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## Counter-discourse in Zimbabwean Literature

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## **Chapter 1: A Historical Discussion of Zimbabwean Counter-Discursive Narratives**

### **Introduction**

Writing a history of counter discursive literary narratives in Zimbabwean context (or for any nation for that matter) is an almost impossible task. What I put together in this chapter is an attempt at an assessment of Zimbabwean literature in English, paying particular attention to its counter-discursive aspects. As Chennells highlights, in Rhodesia ‘the dominant version of history was authorized by whites’ and ‘the current dominant version of history within Zimbabwe is the self-serving historical memory of ZANU PF’ (2005: p. 133), what Ranger elsewhere termed ‘patriotic history’ (2005). In both Rhodesian and Zimbabwean chronotopes<sup>13</sup>, any voice of discontent subverts the dominant version of history and translates into protest. Such literary voices of discontent are what Terdiman has termed ‘dissident discourses’ (1989: p. 80). Counter-discursive strategies in Zimbabwean literature can be discerned in texts that represent the excesses of colonial contact, feminist narratives seeking the recognition of women, autobiographies and post-independence rewritings of Gukurahundi and Third Chimurenga crises. The chapter is arranged along themes and sub-themes. The highlighted dimensions of literary protest confirm Ranger’s proposition that there are ‘admittedly signs of a more systematic historiographical dissent’ (2005: p. 240). The division into sections in this chapter is thematically informed. This applies especially to narratives of the liberation war and feminist narratives of resistance. In terms of year of publication, most of the works that belong to the two categories are post-independence writings, but they deserve to be discussed separately because they represent an identifiable thematic pattern.

### **Resisting Colonialism**

Rhodesian colonialism was multifaceted; it had political, economic and cultural dimensions. Political domination included the creation of an administration that excluded the natives, yet the policies put in place through the administration

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Chronotope’ is a Bakhtinian term referring to how literature represents both time and space.

shaped the natives' existence.<sup>14</sup> One of the most damaging and visible colonial policies for blacks in Rhodesia was the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Through this Act, many blacks lost their fertile lands to the 'new occupants' and were dumped in reserves that could not sustain their living since they depended on land for survival. The introduction of various taxes precipitated the rate at which black people opted for farm labourer positions. As Sachikonye highlights, the creation of native reserves dates back to 1894 in Matabeleland with the setting up of the Gwaai and Shangani reserves. The Shona and Ndebele uprisings in 1896 and 1897 were precipitated by such appropriation of land (2004: p. 3). The creation of colonial boundaries was to 'facilitate the functioning of the capitalist economic system' (Primorac, 2006: p. 63). From the point of view of the colonizer, there existed two mutually exclusive groups in the colonial world: the dominant and the dominated, the Occident and the Orient respectively. These distinctions were based on the ideology of race, which influenced 'the construction and naturalization of an unequal form of intercultural relations' between whites and blacks (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 41).

On the other hand, cultural domination included defining the black person's way of interpreting the world as not only uncivilized but also savage and primitive. In essence, 'colonialism was not simply content with imposing its rule upon the dominated [...] rather by a kind of a perverted logic it turned to the past of the colonized people, distorted, disfigured and destroyed it' (Fanon, 1963, as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995: p. 154). Objectification of the black 'other' was central in the creation of the imperial object in imperial discourse. From time to time blacks were convinced to join the Christian church and the modern school. They entered the church as the 'cursed sons of the biblical Ham' and the curriculum they encountered in the classroom was largely Eurocentric. Black students were taught European history and literature of the canon. The black image they encountered in the English canon had an effect on their understanding of themselves.

Literary texts that resist and (re)present resistances to colonialism and its discourse can be divided into two identifiable categories. The first category is cultural nationalism and the other consists of texts representing the war(s) of liberation. The second category is also known as 'war literature'. It is important

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<sup>14</sup> In some cases black elites were part of the administration yet, mostly, the European-educated who were incorporated into the administration had no capacity to challenge unfair policies and practices.

to note that these categories are not absolute; there are visible instances of overlap. For instance, novels that represent the 1896/97 First Chimurenga are also directed at helping the colonised black people to regain lost pride and dignity. Such texts include Mutswairo's *Feso* (1956) and Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* (1972). In *An Ill-Fated People*, Vambe constructs the proud history of the VaShawasha Shona-speaking people who were free and independent prior to the establishment of colonial rule. Their social and economic progress was slow but steady. They mined and made guns among other notable achievements. Europeans grabbed tracts of land and demanded labour from the VaShawasha, who felt insulted and subsequently rebelled. It is clear from Vambe's *An Ill-fated People* that Western civilization destroyed an established system of survival and 'a life pattern of centuries' (Afejuku, 1988: p. 508). Besides focusing on the 1896/7 First Chimurenga, Vambe's autobiographical narrative also seeks to establish the dignity and the pride of the VaShawasha people by highlighting their history.

### **Cultural Nationalist Fiction**

The cultural revolution seeking to undermine racist ideology is the postcolonial niche of writing-back to the imperial centre and is a central aspect of negritudism<sup>15</sup>. In Tiffin's words, negritude writers are 'not simply writing back to an English canonical text but to the whole discursive field within which these texts operated and continue to operate in postcolonial worlds' (1987, as cited in Kossew, 1996: p. 14). Most texts written by black people are characterized by 'self assertion, the rediscovery of the past and the decolonization of the mind' (Veit-Wild, 1992: p. 1). The main purpose of writing back to the imperial centre is aptly described by Achebe as an act of helping battered societies to regain

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<sup>15</sup> Negritude is a literary and ideological movement that began in the 1930s and can be traced back to French-speaking black intellectuals with Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas as founding figures. As a concept, negritudism refers to the distinctive aspect of the black man's response to the colonial situation, in defence of black humanity against colonial and any other form of dehumanization. According to Ashcroft et al. negritude is a theory of 'the distinctiveness of African personality and culture' (2007: p. 145). There is however need to note that Negritude attracted criticism. Though in my discussion I will refer to these criticisms, here I would refer to some of the criticisms. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) warned that cultural claims would lead Africans 'up a blind alley' (p.172). Ezekiel Mphahlele accused Senghor of being dishonesty. He accused him of advocating for Negritudism, yet sung praises to French culture. Other African writers who were critical of the movement included Wole Soyinka and Lewis Nkosi among others.

self-belief and putting away years of denigration (1988: p. 44). In other words, the works that belong to cultural nationalism strove to re-appropriate black humanity, which western ideology had questioned and dismissed. Black Zimbabwean writers in this category belong to the First Generation, and are the first elite group of educated Africans in Rhodesia (Veit-Wild, 1992: p. 17). Their texts are understandably the first in the history of Zimbabwean counter-discursive narratives (and Zimbabwean literature in general) that date back to the Rhodesian colony<sup>16</sup>. Such works are varied and are written in the three major Zimbabwean languages: Shona, Ndebele and English<sup>17</sup>. However, in my study I will limit my focus to texts written in English (except for my few comments on Mutswairo's shona novel *Feso*) as indicated earlier on. The texts have no strict historical boundaries. One finds that there are some works that were published well after independence that still focus on cultural nationalism as their theme.

Novels that represent the cultural nationalist struggle include *Feso* (1956), *On Trial for My Country* (1966), *Year of Uprising* (1977), *The Polygamist* (1972) and *Jikinya* (1972) among others. Mutswairo's *Feso* 'recreates the image of a unified pre-colonial Shona past so as to undo colonial mythologies and distortion of an African past' (Vambe, 2004: p. 26). Samkange's *On Trial for My Country* (1966) represents an African version of the history of colonialism in Rhodesia. The history of colonization is retold and reconstructed from King Lobengula's point of view. Both *Year of Uprising* and *On Trial for My Country* 'resume the broken dialogue with the gods of their people and thus provide a relatively authentic cultural base from which future and present generations can face the future' (Zhuwarara, 2001: p. 13). What characterizes Samkange's and Mutswairo's writings referred to above is what Schipper has termed 'the idealization of the ancestral Africa, the old Africa that did not have the misfortune of knowing the whites' (1989: p. 34).

Schipper identified suffering as one of the major themes of negritude literature. Black suffering is a theme that is well-developed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his essay *Orphée Noir*. Sartre constructs the black person as a 'man who has

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<sup>16</sup> There is however need to note that counter-discourse existed in Zimbabwean pre-literate communities in song and other forms of oral literature. Praise-denunciatory poetry and songs often performed the protest role.

<sup>17</sup> Examples of Ndebele and Shona cultural nationalist texts include D. E. Ndoda's *Indabikhona* (1988, Mambo Press), N. Sithole's *Umvukela wamaNdebele* (1982, Longman, C. Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995, Mambo Press) and N.M. Mutasa's *Dikita Misodzi neropa* (1991, Mambo Press).

accepted all the burdens of mankind and who suffers for all, even for whites' (1949, as cited in Schipper, 1989: p. 31). Samkange's two works highlighted above concentrate on the theme of black suffering by exposing the injustices meted out to blacks by colonial whites. In the form of a moral outrage, the books resent the brutal way in which blacks lost their land and represent what Schipper termed the 'revolt' element of negritude literature (1989: p. 34). For the same ideological reasons, Sithole wrote and published *The Polygamist* in 1972. His book is a cultural defence of the African family institution of polygamy. He explains 'to the world that there was a philosophy, a value system of depth and some moral beauty' in polygamy (Kahari, 2009: p. 104). Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1972) also fits into the same discourse of cultural defence against the 'othering' and 'objectification' of the African in Western ideology. The cited texts act 'both as literary and political strategy to challenge colonial racism, the idiom of the African people's difference and otherness' and protest against the colonizer's misrepresentation of African history, culture and life (Vambe, 2004: p. 26). Overall, by fighting for national culture, these authors are in a way fighting for what Fanon termed the 'material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible' (1963, as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995: p. 154).

There are complications in the African writer's duty of rewriting history mainly through going back to a mooted past. Vambe identifies 'the paradox of the project of cultural retrieval that insists on recovering a pure and authentic and unchanging identity for Africans' as one of the challenges (2004: p. 27). A recovery of a pure and authentic Africa rests upon the postcolonial concept of nativism. Nativism is 'the desire to return to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society' (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 143). As argued by Spivak and Bhabha, 'nativist reconstructions are inevitably subject to the process of cultural inter-mixing that colonialism promoted and from which no simple retreat is possible' (as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007: p. 143). The other disturbing element associated with retrieving a distorted past includes how the very discourse of otherness and difference in negritude literature maintains notions of fixed binaries of Africans and whites and also 'normalizes and appropriates Africa by freezing it into some timeless zone of the unchanging past' (Hall, 1996, as cited in Vambe, 2004: p. 27). This challenge is directly related to assumptions of retaining pure African culture. Cultural nationalist re-writing of African experience sometimes override reality.

Moments of defending a people's humanity and dignity often emphasize reverence and any rewriting highlighting 'blasphemies and sins' of African existence may seem disloyal. When Mutswairo creates in *Feso* the African people's leader Pfumojena, whose corrupt tendencies lead him to expel voices of discontent from his kingdom, one would want to know how such writing would help a battered people regain belief in themselves. Yet to ignore these aspects of African experiences is to falsify African history and reality. The paradox, however, is that highlighting these truths sometimes complicates the purpose of re-writing and confirms the white stereotypes of black people's behaviour. In Ndhlala's *Jikinya* the effort at recreating a romantic and fantastical past of the Ngara people of pre-colonial Zimbabwe is quite problematic. What needs to be challenged is the practical value of the novel. How does the novel help a battered society regain belief in itself when the writer recreates a romantic and fantastical history bypassing Africa's realities?

Inasmuch as the colonized people insisted on avoiding the colonial taint by refusing to embrace elements of Western culture, Western 'snares' were always tempting. The protest themes 'are in conflict with the deeper desire towards assimilation of many western values' (Kahari, 2009: p. 14). Particularly tempting were the 'bounties of the Christian god [...] education, paid jobs and many other advantages that no one in his right senses could underrate' (Achebe, 1988: p. 31). Such realities are captured in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975). One of the characters who belong to the old generation, the Old Man, asks: 'What kind of fighting is it when you are clutching and praying to your enemy's god?' (1975: p. 115). The Old Man's statement demonstrates the ambivalence of fighting colonialism yet also finding it appealing. The need to resist modernity stems from the fact that in the African context 'Western modernity is inextricably tied to Western colonialism' (Jameson, 1990, as cited in Friedman, 2006: p. 426). Traditionalism subsequently becomes a reaction to the complicated relationship between modernity and imperialism. According to Hobsbawm, the concept of tradition can be traced back, in Europe, to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He intimates that 'traditions (are) actually invented, constructed and formally instituted'. Invented tradition means:

A set of practices normally governed by [...] accepted rules and a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (1992: p. 1)



Traditionalists insist on wanting to restore an imagined and often lost past, whilst 'modernity's dislocating break with the past also engenders a radical reaction in the opposite direction' (Friedman, 2006: p. 434). The need to embrace as well as resist what modernity offers complicates the project of cultural nationalism.

The modernity/tradition dichotomy is problematic, complex and contradictory, especially for the previously oppressed communities. Modernity is associated with colonialism and 'progress', yet holding on to tradition is not only nativist but is representative of 'forces of resistance to modernity's homogenizing' tendencies (Valdez-Moses, 1995, as cited in Friedman, 2006: p. 442). The struggle between tradition and modernity is a 'defining characteristic of modernity' (Friedman, 2006: p. 434). Largely, however, cultural nationalism is useful as a response to the peripheralization of African cultures and history. It facilitates the centring of a marginalized culture by making 'every periphery into a centre [...]' and abolishing 'the very notion of the centre and the periphery' (Pollard, 2004, as cited in Friedman, 2006: p. 429). What should be condemned is a nativist return to an imagined and often lost Old Africa. A favourable position is 'not passive assimilation, but one based in a blending of adaptation and resistance' and in postcolonial terms this results in hybridity (Friedman, 2006: p. 430). I would like to end this section by noting that the terms 'modernity' and 'tradition/traditionalism' are very problematic, and I will simplify their usage in most African discourses. For most Africans 'modernity' is definitive of change brought to African history and cultures through colonialism and other means of foreign intrusion. The perceived change in 'modernity' is either positive or negative. Embracing what modernity/ or what comes with the 'foreigner' then translates into some kind of assimilation. Tradition on the other hand is what Africa used to be before 'modernity'/imperialism; an untainted Africa. Hence being traditional implies rejection of modernity and what colonialism offers. What I have tried to do in this section is to problematise the options, especially in relation to cultural nationalist roles played by African writers.

## **War Literature**

Colonial history in Southern Africa is a 'history of land seizure and settlement' (Primorac, 2006: p. 125). In this history, colonists trampled upon African people's human rights. One of the human rights violated has been discussed in

the previous section as the process of ‘othering’ that denied Africans their history and dignity. Zimbabwean literature and history demonstrate that violent response, as a form of defence against any form of oppression, is a right every man and woman possesses. Blacks fought two important wars against white colonialists in Rhodesia: the First and Second Chimurenga. These two wars are ‘justified’ in that the oppressed blacks fought to defend their humanity.<sup>18</sup> The Second Chimurenga became an important literary event for both white and black Zimbabwean writers - from the point of view of the oppressor and the oppressed respectively. As argued by Hochbruck the Second Chimurenga is one of the wars in the world, which grew in telling (1996: p. 161). Texts by whites are mainly ‘based on the Rhodesian chronotope’<sup>19</sup> (Primorac, 2006: p. 128) - these texts include the following: Stiff’s *The Rain Goddess* (1976), Early’s *A Time of Madness* (1977), Burton’s *The Yellow Mountain* (1978) and Carney’s *The Whispering Death*. Listed texts construct ‘the space time of war as a zone of contact between the forces of order and civilization introduced by Europeans and the threat posed to them by native savagery and communism’-represented by whites and blacks respectively (Primorac, 2006: p. 128). The texts continue in the ideology that ‘others’ the African in support of colonial domination. For instance, the story in Stiff’s *The Rain Goddess* takes place in the mid 1960s to early 1970s and begins as the British South Africa Police fight against communist-backed guerrillas. The image of the guerrillas in this narrative is one that is tainted; they are torturers who use violence to intimidate their tribesmen into joining the war. In the same manner, Carney in *The Whispering Death* constructs the liberation war as an act of terrorism that follows the Declaration of Independence, with guerrillas as terrorists. *The Yellow Mountain* is mainly about the relentless efforts to raise money for the building of a barrier along the Eastern Border meant to disturb nationalist efforts to undo colonialism. *A Time of Madness* recreates ‘the history of black division and irreconcilable difference’ in an effort to justify the colonial conquest and the continuation of white rule (Kaarsholm, 1991: p. 42).

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<sup>18</sup> A justified war shows the redeeming qualities of violence. Fanon observed that ‘for the colonized people violence [...] invests their characters with positive and creative qualities’ (1963: p. 73). However, the same violence has ‘remained a cancer that corrodes the [...] political culture and blocks democratic advance’ in post-independent Zimbabwean politics (Sachikonye, 2011: p. xviii).

<sup>19</sup> Rhodesian chronotope refers to the time and space of colonial Rhodesia.

Bruce Moore King's *White Man, Black Man* (1989)

engages the myth of a people's war that was used by Ian Douglass Smith's to persuade and call up white people to fight the black liberation forces in Rhodesia. (The novel) questions the myth of whiteness as equal to civilization that was propagated by white Rhodesian leaders especially between 1965 and 1980. The novel contests the myth of white invincibility. (Vambe, 2009: p. 107)

Though the novel does not counter and reinscribe a specific hegemonic text, it challenges the 'discursive colonialist field' (Ashcroft, et al 2007: p. 50) that subscribed to the concept of white invincibility in the face of its destruction in the liberation war. This kind of writing also contributes to anti-colonial writings mainly practiced by black writers in the African and specifically Zimbabwean context. Robert Early's *A Time of Madness* (1977) also presents the conflicts over land domination in the pre-colonial Zimbabwean States. He recalls that

the pitiful warriors of the Shona people had taken land from the little yellow bushmen, killing them or forcing them to flee into arid and inhospitable desert of the Kalahari, the Matabele had done the same thing to the Shona and only the arrival of the whites in 1890 had prevented their annihilation.(p. 236 – 238)

In the above words, Robert Early has captured some of the historical situations that Dambudzo Marechera, Patrick Chakaipa and Solomon Mutswareiro protested against in their works, but he does that for ideological reasons that have an inclination towards justifying the colonization process. The counter discursive element in Robert Early's works referred to above is identifiable in the manner in which the writer highlights an element of domination in traditional pre-colonial societies. He argues that this kind of domination has nothing to do with colonial influences. His writing becomes counter discursive in the sense that he challenges an existing notion of the understanding of domination in African societies in general. He shows that domination in the African society did not begin with the advent of colonialism but rather stretches back to pre-colonial times. However, 'this history of division (among blacks) and difference (is used to) justify the colonial and the continuation of white rule' (Kaarsholm, 1991: p. 42). In this light, Robert Early's novel feeds into the general white

representation of black culture and history. Such representation is contested by works by black writers. Texts discussed here belong to colonial popular fiction in support of the colonial regime and represent the colonizers' efforts to stifle the liberation struggle. Such a version of the liberation struggle counters the belief that the liberation struggle was a justified war. As Hochbruck controversially<sup>20</sup> argues, 'because of his politically incorrect position, the intruding settler cannot be interested in a positive depiction of what he does not perceive as just an 'Other' but also the enemy' (1996: p. 164). White writers' constructions of the war are representative of their attitude towards the 'black' enemy. White writers' version of the liberation struggle is contested in texts on the Second Chimurenga written by black writers.

On the other side war construction by black writers is two-dimensional: war glorification and challenges to such glorifications. Such dimensions are also visible in the documentation of Zimbabwean liberation history by historians. Historians differ in their perspectives and understanding of the liberation war; some glorify it while others construct the war space as complex. Such differences may be noted between Manungo and Kriger. Manungo presents 'a harmonious picture of collaboration between peasants and guerrillas'. Kriger on

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<sup>20</sup> The controversy in Hochbruck's argument lies in the fact that there are some white writers 'though politically incorrect (as he argues) who are against the colony and are on the side of the victim of colonial culture, what Chennels described elsewhere as non-homogeneity of white writing. One would find that besides the texts that I isolated above and demonstrated how they are in support of the colonial order, there are some white writers who are clearly against the colonial culture. To illustrate my point, I would refer to the position occupied by John Eppel in the Zimbabwean literary sphere and white-Zimbabwean writing in general. John Eppel is consistent in his attack of both the colony and the postcolony. In an interview Eppel declares, "I am anti people in power who abuse it" and as such he focuses writes "about man's inhumanity to man [...] in Rhodesia, and continues in Zimbabwe" (<http://www.weaverpresszimbabwe.com/index.php/authors/interviews/506-interview-eppel-john-by-drew-shaw>). *The Great Road North* (1992) is a text on the Rhodesian nation where Eppel is against himself and his own people. In *Spoils of the War* (1989) Eppel counters the colonial vision of an unending Rhodesia. This is particularly clear in "Spoils of War" which 'questions the whole concept of Rhodesianism by deriding the excessive violence of its nationalism and patriotism against the racial other' (Musvoto, 2009: p.160). Another good example is the South African white writer J.M Coetzee. Though Coetzee does not comment directly on the anti-apartheid struggle, in most of his works he is critical of colonialism. His stance comes out clear in *Waiting for Barbarians* (1980) and *Foe* (1986). The focus in these two novels is on what Coetzee himself described elsewhere as an 'occlusion' of blackness in narratives by whites. What this simply demonstrates is that there are white writers who invest into antiracism (possibly in the same way we also have blacks who invest into colonialism).

the other hand expresses a ‘gloomier picture of collaboration between peasants and guerrillas’ (Kaarsholm, 1991: p. 5). The early Ranger, Bhebhe, Martin, Aneus Chigwedere and Johnson are nationalist historians while the recent Ranger, Beach and Kriger can be seen as revisionist historians.<sup>21</sup> In literature, the differing perspectives on specific aspects of the guerrilla war highlighted above also suffice.

Major works that belong to ‘war literature’ include Mutswairo’s *Feso* (1956) and *Year of Uprising* (1978), Katiyo’s *A Son of the Soil* (1976), Mutasa’s *The Contact* (1985), Samupindi’s *Pawns* (1992), Chinodya’s *A Harvest of Thorns* (1989), Kanengoni’s *Echoing Silences* (1997), Hove’s *Bones* (1988) and Nyamfukudza’s *Non-Believer’s Journey* (1980). *Feso* and *Year of Uprising* also belong to cultural nationalist literature. This is representative of the instances of overlap of categories referred to in the introduction to this chapter. *Feso* is a recreation of the image of a unified pre-colonial Shona past and as a foundational nationalist text speaks against white land appropriation (Vambe, 2004: p. 26). Samkange’s *Year of the Uprising* (1978), for instance represents the moral outrage of a people who bitterly resented the brutal manner in which Africans were dispossessed of their land. The resentment of land dispossession forced black people into fighting the forces that made them squatters on their own land. In negritude terms, *Year of Uprising* ‘resumes the broken dialogue with the gods of *black* people and thus provides a relatively authentic cultural base from which future and present generations can face the future’ (Zhuwarara, 2001: p. 13). In Mutasa’s *The Contact*, the spiritual attachment to the land and the need to bring about a non-racial society precipitated the liberation struggle. In *A Son of the Soil*, Katiyo highlights the impact of racism on the existence of blacks. *The Contact* and *A Son of the Soil* ‘shared the broad assumption that the guerrilla war was a justified one’ (Kaarsholm, 1991: p. 5). *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) and *The Contact* (1985) glorify and romanticize the war. Glorifications of the war are jubilant counters to ‘the discredited Rhodesian discourse which in the decade before independence produced novels indiscriminately glorifying those fighting against the guerrillas’ (Primorac, 2006: p. 141). Kaarsholm has described texts that glorify the war as part of ‘official celebrations’ for the attainment of independence (1991, as cited in Hochbruck, 1996: p. 168). *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) is about a black fighter who ‘aligns himself with the struggle

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<sup>21</sup> In this case, revisionist refers to the counter-discursive nature of the ‘new’ history narrations.

for independence' and is projected as a genius in organizing and fighting (pp. 50-1). As such, one can argue that Chipamaunga's story is a predictable response to some of the assumptions that most Rhodesians had about black people. The hero's visit to Great Zimbabwe enables him to challenge some of the misconceptions about the building of the monuments. Tinashe's role is that of rehabilitating the African in relation to his culture and history. As such, the guerrillas know that they are fighting at the level of culture and identity.<sup>22</sup> *A Fighter for Freedom* and *The Contact* revere the war and gloss over its complexities.

On the other hand, *Crossroads*, *Non-Believer's Journey* (1980) and *Echoing Silences* (1997) (and others) question the romantic narrative and paint a complex picture of the war. Tizora's *Crossroads* particularly de-romanticizes the impact of the liberation struggle on individuals. In *Crossroads*, Priscilla survives the war but she is not simply a hero, but also a victim whose life is broken. The broken pieces of her life are difficult to reassemble into meaningful existence after the war. In *Non-Believer's Journey* Nyamfukudza exposes 'the shortcomings of the liberation politics and the war; the subjective as well as the destructive' (Zhuwarara, 2001: p. 139). There 'is no celebration of the war as a purification process [...] even if victorious, *the war* will contribute tragedies and complications of its own' to an independent nation (Kaarsholm, 1991: p. 57). Kanengoni in *Echoing Silences* breaks the silence on the forgotten heroes, denouncing the official heroes in the process. In the same novel, Kanengoni also contests the distinction between war veteran and those who did not fight in the war by reminding politicians that all Zimbabweans contributed to the liberation struggle in their own way (cf. Hove, 2002). Chinodya's *A Harvest of Thorns* is one of the early texts that point towards post-independence disillusionment and de-romanticizes the liberation war by criticizing its 'brutalities' (Hochbruck, 1996: p. 170).

This discussion of war literature has shown that 'counter-discourses are not sovereign and do not exhaust reality' and are thus complex (Terdiman, 1989: p. 18). Literary 'nationalists' work against the grain of Rhodesian discourse and its misrepresentation of the war, yet in the process of countering white writers, they create a limited and narrow discourse that needs revision.

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<sup>22</sup> Zhuwarara, Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (the essay first appeared in *Zambezia: The Journal of the University of Zimbabwe* 14 (1987), 140-43), <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/zimbabwe/> (accessed 21 July 2010).

The 'revisionist' writers are far from giving a complete picture of the struggle: for example, the discursive tendencies in these novels downplay women's contribution to the liberation war. For instance, *Nehanda* (1993), *On the Road Again* (1985) and *Bones* (1988) fill in the gaps in nationalist versions of the war. Black women writers and some male writers like Hove, give a new dimension to the liberation struggle history by highlighting the forgotten black woman's contribution in the war. In foregrounding and highlighting the shortcomings of masculine war narratives, feminist texts 'broaden and deepen the understanding of the contradictory nature of liberation history in the hope that the insights will count in the construction of a new and liberated society' (Zhuwarara, 2001: p. 139). The Second Chimurenga remains a highly contested literary theme, with so many versions, coming from authors belonging to different ideologies. The versions are the teller's interpretation of 'reality'. This scenario in the narration of the liberation struggle highlights the complicated concept of truth. If 'truth' is taken to be 'correspondence to reality', then that becomes complicated if perceived in the context of relativism. In essence 'reality' here is perceived to be history (like in this case the history of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle), yet history is narrated, and like other narratives has versions (and depends on who tells the story); so basically we can't use historical sources to verify the 'truth' element of such literary narratives. What this demonstrates is that what there are perceptions and interpretations of reality (otherwise of truth) which are sometimes biased and incomplete. Put together different interpretations and or perceptions are an attempt at diversity; diversity which is also characterised by subversion/ contestation. Most importantly the versions of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle discussed above interact through contestation which is the essence of counter discourse.

### **Subversion in Black Female-Authored Texts**

There are three central functions of feminist writing: a liberating contestation of various forms of oppression, a response to exclusion and a struggle for identity. Zimbabwean black feminists perform such roles by rewriting official historiography and contesting exclusion and misrepresentation of the black woman's experience in mostly male-authored works. Such narratives, then, become 'new discourses that recover the repressed narratives of women' (Maodzwa-Taruvunga and Muponde, 2005: p. xiii). Black women writers resist social silencing and marginality by placing women at the centre of their texts, which is a restoral of women centrality in cultural texts. In such fiction, black

women are also raised to the level of agents and actors in history. In writing, women carve out an identity for the various women that they represent. In terms of time and space, black Zimbabwean women narratives challenge the oppression that black women contend with in both the colonial and the 'independent nation'.

Since the 1960s, publications by black women writers have rapidly increased within and beyond the African continent. The first black Zimbabwean woman to write in English and publish in the colonial period is Chifamba 'who started writing by collecting and transcribing traditional stories' (Veit-Wild, 1992: p. 17). The transcribed stories are contained in *Ngano Dzapasi Chigare* (Stories of Olden Days, 1964), a folktale anthology. In her first publication, Chifamba contributes towards the preservation of traditional knowledge systems as well as redefining justice by outlining some elements of women oppression. One of the traditional stories, 'The Widow and the Baboons', draws attention to the plight of widows who 'are deprived of inheritances and victimized on the deaths of their husbands'<sup>23</sup> (Musengezi, 2004, as cited in Daymond, Driver, Meintjes, Musengezi, Orford and Rasebotsa, 2004: p. 285). Makhalisa is another early Zimbabwean black woman who wrote and published mainly in Ndebele but, in 1984, she published a short story anthology entitled *The Underdog and Other Short Stories* where she mainly depicts the 'harsh realities of female victimization in a patriarchy' (Veit-Wild, 1992: p. 248). In 'Baby Snatcher', Makhalisa highlights the need for African societies to rethink infertility in marriages by demonstrating that childless marriages are not always the woman's fault. Neither Chifamba nor Makhalisa were well-known compared to their male counterparts. This is likely so because during that time fighting for women rights seemed out of place; for there were other 'bigger issues' that black people needed to address in the colonial stifling space and celebrating the newly acquired independence respectively.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The same theme is explored in the film *Neria*, which is based on a script written by Dangarembga. Neria (the woman protagonist) struggles after the death of her husband. The husband's relatives disinherit and victimize the widow.

<sup>24</sup> Comparatively, the African American female writer Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) could not make an immediate impact on African American readers upon its publication because it was considered thematically 'wrong'. Written in the context of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's work was discredited for the use of the dialect spoken by African Americans during a period when blacks were defending their humanity and challenging their marginality. Richard Wright then called the book, 'a minstrel-show turn that makes the white folks laugh'. Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880) wrote and published under a



In spite of the many ‘gender specific deterrents’ that women in Zimbabwe have to triumph over, the independent nation brought an increased publishing literary activity (Primorac, 2006: p. 141). During the larger part of the first decade of independence only males writing in English were known internationally. In an interview prior to the publication of *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga indicated that writers were basically men at the time. All this changed with the publication of *Nervous Conditions* in 1988. Ever since then Zimbabwean female writers began serious writing. Dangarembga has since made an immense contribution to Zimbabwean literature and film industry, as a novelist and a filmmaker. Her major publications are *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and *The Book of Not* (2006). She has also produced a number of films. She wrote a script for *Neria*, a 1993 Zimbabwean film that highlights the disadvantaged positions in which black women find themselves in traditional inheritance systems. *Neria* depicts the battle against the abuse of traditional inheritance customs by black men. The abuse affects the widow and her children who are eventually dispossessed materially. Dangarembga also directed a film; *Everyone’s Child* (1996). *Everyone’s Child* is slightly different in that it represents the disadvantaged positions of vulnerable orphaned children in an adult-controlled postcolonial world.

In all her creative works, Dangarembga protests against various forms of oppression as they affect black women. This is also a lived reality for Dangarembga. When she joined politics and became a member of the Mutambara MDC faction in 2010,<sup>25</sup> she confirmed this by saying: ‘I have always been a vocal critic of injustice, backwardness, intolerance, brutality [...] and all the things that are named in the bible as deadly sins’.<sup>26</sup> In *Nervous Conditions*, the battle waged by black women in a colonial state is two-dimensional. Like black men, they suffer the colonial burden but, over and above that, they have to contend with domination in a patriarchy. Some of the beliefs contested in *Nervous Conditions* include the patriarchy-oriented decision to bar girls from acquiring modern education and a lack of economic freedom, even for women with careers. The animosity in the Tambudzai-Nhamo relationship is a result of the decision to segregate the girl child. Tambudzai is

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the male pen-name George Eliot to obscure her female identity and ‘ensure her works were taken seriously in an era when female authors were usually associated with romantic novels’ (BBC, History, George Eliot (1819- 1880)).

<sup>25</sup> Movement for Democratic Change, opposition political party.

<sup>26</sup> newZimbabweSituation.com, 3 June 2010.

not sorry when her brother Nhamo dies because as long as he lives she cannot get the first priority to go to school. The novel is generally ‘a stark critique of both the patriarchal beliefs of the black community and against the racist structures under which this community must live’.<sup>27</sup> *The Book of Not* is a sequel to *Nervous Conditions* and is about Tambu’s ‘high-school years during the war of liberation and of her struggle to make an independent life for herself in the decade after national independence’ (Kennedy, 2008: p. 88).

In *She No Longer Weeps*, Dangarembga interrogates what it means to be a woman in the Zimbabwean postcolonial context. On attainment of independence, women were promised emancipation, especially in the passage of the Legal Age of Majority Act. This Act was meant to give women the right to contract their own marriages, represent themselves in court, and be guardians of their children. Most of the promises were not seriously honoured on attaining independence, and in *She No Longer Weeps* we witness a daughter's struggle to define her own identity as a woman, independent of her father and the confines of constricted cultural codes. The struggle reflects the broader effort by women in independent Zimbabwe to assert their own understanding of adulthood.

After the publication of *Nervous Conditions*, other women writers complemented Dangarembga’s efforts, and the most prominent among these is Vera who was quite prolific. She published *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* (1992), *Under the Tongue* (1996), *Without A Name* (1994), *Butterfly Burning* (1998), *Nehanda* (1993) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Most of the stories that make up *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* are set during the liberation struggle and are female centred. *Under the Tongue* focuses on ‘the rape of a very young girl by her father while the liberation war engulfs the whole country’ (Gunner and Ten Kortenaar, 2007: p. 6). *Butterfly Burning* is about Phephelaphi, and ‘places at the centre of the protagonist’s crisis over her social and personal identity the consequences of becoming a mother. Phephelaphi’s pregnancy stands in the way of her moulding her identity according to her own desires and of her achieving a position of some stature and economic independence in her social world’ (Hunter, 2000: p. 236). *Nehanda* (1993) is about the spirit medium Nehanda’s role in the liberation struggle. By writing the story of Nehanda, Vera ‘defies the notion that women were simply peripheral to nationalist struggle or that they played back-seat roles’, thereby challenging ‘both the colonial and the male-centred African nationalist erasure of African women's subjectivities and agency’ (Desiree, 2004: p. 193).

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<sup>27</sup> Christiansen-Bull, [www.od.dk](http://www.od.dk).

Another interesting black female writer is Nyamubaya, a poet and a short story writer. Her works include *On the Road Again* (1985), *A Dusk of Dawn* (1995) and 'That Special Place' (2003). *On the Road Again* is a collection of poetry and *A Dusk of Dawn* is a combination of short stories and poems. In most of her texts, Nyamubaya 'revisits the war, to reveal its pains and horrors and to appraise the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters who participated in it. [...] also poetically *re-inscribing* into Zimbabwean society's memory of history the sordid details of the experiences of the past' (Musvoto, 2007: p. 62).

Though not well-known, Masitera has written interesting texts. She published *Militant Shadow* in 1996. This is a collection of poems that militate against emotional and physical exploitation of black women as mothers, wives and children in a male-dominated society. In *Now I Can Play*, Masitera contests various forms of female oppression. In one of the stories, a man's wife and his mistress compete for him, and both emerge out of the competition as the man's 'captives'. In another story, a girl escapes an attempted rape and is told by her mother to keep silent about it or she will 'be ruined for life'. The girl stands accused of inviting the attempted rape. The second story clearly highlights moments of unacknowledged women experiences resulting from patriarchy-imposed silence and women complicity. Masitera's *Start with Me* (2011) highlights the daunting experiences of women in old age. Masitera's *The Trail* (2000) was published on the verge of the Third Chimurenga. *The Trail* has some affinities to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* with particular reference to characterization. Lindiwe, Lindiwe's rebellious aunt and Nyasha are central in Masitera's text and are related to Dangarembga's Tambudzai, Lucia and Nyasha respectively. Thematically *The Trail*

In contrast to Dangarembga's, Masitera's story takes place after independence, and her heroine's rebellion is not directed at a proto-nationalist patriarchy. Instead, it turns itself against the foreign white nuns who run Lindiwe's school without understanding the Zimbabwean students' desire for 'freedom and justice'. (Primorac, 2007: p. 446)

Besides challenging other female writers, Masitera is also popularly known for criticizing 'Vera's representation of three generations of women living together without men in the 1996 novel *Under the Tongue*' (Primorac, 2007: p. 439). Lilian Masitera's works introduce a new and unique feminist voice into

Zimbabwean literature. Besides challenging the ideology of patriarchy, Masitera also challenges what she perceives as misrepresentation and bias in texts by other Zimbabwean feminists.

Gappah and Tagwira are representatives of the upcoming young and modern black Zimbabwean women writers. Gappah contributed stories to the short story anthology *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008), edited by Staunton, and published a short story anthology entitled *An Elegy for Easterly and Other Short Stories* (2009). *An Elegy for Easterly* is a collection of short stories that 'use the motifs of connection and reconnection to examine a range of postcolonial subjectivities from the perspective of women' (Muchemwa, 2010: p. 136). She also has an upcoming novel, *The Book of Memory*. Tagwira has published a novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, in 2006 and contributed short stories to Staunton's *Women Writing Zimbabwe*.

Only prominent black female writers using English are highlighted here. So many others have written maybe a few short stories here and there but have not yet made huge impact in the Zimbabwean literary field. There is a specific pattern to Zimbabwean narratives by black women; there are peculiar forms of oppression that affect black women that women writers are forced to challenge. Primarily, Zimbabwean women writers write against patriarchal dominance and masculinised nationalist history that gloss over women existence and identities. Patriarchy-enforced silence is broken when women writers write about issues that affect them: issues that are particularly considered taboo. In addition, they also protest against the oppressions that affect Zimbabwean people as a whole. Such elements of protest are visible in literature of the post-2000 crisis, also written by black women.<sup>28</sup> Examples are Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly*, Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *Women Writing Zimbabwe*. This kind of writing is peculiar in its presentation of the crisis as it affected women's lives.

Like most male writers of the late 1990s who revise unqualified glorification of the liberation war, Vera and Nyamubaya respond to an official recalling of the contribution of black women in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. They challenge the Joyce Mujuru image of a 'heroine holding a baby in one arm and an AK47 in the other' as the super image of black women in war situations (Christiansen-Bull, 2006: p. 92). Vera and Nyamubaya contest such a glorified role women played, showing that their contribution to the liberation struggle was rather complex. The contribution that women made sometimes left them with painful dents, as in cases of Mazvita in *Without a Name* (1988) and

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<sup>28</sup> Also named the 'lost decade'.

Nyamubaya in 'That Special Place' (2003). Nyamubaya's 'autobiographical return to a 'special place' is a retrospective contestation over narrative so as to redeem the true stories of the revolution' (Muchemwa, 2006: p. 14). Vera's *Nehanda* (1993) rewrites the First Chimurenga from a female perspective (Muchemwa, 2005: p. 200). The writing of alternative history from a feminist perspective is not limited to literary texts. It also characterizes the making of both fictional and documentary films. *Women of Resilience* (2000), *Mothers of Revolution* (1990) and *Flame* (1996) are films 'driven by a common political concern arising out of post independence marginalization of certain voices. Taken together they therefore constituted a counter-discursive movement toward the writing of an alternative history which otherwise would have remained invisible and unarticulated' (Bryce, 2005: p. 28). *Mothers of Revolution* gives women an opportunity to speak about the war through 'oral testimony from Zimbabwean women involved in the war' (Kennedy, 2008: p. 87). *Flame* is about two girls' experiences as liberation fighters and the different paths they take during the war and in an independent Zimbabwe. *Flame's* director claims that the film is a true reflection of the liberation war. Sinclair states that 'in order not to fall in the traps of clichés of stories or legends that are told [...] about the presence of women in the war, I based the film solely on true stories that had really been experienced' (in an interview with *Speciale*, 1996, as cited in Gugler, 2003: p. 57).

Nyamubaya's '*On the Road Again*' (1986) thematically connects with other texts such as Marechera's *House of Hunger*, Nyamfukudza's *Non-Believer's Journey* and Chinodya's *A Harvest of Thorns* that predict the failing independent state. Nyamubaya refers to a 'defeated victory' and a 'mysterious marriage' between 'independence and victory', where 'independence' was celebrated without 'victory'. Her understanding of the liberation struggle entails that attainment of independence did not mark the end of fighting, rather the struggle continues. Vera also participates in post-independence critique of the Gukurahundi violence. Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) was the first comprehensive novel to break the imposed silence on the massacres of thousands of Matabeleland and Midlands residents by government soldiers. Tagwira and Gappah also participate in rewriting the official state position on the 1999-2009 crises in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) respectively. However, these two works are not just feminist<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> In my discussion of gender in this thesis I limit myself to feminism (and to limited extent masculinities) but in Zimbabwean literature there are possible new/other counter-discourses

Rather they fit well into the category of Zimbabwean writers that represent post-independence politics, particularly the ‘millennial crises’.

### **Post-Independence Writing**

Zimbabwe’s post-independence history and politics are not so different from other African states. After a protracted liberation war between black nationalists and the colonialists, Zimbabwe obtained its independence in 1980. From 1980 up to the time of writing this thesis, the nation has been under the leadership of the Nationalist party ZANU, later ZANU PF, with Robert Mugabe as its Prime Minister and later President. On attaining independence, Zimbabwe became ‘a Jewel of Southern Africa’. The new government emphasised reconciliation and sowed a commitment to democracy and economic development (Holmes and Orner, 2010: p. 16). In spite of the social and economic reforms, ‘cracks began to show’ when Robert Mugabe and the ruling ZANU

moved to consolidate power and crush opposition. In the early 1980s, an army was sent into Matabeleland and Midlands provinces [...] to root out supposed traitors among the former soldiers of ZIPRA. (Holmes and Orner, *ibid.*)

Gukurahundi ended in 1987 with the signing of the Unity Accord, which saw the birth of ZANU PF. A severe drought and the IMF-recommended economic restructuring program ostensibly disturbed economic and social growth. Following the controversial land re-appropriation and redistribution of 2000, Zimbabwe entered a period popularized as the ‘Third Chimurenga’. The

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on sexual ‘minorities’ or marginalized sexual groups. These voices can be located in texts on homosexuality. Homosexuality is condemned in Zimbabwe (Robert Mugabe – the Zimbabwean President – is on record for dismissing homosexuals as ‘lower than pigs and dogs’). By voicing the tabooed homosexual theme, writers destabilize what Shaw elsewhere termed ‘officially codified claims to natural authority’ in the area of sexuality (2006: p. 273). ‘Gay, lesbian and transgendered writing’ challenge old assumptions regarding gender and sexuality (Shaw, 2006: p. 274). Such texts include Madanhire’s *If the Wind Blew* (1999) and Huchu’s *The Hairdresser of Harare* (2011). These texts tread on ‘uncharted terrain’ (Shaw, 2006: p. 281), invade the walls of condemned sexualities and articulate not just the prevalence but also the essence of homosexuality. Such writers, just like The Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe Group (GALZ) write to defend human rights for minority sexualities, and what they write present challenges to dominant sexuality beliefs in Zimbabwe (as demonstrated in the constant attacks on homosexuality by the Robert Mugabe).

economic, social and political crises that faced the nation from the late 1990s was lessened by the inception of a Government of National Unity in 2009<sup>30</sup> that ended in 2013, with the re-ushering in of the ‘old’ ZANU PF-dominated government. The GNU was a coalition government that consisted of the two major Zimbabwean political parties: ZANU PF and the two MDC factions and was a solution to the inconclusive 2008 presidential elections.<sup>31</sup> In spite of the political impasse that characterized the GNU era, there were notable improvements in economic and social aspects; improvements that still remain visible in the post-GNU era. In recent times, Zimbabwe has seen a remarkable growth in its economy. Most importantly there is undoubted availability of food in all Zimbabwean shops. At the end of the power-sharing deal, ZANU PF won the harmonised elections in 2013.

As indicated before, in Rhodesia the dominant version of history ‘was authorized by whites’ and in an act of dissent, black writers subverted that and offered their own historical perspective (Chennels, 2005: p. 133). In this process, they managed to re-appropriate the misrepresented black ‘other’ (this is termed cultural nationalism in one of the previous sections of this chapter). In post-independence Zimbabwe, the official and dominant version of history is the one choreographed by the dominant ZANU PF political party and the ruling government. In acts of defiance, all voices of dissent (eventually tagged ‘enemies of the state’) subvert this official narrative. The dominant version of history is mainly characterized by ‘inclusions and exclusions’. ‘Inclusions and exclusions’ in any society’s history depend on ‘the political exigencies of the moment’ (Chennels, 2005: p. 133) largely because ‘official history is selective and supportive of the status quo’ (Muchemwa, 2005: p. 195). The narratives, referred to above, by ‘voices of dissent’ represent what Nyambi has termed ‘narrative interventionism’ (2011: p. 2), which is conceived here as an act of retelling, in other perspective, the dominant versions of history.

Some of the celebrationist war novels discussed in one of the earlier sections fit into the mood of the period immediately following the attainment of independence. The mythologization of war is understood in the context of celebration. The celebration mood characteristic of this fiction carried a genuine euphoria about the revolution being accomplished (Kaarsholm, 1991).

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<sup>30</sup> The Zimbabwean postcolonial political development has also been divided into three phases; 1980-1990, 1990-1997 and 1997 and onwards (Sylvester, 2003, as cited in Primorac and Muponde, 2005: p. 16).

<sup>31</sup> MDC T, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, and MDC M, led by Arthur Mutambara.

Rewriting mythologies of the war is also symptomatic of the disillusioning aspects of post-independent Zimbabwe. Writers like Nyamfukudza, Mungoshi, Marechera and Chinodya 'challenged the discourses of Zimbabwean nationalism well before its historiography did so' (Primorac and Muponde, 2005: p. xvii). Texts that fit into this category include Chinodya's *A Harvest of Thorns*, Marechera's both *Black Sunlight* and *House of Hunger*. In both *Harvest of Thorns* and *Black Sunlight*, though the death of Rhodesian colonialism is certain, in the emerging Zimbabwe promises of independence are betrayed. At the end of the war Benjamin, in *Harvest of Thorns*, comes back home and realizes that, though some things have changed, much still remains unchanged. It is important to note that Chinodya received fierce literary attack after the publication of *Harvest of Thorns* for what seemed to be a premature and unfair judgment of the gains or non-gains of independence. In *Black Sunlight*, Marechera demonstrates that as long as opposition politics cannot be tolerated in a free nation, there is no freedom to talk about. For him 'true liberation [...] could be achieved only through the overcoming of oppositional identity discourses and freeing the imagination to create space for individual reinvention' (Pucherova in an Interview with Magadza, 2012).<sup>32</sup>

True to the prophetic voices of Marechera and Chinodya (among others), as early as 1982, the historical tensions, conflicts and rivalry between ZANU, ZAPU, ZIPRA, ZANLA, 'the Shona and the Ndebele' led to Gukurahundi. The 'civil war' was representative of a violation of the nationalist ideology, but also an act of ethnic cleansing and a sign of retrogression.<sup>33</sup> The cleansing was largely a result of ZANU's tendency towards monopolization of power and an effort to create a one-party state, which is modern dictatorship (Fanon, 1963: p. 132). The then government of Zimbabwe suppressed Gukurahundi reality. Robert Mugabe's argument that this 'ugly' history was not supposed to be brought into the future was a statement directed at suppression of history (Ranger, 2005: p. 240). Subsequently, this remained a silenced memory throughout the 1980s. Significantly, Zimbabwean literature contains fiction that interrogates facts found or not found in the official historical narrative with respect to Gukurahundi violence. Though not comprehensively, Marechera was

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<sup>32</sup><http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/08/qa-the-undying-legacy-of-dambudzo-marechera/> (accessed 20 March 2012).

<sup>33</sup> 'Civil war' may not be an appropriate phrase to describe Gukurahundi, because there was no fighting; the government simply went into what they identified as enemy territory and killed thousands of unarmed civilians.



the first male black Zimbabwean writer to deal with the silent and unacknowledged historical narrative of Gukurahundi in *Black Sunlight* (1980) by particularly referring to 'intelligent opposition', the term the government used for dissidents (Kahari, 2009: p. 100). Hove in *Shadows* also deals with the unnamed trauma of Gukurahundi. Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) counters Hove and Marechera's male understanding of the event as a 'male affair' (Vambe, 2004: p. 100). In this novel, Vera describes Gukurahundi violence as experienced by the people of Kezi. Two women's lives are shattered by the battle between government forces and 'dissidents'. Godwin's autobiography *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* also captures the Matabeleland massacres but his text had no immediate effect in Africa though it made an impact in Britain for obvious ideological reasons. The book 'fell into a genre of white memoir' in Zimbabwe (Muchemwa, 2005: p. 196). Other texts that contest the suppressed Gukurahundi history and 'silenced memories' include Ndlovu's short story 'Torn Posters', Kilgore's *We Are Now Zimbabweans* and Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (Toivanen, 2009: p. 1). Such texts resist 'the slipping into oblivion of unacknowledged, unspoken traumas of *Gukurahundi violence*' (Muchemwa, 2005: p. 196) (my emphasis).

In the 1990s and onwards, as the government abandoned the socialist ideology, the disappointments of independence became more obvious (Kaarsholm, 1991). Against the background of the 1999-2009 political, social and economic Zimbabwean crises, there existed 'multiple re-evaluations of the country's history' (Primorac and Muponde, 2005: p. xii). There is 'patriotic historiography' on one hand and voices of dissent on the other. Patriotic historiography builds and departs from the previous nationalist narratives through 'a series of omissions, additions and simplifications' (ibid.). Such an incomplete and biased historical version was made available to the public through the state-controlled media, *The Herald* and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings. Chikwava laments this situation in 'Seventh Street Alchemy'<sup>34</sup> and intimates that people were 'tortured with recycled maxims of state propaganda which ranged from the importance of being a sovereign nation to defending the gains of independence' (2003: p. 21). In 'At the Sound of the Last Post', Gappah satirizes such monopolization of history. The narrator in Gappah's story says:

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<sup>34</sup> One of the short stories that make up *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003), a short story anthology.

Only the official truth matters, only that truth will be handed down through the history books for the children to learn [...] they will learn [...] the land is one of plenty with happy citizens. The injustices of the past have been redressed to consolidate the gains of independence. (2009: p. 24)

Here, the narrator grapples with the official denial of the crisis and the representation of the Zimbabwean Fast Track Land Reform of 2000. Fiction about the Zimbabwean crisis witnesses the 'sad' lives of a majority of Zimbabweans, and short stories on land re-appropriation demonstrate that the process was marred by corruption and land imbalances were recreated, with ZANU PF leaders getting more land ahead of land-hungry ordinary citizens.

Robert Mugabe, in a classic act of denial of 'the crisis', once said that anyone who believed that the nation was in short supply of fuel should test that by lying on any of the Zimbabwean roads. Such a denial resonates well with the argument that 'African economies never collapse until there is no food in the state house' (Hove, 2009: p. 23). Alongside state-controlled media, during the same period a literary tradition emerged that also fits well into Ranger's 'patriotic narrative'. Nyambi locates Gomo's *A Fine Madness* in this tradition. In line with the official discourse on the crisis, Gomo's book

represents negative images of an Africa suffering under western neo-colonial siege years into self rule in an essentialist way that projects the continent as entirely beleaguered by terrorist groups, rebels and opposition parties sponsored by western powers to destabilize African 'democracies that threaten to overwhelm white minority influence'. (Nyambi, 2011: p. 3)

The story of Africa as victim can also be found in Robert Mugabe's understanding/misunderstanding of opposition politics, particularly the Movement for Democratic Change. Mugabe's favoured rhetoric - 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again' - correlates with the belief that 'the MDC is implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces [...] the repulsive ideologies of return to the white settler rule' (White, 2003: p. 101). According to Moyo, ZANU PF could never share power with MDC because 'they are British backed racists whose existence is provocative' (as cited in White, *ibid.*). The affinity between state discourse and Gomo's *A Fine Madness* shows that this

specific literary tradition has ‘entered the public sphere as a sympathetic force to the state, advancing its rule and subsequently subverting anti government voices’ (Nyambi, 2011: p. 4).<sup>35</sup>

The counter-discursive, anti-government voices that challenged the official discourse on the crisis included opposition parties, privately owned media, civil society, revisionist historians, creative and critical texts. Non-official re-writing of the Third Chimurenga history by particularly creative writers is interesting. From 2000 onwards, many Zimbabwean short story anthologies were published by different local and international publishing houses. The most visible publishing houses in ‘the scramble for short story’ include Amabooks of Bulawayo and Weaver Press of Harare. From Weaver Press, Staunton edited four short story anthologies: *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003), *Writing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2005), *Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2007) and *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008). Morris edited the three series of *Long Time Coming: Short Writings from Bulawayo* (1, 11 and 111). Most of the short stories rewrite the official denial of the Third Chimurenga crisis. Other such works include Chingono’s *Not Another Day* (2006), Chinodya’s *Harare North* (2009), Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) and Chinodya’s *Chairman of Fools* (2005).

Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope* challenges the official narrative of Operation Murambatsvina.<sup>36</sup> As shown by Nyambi, ‘the state narrative characteristically shows a clear defensive assertiveness that finds expression

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<sup>35</sup> Other texts that belong to the same tradition include Maruma’s *Coming Home* (2007) and Mtizira’s *The Chimurenga Protocol* (2008). According to Primorac and Muponde, ‘some xenophobic novels in indigenous languages, monologic popular texts and nationalist narratives of patriotic childhoods’ helped to pave way for the Third Chimurenga as well as rehearsing it (2005: p. xv).

<sup>36</sup> Operation Murambatsvina was implemented by the government in 2005 and was mainly characterized by violence. It was a programme purportedly meant to clean ‘dirt, crime and subversion’, targeted at urban dwellers. The ‘cleansing exercise was however politically motivated’ - it was an opportunity to disturb the emerging strong opposition political MDC party. As explained by Sachikonye, Operation Murambatsvina was an example of the 2002 ‘post-election retaliation by the Mugabe Regime mainly against an opposition movement that had strongly become rooted in urban areas’ (2011: p. 26). The operation was characterized by destruction of ‘illegal’ business and residential structures and between 700,000 and 2.5 million people were left homeless and without a source of income. Elsewhere, Operation Murambatsvina has been described as a ‘man made socio-political catastrophe’ (Nyambi, 2011: p. 5). For more details see chapter 5 of this study.

[...] in the government's intransigent official response to the [...] United Nations' report that concluded that the operation violated its victims' basic rights' (2011: p. 6). Tagwira questions the state's denial of the brutal violation of basic human rights curtailed in the operation. Thus, her work translates into a discourse of protest that is 'counter narrative [...] of the official narrative of time-space' and in reading the work, the reader experiences 'the tragedy of Operation Murambatsvina in ways that steer him/her to certain perceptions [...] which have not found expression in the state narrative' (ibid.).

The centrality of the land issue in Zimbabwean politics and crisis of the last decade cannot be overemphasized.<sup>37</sup> Its centrality is not limited to history but also extends to literature. From as early as the 1950s, Zimbabwean writers focused on the land theme. Key texts include *A Son of the Soil*, *Feso*, *Nehanda* and *Waiting for the Rain*. These texts describe how colonized black people are affected by colonial land ownership imbalances. When the liberation war was waged, major issues to be resolved included land ownership imbalances. Upon attaining independence, it took the ZANU and later ZANU PF government a long time to correct those imbalances. Faced with a powerful and influential political opposition party (MDC in the late 1990s), ZANU PF fell back on the emotional land issue and put in place a largely chaotic Land Reform Programme, and dubbed it *Jambanja*. The manner in which the justified cause of redressing the land ownership imbalances was implemented had dire consequences to a nation whose economy was slowly crumbling under a corrupt leadership. This kind of leadership is satirized in Musengezi's *The Honourable*

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<sup>37</sup> Land reform has always been controversial in Zimbabwean politics. In 1888, Cecil John Rhodes led colonists to expropriate the black people's land, getting the best productive land and creating ownership imbalances in the process. The struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe sought, among other things, to redress colonial land ownership imbalances. However, the colonial land ownership patterns established during the colonial conquest were largely maintained in the post independent period. There were a number of land reform processes in the history of the independent Zimbabwe and the 2000 Land Reform Programme is the most controversial. ZANU PF was accused of reacting to the referendum defeat and MDC's popularity by 'bashing [...] a few white farmers' (Bond and Mandinyanya, 2002: p. 67). Revisiting the land question was taken to be ZANU PF's predictable political strategy 'to reclaim [...] lost political ground' (Hammar, 2004: p. 10). The ruling party is believed to have planned to achieve two things through the land reform: to get 'revenge against white farmers, who are largely believed to have a greater influence in the opposition party and to garner support from the electorate (Bond and Mandinyanya, 2002: p. 67).

MP (1983). As writers struggle to undo the damage of the official representation of the land reform and its attendant negative impact on human existence, they contribute to the discourse of protest. Major texts in this category include selected short stories in *Writing Now* (2005), *Writing Still* (2003), *Laughing Now* (2007) and Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories*.

It should be pointed out from the onset that 'despite all evidence to the contrary, the fast track land reform was officially represented as a pinnacle of national history: the long overdue reclaiming of a key national and spiritual resource, and thus a glorious act of final decolonization' (Primorac, 2006: p. 2). Writers demonstrate overwhelming evidence to the effect that, though the land invasions could be considered reclamation of a national and spiritual resource, these were largely chaotic and could be viewed as one of the factors behind the millennial crisis. Most importantly, however, the land invasions became an important literary event, providing artists with a new reality to be recreated. Writers show how the invasions were mostly anarchic. For instance, Hove bluntly refers to the fast track program as a 'chaotic resettlement program' (2002: 6). From Chinodya's 'Queues' (2003) in *Writing Still*, 'grabbing of farms' is one of the crimes that Zimbabwe committed against the world, the world that later punished us. The farm invaders are first and foremost 'reformed rustics [...] who rejoiced at the pieces of their ancestral land that were restored to them, at the little seed packs, thrift bags of fertilizers and itinerant tractors availed at them' (p. 51). Though in nationalist narrative the Third Chimurenga was 'represented as a glorious final act of decolonization', in intervention narratives the same act 'led to the collapse of the nation's economy' (Primorac and Muponde, 2005: p. xiii).

One interesting contribution by Chingono is his story 'Minister without Portfolio' (2007).<sup>38</sup> From Chingono's point of view, the farm dwellers have built matchbox size houses and are busy dancing and drinking beer, while the land lays fallow. Some of the grabbed farms are deserted. This prompted the minister in the story to conclude that these invaders are 'sabotaging the revolution' by derailing the land reform program. He becomes a laughing stock at the end of the story when it is confirmed that these are some of the farms he invaded and now belong to him. Chingono's story undermines ZANU PF's claim that the opposition MDC party and its allies that were derailing the supposed land reform program. As Kanengoni argues: 'Though the intentions of

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<sup>38</sup> Hoba's '*Specialization*' (2007) also paints a picture of a chaotic land reform programme and will be discussed in chapter 5.

the monumental land allocation were noble the implementation was fraught with corruption and rampant abuse' (2004: p. 50). The corrupt manner in which the Land Reform Program was implemented has resulted in yet another land imbalance where mostly ZANU PF stalwarts now own the land. A fourth Chimurenga would be needed to undo the imbalances created by the 2000 Land Reform Program.<sup>39</sup>

Writers go beyond the land crisis and demonstrate the various aspects of the crisis that the government of Zimbabwe largely dismissed or deliberately ignored in their national discourse. They do so by highlighting the material realities of ordinary Zimbabweans denied basic commodities like food, decent accommodation, dignified remuneration and freedom of expression. Mostly the accusation by the government that the so-called 'enemies of the state' choreographed the problems Zimbabwe faced was a crucial part of the official denial of the crisis. The 'enemies of the state' discourse relates well to the blame loaded on the MDC and its supposed allies Britain and America that the ruling ZANU PF wanted the world to believe were the chief choreographers of the crisis. With differing levels of success, writers of the Zimbabwean crisis grappled with issues related to the causes and the nature of the post-2000 crisis. Their texts ultimately offer a challenge to the grand narratives of the 'crises'. In what Pilosof described as 'the latest evolution of Zimbabwe's white writing' white writers add their voices and narrate especially the 'land invasions' aspect of the Zimbabwean crisis (2009: p. 621). Texts that give the aforementioned white version of the land invasions include; Buckle's *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions* (2001) and *Beyond Tears: Zimbabwe's Tragedy*. (2006), Vanbuskirk's *The Last Safari: A Season of Discovery in Zimbabwe* (2006), Godwin's *When A Crocodile Eats The Sun: A Memoir of Africa*. (2008), Harrison's *Jambanja* (2006) and Wiles' *Foreshadowed Is My Forest: The Diary of a Zimbabwe Farmer* (2005). Key to note is the fact that these white writers, like the black writers who subvert the state land discourse, paint a negative picture of the invasions. The notable difference is that white writers are narrating the 'land invasions' as victims of the Third Chimurenga and for the greater part their narratives fit into the 'white writing' category that is often dismissed as part of the colonial discourse. However this is not meant to suggest that their stories do not contribute meaningful alternatives to the state discourse on land invasions.

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<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion of the possibility of a fourth Chimurenga, see Primorac, 2006: p. 74.

### **Autobiographical Writing and Alternative Historiography**

Autobiographical writings are an important aspect of Zimbabwean literature. These are personal and private in nature but operate 'within a broader socio-political context' (Harris, 2005: p. 104). Autobiographical writings are both Rhodesian and Zimbabwean. According to Chennels, 'early autobiographical writings contributed to the larger imperial narrative' and were mainly written by white Rhodesians (2005: p. 132). Examples include Ian Douglass Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* (2001) and Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996). In his autobiography, Smith locates the place of the self in the history of Rhodesia. Key points emphasized in his narrative include 'displacement' of the 'non-existing' black race through colonial infiltration. Still steeped in colonial discourse, Smith minimises the significance of black resistance (especially the First Chimurenga) to colonial encroachment (Javangwe, 2011: p. 77). What Smith does in his autobiography is re writing the history of colonialism, offering an alternative to what black writers and individuals have said on the subject. Godwin's *Mukiwa* will be discussed in chapter 3 as one of the texts that rewrite the Gukurahundi aspect of Zimbabwean history. *Mukiwa* 'traces and delineates the life of Peter Godwin in colonial Rhodesia from childhood up to the time he returns to independent Zimbabwe in the early 1980s' (Javangwe, 2011: p. 90)

On the other hand, early black Zimbabwean autobiographies were an important consciousness formation for nationalists. Shamuyarira (1965), Vambe (1972), Nyagumbo (1980) and Sithole (1976) 'recall how racial insult, poverty and the frustration of educational ambition constrained their lives within Rhodesia' (Chennels, 2005: p. 133). Autobiographical writings by black politicians in Rhodesia resist the excesses of the colonial contact and ideology. In post-independence Zimbabwe, popular political figures continue to write their life-stories and the most interesting of these are Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* (1983) and Tekere's *Life Time of Struggle* (2007). These two autobiographies exist in a terrain that is dominated by 'the self-serving memory of [...] ZANU PF' (Chennels, 2005: p. 133). *The Story of My Life* (1983) contests ZANU's misrepresentation of Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU's political contribution to the building of a new Zimbabwe. It is particularly Nkomo's misrepresentation as 'father of dissidents' that he questions in his autobiography. Largely, his autobiographical projects 'forms part of a political reconstruction in the midst of hostile deconstruction' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006: p. 78). Self-writing allows Nkomo (and others) an opportunity at creation and

recreation of their identities (Chennels, 2005: p. 132). Gukurahundi was a ‘full scale repression of ZAPU and anything to do with that organization’s history of contributing to the nationalist struggle and the liberation war’ (Kaarsholm, 2005: p. 4). In *The Story of My Life*, Nkomo reacts to repression of ZAPU and re-establishes its contribution to the nationalist struggle and the liberation struggle. Tekere was a founding member of ZANU who also served the new Zimbabwe in 1980 as one of its cabinet ministers and was sacked from the government in 1981, and subsequently from the ZANU PF party in 1988 and formed an opposition party (ZUM).<sup>40</sup> In his autobiography, Tekere is ‘at pains to portray Robert Mugabe, who often had poor judgment, was manipulative and cunning’ as a response to ‘the propagandists who present Mugabe as a courageous man’ (Mambipiri, 2011)<sup>41</sup>. This shows that ‘the ruling party’s history is not an uncontested call of the past’ (Chennels, 2005: p. 133). Generally, the lives of the autobiographers reflect on the history of the nation and make an interesting contribution to national history by questioning and deflating certain elements projected on nationalist history. Personal testimonies in self-writings fill in the ‘cracks and interstices’<sup>42</sup> of Zimbabwean history and ‘articulate previously censored and suppressed’ realities (Harris, 2005: p. 103). In this section I have demonstrated how race is also a key aspect in self-writing and narration of the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean history.

## Conclusion

Counter-discourse is a crucial feature of Zimbabwean literature. A study of the trends of counter-discursive narratives in this chapter has confirmed Terdiman’s description of counter-discourse as not sovereign and not exhaustive of reality (1989: 18). Initially, black Zimbabwean writers had to reconstruct the African past disfigured in colonial discourse by dismantling its colonialist assumptions. Such re-appropriation of history influenced cultural nationalist writings and all literature that resisted the oppressive tendencies of colonial contact. Later, black Zimbabwean writers had a task to write and rewrite post-independence successes and failures. In tracing the theme of violence in novels from independence onwards, patterns of inter-textual relationships emerge prominently with texts ‘quoting, echoing and debating each other and in the

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<sup>40</sup> Zimbabwe Unity Movement

<sup>41</sup> [www.newzimbabwe.com](http://www.newzimbabwe.com), Mambipiri, *Edgar Tekere: A Review* (accessed 9 June 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Harris uses this phrase to refer to personal testimonies that are part of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission generated stories.



process reformulating and challenging earlier tales' (Kaarsholm, 2005: p. 18). In challenging colonialist construction of the liberation struggle and celebrating independence, selected black (largely male) writers romanticised the liberation struggle. There are texts that revise the romanticised versions of the liberation struggle and yet the revisions are insufficient. The revisions have been subsequently challenged in texts that highlight the complexities of war violence and write women into the liberation history. A number of writers also challenge the state discourse on Gukurahundi and the Third Chimurenga. Prominent politicians offer alternative voices to state discourse through autobiographical writing. Compared to literatures from other parts of the African continent, the dynamism of the post-1980 literary history of Zimbabwe is exceptional in this respect. Many of the literary texts that can qualify as counter-discourse have been written about Zimbabwe, and this study cannot pretend to be exhaustive. As a result, I will only refer to selected themes in the chapters that follow.

