

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/31875> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Mangena, Tendai

Title: Counter-discourse in Zimbabwean literature

Issue Date: 2015-02-11

Chapter 2: Feminist Subversion of Nationalist Narratives

Until lions have their histories, tales of hunting will always glorify their hunter - African Proverb (Hudson-Weems, 2007: p. 1)

Introduction

In tracing the history of counter-discourse in Zimbabwean literature in the previous chapter, I demonstrated how black women writers make their contribution through a subversion of patriarchal and nationalist narrations of Zimbabwean history. In this chapter, I expand on that position and demonstrate how Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove⁴³ resist the social silencing of women by placing women at the centre of their texts. That process is not just a refusal of marginality but is also a restoral of centrality of women in cultural texts. Selected writers write black women into Zimbabwean liberation history in two ways: through a revitalisation of women's roles in the liberation struggle and emphasising women-specific struggles that are often ignored in nationalist writing of the liberation struggle. I begin this discussion by revisiting the subject of colonialism: highlighting its nature and the colonized subjects' responses. I also highlight some characteristics of nationalism as a response to colonialism paying particular attention to how nationalist discourse on the liberation struggle ignored and excluded women's issues from its agenda. Such a background is useful in understanding the selected texts set in Rhodesia and focusing on the liberation struggle against colonialism. Texts selected for this chapter are Vera's *Without a Name* and selected stories from *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals and Other Stories*, Nyamubaya's 'That Special Place' and Hove's *Ancestors*.

European colonization of African space and people was motivated by the general pursuit to dominate and conquer, informed by a political and economic desire for expansion and enrichment of European nations. Colonialism in Africa was multifaceted and systematic. It was not only about political and economic domination but had also a cultural aspect. In imperialist logic, imperial culture thrives to obliterate the culture of the oppressed and to impose its own cultural idea. Colonialism in its various forms dehumanized the colonized Africans, and was 'a heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as the other'

⁴³ Hove's *Bones* fits here even though he is a male writer, largely because the text is female-centered and addresses women's issues. I will however discuss the complexities associated with male writers speaking on behalf of women in their texts.

(Spivak, 1988: p. 76). The colonized African subjects responded in various ways. Supporters of colonialism in Europe and the rest of the world believed that the majority of Africans welcomed and embraced colonialism because it supposedly brought peace to the continent, most parts of which were said to be conflict ridden. Such a version of colonial history is not convincing in all respects and was as manipulative as it was ill-informed. African scholars argue that even if the African pre-colonial society was 'itself not a golden age of democracy [...]' colonialism was 'undemocratic to the core' and hence could not have brought peace but created new conflicts (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: p. 1144).⁴⁴ There is also considerable evidence of a mixed reaction to colonialism by the colonized, what is termed 'hybridity' in postcolonial discourse - with many colonized people living at the crossroads of cultures. Though the colonized people made efforts to resist colonial encroachment, some aspects of imperial culture were rather tempting. Achebe refers to 'the bounties of the Christian God [...] education, paid jobs and many other advantages that nobody in his right senses could underrate' (1988: p. 31). The postcolonial concept of hybridity was 'invented' to go beyond the simplistic dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized. Living at crossroads of cultures for colonized people is quite problematic because it confirms the supremacy of Western values, yet:

The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native man mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him. (Fanon, 1963: p. 33)

Hence, proper decolonization entailed that the colonized register a 'total rejection' of the colonizer's values. The need to resist 'modernity' is justified because in the African context modernity 'is inextricably tied to western colonialism' (Jameson, 1990, as cited in Friedman, 2006: p. 426).⁴⁵ Such a

⁴⁴ This is comparable to Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina's position that Europeans 'propagated that they had come to Africa to keep the peace *with the intention of stopping* intra-African warfare and to suppress those African customs they regarded as repulsive' (italics my own) (1995: p. 423).

⁴⁵ The use of the term 'modern' in relation to African space has always been problematic. As Taiwo argues 'colonialism and modernity are used interchangeably in much of the discourse about Africa' (2010: p. 3). Claiming that colonialism 'installed modernity in Africa' (ibid.)

rejection normally manifests itself in traditionalism and is a reaction to the complicated relationship between modernity and imperialism. However, ‘total rejection’ becomes an empty declaration: particularly contradictory and paradoxical vis-à-vis the process of hybridisation. As colonial rule became more institutionalized and intense, African resistance became more organized and focused, and was couched in the concept of Nationalism - it is also quite important to note that the idea of a nation was borrowed from western thinking (this is also an expression of hybridity). Subsequently, then, ‘colonialism created African nationalism and African nationalists’ and nationalism was one of ‘the strongest foci for resistance to imperial control in colonial societies’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: p. 1144). Nationalism is a concept of a shared community, what Anderson has termed ‘an imagined community’ (2006). Nationalism enabled postcolonial societies to reinvent a self-image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression. Some of the African Nationalist Movements that fought for liberation from colonialism include MPLA⁴⁶ and UNITA⁴⁷ of Angola, FRELIMO⁴⁸ of Mozambique, SWAPO⁴⁹ of Namibia, ANC⁵⁰ and PAC⁵¹ of South Africa and ZANU⁵² and ZAPU⁵³ of Zimbabwe. All these movements represent the difference and diversity of colonial resistance.

Fanon describes the struggle for national culture as a revolutionary schema that comprises three separate but related stages. He indicates that in the assimilationist stage, the native intellectual demonstrates assimilation prowess but in stage two he ‘remembers his authentic culture and kicks against attempts to assimilate him’ (1963, as cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995: p. 159). What characterizes stage two is cultural reaffirmation and unbridled traditionalism. Stage three represents the nationalist phase that is characterized by fighting back. This last stage is always ‘a violent phenomenon’ and is a

remains problematic. In what ways are African states considered non-modern, and who measures ‘modernity’? In the context of this study, modernity is understood to be any changes (good or bad) that were brought to the African continent through colonialism.

⁴⁶ Popular Movement for the Independence of Angola.

⁴⁷ Union for the Total Independence of Angola.

⁴⁸ Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.

⁴⁹ South West Africa People's Organization.

⁵⁰ African National Congress.

⁵¹ Pan-African Congress.

⁵² Zimbabwe African National Union.

⁵³ Zimbabwe African People's Union.

significant aspect of decolonization (Fanon, 1963: p. 27). From Cabral's point of view, 'national liberation struggle as a historical act becomes an act of cultural resistance to such an extent that it is recognized that the object of national liberation is the freedom of a society and its values from foreign domination' (1973, as cited in Ashcroft et al, 1995: p. 160). One has to note, however, that besides such a militant intellectual position adopted by both Fanon and Cabral, nationalism is not unitary. Schiff demonstrates that 'cultural domination is [...] a major aspect of imperialist domination [...] *and* is always a major site of resistance [...] *but* the totality of indigenous culture can hardly be posited as a unified, transparent site of anti-imperialist resistance'.⁵⁴ This becomes clear when it comes to the voices of women challenging nationalist discourse on the liberation struggle. Though African Nationalism was a response to the undemocratic colonial enterprise, it was itself not a 'school for democracy' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: p. 1144). This is another example of hybridity that cannot escape our attention, in particular as we read Zimbabwean writers who subvert and reread the mainstream narration of the liberation struggle - especially the ones I have selected for this chapter. Nationalism rested on patriarchal ideology, and particularly failed to escape gender discrimination, which is one of 'the problematic aspects of nationalist ideologies' (Engelke, 1998: p. 36). In the Zimbabwean context, 'the woman as subject has been rendered invisible by the historiographies of Rhodesia' as well as by the nationalist ideology (Lyons, 2004: p. 67). Where/when femininity is excluded, masculinity 'becomes the only trusted guardian of national history, land and heritage as well as the only fire that warms the national patriotism' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: p. 1154). Once the exclusion of women is accepted as the norm, the collective of nationalism is defeated and nullified. The woman's question is not made an integral part of the fight for national culture for obvious reasons of such exclusion 'has been to render invisible women's hands in the making of nations and states' (Nagel, 1998: p. 243). This is largely so because 'nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope' (Enloe, 1990, as cited in Nagel, 1998: p. 244). It suffices then that nationalism is 'a discriminatory identity' (Bhabha, 1995: p. 34). The masculinized dominant nationalist version of history excludes women and hence is gender-blind.

⁵⁴ M. Schiff, 'Histories and Theories of Nationalism: A Semiotic Approach', <http://www.janushead.org/4-2/schiff.cfm> (accessed 2 May 2011).

According to Lyons, ‘most popular fiction about the war has been written by men’ (2004: 26). All the literary works studied for this chapter contest ‘the image of the historic woman warrior fighting for political independence, wielding a gun in one hand and holding a baby with the other’ (Lyons, 2004: p. xix). The selected writers show the complex roles and positions occupied by women in the fight for national culture and other struggles that are women-specific. The response to the biased narration from ‘feminist’ perspective has been to illuminate the role played by women in the fight for national struggle, the impact of the struggle on women’s lives as well as the other struggles that are specific to women. Such narratives are then directed at ‘bringing women back in the study of nationalism and national politics’ and have since filled in an important gap in Zimbabwean war historiography elsewhere and in literature (Nagel, 1998: p. 243). As part of the postcolonial discourse, they weaken the orientalist nature of the grand narratives by exposing ‘the inadequacies of conventional accounts of the past by attempting to include what these accounts tended to leave out’ (Lyons, 2004: p. 4). In view of this, this chapter then seeks to study some texts by Vera, Hove and Nyamubaya - short stories from *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* (1992), *Without a Name* (1994), *Ancestors* (1996) and ‘That Special Place’ (2003).

Rethinking Land Politics in Vera’s *Without a Name*

At the centre of the liberation struggle was a demand for lost land. For colonized black people, the ‘demands for [...] lost lands were part of a developed consciousness of the mechanisms of their oppression; of an understanding of the ways in which the state had expropriated them to the direct advantage of settler farming’ (Ranger, 1985, as cited in Gunner, 1991: p. 77). Anti-imperialism, ‘has from the outset embodied ideals of freedom, democracy and equality as well as the restoration of land to the people’ (Primorac, 2006: p. 4). Nationalist narratives insist on the centrality of the land issue since colonial occupation was understood as ‘geographical violence’. Through decolonization, the oppressed people reclaim their ‘geographical identity’ (Said, 1993, as cited in Mangwanda, 2003: pp. 141-42).

In redressing the loss of locality to the colonizers, the indigenes struggle to restore lost lands. Many Zimbabwean authors articulate such a nationalist approach to an understanding of land as a central aspect of the decolonization process. In this discussion I focus on Vera’s contribution to the land debate in *Without a Name*. Vera adopts a nationalist approach to land and identities in her

other works *Nehanda* and *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals*. However, in *Without a Name* she revisits the way black women relate to land in the context of the liberation struggle. She demonstrates that there are notable contradictions on the way colonized people relate to land. Vera achieves this through a representation of Mazvita's sexual abuse, her decision to escape to the city and the critical stance that she takes against Nyenyedzi's loyalty to the land. Mazvita rejects the land, yet in grand narratives of colonial domination women are normally used as symbols of 'the virgin land to be tamed by the European' (Busia, 1989-1990: p. 91). In Mazvita, Vera problematizes how violated women relate to land. Mazvita is the protagonist of the story. Men initially call her Mazvita and later on Howa, and she refuses such naming. Symbolically her refusal to be named extends to include a refusal of male historiography, especially on the imagination of the land space. In the African traditional sense, land is inseparable from a people's identity. Land supposedly gives Mazvita her identity but to her it is not just a cultural artefact but rather reminds her of the personal violation that she experienced during the rape incident, an experience that she struggles to forget. Here Vera searches for a re-evaluation of how violated women relate to the land and its features in complex ways. During rape, Mazvita could not see the rapist's face, yet she needed to see the face to hate the man for the abuse. She then transferred the hate to various elements that seemed complicit in the act of her violation. She hated the land, the dew-covered grass, the call of the strange bird and the mist. The things she hated 'contained the loss *and* continued to remind her of her pain' (p. 30) and contributed in various ways to the pain and horror of the moment of violation. She hated the dewy grass 'she had felt graze tenderly against her naked elbow in that horrible moment' (ibid.). Mazvita wanted to cry out her pain but an unknown bird 'had silenced her when she needed to tell of her suffering [...] to hear her own suffering uttered, acknowledged' (ibid.). Crying for her would have meant a release of pain. The unknown bird's silencing force relates to the traditional silencing of women. Women are not given an opportunity to articulate their existence - which for the greater part is characterized by pain. However, African women have found ways to articulate their voices in serene ways, although often their voices remain subordinate.

Mazvita also 'hated the land that pressed beneath her back as the man moved impatiently above her, into her, past her' (ibid.). She connected the man to the land because it had 'allowed the man to grow from itself into her body' (ibid.). The violence that she experiences in the rape incident is inseparable from

the land, where the land and other geographical features become accomplices with the rapist, making it very difficult for the violated Mazvita to have any sense of connection with the land, that which, in the Zimbabwean worldview, gives one an identity. Psychologically, anger and hatred have significant functions. For Mazvita anger and hatred function ‘as some kind of psychic glue [...] *and as alternatives to sexual violation*’ (italics my own).⁵⁵ The rage of anger and hatred then ‘function as a defence against shame that feels unbearable’.⁵⁶ Such an unbearable shame is connected to Mazvita’s emotional feeling as she emerges out of the act of rape ‘damaged *and* that sense of damage can mean that the self is felt to be in pieces, in danger of collapse’ (italics my own).⁵⁷ The three related emotions ‘hatred, anger and rage serve a defensive and cohesive function’.⁵⁸

Mazvita could not connect the emptiness that she felt after the violation to the rapist but rather connected it ‘to the land’. Mazvita strongly feels that the land played a significant part in the violation of her body and being and, as a result, she feels so alienated from it and wants to escape to the city where she would feel safe because the city space is ‘landless for her’ (Vera in a Primorac Interview, 2012: p. 379). Mazvita is thus critical of her lover Nyenyedzi’s attachment to the land and his claim that ‘the land is inescapable [...] *and* is everything’ (italics my own) (p. 33). For Nyenyedzi the land is an inheritance from the ancestors that should be guarded jealously, hence he is against Mazvita’s suggestion that they move to the city. Nyenyedzi thinks that moving to the city is an admission that the indigenes have lost the land to the new colonial occupants and translates into some kind of betrayal to ancestors who are the real owners of the African land. Yet for Mazvita nothing justifies such an attachment to the land. The land did not only collude in her violation, but as farm labourers, the colonized black people are also alienated from it in various ways. In her view, the colonized are

servants paid poorly for *their* labours. *They* cannot decide which crops to grow on it. *They* do not pray for the success of *their* crop because it is no longer *their* crop. *They* cannot pray for another’s

⁵⁵ J. Burgo, ‘Narcissistic Rage and the Sense of Entitlement’,

<http://www.afterpsychotherapy.com/narcissistic-rage/> (accessed 27 April 2013).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

crop. There are no rituals of harvest, of planting the crop into the ground. *They* labour because it is *their* task to labour. *They* do not own the land. The land is enclosed in the barbed fences, and *they* sleep amid the thorny bushes, in the barren part of the land. (p. 33)

They have been dispossessed, alienated and they cannot afford to be uncritical of the land and the new meaning it has acquired in the colonial set-up. As labourers, the colonized natives have lost ownership of the land and what they occupy is quite unproductive and very repulsive. The land has also been ‘desecrated by commercial cash crop farming’ and has become privatized through commercialization and the creation of farms (Samuelson, 2003: p. 94). Mazvita agrees that land is a cultural artefact that black people should guard jealously, but she believes that such an understanding of the significance of land is not the only truth. She asks Nyenyedzi the following question: ‘what you say about land is true, but does this truth belong equally to all of us?’ (p. 33). Her personal experiences have forced her to revisit issues of land and identity, land and loyalty, and land and attachment. The intricate relationship between land and black people changed for the violated Mazvita. In essence, the position that Mazvita takes in *Without a Name* represents a rebellion against the cultural loyalty to land (Pucherova, 2012: p. 186). ‘She had loved the land, saw it through passionate and intense moments of freedom, but to her the land had no fixed loyalties’ (p. 34). For instance, she refers to how the land has allowed the colonizers to succeed in violating its cultural significance. She says:

The strangers have taken the land. They have grown tobacco where we once buried the dead. The dead remain silent. They have grown tobacco where we once worshipped and prayed. The land has not rejected them. (p. 33)

What Mazvita articulates here is the land invasion by colonialists - and how that has disturbed the land and transformed it from a sacred place (where ancestors are buried) into an economic commodity. In Mazvita’s view, the land did not reject such a transformation.

Mazvita’s personal story dramatizes women’s alienation from the land and at the same time satirizes Nyenyedzi’s and, by extension, any uncritical attachment to it as a cultural artefact and as a site of identity. Through a foregrounding of how Mazvita and Nyenyedzi differ in their perception of the

land and the freedom fighters, Vera refers to differences in perception as ‘heterogeneity of expectations and aspirations’ (Musila, 2012: p. 9). The differences are noted where ‘Nyenyedzi has a firm belief in the freedom fighters’ struggle to free the land, while for Mazvita the soldiers are terrorists, and after the rape, her immediate need is liberation from the trauma of the experience, and the need to run away from a defiled identity, which is tied to the land’ (ibid.). It is also significant to note that historically, in many African states ‘land belonged to men and women were mainly part of the labour on these farms’ (Musila, 2012: p. 6).⁵⁹ Hence, even before colonial intrusion women were already disillusioned with the land, especially with respect to its ownership. In the liberation struggle, women are further disillusioned. In Mazvita Vera is conscious of class. Initially Mazvita is a peasant girl who traverses geographical spaces. She moves from the village to the farm, later on to the city and back to the village. The physical journey also signifies movement from peasantry to proletariat, and finally reclamation of peasantryhood.

In *Without a Name* Vera also highlights how women’s bodies are sites of the liberation struggle. This she achieves through a representation of Mazvita’s rape. Rape is one of the ‘issues whose existence may not have been made visible in nationalist discourse’ (Lipenga, 2012: p. 271). According to Muchemwa, ‘patriarchal history and memory gloss over taboo experiences of rape’ (2005: p. 197). In that context Vera’s interpretation of the taboo of rape is politicized and her writing becomes a radical challenge that has ‘interrupted traditional relations of speech and authority by uttering the unsaid taboos’ (Devault, 1999: p. 183). In *Without a Name*, Vera also emphasizes the fact that Mazvita is not just a victim of rape but emerges out of the experience as a survivor. She saves herself from the traumatic memory of the rape through infanticide: ‘she rested her fingers shakingly on the child and remembered. The past came to her in rapid waves that made her heave the child forward, away from her, in a deep and uncontrollable motion of rejection’ (p. 17). It is important to note that even though women are excluded from ‘national community, [...] through the violence inflicted on their bodies, they become some sort of unofficial displaced sites of struggle’ (Toivanen, 2009: p. 66). It is also quite paradoxical that the female body is more often than not violated, yet the nation is conceived in terms of the same female body. This is implicit in ‘the familiar discourse of the rape between the colonizer and the colonized country’ (Kanneh, 1995: p. 347).

⁵⁹ See also Schmidt, 1992, as cited in Musila, 2012: p. 6.

A Re-Interpretation of Black Women's Experience of the Liberation Struggle

If we agree that in fighting for national culture 'the collective disillusionment and anger was over the denial of manhood, identity and peoplehood', we also have to agree that such a discourse deliberately ignores the impact of imperial culture on black women and the subsequent women participation in the liberation struggle (*italics my own*) (Hunter and Davies, 1992, as cited in Zenenga, 2007: p. 132). This emanates from the fact that, from the onset 'the colonial subject is always *perceived* as male' (*italics my own*) (Busia, 1989–1990: p. 97). Such exclusion represents some kind of misinterpretation of colonial history and the nature of the liberation struggle. Both Nyamubaya and Vera fill in the ideological void within the public political sphere, and re-appropriate such a masculine nationalist perspective of the liberation struggle and particularly problematize the war front and rear dichotomy in 'That Special Place' and 'It is Hard to Live Alone' respectively.

The front-rear dichotomy has roots in the Manichean tendency to 'see the world in terms of dualistic and conflicting binary opposites' (Murray, 2009: p. 3). In the context of war, the battlefield is understood as a territory of strong men and the rear is reserved for weak men, children and women. In terms of hierarchy, the battlefield is the most important and the rears are subsidiaries. Such dualization corresponds to 'a subtle mechanism of hierarchization which assumes the unique valorisation of the positive masculine pole while perpetuating the inferiority of the negative feminine term' (Murray, 2010: p. 490). Men as major players in the battlefield are believed to be more important than women, who in most cases are relegated to the war's rears.

The two short stories selected for this part of the chapter are set during the liberation struggle, are women-centred, and deal with the deliberate exclusion of women from different standpoints. The two stories force readers to collapse the boundaries between the battlefield and its rears and understand that women made meaningful contributions to the making of the nation either in the battlefield or in the rears. Vera and Nyamubaya re-imagine the war from two distinct standpoints. Nyamubaya particularly forces readers to rethink war heroism by highlighting that those at the battlefield were not always heroes of the liberation struggle. Vera celebrates a meaningful contribution of women to the liberation struggle in domesticity. She demonstrates that women may not be at the battlefield but they make meaningful contribution from their homes. Nyamubaya on the other hand writes from the battlefield and reflects on the war

experience, especially her personal experience as a trainee soldier at Tembwe Training Camp. Both writers demonstrate how black women experience the war in ways that are different from men. This is largely so because women's social role 'is always defined at least in part by their reproductive capabilities, and they experience revolution and its outcomes differently' (Tetreault, 1994, as cited in Lyons, 2004: p. 31). In this discussion I specifically refer to Nyamubaya's 'That Special Place' and Vera's 'It is Hard to Live Alone'.

In the previous chapter, I indicated that Nyamubaya is one of the writers of the late 1990s who revise unqualified glorification of the liberation war. She responds to an official recalling of the contribution of black women to the liberation struggle and show that their contribution was rather complex. She makes such a contribution in *'On the Road Again'* (1986) and 'That Special Place' (2003). For the purposes of this chapter, I analyse 'That Special Place', which has been described as an 'autobiographical return to a 'special place' [...] to redeem the true stories of the revolution' (Muchemwa, 2006: p. 14). In 'That Special Place', Nyamubaya is very consistent in reflecting on the injustice of the liberation struggle with special reference to soldiers' ill-treatment by fellow soldiers in positions of authority. Nyamubaya recounts her experiences and four other soldiers at Tembwe Training Camp as captives. Upon joining the training camp, they are branded suspects for various reasons. Writing a synopsis of their lives is a requirement for all new recruits. Nyamubaya and other prisoners are held in captivity because their biographies had not satisfied the Camp Security Commander. The story is a gloomy picture of such captivity, where they are given nothing to eat and drink, and are physically tortured. The reality of such a traumatic experience is expressed bodily. Nyamubaya relates how the captives 'looked ghostly and frightening with their disfigured cheeks, lips, eyes and noses covered in grey dust. One of them had a thick swollen sagging lower lip and a large swollen forehead that seemed to hang over his eyes' (p. 219). Such reference to body disfigurement becomes 'the loci of both psychic and physical pain' (Murray, 2010: p. 489). This narration of gruesome aspects of the war undermines the nationalist narrative that largely glorifies it.

What is particularly significant for this discussion is the black woman's experience of war terror. It is common knowledge that for many women physical appearance is very important. For Nyamubaya there is a sense of great discomfort when in captivity her afro hair turned white, and she had dust on her face and on her 'java print dress she had once been proud of' (p. 217). She feels utter discomfort when Nyathi instructed his men to 'make a cross through her

hair from ear to ear and from her forehead to the back of her neck' (ibid.). Nyathi did this to destroy any feeling of beauty that Nyamubaya had. Though the precision and force that normally characterize traumatic recall is lost in the narrative, Nyamubaya informs the reader that Nyathi also raped her (Murray, 2009: p. 4). It is important to note that the perpetrator here is a Camp Security Commander, one who has a key post in the struggle. His liberating role thus remains questionable. What is particularly derided in Nyamubaya's narrative is the figure of authority in the person of the Camp Security Commander Nyathi whose ego has been described by Muchemwa as 'big as his penis [...] whose erection got harder with resistance' (2006: p. 12).

Nyamubaya also forces the reader to rethink the concept of freedom. The recruits are meant to participate in the liberation struggle whose aim is to free people from the clutches of colonialism. Ironically, they further lose their own freedom in the process, to fellow soldiers, when they are held in captivity. In captivity, they are removed from the real business of the liberation struggle. Nyamubaya describes their prison in the following words: 'the hut fell a long, long way from the liberation struggle of my dreams' (p. 223).

The overall picture we get from Nyamubaya's construction of the liberation struggle in 'That Special Place' is that not everyone who joined the war got a chance to make a meaningful contribution; others like her and the fellow soldiers were victimized and alienated from the real battle. Such a dimension of the reality of the liberation struggle was never the limelight of the official narration of the liberation war. Nyamubaya refers to all this as the experiences of a 'special place: the place that many people in this world will never know' (p. 228). Her text then functions as a subversion of the official nationalist narrative of the liberation struggle by projecting what Terdiman terms 'an alternative' (p. 13).

On the other hand, in 'It is Hard to Live Alone', Vera writes the story of a community of black women who are affected by and contribute to the liberation struggle in various significant ways. Women vendors meet at the vegetable market and share their experiences of the war. The war is fought somewhere else and yet they are here, affected by it and contributing to it meaningfully. As they discuss ordinary things, one of the women refers to the need for women to be strong since most of them live without husbands who have joined the war. These women may appear confined to the domestic space, but in that domesticity, they make a meaningful contribution to the war. They particularly celebrate the fact that they are mothers - they 'give birth to sons and daughters

who fight in the war' (Vambe, 2012: p. 320). What excites them even more is that their daughters have the potential to play a 'more active' role as soldiers. In this case then 'women's reproductive capacity is important for the nation' - for giving birth creates a base for potential freedom fighters (Toivanen, 2006: p. 68). Women 'are asked to bear children [...] *whose blood must water the land*' (p. 42) before land ownership is regained. The different roles women play in the absence of their husbands may appear limited to domesticity but they are not mean roles. They look out for their families and doubly operate as mothers and 'fathers'. They work and pay for their children's education. Their identities are also redefined. Without their men, women raise children and, hence, 'they have to make sure that the community structures do not have to collapse; they have to feed the aged and their young ones' (Vambe, 2012: p. 320). However, these women talk about imminent change in abstract terms. Mampofu particularly refers to how some other people say: 'Things will change one day. That we shall all have more to eat and that education will soon be free' (p. 42). This is the only time that the market women talk about their expectations of achievements in anticipation of independence. Such talk may be just dismissed as small talk, yet it is an indication of how their interpretation of reality is not just limited to the present but also includes the future. Inasmuch as the women could be worried that they have to live without their men, who have joined the battlefield, they anticipate an end to the war and a beginning of a new reality.

From a masculine understanding of the participation of women in the war, women are just 'needed to support the war and are assigned roles designed to serve male participants such as wives, prostitutes, entertainers and sympathetic nurses' (Lyons, 2004: p. 22). Women are thus restricted to supportive roles, which are principally secondary and on the other hand 'the real actors are men' (Lyons, 2004: p. 244). This however does not mean that women do not play significant roles in the 'making [...] of nations' (Nagel, 1998, as cited in Lyons, 2004: p. 243). Vera highlights the other roles that women played in the liberation struggle. Such participation highlights not a passive presence, but an agency that influences the course of the liberation struggle. In Vera's 'It is Hard to Live Alone', black women are represented not just as passive objects in the war zones but play active roles even in their domesticity. The war is reconstructed not just as a male-dominated space but women are part of it as significant subjects - war narratives that give the black woman no meaningful role as if she were absent are limited and narrow in comprehending the revolution. The position that Nyamubaya recreates in 'That Special Place'

foregrounds the complexities of the liberation struggle. The setting is a training camp but what happens contributes little to the real aim of the revolution. Those who intend to join and contribute to the liberation struggle are tortured by freedom fighters in positions of authority. Women participate in the war as soldiers but are sexually abused and humiliated.

Black Women's Other Struggles

Generally, the colonial world revolves around boundaries and borders based on the centre-periphery model. This model is 'crucial in the imperial occupation and domination of indigenous space [...] and of economic marginalization' (Ashcroft et al, 2007: p. vii). The

binary logic of imperialism is a development of that tendency of western thought in general to see the world in terms of binary opposition that establishes a relation of dominance [...] centre / margin, civilized / primitive and colonizer / colonized *distinctions*. *The distinctions* represent very efficiently, violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates. (Ashcroft et al, 2007: p. 19)

However, a close reading of black women's lives shows that the existing boundaries in a colonial world are cut into several segments and that women exclusively occupy the bottom segment. Even in that 'bottom segment', one finds that there are sub-segments with women from different social classes occupying different segments. This specifically refers to intersectionality, where the significance of 'examining intersection of multiple forms of discrimination' is emphasized (Yuval-Davis, 2006: p. 66). The intersections of race, gender and class show that black women experience oppression from various sources in especially colonial spaces. Both Vera and Hove go beyond the race problem and demonstrate that black women also have problems that are specific to them because of their gender and social class. Such women-specific problems are often ignored in nationalist narratives.

According to Lyons 'during various struggles in Africa, many women realized that the root cause of their oppression was not capitalism and colonization alone but also patriarchal', and hence, they suffered from a multiple-layered marginality (2004: p. 33). Against a background of national liberation, the women represented in the texts selected for this section of the

chapter also seek emancipation from the clutches of patriarchy. Black women could register their fight against colonialism in the nationalist struggle (as part of the oppressed black race) but they needed to wage a separate fight against patriarchy. This kind of emancipation for women was never intended in the national liberation struggle. This is largely because ‘the culture of nationalism is constructed to emphasize and resonate with masculine cultural themes’ (Nagel, 1998: p. 251). Yet, paradoxically, ‘women’s emancipation is a prerequisite for national liberation’ (Lyons, 2004: p. 39). A foregrounding of black women’s other struggles demonstrates that while ‘the armed struggle may be necessary’ to deal with colonial domination, a *total national* liberation can only be achieved if women are also liberated from the clutches of patriarchy (Baker, 2012: p. 124). This is largely so because ideally ‘no cultural liberation without women’s liberation’ is total for any nation (Ngugi⁶⁰ as cited in Petersen, 1995: p. 254).

The texts studied in this section highlight the ‘other’ specific women’s struggles that are not made part of the national liberation struggle. Some of the texts are not solely about such women-specific struggles, so in my discussion I isolate just the parts that define the struggles. I will begin by analysing Vera’s ‘An Unyielding Circle’. Men in this short story order women around and give them a manual on expected female behaviour. The manual includes the following: ‘a woman must bend on her knees to give food to a man, [...] must use two hands to give food to a man, [...] must sit down when she is among men, [...] and must use two hands to receive anything from a man’ (pp. 76-8). This manual is hinged on the patriarchal belief that women should respect men. Men ‘uphold the age-old tyrannical values associated with the subordination and humiliation of women’ (Vambe, 2012: p. 320). What is particularly interesting is women’s responses to such domination and humiliation. The vendor women come close to shedding ‘salty tears’. Witnessing men’s boasts about ‘women they had thrown out of their homes’, the two women in this story felt ‘sympathy for each other and [...] a flame rose between them while the men continued their speech’ (p. 77). They are obviously angered but their anger does not develop into any meaningful form of organized protest; they feel ‘the pressure of the moment’ but do nothing and resume their talk. The positive thing is that the women are self-reliant and economically independent. Both women are vendors; one sells maize cobs and the other knits and sells bedcovers. They find consolation in economic independence; thus one of them says, ‘You have your

⁶⁰ A date is not provided in the source text for Ngugi’s citation.

cobs [...] and I have my knitted bedcovers' (p. 77), yet this is insufficient and disillusioning. They are aware that such economic independence will not protect them from the bullying attitude of the men, and hence they ask what the bedcovers 'hide' or 'cover'. In the disillusioning present, they 'wove a silence that protects and consoles [...] postponing the moment when they have to endure the anguish' (p. 78). In this short story, black women characters have achieved some kind of economic independence and yet, with that independence, men always find ways of dominating and humiliating them. The manual of female behaviour highlighted above is given to a woman who is just trying to make ends meet by selling maize cobs to a group of men drinking beer and is forced to comply with their demands.

Patriarchy is also questioned in relation to 'Western formal education' that the girl-child is usually denied. In African history, colonized people embraced Western education, yet it also occupied an ambivalent position in their lives for it was also a major colonizing tool. Ngugi indicates that in colonialist narrative of African history that informed what was taught in most African schools, there is 'almost total omission of colonialism, racism and ideologies of repression and their opposites, anti-colonialism, anti racist struggles and ideologies of liberation' (1981: p. 3). This selection of taught issues in schools was a political decision and an 'integral part of imperialism and domination' (ibid.). The exclusion of critical material was directed at cultural domination through the spread of 'racist formulations' central in the great tradition of European literature reflecting the 'white image of the world'. On the other hand, formal education was a useful tool in the development of critical consciousness needed for the decolonization process. The later idea is espoused by Shaul as one of the functions of education that helps 'men and women to deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the oppressed's world' (in the Foreword to Freire's 1996 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 16). Freire succinctly summarizes the ambivalent role of Western education for the colonized people. Education as an instrument of oppression 'attempts to control thinking and action and leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power while [...] indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression' (Freire, 1996: pp. 58-9). On the other hand, education as 'a humanist and liberating praxis, posits [...] that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation' (Freire, 1996: p. 67). Yet when we read texts where black women fight for access to such education, such dimensions are often ignored. Black women are

not so much worried about the content of education but are impressed by the prospects that come with the attainment of education in a modern African set-up. I will demonstrate this point by focussing on what happens in Vera's 'Crossing Boundaries' and Hove's *Shadows*.

In Vera's 'Crossing Boundaries', Masibanda reflects on how her father did not allow girls to attend school. She says, 'my father did not allow us girls to go to school, why waste money on a girl? [...] when it came to making a choice, he sent the boys to school' (p. 5). Sending a girl-child to school is considered money-wasting; hence if there are choices to be made boys always get first priority. Yet there are implications for the lack of education in girls' lives. Masibanda retorts: 'It is difficult to be a woman in these times. If my daughter can get an education, she will not have to live this hard life that I have endured. She can walk away from pain' (p. 6). Masibanda believes that women generally live difficult and painful lives and that one of the available outlets is embracing the white world and what it offers, in this case modern education. However, Masibanda is very cautious: 'she felt that their condition on the farm was a daily trial and to embrace more of the culture of those who kept them subservient was hard to accept' (p. 6). She understands the ambivalence and complexities associated with embracing what colonialism offered, good or bad - explained earlier on as the need to embrace as well as reject colonial modernity. Here Vera emphasises that, from the point of view of the black woman, the colonial world is not just about the colonial/racial boundaries, but it is also imbedded in these are gender boundaries.

As Hove demonstrates in *Shadows*, children who do not go to school end up like Johana, 'milking the cows, dehorning the small bulls and smelling of cow dung' (p. 10). Failure to go to school means one will remain in the village and will not go to and enjoy the city. Division of space is crucial in Zimbabwe, as in other parts of the world, and the rural-urban dichotomy is particularly significant. Rural space has come to be associated with backwardness, traditionalism and poverty whilst, on the other hand, the city remains a symbolic expression of modernity and good life. Failure to get an education means that girls will remain in the rural space living a life of poverty. According to Johana's father:

Girls do not have to go to school for more than was enough to open their eyes to the letters of their young lovers who courted them in the forests. The little money there was would be spent on the boys,

not the girls. Did not the white man rule it, when he said only boys would pay taxes? What was the use of sending girls to school when [...] only boys would pay taxes? (p. 21)

Girls' future is limited to marriage, so the kind of education permissible for them should only help them with courting. The impression that we get here is that the colonial administration also realised that black women depended on men and thus exempted them from paying taxes. This kind of discriminative violence against the girl child is instituted as a necessary measure 'to maintain the institutions of patriarchy; that is the structures, beliefs and practices that maintain male dominance over women' (Williams, 2001: p. xiv). For without that education women will continue to depend economically on their men, and dependence makes them vulnerable to all sorts of abuse.

In this section of the chapter, the selected texts highlight the fact that black women are also subjected to patriarchal domination. Spivak has described the above phenomenon as 'instances of doubly-oppressed women who are caught between the dominations of a native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist imperialist ideology' (1988, as cited in Parry, 1995: p. 36). The empire and native patriarchy act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female subjects who are thus doubly colonized. What compounds the women's position is that nationalism does not necessarily seek to dismantle especially the power of patriarchy. Attaining freedom from the clutches of patriarchy is not a priority in the liberation struggle that is largely masculine in nature and purpose. So, the black woman's 'other struggle' often continues after national independence; and 'women's sites of struggle seem to be emphasized in other areas than purely those of decolonization and nationhood' (Toivanen, 2006: p. 70).

Both authors successfully highlight the 'other' struggles that women have to wage outside the popular and masculinised liberation. They do so through a 'rebellion that questions patriarchy' (Vambe, 2012: p. 307). For women, then, 'the past does not automatically mean a glorious golden age that decolonization is anticipated as bringing back; rather it is marked by a continuous burden of indigenous masculine oppression' (Toivanen, 2006: p. 72). However, unlike the liberation struggle reflected in the background of women's other struggle, theirs is not an organized response. Rather it remains at the level of the affected individual and there are no intentions, from the other women around, to come up with an organized response. As rightly noted by Vambe, 'one senses that *the*

struggles are open-ended so that what is privileged [...] is not necessarily organized political rebellion stacked with a knowable beginning and anticipated by predictable ending' (2012: p. 307). All the above-discussed women in the selected works represent a 'shift from portraying women as *only* victims to depicting women as feisty, assertive and self reliant', and this represents 'a counterpoint to the victim paradigm' (italics my own) (Vambe, 2012: p. 314). Inasmuch as I agree that there is no such unitary notion as 'women's struggle', here I have assembled some aspects that I have discussed as constituting black women's struggle. Giving prominence to the 'other' struggle of women challenges the unity of national identity and that of the collective understanding of the fighting colonial oppression. As demonstrated by Lipenga 'there are also other battles that are being fought and which constitute part of the nation in the same way as the liberation war' (2012: p. 270). In this part of the chapter, I have demonstrated this by highlighting Vera and Hove's representation of specific black women's struggles in 'An Unyielding Circle' and *Shadows* respectively.

The Struggle for Memory in *Ancestors*

In *Ancestors*, Hove relates the story of suppressed female memories. He explores women's voicelessness through a representation of Miriro and Tariro's lives. Miriro is born dumb and 'faced the earth without words', without a voice (p. 3). This entails that 'she was born without a history of her own [...] her story will be told by others while she sat there and did not even nod or listen' (p. 3). According to Miriro's family traditions, her birth condition and abnormality ironically signal death.

She did not yell loud as the other children did [...] all was *silence* in the sooty hut. No words, not even mumblings of words [...]. She faced the earth, with its ants and anthills in *subdued silence*, facing the roaring thunder and flushes of lightning with a *defiant silence*, the winds too, with her *silence*, like one who does not want to describe, or name anything'. (p. 4)

The silence that defines Miriro's birth is symptomatic of the silence and traumatic voicelessness enforced on women in patriarchy, and lack of speech signifies objectivity. According to Busia, 'voicelessness is often a deliberate unvoicing, rather than an intrinsic absence of speech on the part of the women' (1989-1990: p. 87). In the context of narrating national history, such deliberate

unvoicing translates into some kind of domination directed at removing women's voices from the narratives. The text that recognizes women and represents them as agents then becomes a liberating text and a symbol of the suppressed women's voices. Hove achieves this in *Ancestors* through a chronicle of Miriro's life. Irrespective of the fact that she leads a painful life leading to a forced marriage, after death she becomes an important being and haunts her family, especially Mucha, as a way of enforcing recognition and memory. The story she eventually tells through Mucha's voice is located in 'the realm of oppositional struggle' (hooks, 1990: p. 145).

Miriro's initial silence at birth and life makes her a 'latecomer to [...] words' (p. 20). During her silence, some other people are busy constructing her story and the story that she tells herself subverts these constructions. The dominant discourse that Miriro subverts marginalizes and trivializes the experiences of women and hence is narrow, biased and not all-inclusive, and is told from the perspective of the dominant male voice. In the opening chapter to *Ancestors*, the narrator says:

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

Mucha's father tells a narrow version of history. In his account of the history of the family, he mainly focuses on his experiences of colonialism. He recounts how The Land Development Officer introduces him to the new capitalist discourse of farming for commercial purposes; euphemistically referred to as the 'belly of the purse' which he embraces (p.22). He also relates his adventures to the lands of Gotami where the original owners were displaced brutally by the colonizers. Such stories of invasion also go back into pre-colonial history of tribal invasions. As he narrates this history, he deliberately leaves out 'the story of the bones of one born without words in her mouth'. This is Miriro's story and other 'stories about female blood [...] blood that has been neglected by so many tales which father has hidden away' (p. 45). Listening to the one-sided male

voice is tantamount to listening to lies, for this voice is always narrow in its interpretation of history. In the afterlife, Miriro 'is now a voice that comes and goes as it wills [...]. She is a dark voice full of joy and sadness, telling its story, my story, our story [...] telling our story, as she lived' (p. 12). Her story is part of the 'haunting stories which come in a voice the ears and the heart cannot resist' (p. 12), a haunting voice that advocates for gender justice and creates space for multiple narratives. Death transforms Miriro into a speaking subject and a timeless super-being. Articulating the transformation Miriro's voice says 'many years later, after I have died, I can speak. I can tell my story to all my hearers.[...] My joys and sorrows cross all rivers of time and distance, hearing voices from across generations of families and homes' (p. 17). What Miriro's ghost articulates defies boundaries in terms of physical and temporal spaces. Tribulations narrated in her story are essentially female experiences across generations.

To complement and expand on Miriro's traumatic existence and eventual liberation in death is Tariro's life. Tariro is not given a chance to make choices in her life and is given away in marriage to an old drunkard. This is promoted and instituted through old aunts who take her to a new home without telling her where they are heading to. Most importantly, this is an instance of forced marriage, which violates the girl's right to make choices in life, including the choice of a life partner. The old man who marries Tariro only accepts her as an

offer [...] and thinks the girl may be too young for him [...] for the young woman would soon know widowhood than marriage but [...] a man who marries a young wife also marries for his blood who are not yet born. (p. 103)

The idea of a forced arranged marriage turns Tariro into a commodity that is passed from one hand to the other. Since the husband is old and approaching his death, this means that she will also be passed on to the young men in the family upon her husband's death. Both Tariro and her mother respond to the forced marriage in different but significant ways. Tariro's mother fights against the forced marriage, defies the ancestors and 'orders them to bring back her child, [...] to her own hut, not to some old man who does not know women of his own age group from among whom he must marry' (p. 121). She curses the ancestors, yet in traditional wisdom that is an abomination. She insists: 'If the ancestors take away my daughter, I curse them' (p. 121). This rebellious stance challenges

traditional authority in cases where it subjugates women's position. Tariro in protest refuses 'to look at the faces of those around her' (p. 144) and eventually kills herself to make an impact. As Busia suggests, suicide cannot be valorised as 'the only legitimate option within confining social conventions for the native woman to make herself heard' (1989-90: p. 103).

Girl-child exclusion is implicit in the children's games played by Mucha and other children. In the naming game, other children refuse to name Tariro and agree that she should not be mentioned. For Mucha this means that 'Tariro is dead' and '[...] must be removed from the memories of the living' (p. 96). Through this Tariro is declared non-existent.

The male writer as hearer listens and re-tells female stories that are however also part of his history and identity. Such storytelling, which is a key aspect of oral culture, plays a significant role in memories and the telling of the often-untold stories of female experience. The story that Mucha retells remains an instance of shared memory. He says:

I, Mucha, the hearer of endless tales, stories to which I belong but could not assist in making, I was part of that memory until I was born to be a mere hearer, [...] for as my ears listen, it is not known how many words of the owner of words spread their mat in the ears and the heart of the hearer. (p. 12)

Hove is grappling with the ethics of representation, or narration, and challenges associated with speaking on behalf of others and speaking from outside the circle. This has been defined by Spivak as one of the two senses of representation - speaking for - which in itself is quite problematic (1988: p. 70). Not only is Mucha, and by extension the author, recreating female experiences, yet he is shut out from the knowledge of the uniquely female experience. Thus speaking from 'without' is one of the complexities of speaking for. This refers well to what hooks has termed the 'politics of location'. Mucha speaks about both Miriro and Tariro from a location that poses a number of problems (1990: p. 145). He 'merely reports on the non-represented subjects' (Spivak, 1988: p. 74). If Mucha speaks on behalf of the female ancestry (retelling Tariro and Miriro's stories), the two remain mute and do not become speaking subjects and this signals continued enforcement of women's voicelessness. This also gives an impression that Miriro and Tariro 'cannot represent themselves, must be represented' (Spivak, 1988: p. 71). In *Ancestors* Hove deliberates on the female

ancestors' point of view of history, a dimension to an understanding of reality 'which officially does not exist'. In this specific text, Hove has managed to speak for and about the silenced women's voices. He particularly deals with women's deliberate devoicing through scripting a text that eventually represents their story. However, female representation within male-authored texts remains a challenge, since male writers usually work subtly within the confines of patriarchal discourse. For instance, Hove silences his female characters in *Ancestors* by allowing a male figure to retell the story of their ancestry.

Conclusion

The liberation struggle against colonial domination has been contested from various angles as shown in the previous chapter. In the texts selected for this chapter, Hove, Vera and Nyamubaya contest the liberation narrative and offer a different imagination that is women-oriented, and engage the reader in various key aspects of the liberation struggle. In the first section of the chapter, I argued that Vera in *Without a Name* expands on the limited understanding of the liberation struggle with specific reference to the land politics. Through Mazvita, Vera challenges the representation of the land as a cultural artefact that black people should guard jealously and demonstrates that the black woman associates the land with personal violation and is alienated from it. Both Vera and Nyamubaya reinterpret and destabilize the war battlefield and -rear dichotomy. In Vera's 'It is Hard to Live Alone', black women contribute to the liberation struggle through domesticity in significant ways. Nyamubaya in 'That Special Place' re-imagines liberation war heroism and demonstrates that those at the battlefield were not always heroes - not all freedom fighters are heroes, some are rapists, murderers and sell-outs. The Camp Security Commander Nyathi raped women, terrorized other freedom fighters and sold out to the Rhodesian soldiers.

The authors I selected deal with various aspects of black women's inarticulateness and silences in the context of the liberation struggle. Foregrounding women's 'other' struggles shows that there is no common link between the nationalist struggle and women's struggles. It becomes very problematic to say that the nationalist struggle is for national independence when the majority of black women do not seem to have their issues addressed by the liberation struggle. A reflection on the concept of women's double colonization then forces readers to adopt a comprehensive approach to questions

of oppression and justice. Such a reflection challenges nationalist histories that narrate the liberation war as a one-sided kind of resistance.