to historians' ideas. Of particular use in my study are Ranger, Lyons and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's works. These historians and (others)⁶ revise what Ranger termed 'patriotic history'. Thus, literary texts discussed here and the historical sources consulted in reading the literary texts are both revisionary. Lyons' *Guns and Guerrillas Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle* (2004) (seminal history text) shaped my discussion in

⁶ Kriger's *Peasant Voices* challenges influential studies such as Ranger's *Peasant Consciousness and the Guerrilla War* (1985), Lan's *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985) and Martin and Johnson's *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War* (1981). It also challenges scholars whose support of African nationalism resulted in the production of 'praise texts' (Robins, 1992: pp. 78-9).

chapter 2 on Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove's rethinking of the second Chimurenga with respect to black women's participation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, has written extensively on Zimbabwean history (with a clear bias on Zimbabwean nationalism) and some of his ideas used in my discussion were drawn from a significant number of articles and books. 'Rethinking Chimurenga and Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Critique of Partisan National History' (2012), delineates the historical use of *gukurahundi* as a strategy of eliminating opposition in colonial and post-independent Zimbabwean politics. 'The Nativist Revolution and Development Conundrums in Zimbabwe' (2006), and *Redemptive or Grotesque Nationalism: Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe* (2011) are useful interpretations of the Third Chimurenga and these give shape to my reading of texts that rewrite the Third Chimurenga.

Though some of the essays that make up Vambe's *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe* (2008) are dismissed as 'speculative'⁷, in my study I find Chari's article 'Worlds Apart: Representations of Operation Murambatsvina in Two Zimbabwean Weeklies' and Mhiripiri's 'The Zimbabwean Government's Responses to Criticism of Operation Murambatsvina' quite useful. I particularly use Chari and Mhiripiri's ideas in my reading of Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* as a text that rewrites state discourse on Murambatsvina. The Government's official discourse sanitized Murambatsvina to mean, 'clean up' and 'to restore order' (Mhiripiri, 2008: p. 156), yet the UN report on the operation condemns it as a violation of basic human rights.⁸ What emerges clearly from Chari's discussion is how dimensions of Murambatsvina are polarized and contradictory. The two potentially contradictory narrations of the operation are visible in Zimbabwe media's coverage - 'pro-government *Sunday Mail* promoted it as a blessing in disguise or as having paid dividends by removing all illegal activities' (Chari, 2008: p. 109). Yet, on the other hand, the privately owned *The Standard* largely represented it 'as a bankruptcy on the part of the government [...] and unreservedly undermined the clean up' (ibid). The state used controlled media

⁷ Wermter SJ's Review of Vambe's *Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina of Zimbabwe*, Mukai-Vukani Jesuit Journal for Zimbabwe, No 48, May 2009, 24-6.

⁸ Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka (2005).

to articulate its 'literal, interpretive and implicatory denial' of the negative impact of the operation on the affected citizens (Mhiripiri, 2008: p. 152). Tagwira's text is read in this study as one of the texts that offer an alternative to the state's misrepresentation of Murambatsvina reality as stated above. As I have demonstrated in this section, my study is not carried out in isolation; it is steeped in existing literature but also departs from it in several ways.

The Corpus of this Study

The corpus is restricted to texts written in English by black as well as white writers. The decision to limit the study to Zimbabwean literature in English is influenced by the fact that the English language tradition represents the mainstay of Zimbabwe's literary heritage (Primorac and Muponde, 2005: p. xv). Zimbabwean literature takes many forms but in this research I limit myself to the novel and the short story.

Zimbabwe has given birth to and nurtured a number of locally, and internationally recognized writers, who are writing in English. For issues central in this study, I selected those writers who are of central importance for a discussion of those issues. In chapter 2 I will specifically study Vera's 'Crossing Boundaries' (1992), 'It is Hard to Live Alone' (1992) and *Without a Name* (1994). I also read Hove's *Ancestors* (1996) and Nyamubaya's 'That Special Place' (2003) in the same chapter, under the theme 'feminist narratives rewriting nationalist discourses'. In my discussion of Gukurahundi narratives, I read to Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Hove's *Shadows* (1991), Ndlovu's 'Torn Posters' (2003), Godwin's *Mukiwa* (1996), Kilgore's *We Are Now Zimbabweans* (2009) and Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012). On texts that contest state lies on the Third Chimurenga I selected Chinyani's 'A Land of Starving Millionaires', Hoba's 'Specialization', Chinodya's 'Queues', and Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*. All works selected for this study were published after Zimbabwe attained its independence from British colonial rule. The emphasis is on how the selected authors (as demonstrated in selected works) employ counter-discursive strategies to challenge the hegemonic tendencies of dominant discourses. In the context of this thesis, I specifically refer to patriarchal, nationalist and 'patriotic' dominant discourses subverted in selected counter-discursive texts. Ranger differentiates between nationalist and patriotic historiographies in his article 'Rule by Historiography: The Struggle over the Past in Contemporary Zimbabwe' (2005). He explains that patriotic history is 'different from and more narrow than the old nationalist

historiography, which celebrated aspiration and modernisation as well as resistance. It resents the questions raised by historians of nationalism' (2005: p. 220). As Ranger demonstrates, patriotic history is 'a complex phenomenon [...] variously propagated - in courses taught by war veterans in the camps⁹, in collections of Robert Mugabe's speeches¹⁰, in Chigwedere's syllabi and textbooks in the schools¹¹, on state television and radio, and in the writing of Mahoso¹² and others in the state-controlled press' (2005: p. 235).

Reading the Corpus of Zimbabwean Literature in English

In terms of methodology, my study is an exercise in interpretive textual analysis. The key aspect of my textual analysis is 'close reading'; where 'reading' is taken to mean 'interpretation'. Close reading encompasses aspects of 'symptomatic reading', where interpretation, as Jameson argues, 'could never operate on the assumption that the text means exactly what it says' (Best and Marcus, 2009: p. 3). Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and Crane's 'Surface, Depth, and the Spatial Imaginary: A Cognitive Reading of *The Political Unconscious*' (2009) are some of the key texts on symptomatic reading. The hidden things that need to be unravelled in selected texts come out clear in almost all the texts studied for this thesis. For example Chinodya re-interprets Zimbabwean political history in 'Queues' through the sexual relationship trope. I read selected texts as self-contained, yet also went beyond to include new historicism approach and read texts in their historical contexts. In my reading of the selected texts, I often interpret the text in the context of Zimbabwean history, since these contest official narrations/non-narrations of history. Such interpretive exploits are used especially in chapters 3 and 4. Texts selected for these two chapters are discussed in the time-and-place-specific contexts of Gukurahundi and the Third Chimurenga aspects of Zimbabwean history, and are read as representations of such history. The emphasis here is on the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope which rests 'on the inseparability of space and time in novels' (Primorac, 2006, p. 35). In such cases I constantly

⁹ The government-instituted compulsory National Youth service put in place in 2001 was meant to teach 'patriotic history'. Central in the content material was ZANU PF propaganda, 'entirely consisting of speeches made by Robert Mugabe since 2000' (Ranger, 2005: p. 222)

¹⁰ Robert Mugabe's speeches can be found in *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, published in 2001.

¹¹ Chigwedere authored a number of history books used in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

¹² Mahoso is the Chairman of the Zimbabwean Media and Information Commission and a weekly columnist at the Sunday Mail (Ranger, 2005: p. 226).

refer to historical sources in my reading of texts. I also go beyond the 'information' in such historical texts, to include in my interpretation, the poetic and rhetorical devices. For example, in as much as I interpret selected texts on 'land politics' of the Third Chimurenga in the context of history, I also highlight how the use of satire is a significant counter-discursive strategy (a key aspect of symptomatic reading where there are sometimes hidden things in a text for ideological reasons). I demonstrate this point by referring to how I interpret Chingono's use of satire in 'Minister without Portfolio' as a counter-discursive strategy. Chingono attacks the minister, particularly unmasking his hypocrisy. His choice of an anti-hero of a minister is a counter-discursive strategy to subvert the 'Zimbabwean state fiction [...] which is precisely the kind of hero centred narrative' (Bakhtin, 1986, as cited in Primorac, 2007: p. 437). Most of the texts studied in my thesis are best read as 'witness/*testimonio* literature'. 'Testimonio is implicitly or explicitly a component of what Barbara Harlow has called a "resistance literature' (Beverly, 1989 p. 11). The resistance aspect is located in the sense that testimonio literature is 'an alternative reading to the canon' (Beverly, 1991, p. 3). As I demonstrate elsewhere, my understanding of the canon is expanded beyond the imperial text to include patriarchal, nationalist and 'patriotic' narratives. Since intertextuality is a key aspect of counter-discourse, in my reading of the selected texts, I go beyond these texts to refer to the 'outside texts' that they engage with. In most Zimbabwean counter-discursive narratives one finds echoes of earlier texts and in some cases instances of 'forward referencing'. For instance, in my reading of feminist texts in chapter 2, I also refer to male-written texts on the subject under study. This is the case since 'revision' is a key concept in counter-discourse. The intertextual is described by Terdiman as an act 'of looking back, seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction' (1971, as cited in Widdowson, 2006: p. 491). In the process of text interpretation, I also refer to existing relevant literature (what is elsewhere referred to as 'secondary sources') to respect other related forms of text interpretation.

Study Layout

This study consists of four chapters, introduction and conclusion. In Chapter 1, entitled '*A Historical Discussion of Zimbabwean Counter-Discursive Narratives*', I discuss the counter-discursive trends in Zimbabwean literature. From the historical and thematic approach adopted, it becomes clear that challenges to established/dominant discourses go beyond the imperial culture to

include subversion of established discourses in the post-independent state with specific references to nationalist, patriarchal and 'patriotic' discourses. Since 'counter-discourses are not sovereign and do not exhaust reality' (Terdiman, 1989: p. 17), one finds that counter-discursive narratives in Zimbabwean literature are open-ended. Nationalist writers challenge colonial discourse on African history and culture. Their narratives of especially the liberation struggle are incomplete and largely biased. Reacting to the nationalist view of the war and history, revisionist writers downplay women's role in the liberation struggle and hence the picture they project is incomplete. What revisionist writers exclude is contested in feminist writings, which in general speak for as well as about women. Zimbabwean feminist writings recover 'repressed narratives of women' (Maodzwa-Taruvinga and Muponde, 2005). Post-independent resistance narratives decry a glossing over of the cracks and 'aching spots' in what Ranger has termed 'patriotic history'. Challenges to 'patriotic history' defining the Zimbabwean postcolony are performed in two significant ways: rewriting Gukurahundi violence and the Third Chimurenga.

In Chapter 2, entitled '*Feminist Rewriting of Nationalist Narratives*', I discuss Vera's short stories 'It is Hard to Live Alone' and 'Crossing Boundaries' (both from *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*) and *Without A Name*, Hove's *Ancestors* and Nyamubaya's 'That Special Place'. All texts selected for this chapter are set during the liberation struggle against colonialism, and are women-centred stories. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove challenge the nationalist version of liberation history through a foregrounding of women roles in the liberation struggle (as part of the battlefield and its rears), women-specific struggles ignored by the nationalist struggle. The chapter has four significant parts: 'Rethinking Land Politics in *Without a Name*', 'Re-Interpretation of Black Women's Experience of the Liberation Struggle', 'Black Women's Other Struggles' and 'The Struggle for Memory in *Ancestors*'. In this chapter I explore ways in which selected authors rise above nationalist sentiments and decry the patriarchal domination of women by foregrounding women-specific struggles.

In Chapter 3, entitled '*Narrating Gukurahundi Violence*', I discuss the various literary texts that articulate Gukurahundi, paying particular attention to the various stages and forms of articulation. The first years of post independence were quiet on the 'Zimbabwean literary front [...] and the early post independent writings were celebrationist [...] (but also contained) elements of criticism and articulated frustration' (Kaarsholm, 2005: pp. 4-5). Gukurahundi

remained suppressed history until a report by the Catholic Peace and Justice Commission was released in 1997. Gukurahundi also became a literary event beginning with Hove's *Shadows* (1991) reaching its culmination with Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002). In this chapter, I trace the literary developments in narrations of Gukurahundi paying particular attention to how writers challenge the suppressed history and silenced memory of Gukurahundi violence. In my discussion, I refer to Hove's *Shadows*, Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, Godwin's *Mukiwa: The White Boy in Africa*, Kilgore's *We are Now Zimbabweans*, Ndlovu's 'Torn Posters' and Mlalazi's *Running with Mother*.

The focus in Chapter 4, entitled 'A Re-interpretation of the Third Chimurenga in Post-2000 Writings', is on texts that revise the government's Third Chimurenga discourse. The chapter is made up of four major parts: 'Troping a Different Zimbabwean History in Chinodya's *Queues*', 'Of Extreme Wealth and Abject Poverty: Chinyani's *A Land of Starving Millionaires*', 'Rethinking the Land Issue in Chingono's *Minister Without Portfolio and Hoba's Specialization*', and 'The Uncertainty of Hope (*Reflections on a Failing State, The Victim Trope and Rewriting Murambatsvina*)'. The selected texts discussed in this chapter present a challenge to the inadequacies of the biased and often-incomplete dominant 'patriotic' narrative of the Third Chimurenga. Literary counter-imaginings of Zimbabwean history contribute to multi-re-evaluations of the history of the Third Chimurenga. According to Muponde and Primorac, 'through a series of omissions the patriotic historiography builds and departs from the previous nationalist discourses' (2005: p. xii). The patriotic version of history, which was sold to the public through the state-controlled media, threatened to exclude the last decade crisis.. Alongside state-controlled media, a 'patriotic literary narrative' emerged. This tradition entered the public sphere 'as a sympathetic force to the state advancing its rule' (Nyambi, 2011: p. 3). The state's understanding and subsequent denial of the crisis is contested by not only opposition politics, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Private Media but subversion also came from creative writers.

