Confronting Heteronormativity in Postcolonial Zimbabwean Literature

Timothy Mongiat

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University of Kent

School of English

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## **Abstract**

This project addresses the settler colonial context of Rhodesia and postcolonial Zimbabwe, and investigates the nature of, and relationship between, gender and sexual norms and colonialism through early postcolonial literary responses. Literature is not merely examined as a source of representation, but as an element of discourse which reflects and shapes norms. I analyse how writers police and reiterate heteronorms, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, and how they resist and contest the realities and logic of heteronormativity.

Robert Mugabe's now infamous homophobic outbursts in 1995 dehumanised homosexuals through references to dogs and pigs, and associated same-sex sexuality with American and European contexts. His rhetoric articulated a form of heteronormative nationalism which politicised the memory of colonialism, but also represented a significant discursive change in Zimbabwean society. Homosexuality, previously submerged by a culture of discretion and repression, had moved from the domain of the unspoken to the spoken, and from an invisible to a visible presence. Previously, references to homosexuality had been absent from public discourse in the postcolonial and much of the colonial period, and in Zimbabwean literature until the 1990s. Yet Dambudzo Marechera's controversial and progressive writing provided an exception – he explicitly represented the same-sex sexuality suggested by homoerotic depictions in other writing, but which was not portrayed.

This offers an example of the way I approach literature in this thesis – I view writing as a means of representation, but also as an element of discourse which reflects, shapes, and contests ideas and norms. Discourse, following the work of multiple poststructural theorists, is conceived of as a constitutive form which produces and limits subjects and expression, but which is subject to a persistent threat of reconstitution. My project, which explores the articulation of heteronormativity in postcolonial writing until the 1990s, is intersectional, and documents the relation between modes of oppression. Accordingly, gender constructions are examined and related to the articulation of normative heterosexuality, and to other signifiers, especially notions of race and ethnicity integral to the settler colonial context of Rhodesia and to Zimbabwean society. Colonialism is discussed throughout, and I examine and problematise the represented relationship between heteronormativity and the violent material, discursive, and psychological products of colonialism, and postcolonial nationalisms. My project aims to satisfy the need for a composite intersectional study examining heteronormativity in Zimbabwean literature.

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## Table of Contents

## **Introduction**

> Homosexuality...degrades human dignity. It's unnatural and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs…We have our own culture, and we must re-rededicate ourselves to our traditional values that make us human beings.[1]
>
> Let the Americans keep their sodomy, bestiality...out of Zimbabwe...Let them be gay in the US, Europe and elsewhere...[2]
>
> I and the gang used to take our lives into our hands and follow the prostitutes and their clients into the heart of the bush…One day we followed a woman back into the township…We could see on the gravel road splotches and stains of semen that were dripping down her as she walked. Years later I was to write a story using her as a symbol of Rhodesia.[3]
>
> Imagine it, O Chief, mating with a thing (the white woman) that cannot possibly exist and then eating it afterwards in a cicada sauce. You are not a sodomite…you can't be a great chief and a buggerer in the same breath.[4]

Robert Mugabe, once an icon of hope and progress, has been cast as a tyrannical and retrograde figure in recent years. Clinging to power atop a regime criticised within and outside of Zimbabwe, a well-documented economic crisis, election and corruption scandals, mass unemployment, and the role of Mugabe in the Matabeleland massacre in the 1980s have all diminished belief in the Zimbabwean leader. Much of the recent European and American led criticisms relate to his exaggerated and now infamous homophobia, which over the past two decades has seen Mugabe declare 'we are not gays!' in front of the General assembly at the UN,

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[1] Robert Mugabe, speech dated 11th August 1995 (Heroes day in Zimbabwe). Quoted in Chris Dunton and Mai Palmberg, *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), p.12; and Godfrey Mugoti, *History of Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe: Godfreybooks, 2008), p.144.
[2] Robert Mugabe, speech delivered on the 18th of August. Dunton and Palmberg, p.13
[3] Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993 [1978]), p.49.
[4] Dambudzo Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p.2.

condemn Barack Obama and David Cameron for their 'homosexual agendas', and repeatedly represent homosexuality as an un-African abomination.[5] Foreign media channels have generally depicted Mugabe as a man out of touch, clinging to a traditional order rendered antithetical to largely European and American definitions of progressivism. As a result, the colonial history that preceded and produced Mugabe, and influenced the constitution of the country's economic and social fabric, has been cast into the shadows of 'history'. Mugabe has become an increasingly authoritarian leader, but the desire to understand his political constitution and that of Zimbabwe has been overshadowed by the nature of the criticism he has received.

Mugabe's homophobic attacks, delivered in 1995, reconstituted the discursive engagement with homosexuality: from this moment onwards homosexuality was closely policed at a political and public level by Mugabe and other ZANU-PF politicians.[6] The homosexual, branded and homogenised, was cast as un-African and subhuman, and associated with the European colonial world. Associations with cultural imperialism were both implicit and explicit, as national boundaries were defined through sexual relations. In the process, a mutually endorsing relation between nationality and sexuality was instituted, in which sexuality and gender shaped nationhood and nationhood shaped sexual and gender normativity. This

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[5] Rose Troup Buchanan, 'Robert Mugabe tells UN General Assembly: ''We are not Gays!''', *The Independent* (online), 29th September 2015, www.independent.co.uk/news/people/robert-mugabe-tells-un-general-assembly-we-are-not-gays-a6671316.html. Last accessed 10.10.2016; and Aislinn Laing, 'Robert Mugabe Criticises Barack Obama's Gay Rights Stance', *The Telegraph* (online), 24th July 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/10200191/Robert-Mugabe-criticises-Barack-Obamas-gay-rights-stance.html. Last accessed 10.10.2016; and Aislinn Laing, 'Mugabe Calls David Cameron ''Satanic'' for Backing Gay Rights', *The Telegraph* (online), 24th November 2011, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8912132/Mugabe-calls-David-Cameron-satanic-for-backing-gay-rights.html. Last accessed 10.10.2016.
[6] ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union) has been the ruling party in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980.

intersectional relationship offers an example of the relation between discourses which this study seeks to investigate. The nationalistic dimensions of Mugabe's speeches are enhanced when their timing is considered: the first address was delivered on Heroes day in Zimbabwe, little over a week after GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) had held an exhibit at the International Book Fair, which is held annually in the capital Harare. The second was delivered one week later, to a crowd of ZANU-PF supporters who had congregated outside his presidential office. The politicisation of the memory of colonialism is undeniable, and part of a strategic ploy mobilised by Mugabe as his grip on power began to loosen in the 1990s. Yet it is impossible to conceptualise normative sexual and gender constructs in any postcolonial context without acknowledging the legacy of colonial history. Whilst critics may rightly condemn Mugabe's aggressive homophobia, it is necessary to examine how various discourses, practices, and the effects of colonialism have structured gender and sexuality. This is all the more relevant when shifting focus to the colonial period and the early postcolonial period, in which the visible effects of colonialism were more pronounced.

Zimbabwean author Dambudzo Marechera's representation of the abject nation bears little resemblance to Mugabe's rhetorical policing of nationhood. Marechera's symbol of Rhodesia is a prostitute unable or unwilling to clean semen dripping down her leg. She is dehumanised, even zombified, in the passage, and is also unaware or unconcerned about the voyeuristic gaze of the township boys, and in turn the gaze of the author and reader. It is an image of powerlessness, which also genders Marechera's articulation of colonial experience because of the nature of prostitution, and because the unnamed woman is separated from the observing boys by her

gender. The township boys also suffer under the yoke of colonial rule, but they are not similarly oppressed by a hierarchal gender order. Whilst this depiction of an intersectional form of gendered victimhood arguably resists societal norms, there are gendered dimensions which move beyond the textual environment, to the role of the writer. Marechera reproduces a typical trend in postcolonial literature: the representation of women as national symbols, or as Ann McClintock describes it, as 'symbolic bearer[s] of the nation'.[7] This representational technique reiterates gender binaries as women are habitually appropriated by men as passive symbols of nationhood, often in the act of mobilising gendered nationalisms. For example, the nation has historically been feminised during wartime in contexts across the world. Therefore men must fight, and fulfil masculine expectations, to protect the woman/women, both as national symbols, and as material entities: as mothers, wives, and daughters. In this manner, an antithetical relationship is endorsed in which men protect and fight, and women are protected and fought for and thus in need of protection. Marechera arguably reiterates this symbolic measure, illustrating the potential trap of a constitutive discourse, for a writer wishing to destabilise a gendered construction may unwittingly reproduce that construction. Any individual, or any writer, is a product of society and of discourse, and transcending that trap is a near impossible feat. It is perhaps rather a question of working the 'trap' we are 'inevitably' all in.[8]

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[7] Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993), p.62.

[8] The 'trap' of discourse, referred to in the writing Judith Butler amongst others, illustrates the impossibilities of transcending a constitutive system. This idea will be discussed in more detail later in the introduction. See footnote 62.

Marechera's extract is taken from his seminal 1979 short story 'House of Hunger', which was published at an interregnum at the end of the colonial period but before the birth of the postcolonial nation.[9] Like much of Marechera's work it is peculiarly anticipatory, concerned with the constraints of gender and consequently the gendered nationalism represented in the Mugabe speech sixteen years later. In the second Marechera extract sexuality and gender are explicitly combined through the conceptualisation of the colonial encounter. The protagonist, trapped and swinging from his legs after being hung upside down, is threatened with sodomy by the great chief, and responds by telling him to save his erection for the 'white woman' he has seen bathing nearby.[10] By depicting the irreconcilability of sodomy with chiefdom, Marechera parodies a conceptualisation of homosexual desire as un-African but subverts its normative conceptualisation. In this extract, homosexual practice is depicted as preceding the colonial encounter, directly denying a notion of homosexuality as a European importation. The retrograde depiction of the chief also parodies European conceptions of the African savage. Sexually violent, and evidently a cannibal, the monstrous chief is an atavistic caricature of European manufactured colonial era stereotypes. He is also a sexual threat to the white woman, playing on notions of imperilled white female sexuality because of the constructed hypersexuality of the African man. The conflation of stereotypes illustrates the relationship between racial discourses and the conceptualisation of both gender and sex in the context. It also implicitly promotes the notion of colonialism as

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[9] I echo the use of interregnum made by Nadine Gordimer, in relation to a slightly premature representation of the final days of Apartheid South Africa, and of the transition into the new and unknown: 'The interregnum is not only between two social orders but between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined.' Nadine Gordimer, 'Living in the Interregnum', *The New York Review of Books* (online), 20th January, 1983, www.nybooks.com/articles/1983/01/20/living-in-the-interregnum/. Last accessed 07.06.2017.

[10] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.2.

emasculating because the performance of sexuality is confluent with the appearance of the white woman, who represents a feminised vision of British colonialism. The performance of sex and sexuality is not coincidental, but directly relatable to the fracturing process of colonialism, and to the emasculating perceptions rendered in the reference to Rhodesia as a prostitute in the first Marechera extract. In this regard, the conception of the chief conflates past, present, and future. He is a pre-colonial Orientalist abomination and he is the retaliatory sexuality of an emasculated man; and the woman is again an unknown presence, used as a representational ploy.

I have forced Mugabe and Marechera into dialogue not only because of their politicisation of nationhood, but because their comments inform a discursive environment in which the depiction of gender and sexuality are connected. Both differently represent the role of colonialism in the articulation of gendered and sexual norms. For Mugabe, homosexuality is depicted and politicised as an American and European abomination, but in Marechera's writing colonialism is configured as informing and forming modern normative sexual and gender discourses. In turn, the Marechera extracts can be used to understand the Mugabe comments, even if they are separated by almost two decades and extensive historical transformation. The examples discussed illustrate that the relationship of discourse to context is not fixed, but fluid and mutually reinforcing, and at times contradictory and disruptive. Discourses produce contexts, just as contexts produce discourses. The relation of discourse and context is primary in my thesis, which investigates the representation of gender and sexuality in Zimbabwean literature, and accordingly the societal discourses literature reproduces and resists. It seeks to locate literature within a context, and examine the fluid relationship of discourse and context as a

means of resisting essentialised and oppressive ideas. Consequently, it is a project determined to relate colonialism and racial discourses and materialities to colonial and postcolonial definitions of sexuality and gender. In the process, it seeks to satisfy a need for a composite postcolonial Zimbabwean literary study of gender and sexuality.

The Heteronormative Culture of Discretion

I selected the Mugabe quotes to begin my introduction not because of a willingness merely to condemn a now infamous homophobia, but because they mark a critically acknowledged changing point in Zimbabwean history. They define the emergence of a new discursive engagement with homosexuality, at a public and political level, engendered by local and global changes in the understanding and representation of sex and gender.[11] Homosexuality had moved from the domain of the unspoken to the spoken, and from an invisible to a visible presence. Mugabe, by willingly identifying and talking about homosexuality, had reacted to, and defined, a changing discourse. Prior to the mid-1990s, same-sex sexuality had generally been ignored in public discourse in Zimbabwe, even if traces of explicit homophobia were perceivable in both colonial and postcolonial life. Social institutions and practices produced and reproduced an assumption of heterosexual practice before, and especially after, the institution of colonialism. This is not the say that homosexuality was always

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[11] Drew Shaw has similarly identified this discursive change, arguing that since 1995 there has been 'a sea-change in national consciousness with regard to sexual orientation'. However, it is more appropriate to define this change in terms of a political, rather than national, consciousness, even if the political may define the national. Drew Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations: Dambudzo Marechera and Zimbabwean Literature', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, vol. 1, ed. by Dirk Naguschewski and Flora Veit-Wild (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), p.97.

constructed as explicitly incompatible with heterosexuality. Indeed, there is evidence

to suggest that homosexuality was 'quietly' practiced between men in the precolonial

context and throughout the colonial period.[12] However, whilst homosexual acts may

have taken place, homosexuality remained a generally invisible and unspoken

practice. This has been attributed to a deeply embedded culture of discretion or

concealment identified by critics. Marc Epprecht, the leading authority on matters of

gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe, has largely been responsible for defining this

discretionary conception, and has been backed in his claims by other academics.[13]

According to Epprecht, the culture of discretion led to the repression of the

discussion of all matters of sexuality. Sex and sexuality were private matters and

were not discussed publicly, even if the necessity of procreation was institutionalised

in religion and normalised through various practices. Whilst this culture stretched

back to the precolonial period, Epprecht is a little vague about its end, and perhaps

some critics would identify 1995 as the moment of transformation because of the

changing discursive engagement with homosexuality. However, heterosexual sex

was being discussed openly much earlier. Literary texts, which I will analyse later,

stage explicit discussions about sex in the late 1970s and 1980s.[14] The performance

of masculinity, especially prevalent in the late colonial and early postcolonial period,

necessitated male displays of heterosexuality and perhaps predicated the changing

relationship with homosexuality that followed, as sex became a subject of

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[12] Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani*: *The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*, second edition (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), pp.104-130.
[13] Marc Epprecht, 'The ''Unsaying'' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 (December 1998), pp.635-639; and Edward P. Antonio, 'Homosexuality and African Culture', *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*, ed. by Paul Germond and Steve De Gruchy (South Africa: David Philip, 1997), p.297. See also Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani*.
[14] Examples include Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001 [1982]).

discussion. Dambudzo Marechera has recalled these societal forms in interviews, in which he has variously described the pressures of conforming to masculine heterosexual norms. For example, he has discussed how he caught venereal disease from a prostitute he was supposedly pressured into having sex with by his brother, who had discovered that Marechera was still a virgin in his first year of University.[15] The 1970s, which is the period related in Marechera's anecdote, witnessed rapid changes in normative sexual modes in certain contexts. This was connected to the intensification of the liberation war in the 1970s, as forces loyal to Mugabe's ZANU party (principally Shona) and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU (principally Ndebele) fought Ian Smith's Rhodesian security forces. As with many periods of contextual rupture, the liberation war provided an environment in which transgressive gender performances emerged for men and women relatively free from institutional expectations. This was especially true for female combatants who fought alongside men and circumvented the constraints of domesticised maternal norms, as I will discuss in detail during my final chapter.[16] Although the 1970s was certainly a transformative decade, it is not possible to specifically date a moment of transformation, in part because of the inconsistent nature of discourse, and because of a disjuncture between the government and its subjects. It seems clear, however, that homosexual practice and desire remained a taboo subject of discussion until the 1990s, whereas matters of heterosexual sex were being discussed openly, and gender

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[15] Dambudzo Marechera, 'Slow Brain Death can only be Cured by a Literary Shock Treatment', interviewed by Alle Lansu, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work*, ed. Flora Veit-Wild (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), p.13.
[16] Yvonne Vera describes these transgressive gender changes in *The Stone Virgins* through her depiction of the women who fought alongside men, and have 'no desire to be owned, hedged in, claimed'. Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), pp.54 and 56.

norms reconstituted, at least two decades earlier. This was especially true for city spaces less subject to the regulatory relations and conditions of rural life.

The culture of discretion identified by Epprecht, whilst influencing both the precolonial and colonial space, was changed by colonialism. The colonial administration made a concerted attempt to define and redefine gender and sexual norms and practices, and the institutions imagined to inform internal patriarchal relations conceived of as oppressive. Whilst my research is generally concerned with the late colonial and early postcolonial period, the institution of colonial practices at the inception of settler rule necessarily impacted upon discourses and practices during the entirety of the colonial period and following independence. Accordingly, I will provide a brief overview of the attempts to redefine gender and sexuality by the colonial government, which will inform the discussions of colonialism in the chapters that follow.

Redefining Heteronormativity: Interventions of the Settler Government

Changes to gender and sexual norms were principally introduced through laws, and enforced through magistrate courts from the early 1890s and with the establishment of the High Court of Southern Rhodesia in 1898.[17] It is important to note that legal changes merely reiterated a discourse similarly transmitted through emerging religious, educational, and economic institutions. Chief among these legal changes was the controversial regulation of Lobola (bridewealth). Lobola had existed for

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[17] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p.105; and Tapiwa B. Zimudzi, 'African Women, Violent Crime and the Criminal Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1900-1952', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.3 (September 2004), p.502.

hundreds of years in the area of Zimbabwe, stretching back to the arrival of the

Portuguese in the 16th century when some Shona rulers were estimated to have had

hundreds or even thousands of wives and influenced large geographical spaces.[18]

The practice was invariably gendered and is still to a lesser degree, with men paying

and women being paid for, and marriages historically used to promote homosocial

links.[19] Yet, bridewealth was related to a very different understanding of marriage in

Africa, connected to a lineage system and the production of familial bonds essential

to indigenous Shona and Ndebele ancestral religious beliefs. Whilst some British

settlers were in favour of the Lobola system, imagining that the need to generate

money encouraged proletarianisation (especially beneficial to the mining industry), a

marriage ordinance was passed in 1901 (amended in 1905) changing its scope and

nature.[20] The ordinance attached limitations to the age of those involved, restricted

the money paid, restricted when the money was to be paid, and necessitated the

official registration of the marriage and the registered consent of the female party.[21]

Ostensibly, these changes were motivated by a desire to free women from a practice

conceived of as essentially oppressive, and to bring African marriages under the

remit of colonial authority. It was an act of authority on the part of a colonial

government determined to make its mark on Rhodesian society. Yet the belief in the

diminishment of female autonomy also homogenised a complex culturally diverse

system in which women could, and did, free themselves of marriage commitments,

especially in areas where Lobola was not strongly enforced.[22] The attempts to 'free'

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[18] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p.29.

[19] Ibid; and for a discussion of modern responses to, and manifestations of, Lobola see Excellent and Regis Chireshe, 'Lobola: The Perceptions of Great Zimbabwe University Students', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3.9 (June-July 2010), pp.211-221.

[20] Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1894-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.82.

[21] Jeater, pp.79-82.

[22] Jeater notes that Lobola had almost 'died out among the Amendabele when the country was occupied by the Chartered company, the late King Lobengula having made no effort to uphold it',

women played into a stereotype of the African man as oppressive, ignoring the gendered dimensions of an inherently patriarchal colonial system presided over by white men.[23]

The changes to bridewealth took place at a time of rapid economic change in Rhodesia. Mining communities quickly emerged across the country as British colonial authorities sought to benefit from the riches provided by the gold mines of South Africa, whilst mission stations, European farms, and developing town spaces changed the social fabric of the country. Studies have shown that these communities provided women with a means to escape harsh economic conditions and patriarchal controls in rural areas, especially after the changes instituted in the 1901 act.[24] However, patriarchy did not begin and end with the rural space, and the patriarchal controls and ideas were part of a discourse which influenced all areas and spaces, albeit differently.

The increased mobility of women and their labour, despite being a limited manifestation, created problems for colonial authorities. Extra-marital partnerships developed in mining communities which were not reconcilable with conservative Christian values nor precolonial lineage systems, as family heads and chiefs increasingly complained about women transgressing marital commitments. The rise of adulterous affairs also coincided with greater numbers of women applying to

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p.65; However, these commitments were normatively encouraged, as documented in Zimbabwean literature. For an example, see Chenjerai Hove's *Ancestors* (London: Picador, 1996).

[23] This was not only a product of a colonial culture presided over by men because of European patriarchal structures, but of early migration patterns also. As Elizabeth Schmidt has noted, during the first decade of settler occupation the vast majority of occupiers were white British and South African men, who were joined later by families and eventually single women. Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1992), p.9.

[24] Zimudzi, p.504; and Schmidt, p.7.

courts for divorces because of the legal opportunities opened to them by legislative changes, whilst compensation claims relating to broken marriage were increasingly heard.[25] In response to these social and legal pressures, the colonial administration began increasingly to favour patriarchal control. As Zimudzi has argued, a series of laws passed in 1916 and in the 1920s and 1930s were specifically designed to limit 'the labour, mobility and sexuality' of African women.[26] The 1916 act, the Native Adultery Punishment Ordinance, was particularly gendered, and demonstrative of the attempt to regulate and control the sexuality of women. The Ordinance made adultery a criminal offence, subject to a punishment of up to one year in prison. Men were liable, but the act underlined gender stereotypes as Oliver Philips has argued, especially in view of polygamous marriage practices.[27] Whilst a married man could be convicted if he slept with another man's wife, a married woman would be committing adultery if she slept with any man, irrespective of his marital status.[28] These changes heralded a transformation of tactic, in part because of a realisation that changing gendered practices had produced both resistance and unintended results. For example, the usurpation of the authority of chiefs had created social problems, with an increasing disregard for authority and lawlessness reported among native commissioners.[29] Seemingly, the colonial government realised the necessities of working more closely with internal patriarchal power structures during the second decade of the twentieth century. As Jeater has argued, this moment of transformation

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[25] Jeater, p.87; and Schmidt, p.7. This also created problems because of bridewealth, as family heads may have had to repay monetary amounts or lose an essential labourer. Jeater, p.132.
[26] Zimudzi, p.504.
[27] Oliver Phillips, '''Constituting the Global Gay'': Issues of Individual Subjectivity and Sexuality in Southern Africa', *Sexuality in the Legal Arena*, ed. by Carl Stychin and Didi Herman (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), pp.29 and 232.
[28] Ibid, p.232.
[29] Reported by Jeater, p.137.

was also related to the context of the First World War, as the British administration

feared a second Chimurenga whilst their forces were stretched in Europe.[30]

The racial dimensions of the culturally imperialistic reformation of marriage seem

clear, however an act passed in 1903 provides an even more explicit example of

settler racism. The 1903 Immorality Suppression Ordinance made sex between white

women and black African men illegal, responding to contemporaneous fears over

miscegenation.[31] By constraining the sexuality of white women, the ordinance also

enforced gender disparity within the settler community and enforced the idea of the

white man as a paternalistic protector of female sexuality. The 1903 act was also

preceded by legislation passed the year before that imposed the death penalty for the

rape or attempted rape of a white woman by an African man.[32] Both the 1902 and

1903 acts were informed by, and promoted, the idea of a dangerous black sexuality,

illustrating the relationship between discourse and legality (and thus material

constraints).

The attempts to regulate bridewealth and redefine gender relations were also

paralleled by the intense persecution of allegations of same-sex practice and assaults

in the first quarter of the twentieth century.[33] Hundreds of allegations were brought

to court across the first three decades of British rule, testifying to the presence of

same-sex desire, and the readiness of the British to rigidly define acceptable and

normative sexual relations. The attempts to stamp out same-sex crimes were evident

immediately, and within the first year (1892) of the operation of magistrates courts in

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, p.91.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, pp.104-130.

Harare and Umtali (colonial Salisbury and Mutare) five cases of sodomy or indecent assault by men were tried.[34] However, no heterosexual crimes of rape or indecent assault were persecuted, suggesting homophobic biases were influencing the judicial process.[35] The distaste for same-sex activity was also illustrated by the relatively disproportionate punishments handed out for same-sex crimes. Epprecht has reported that wife battery resulting in death could earn an African husband as little as three months in prison if there were extenuating circumstances, whereas homosexual acts could result in up to five years in prison with hard labour.[36] This statistic also illustrates the workings of gender disparity, and how colonial era legislation endorsed the objectification of African women.

The readiness to persecute homosexual assaults and affairs with such intensity, and the desire to engage with pre-existing gender relations, has led critics to claim that Southern Rhodesian society witnessed a movement from a culture of concealment to publicisation in the early part of the twentieth century.[37] However, just as the original attempts to empower women through bridewealth changes gave way to a reaffirmation of internal patriarchal authorities, so too were the changes in the persecution of same-sex transient. Cases dealing with same-sex sexual acts dropped off markedly in the late 1920s and this trend continued in the following decades, even if later legal changes still revealed a deeply embedded homophobia.[38] Whilst this change may be related to the granting of Responsible Government in 1923, it was also characteristic of a changing strategy of engagement with matters of gender

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[34] Ibid, p.105.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, p.125.
[37] Tabona Shoko, '''Worse than Dogs and Pigs?'' Attitudes Toward Homosexual Practice in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Homosexuality* 57.5 (May 2010), p.640.
[38] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, pp.111 and 128; and Shoko, p.641.

and sexuality in Southern Rhodesia. That a culture of discretion persevered may also have been related to the influence of conservative Christianity on the settlers, which necessarily affected societal discourses and interpersonal relations. For example, as Epprecht has contended, many missionaries were reluctant to talk about sexual matters because of conservative religious attitudes and may even have enhanced 'indigenous cultures of discretion'.[39] The familiar notion is depicted in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, which is set in the 1970s, through the narrator protagonist's description of missionary school headmaster Babamukuru's 'inbred aversion to biological detail'.[40] Babamukuru's characterisation illustrates how the attitudes of some Africans were transformed by a conservative Christian discourse promoted through legality, religion, and associated educational systems. A failure to explicitly engage with same-sex sexuality beyond the first quarter of the century was also demonstrated by a lack of response to same-sex sexual practices in mines. Same-sex sexual acts were relatively commonplace but rarely discussed, and there were no explicit moves to outlaw or challenge this behaviour, even if the readiness to relax rules relating to the presence of families and prostitutes in Southern Rhodesian mines suggested a covert desire to promote heterosexuality in response to the existence of same-sex relations.[41]

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[39] Epprecht, 'The ''Unsaying'' of Indigenous Homosexualities', p.637.

[40] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004 [1988]), p.133.

[41] In contrast, Epprecht mentions that homophobic literature was distributed at mines in South Africa and that talks were arranged which were specifically designed to reiterate the non-normativity of homosexual relationships. Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p. 153. However, the closed nature of compounds in South Africa restricted movement differently to those in Southern Rhodesia, both foreclosing heterosexual options and the possibilities of encouraging heterosexual relations by incentivising the presence of women in compounds. Arguably, same-sex relations in a more culturally diverse South Africa were also more explicit, and less related to the culture of discretion characteristic of precolonial and Southern Rhodesian society.

The attempts to redefine gender and sexuality may have become less aggressive after the first two decades of the twentieth century, but remained a concern of the colonial administration and an effect of settler relations. Particularly striking was the aforementioned reiteration of gender disparity, and to a degree, the promotion of domestic ideas of femininity, even if social and economic changes provided women with a means to circumvent rural familial constraints. Accordingly, it is important not to attribute gender disparity, and fixed ideas of masculinity and femininity, to either precolonial cultural formation or to the practices of colonialism, but to a combination and imbrication of these factors. The intersectional formation of patriarchy and colonialism, introduced at the beginning of this introduction, is a prevailing theme in Zimbabwean writing. It is most prominently explored, and traced through history, in the writing of Yvonne Vera. Her earliest novel, *Nehanda*, provides a feminist reconceptualisation of the story of a prominent spirit medium/spirit who fought against the British in the first uprising (Chimurenga) of 1896-1897.[42] Published in 1994, the novelette, as I will discuss later, contests both domestic notions of femininity and colonial and patriarchal power. Vera's next text *Butterfly Burning* situates a story of female suffering in the late 1940s, exploring a city space to which women migrated in record numbers in the 1940s and 50s.[43] Protagonist Phephelaphi, seeking to define a life outside of the family and home, applies to become a nurse under a new scheme introduced by the colonial administration. Yet her later pregnancy forecloses this possibility because of limitations placed on the post, which only accepts single women, and not the pregnant unmarried protagonist who challenges European moral values. The novel

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[42] Yvonne Vera, *Nehanda* (Ontario, Canada: TSAR Publications, 2007 [1993]).

[43] Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); and Schmidt, p.11.

accordingly provokes the contradictory values of a colonial administration which

reinscribed traditional gender values and familial roles, whilst opening up

possibilities for women. *Butterfly Burning* is not merely a critique of colonial

practice, but of the production of gender norms, and specifically patriarchy.

Protagonist Phephelaphi also struggles to free herself from her patriarchal and

controlling older lover, who is haunted by the execution of his father by the British

at the end of the previous century. In this regard, Vera relates individuals to systems

and discourses, provoking an understanding of an imbricated network of relations

which produce the oppression and suffering of her female protagonist. Her work

explores, like that of Dambudzo Marechera, both structures and ideas, and the

constitution and inter-relation of masculinity and femininity. In turn my research,

rather than merely representing and describing gender and patriarchal norms, will

investigate how these norms are produced, and how Zimbabwean writers seek to

resist them.

Invisibility to Visibility: The Changing Context of the 1990s.

Zimbabwean literature also reveals the workings of a culture of discretion in relation

to matters of same-sex sex. There is a lack of references to same-sex sex in literary

productions, even during the 1970s and 1980s when Zimbabwean novels in English

proliferated. Yet there were traces of same-sex desire in early Zimbabwean

postcolonial literature, as I will discuss later, although writers stopped short of

representing same-sex sexual acts until the 1990s. The only exception to this was in

the writing of Dambudzo Marechera, who was the first Zimbabwean author to

reference homosexuality and to depict both sex between men, and sex between

women. His transgressive representational practice illustrates the possibilities of literature as a means of resisting dominant societal discourses. Marechera's contributions, and the omissions and traces in other productions, provide an invaluable means of documenting and understanding a discretionary discourse. But in the 1990s the literary trend changed, paralleling and reproducing the dominant societal discourses. This began with Stanley Nyamfukudza's 1991 short story 'Posters on the Wall', which located same-sex sexuality in a prison context.[44] The publications of Nevanji Madanhire's *If the Wind Blew* (1996) and Charles Mungoshi's short story 'Of Lovers and Wives' (1997) followed, marking a critically acknowledged changing point.[45] It is not coincidental that the latter texts emerged after Mugabe's infamous outburst in 1995. This was not just a product of a changing culture, but a result of Mugabe's homophobic outburst. After all, Mugabe's readiness to engage with homosexuality on a public and political level rendered same-sex sexuality differently intelligible, because its production as a taboo practice nonetheless visualised its existence in ways which a culture of discretion did not.

Mugabe's homophobic nationalism did not emerge within a vacuum. Rather, his outbursts were also a product of contextual factors which contributed to a change in the visibility of non-normative sexuality, and to the change in the literary discourse discussed. Mugabe's speech was delivered after he had visited a stall of the association of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) at the Harare international book fair. GALZ had grown in prominence since its establishment in 1989 in spite of prevailing rigid conceptions of gender and sexuality in Zimbabwe, and of the

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[44] Stanley Nyamfukudza, 'Posters on the Wall', *If God Was a Woman* (Harare: College Press, 1992 [1991]), p.85.

[45] Shaw, p.97; and Nevanji Madanhire, *If the Wind Blew* (Harare: College Press, 1996); Charles Mungoshi's text can be found in his *Walking Still* collection (Harare: Baobab Books, 1997).

implications of an AIDS epidemic discursively associated with homosexuality.[46]

Such contextual attitudes were epitomised by Chenjerai Hove's depiction of a piece of graffiti in the 1990s in the autographical *Shebeen Tales*: 'AIDS: American Idea for Discouraging Sex'.[47] The graffiti responds to a culturally imperialistic idea about the regulation and control of African sexuality related to colonial era conservative Christian ideas and racist stereotypes.

GALZ's emergence was paralleled and likely influenced by the increasing prominence of global gay movements, and by changing conditions in bordering South Africa, which became the first country in the world to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the 1990s. This legal change, ratified in South Africa's 1996 constitution, represented the rainbow nation's readiness to tackle homophobia and embrace the gay cultures which had emerged in the country.[48] This ban on sexual discrimination, which was also part of the ANC's first draft bill of rights in 1991 and interim constitution in 1994, notably occurred shortly after the trial of Winnie Mandela (also 1991).[49] Mandela was persecuted for her involvement in the death of a teenager who had been kidnapped along with three others in an alleged attempt to save them from the sexual advances of a white priest.[50] This case captured public interest and was especially notable because Mandela's defence team,

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[46] Simmons has discussed the global emergence of this misconception in the 1980s, and its legacy in a heteronormative Zimbabwean society. David S. Simmons, *Modernizing Medicine in Zimbabwe: HIV/Aids and Traditional Healers* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), pp.69-73.

[47] Chenjerai Hove, *Shebeen Tales* (London: Serif, 1994), p.76.

[48] Rachel Holmes, 'Queer Comrades: Winnie Mandela and the Moffies', *Social Text* 52-53 (1997), p.161.

[49] Ibid; and William J. Spurlin, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representation and the Politics of Culture in Southern Africa* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds*., Encyclopaedia of Africa*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.570.

[50] Spurlin, p.89.

as Rachel Holmes has argued, sought to associate homosexuality with whiteness and colonialism, invoking the forms of heteronormative nationalism which increasingly characterised the later rhetoric of ZANU-PF.[51] Whilst looking at conditions in South Africa may illustrate a representational trend in terms of the politicisation of the colonial memory, Mugabe's nationalistic rhetoric was also related to other social issues in Zimbabwe. Mugabe's homophobia, which functioned to unify the country's sexual and associated political demands, emerged at a time of waning support for his administration. Fears over corruption, which were especially prominent during the Willowgate car scandal, the failure to provide jobs to meet the demand created by successful educational reforms, and an economic downturn all contributed to growing discontent which resulted in the first major challenge to Mugabe in 2000, and predicated the beginning of the land reform programme.[52] The intensification of homophobic nationalism may then have strategically invoked the colonial backdrop which had united support behind Mugabe after the independence war.

The mid-1990s represented a period of discursive transformation in Zimbabwe. In my thesis, it will function as an end point, with most of the literary texts analysed written before 1995. This is in part a response to the discursive change I have discussed, and because of the necessity of limiting my scope. The study, which is

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[51] Holmes, pp.161-180.

[52] The 'Willowgate' affair was uncovered in 1988. It involved several high-ranking members of government who had used their influence to purchase cars, which were in short supply during the period, from the state-controlled assembly plant for below market value. The cars were then sold on for higher prices by some ministers, who abused the government initiative for personal gain. These allegations were not properly addressed by the state-controlled press, but rather brought to light by the Chronicle and Geoffrey Nyarota, who now lives in exile following attempts on his life. Hevina Smith Dashwood, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000), p.101; and Geoffrey Nyarota, *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsman* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2006), pp.149-171; and the economic problems of Zimbabwe are well documented. The failing job market of the early 1990s has been effectively represented by Hove, who has described how 200,000 secondary-school-leavers lay on the lawns every day, waiting for jobs, and the consequent economic irrelevance of their treasured '5 O levels'. *Shebeen Tales,* p.72.

broad in its attempt to examine the discourses of heteronormativity in literature

across several decades, would have to be far longer if it was to engage with the

notably different discourses, and historical moments, of the last twenty years. The

focus on earlier writing is also a result of my desire to investigate the representation

and reimagining of colonialism, and the relationship between colonialism and

normative gender and sexual modes. Whilst the legacy of colonialism continues, and

will continue for many years to come, it is necessarily more of a preoccupation in

texts written in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Accordingly, whilst I will examine how the

changing engagement with homosexuality is depicted in texts from Madanhire

(1996) and Mungoshi (1997), most of the writing discussed will be from earlier

years, except for where it is necessary to contextualise an idea through reference to a

later text. The significant exception will be in relation to the women's writing

discussed. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the writing of the two most influential

female writers in Zimbabwe, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, began in the

late 1980s and early 1990s, but did not end until the 2000s. Vera's oeuvre, which

stretches from 1993 until 2002 and draws together interconnected themes and ideas,

is best read in terms of a body of work than as isolated texts. Similarly,

Dangarembga's 1988 novel *Nervous Conditions* was followed by a sequel, *The Book

of Not*, in 2006, which chronicles the female protagonist's experience of the

liberation moment and aftermath, and is directly relatable to my subject matter.[53]

Secondly, there was a paucity of Zimbabwean women's writing because of the

limitations of the gender discourses examined. Notably, *Nervous Conditions* was the

first novel published by a black Zimbabwean woman, and the lack of women's

voices illustrates the intersecting limitations of racial and gendered hierarchies in

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[53] Tsitsi Dangarembga*, The Book of Not* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006).

Zimbabwean society. Because of the limitations of this discourse, it would be remiss to ignore later female writing, even if the mid-1990s clearly marked a changing point. The contextual moments represented in my study and in the texts I discuss will range from the depiction of colonial contact in the 1890s to the literary representations of the Matabeleland genocide (known as Gukurahundi) in the late 1980s. Details of the genocide, in which approximately 20,000 people living in the Matabeleland area were murdered, and others arrested, assaulted, and tortured, have been actively repressed by the political administration in Zimbabwe. The repressive response limited literary representations of Gukurahundi, especially in the years during and immediately after the genocide. Accordingly, I will engage with literature from the late 1990s to contextualise the massacres. Much of the focus in the literature examined in this thesis is on the late colonial period, and particularly the liberation war and transition to the post-independent space. The topics discussed are a product of their centrality in Zimbabwean history and literature, and because of their relationship to the heteronormative conditions which interest me. Therefore, this is at once a literary and a contextual study, as a means of locating literature within a material and discursive context.

Understanding Heteronormativity: Engaging with Poststructural Theories

I have made several references to heteronormativity so far in this introduction, and my research is concerned with investigating and confronting heteronormativity in Zimbabwean literature. Heteronormativity is a dominant term in my research because it expresses the social construction and inter-relation of gender and sexual norms. Accordingly, heteronormativity depicts both the gender differentiation of

men and women (and the negation of other gender identities), and an assumption of heterosexuality which informs, and is informed by, gender. It acknowledges how normative or compulsory sexuality is promoted through gender constructions and institutionalised practices which in turn both gender, and are gendered, as they transmit and reproduce social constructions. The institutionalisation of heteronormativity is endemic, and not related merely to the expression of sexuality and gender, but to all areas of life. As a consequence, heteronormativity may reaffirm other hegemonic practices and beliefs, such as racism, classism, and patriarchy. By recognising the normative conceptualisation of gender and sexuality, theories about heteronormativity necessarily reject gendered conceptions of essence, and are directly concerned with exposing the fictionality of normative constructions. Arguments about natural sexual difference and the evolutionary necessity of normative heterosexuality are accordingly denied, because these claims are subjectivised by normative values. It is perhaps needless to say then that heteronormativity is conceived as an oppressive formation, because it acts as a form of social regulation, buffered by an illusory essence and permanence. Its effects, however, are not illusory, but at once psychological and material. Its victims have been beaten, murdered, and languish in prison cells for practicing homosexuality. They have been subject to violence for transgressing gender roles, or socially ostracised because of normative conventions. They have endured the psychological consequences of repression and the internalisation of hatred and difference produced by heteronormative contexts. And they have been subjugated because of their difference.

My understanding of the production of normativity is largely defined by gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler's conception of performativity, and by the poststructural theories which inform Butler's work. By way of an introduction, Butler's theory of performativity is influenced by Foucauldian discursive theories, and in particular the notion that power relations constitute identity. Michel Foucault theorised this notion in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, which represented a broad and at times homogenising examination of discourses of sexuality in the 'Western' world from the 17th century onwards.[54] By examining the discursive constitution of sexuality, Foucault critiqued the hypothesis that sexuality was repressed. Rather, Foucault identified a contradiction in this expression, because sexuality became the subject of frenzied examination and discussion from the eighteenth century onwards.[55] Whilst non-normative forms of sexuality were legally punished and socially delegitimised, there was also a desire to understand and document these sexual forms. Scientific and psychoanalytical discourses multiplied around issues of sexuality whilst the practice of confession rendered sexuality the topic of regulated discussion.[56] Accordingly, Foucault theorised that sexuality was visualised through the attempts made to document, regulate, and understand it, even if discursive measures may have had repressive effects, or the appearance of a repressive manifestation. This notion compares with the hypothesis discussed in relation to colonial culture in the first quarter of the 20st century, in which sexuality was more rigidly defined and in the process rendered in some ways more visible and intelligible. Judicial changes were at the forefront of this discursive change, and are afforded prominence in Foucault's discussion of prohibition and power in 'Western'

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[54] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*: *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998).
[55] Ibid, p.23.
[56] Ibid, pp.19-35 and pp.61-69.

societies. However, the nature of power is always a contextual product and is not manifested in the same ways across space and time. Accordingly, power relations are always diverse and fluid and overlap and intersect.[57] Power's 'capillary interventions' are part of a system and chain, which constitute and are constituted by power relations.[58] Legality then merely enforces and transmits a form of power produced by the interrelation of discourses, which inform the production of law. Yet the effect of power is not explicit but illusory, because the effect of power is 'proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms'.[59] Consequently, the social construction of normative sexuality is concealed by arguments about naturalised sexual difference, by the institutions, traditions, ideas, languages, and religions that support a normative hierarchy. Foucault's approach accordingly denies naturalised essence, and examines the ways in which ideas are understood and subscribed through power. Despite the all-encompassing nature of Foucault's rendition of power, power is not consistent or omnipotent, as the disjuncture between the repressive conception and reality illustrates. Rather, it always produces, and is haunted by, the possibility of resistance.[60]

Foucault's conception of discourse and power as constitutive inform Butler's notion of performativity. In her writing Butler centralises normativity, which is represented as a product of discourse, and a hegemonic construction which restricts and influences identity. She defines performativity accordingly:

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[57] Ibid, p.92.
[58] Ibid, pp.84 and 92.
[59] Ibid, p.86.
[60] Ibid, pp.101-102.

> performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.[61]

By performing a normatively constructed gender identity, individuals recreate this identity as a norm, and contribute to its illusory stability and permanence. Performance is, however, constrained because of the effects of normativity, and the disciplinary social protocols it in turn establishes. It is this question of constraint which is key to Butler's theorising, because for Butler discourse always constrains in one way or another as the discursive world precedes and defines the subject. Initially, Butler's theorising was met by misunderstanding in some quarters because of a perception that performativity was voluntary. This was perhaps a product of the theatrical connotations of performativity, and because of a notion of performativity as an unconscious rather than involuntary act. The misunderstanding of the unconscious conception led some to understand that individuals may be self-consciously performative, and in turn reconstitute social norms. Butler, in part because of an initial failure to explicitly and consistently define the involuntary nature of performativity, subsequently clarified and refined her representation.[62] One such example was represented during in an interview with Liz Kotz, in which she rejected the 'bad reading' of performativity:

> The bad reading goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender, stylize it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other…when my whole point was that the very formation of subjects, the very formation of persons, *presupposes* gender in a certain way—that gender is not to be chosen and that

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[61] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p.6.
[62] Butler acknowledges this issue, and her own changing perceptions, in her updated 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p.16.

> 'performativity' is not radical choice and it's not voluntarism…This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in.[63]

Butler's clarification of performativity reiterates its inevitability: we do not choose to be performative subjects. We are invariably and inevitability defined by the means of our socialisation. Subjectivity is a product of discourse, or in other words, as Nikki Sullivan argues, there is 'not first an ''I'' who performs, rather, the ''I'' is constituted in and through performative processes'.[64] In this regard, Goffman's use of Shakespeare's analogy of the world can be amended to analogise the performative. It is useful to view context as a stage for which we have a script, but that script only allows for partial opportunities for improvisation.[65] Any improvisation is ultimately still defined by that script, even if one seeks to reject the very essence of it.

Judith Butler's theoretical position invites questions: if an individual is so defined by society, how is normative change possible? Where are the possibilities for resistance which Foucault argued were produced by power relations? At face value, perhaps, Butler's position subscribes an impotence to the subject. This notion ties in with a critique about the heavily theoretical nature of poststructuralism in general, and an argument that the movement is concerned not with what is to be done, but what is not to be done. It is useful to engage with both of these arguments at the same time, because of a clear interrelation.

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[63] Liz Kotz, 'The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler', *Artforum* 31 (November 1992), pp.83-84.

[64] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p.89.

[65] As Butler argues in *Undoing Gender*, gender is 'a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint'. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.1.

There is no doubt that language and discourse are a source of frustrated constraint for poststructuralists, as depicted through the play with words and language in early poststructural texts. Derrida followed Martin Heidegger in the use of the technique of *sous rature,* in which words were crossed through but remained visible. In the process, the problem of meaning or ~~meaning~~ is constituted, as the signifier is expressed as unsuitable but necessary.[66] The constraint of language is presented, as is an attempt to redefine the signification of a word or term, and to invoke new meaning, or rather, to critique prior ~~meaning~~ and the presupposition of logic behind that 'meaning'. Attempts to reconceptualise the constraints of language were epitomised by Derrida's conception of *différance*. Invented by Derrida, the neologism means both to differ and defer.[67] *Différance* denies what Derrida conceived as a privileging of the spoken over the written, because *différance*'s meaning relies upon its being read.[68] Derrida's wordplay demonstrated that language was not static but fluid, and could be remade and resignified to challenge hierarchal and logical assumptions. Crucially, *différance* was central to Derrida's notion of the metaphysics of presence and a project of deconstruction which has influenced later poststructural theories of resistance.

Derrida's metaphysics of presence maintains that a 'Western' philosophical tradition has privileged presence over absence, and in turn the spoken over the written. This is because of a conceptualisation of the speaker as present and the writer as absent, and the ways in which philosophical discourse presupposed this notion. Yet for Derrida

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[66] Spivak provides an excellent discussion of *sous rature* (under erasure) in her preface to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp.xiv-xvi.
[67] Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvest Press, 1982), pp.3-27.
[68] Ibid.

the differential nature of language, and the role of supposedly absent terms (the trace) in the construction of meaning, rendered the binary production of presence/absence and the spoken/written an illusion.[69] Derrida sought to undermine this binary opposition, as a manifestation of power, and also as a notion of binarism which influences all discourses. He was concerned with provoking the illusory nature of this conceptualisation, denying any essentialised truth in the act of rendering the construction, and logic of construction, the subject of enquiry. Derrida's writing, in relation to the metaphysics of presence, accordingly manipulated the possibilities of the perceivably absent and written, undermining the privileging of the spoken and present in the process.

The metaphysics of presence, and the project of deconstruction, informed the movement of poststructuralism which sought to reject, and render incoherent, the systems privileged by structuralism. Whereas Saussure interpreted language in terms of an arbitrary relation between signifier (word) and signified (meanings related to the word), Derrida read a relationship defined by oppositions that were not, and could never be, neutral.[70] He described deconstruction, in relation to these oppositions, in the following terms:

> an opposition of metaphysical concepts (e.g., speech/writing, presence/absence, etc.) is never the confrontation of two terms, but a hierarchy and the order of a subordination. Deconstruction cannot be restricted or immediately pass to a neutralization: it must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing - put into practice a *reversal* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions.[71]

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[69] For a discussion, see Derrida, 'Semiology and Grammatology: Interview with Julia Kristeva', *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp.23-29.

[70] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.32.

[71] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.21. For a further discussion of

Derrida's deconstruction subverts a hierarchical and binary order. It is not merely a

project of inversion, because it structurally resists and dismisses a binary logic. To

invert a relationship of power is merely to install a new order, similarly beset by

structural disparity. Rather, it is a reversal of a constructed opposition and

simultaneously a displacement of that system. By introducing new meanings and

new interpretations, deconstruction thus disturbs the coherence proffered by binary

and normative systems. It focuses on inherent contradictions and inconsistences and

'undecidability' to unmask the illusory nature of discourse, and it is in this illusion

where power in part resides, as Foucault also claimed.[72] Accordingly, deconstruction

is a project of denaturalisation and disturbance. It is not an act of destruction but of

resuscitation: of finding new 'meaning' inherent in the production of prior meaning.

It is concerned with upsetting the illusions of order, systems, and power. In the

process, hegemony is threatened and pluralities emerge. Masculinity becomes

masculinities, is not cast in an antithetical relationship with a feminine, is not

reducible to any singular essence, and eventually may not exist because the label of

masculine and feminine is a fiction, as a constructed and hierarchical gendered order

of two in a world of multiplicity. In turn, homosexuality need not be cast in the

shadow of heterosexuality, or be conceived of as its antithesis. Rather, a fluid

relationship may be installed which disturbs an antithetical understanding and denies

the possibility of rigidly defining sexuality. And so the marginalisation of women,

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the violence of hierarchy, see 'Positions: Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta', *Positions*, p.39.

[72] Derrida has described undecidables as 'unities of simulacrum, ''false'' verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, inhabit philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganising it, *without ever* constituting a third term…' For example, '*supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence…' Derrida, 'Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine', *Positions*, p.40.

homosexuals, transsexuals, and other identities may be undone and revealed not as the antithesis of the normal, but in the death of the normal.

My theoretical approach emerges from deconstruction and poststructuralist discursive theories, especially in relation to my discussion of, and reliance on, gender theory from the 1990s onwards. Specifically, my research will analyse the workings and nature of a heteronormative discourse in Zimbabwe, and the fissures and contradictions in its production. I will attempt to unmask, denaturalise, and deconstruct normative assumptions through a discussion of Zimbabwean postcolonial literature. I will install discourse as a constructer of identity, but I will seek to undermine normative discourses at every turn and the illusory essence these discourses transmit. In this regard, I will also dissect a relationship between context and discourse, which I perceive as more complex than occasionally represented in criticism. My conception of discourse will not privilege it above context, but situate it in a mutually endorsing but always fragile relationship with context. After all, discourse determines context but contextual change may undermine discourse. It may create the circumstances for the change, or even death, of a normative discourse which has constrained a context. Throughout this thesis, I will seek to provoke, and to render anxious, the illusory power of normativity. My research, despite having a heteronormative focus, necessarily transcends questions of gender, sex, and sexuality. I am also addressing a colonial context, and the intersection between colonial and postcolonial discourses, and gendered and sexual norms. My thesis began with an example of this intersectional relationship, by considering how nationalism structured gender and sexual norms, and in the process how nationalism was a product of heteronormativity. This is a mutually endorsing, if fragile,

relationship used to reproduce and normalise a discourse, and is representative of the nature of discourse. It is not possible to read an idea in isolation, because it does not exist in isolation. Gender, sexuality, race or class do not exist as singular entities, but are related to other signifiers of difference.

The Intersectional Approach

A contextual focus therefore necessitates an understanding of intersectionality, as a means of moving beyond the singular and homogenising conceptions of identity which have informed racism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressive ideas. The theory of intersectionality, first named in 1989, has emerged as a means of engaging with overlapping and mutually determining forms of oppression.[73] By considering the effects of various factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, it becomes impossible to attribute singularity to a diverse group. The critical movement illustrates how academic thought can participate in the delegitimisation of homogenising approaches, even if these homogenising approaches are in part a product of, and constrained by, language, and the insufficiency of terms like 'black', 'white', 'woman', and 'man'. Emerging from a deconstructive logic that rejects binary visions and hierarchal structures, intersectionality theory ushered in gender theory and related, if not directly interchangeable, forms of third wave feminism. It is not possible to identify a clear moment of change, because, whilst intersectionality may have been named in the late 1980s, such approaches were documentable in

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[73] Kimberlé Crenshaw's 1989 essay 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics' introduced the term into academic discourse. Whilst intersectional approaches were not new, Crenshaw's self-conscious engagement and readiness to label intersectionality contributed to a new critical movement, and paralleled the emergence of third wave feminism. *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), pp.139-167.

earlier works. Yet bell hooks' influential article marked a major turning point

between second and third wave feminism, because of the advent of intersectional

thinking which also influenced contemporaneous and later forms of gender theory.

As hooks states:

> Feminist thinkers engaged in radically revisioning central tenents of feminist
> thought must continually emphasize the importance of sex, race and class as
> factors which *together* determine the social construction of femaleness, as it
> has been so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of many women active in
> feminist movements that gender is the sole factor determining identity.[74]

hooks calls for a different and more malleable theory which interrogates the relation

of systems of difference. In the process, those forms of difference, and the ideas used

to understand them, become a battleground. So whilst earlier forms of feminism

were essential in the gradual debunking of patriarchy, a logic or bias in these ideas

became the subject of attack. hooks, and later feminists explicitly allied with the

third wave, denied the possibility of talking for all women because a middle class

white English woman is not the same as a lower class black American woman, or an

Ndebele woman from Zimbabwe. Their experiences are necessarily determined by

other signifiers, and other contextual features. hooks, along with other theorists,

centralised a form of thinking which evolved the distrust that marked second wave

feminism, by questioning not only gender, but all signifiers of identity, because of

the oppressive and intersectional nature of discourse.

The logic of intersectionality engenders a problem for those engaged in the

application of theory across contexts: if all women are not the same, and all men,

how can one group speak for or with another? This is all the more relevant to

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[74] bell hooks, 'Feminism: A Transformational Politic', *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, second edition, ed.
by Frances Bartkowski and Wendy K. Kolmar (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), p.467.

theoretical approaches applied from colonial to postcolonial contexts, in view of the historical and continuing structures of exploitation which mark geographical spaces. The notion was infamously interrogated in Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', which critiqued an academic silencing of the 'subaltern subject'.[75] I do not believe that silencing is an inevitable product of postcolonial studies, because if I did then this research would not exist. Indeed, to reject cross-cultural exchange would merely be to install a binary, and to police difference. It would in some ways repeat the oppositional logic of colonialism, even if the rejection of cross-cultural exchange is an understandable product of retaliatory postcolonial discourses. Rather, such studies must be informed by an understanding of intersectionality, difference and context, and cross-cultural discussions must go both ways. Even if theories emerge in one context, that is not to say that they might not enlighten another, and this cross-cultural exchange is certainly a product of a hybrid Zimbabwean literary scene which borrows, manipulates, and challenges specifically European and American ideas and movements. Accordingly, applying theory must not be an act of mere translation, but of dialogue and exchange. Theory can be used to understand context and contextually specific discourses, and in turn those contexts and discourses may be used to interrogate theory. To merely translate theory from a European or American context onto a postcolonial one, and to impose one's own normative values, would be to repeat the logic that underlined and underlines imperialism. Cross-cultural studies should not function to negate the voice of another, but to understand the subject of the study, and tools of that study. Its intention must be to understand

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[75] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp.271-313.

another and oneself in the process, and it must seek to comprehend, but not overwrite, difference and the means and circumstances of production.

The application of Judith Butler's ideas, and poststructural theories, to other contexts engenders other potential problems. Primary among these is the notion that heavily theoretical poststructural ideas are the antithesis of practice, and that overly theoretical approaches ignore bodily realities. For example, it is possible to claim that reducing essence to discourse negates materiality and perhaps even underwrites dehumanising discourses. Butler has been habitually critiqued in this respect for an overly discursive position, and it became a quite evident anxiety in her writing.[76] Her second book, *Bodies Matter*, was in title and subject matter concerned with the question of the material, but it has not stemmed the criticisms of her work, or those directed towards poststructuralism in general.

The criticisms of overly discursive theories take on greater weight in acts of cross-cultural translation, because theories often emerge in very different contexts separated by time, space, and circumstance. A theory emerging in England, America or France has arisen from a relatively privileged context that has benefited from being on one side of a global capitalistic order that has directly, and indirectly, exploited other parts of the world. The proliferation of technology in developed contexts has arguably produced a virtual notion of existence which is far divorced from certain contexts and historical moments marked by more extreme conflict. For example, in Zimbabwe, the liberation war, Matabeleland Massacres, the effects of

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[76] Butler: 'I confess, however, that I am not a very good materialist. Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language'. *Undoing Gender*, p.198.

poverty, and water and food shortages have surely engendered a different relationship with one's body than in certain developed contexts in which the effects of poverty and conflict are less consistently and powerfully felt. The differing realities of racial and gendered hegemonies in turn necessitate a fluid understanding of the body, because of a direct relationship to both discourse and context. I do not endorse many of the criticisms directed towards Butler or others concerned with discursive theories, because these theories seek to resist oppression. They merely seek to resist a structural outlook that underlines and predicates the dehumanising and subjugating conditions that produce material suffering. Yet a critic must be aware of contextual differences, and be wary of the ways in which bodily suffering may be unwritten by discourse, and may determine discourse. Accordingly, I will seek throughout to combine a fundamentally discursive study with an examination of bodily representation and violence through literature and documented accounts. In turn, I will examine the suitability of theories like Butler's, and consider whether the postcolonial accounts discussed necessitate a re-examination of discourse concentrated theories.

My first chapter will centralise context through a literary examination of colonialism. I will not discuss heteronormativity immediately, but introduce the colonial context that informed colonial and postcolonial life in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and in turn gender and sexual norms. Dambudzo Marechera will be integral to this discussion, as he will be throughout my thesis, because of his preoccupation with the material, discursive, and psychological effects of colonialism. Marechera will be discussed alongside other Zimbabwean writers, as a means of comparing their representation of colonial rule, principally through a discussion of education,

religion, and language. This will be followed by an examination of hybridity in Zimbabwean literature, in view of the conflicting cultural products of colonialism, and specifically because of the effects of racial and gendered oppression. I will consider these effects by analysing literary representations of internationalisation, self-loathing, and doubling, and examine how these ideas are communicated through stylistic choices in Marechera's texts. I will then shift my discussion to the gendering of colonialism, as I explore depictions of the colonised nation and the colonial encounter. This will revolve around a discussion of an underlying thesis in Marechera's and Zimbabwean writing, namely that colonialism was emasculating. I will interrogate and deconstruct the masculinised dimensions of this representation, whilst considering the potential material realities through a discussion of Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*.[77]

My second chapter will examine the constitution of hegemonic masculinity in Zimbabwe, and interrogate the role and representational techniques of male authors. I will investigate how the constitution of masculinity is produced, and what makes a 'real man', as well as the effects of constructing authentic and non-authentic forms of being. In other words, I will analyse the representation of normative masculinity through a discussion of the core signifiers of masculinity, and I will focus on the represented relationship between men and women. The second half of the chapter will shift focus, and is motivated by a famous critique directed towards Marechera's work by fellow author Chenjerai Hove. Hove argued that in Marechera's writing woman was the 'mother of ''bastards''', the ''bitch'' or the ''wench'''.[78] I will

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[77] Chenjerai Hove, *Bones* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990 [1988]).
[78] Flora Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, pp.350-351.

examine this claim in detail, and the difference between representation and reiteration, through a discussion and comparison of male writers' depictions of women. Accordingly, this section will analyse to what extent leading Zimbabwean male authors were complicit in the promotion of heteronormative ideas, even in texts ostensibly designed to reject them. By analysing the potential trap of discourse, I will also examine the difficulties in destabilising and resisting a normative system which is constitutive, expanding on discussions of the limits of resistance introduced during this introduction.

The first two chapters in this thesis focus predominantly on gender, albeit normative ideas of gender underlined by the primacy of heterosexuality. However, the third chapter will specifically analyse normative sexuality, and examine the workings of the culture of discretion through an analysis of Zimbabwean literature, before engaging with a contextual examination of same-sex sex in mining communities. The literary segment of the chapter will consider traces of homosexual desire in various texts, alongside the absence of same-sex sex and the refusal to name homosexuality. I will focus on the cracks and anxieties of a heteronormative discourse which repressed the visualisation of same-sex sexuality, and which produced, and was produced in part by, literature. Following a discussion of homosexual desire and repression, I will consider in detail the same-sex sex acts represented in the work of Dambudzo Marechera. The discussion will examine not only the significance of representing homosexual acts, but also the differential effect in relation to the performances of masculinity presented through a deconstructive reading of heteronormativity in Marechera's short story 'House of Hunger'. The second half of my chapter will be notably different in scope, and relegate literary

discussion whilst examining context and its relationship to discourse. I will introduce the mining contexts which were essential to the economics of colonialism, and were exploitative of colonial labour. I will then explore the homosexual practices that developed in Zimbabwean mining contexts, and also in neighbouring South Africa, and consider what these practices suggest about the limits of heteronormative discourse and the relationship between normative masculinity and sexuality.

My final chapter will centralise the body and women's writing, primarily through a discussion of the work of Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera. It will not be a straightforward comparative study, although it will be comparative at points, but will principally be concerned with the depiction of female experience during certain historical moments in Zimbabwean history. I will predominantly focus on the liberation war period and its aftermath, and the Matabeleland massacres, and will gender the experience of these moments, especially through a focus on the gender and ethnic violence that has been repressed from Zimbabwean public discourses. The chapter will also consider how women writers violently reject patriarchy and maternal constraint, and interrogate how the bodily realities of gender-related suffering relate to discursive concentrated theoretical ideas. The chapter will finally analyse the gendering of history, and examine Vera's feminist reconstitution of patriarchal, racial, and gendered colonial histories.

I believe that this study fulfils the need for a body of work examining heteronormativity in Zimbabwean literature. I first encountered this absence after reading 'House of Hunger', and writing a short essay comparing Marechera's and

Tayeb Salih's conceptualisations of gender and sexuality in a colonial context.[79] It was this work that motivated my interest in contextualising gender and sexuality in Zimbabwean literature. Many of the studies that exist currently read gender in isolation of sexuality, or else Zimbabwean writers in isolation of one another. My discursive concentrated study will provide a composite exploration of heteronormativity, and rigorously examine the nature and constraints of discourses. I will examine these discourses as intersectional products directly and indirectly related to colonialism, and will explore the represented relationship between colonialism and heteronormativity. My concern throughout will be in engaging with the resistant strategies and techniques used by Zimbabwean authors, and in confronting heteronormativity in all its forms.

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[79] Timothy Mongiat, 'Consider the Representation of Masculinity and/or Heteronormativity, and their Relationship with Colonialism, in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*' (unpublished Master's essay: The University of Kent, 8th January 2013).

## Chapter One: Introducing and Gendering Colonialism

'The colonial world is a world cut in two.'[1]

Edward Said's *Orientalism* offered a revealing and revolutionary insight into the discursive strategies which underlined and endorsed European colonialism. Documenting and problematising antithetical constructions such as civilisation vs savagery, morality vs immorality, and progress vs atavism or backwardness, Said's work engaged with a binary and homogenising logic which would be more fully interrogated in subsequent research. [2] These constructions of otherness were not merely expressed for European audiences, but were transmitted through material and discursive interaction within the colonies, as part of the systematic degradation and negation of the colonised. They were manifested through the 'rifle-butts' of the police officers described by Fanon and all which that connoted, and by the institutional forces that constituted these subjectivities and relations.[3] In Foucauldian terms, this force represented an interconnected web of discourses and material expressions, as ideas and practices informed and shaped the institutions that transmitted these ideas. Norms were transmitted in part through the introduction of a variety of laws in the earliest years of the settlement of Rhodesia, as the colonisers sought to reform the local culture and economy. Connected religious and educational systems promoted the discourses of the settlers, whilst access to the latter was limited for Africans because of European racism, labour strategies, and fears about the power of education. Language functioned as a means of cultural imperialism, and, along with coerced baptisms, name changes, and labour displacement,

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[1] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p.29.
[2] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).
[3] Fanon, p.29.

represented the readiness of the settlers to tear away one culture and replace it with the partial imprint of another for economic and political benefit. Counter-discursivity was necessarily limited by the normalising function of discourse, by acts of censorship, and by the significant educational disparities maintained by settler colonial practice. The processes constituted and trapped the colonised, who laboured under the physical and mental effects of colonialism.

This mental condition is explored in Fanon's work, and is a preoccupation in Zimbabwean writing. It is clearest in the schizophrenic contestations and nightmarish surrealism of Marechera's and Vera's writing. Various images of doubling, fracturing, and splitting pervade their stories, as protagonists struggle against, and are ripped apart by, the oppressive conditions of their existence. This is not only an expression of racial difference, of the separation of African and European by skin colour, but of various intersectional factors which underlined the colonial context.

Zimbabwean and postcolonial fiction is not merely a representation of victimisation and conflict produced by colonialism, but a form of resistance. This is in part achieved through a demythologisation, as the power and supposed rigidity of colonial discourses are undermined by a counter-discursive affront. These counter-discourses highlight an anxiety repressed by the mechanisms of normativity – this is the anxiety of change and revolution. In Fanon's writing, this possibility is expressed in terms of 'envy' and fear – of the colonised wishing to possess what the coloniser holds, of wishing to 'substitute' oneself for the settler.[4] It is necessarily a violent

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[4] Fanon, p.41.

substitution, as Fanon's writing makes clear, as the violence inherent in the colonial enterprise threatens to consume it. So violence begets violence, and the postcolonial context emerges from this. It is not merely the militarised violence of liberation wars and struggles, but of the discursive ramifications of subjugation.

The very act of conceptualising colonialism and resistance is threatened by the logic of hegemony described. Fanon, despite his unique contributions to anti-colonial movements and postcolonial theory, is not free of criticism. His writing has rightly been condemned for its male bias, with a male subject centralised and women typically marginalised and constrained by the heteronormative attitudes promoted.[5] Fanon's conceptualisation of colonialism, whilst complex, is haunted by a binary logic which risks overwriting forms of oppression which are naturalised by, or rendered less significant than, an overarching racial idea. As critical developments have demonstrated, it is essential to consider how elements such as gender, class, sexuality, and racial distinctions influence individual subjectivity and agency within a colonial (and postcolonial) system that is also determined in part by these overlapping identity categories. Heteronormativity is primary in my analysis for this reason, especially because of the tendency of early postcolonial literature to reify society as a domain of men. In texts by Dambudzo Marechera, Chenjerai Hove, and Charles Mungoshi racial oppression is rendered emasculatory. This male-centred articulation of colonialism marginalises women, and it is no surprise that women, oppressed by colonialism and a gender hierarchy, typically become victims of emasculated characters in literary texts. They are assaulted, raped, and even

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[5] bell hooks, among others, has criticised Fanon for a male-centred sexist perspective. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp.41-42.

murdered, as I will discuss in later chapters. Some women fight back and transgress gender expectations but a truth remains: heteronormativity existed alongside, and after, colonialism, and reinforced an oppressive mindset related to an emasculatory perception. Arguably Fanon, and critics who focus on only the racial dimensions of colonialism, reiterate other intersectional products of oppressive colonial and postcolonial contexts. It is the aim of my chapter to analyse depictions of colonialism, whilst introducing the heteronormative constraints which I will centralise in later chapters.

This chapter will explore colonialism via its represented effects and manifestations. It will begin with a discussion of the role of education, language, and religion within the settler context, whilst exploring the represented material and psychological consequences of these forms. This will lead to a discussion of identity and hybridity for colonial subjects afflicted by racial discourses, cultural displacement, and the at times restrictive demands of postcolonial nationalism. The final section of the chapter will shift focus to, and problematise, the notion of colonialism as emasculating, introducing a discussion of the relation between colonialism and gender roles which will continue in the following chapter. I will explore this idea textually, and examine the depicted effects of emasculating settler relations and discourses on men and women. I will discuss the work of various Zimbabwean authors in this chapter, but focus primarily on the writing of Dambudzo Marechera because of the complexity and depth of his engagement with colonialism, postcolonial nationalism, and heteronormativity.

Colonialism was never a benevolent project. It was principally an economic and political venture, engineered to benefit the interests of a foreign country and to personally enrich the individuals involved. Zimbabwe was not colonised for the benefit of Africans, but for that of white Europeans. Whilst celebrations of empire stress the positive achievements of colonialism, such a position reveals a troubling logic which not only overlooks the material and psychological subjugation of colonised subjects, but suggests that innovations could not have emerged without the help of Europeans. Yet every technological innovation and every social institution served European interests, as part of a material and discursive network which was predicated on, and reiterated, racial disparity. The education system provides a means to examine this notion, as a cultural product often used to delineate the benefits of colonial rule. Various Zimbabwean writers in the late colonial period relate the importance of an education because of the obvious intellectual benefits, and since an education facilitated limited social and economic progress. No writer is as explicit as Shimmer Chinodya, whose didactic treatment is most prominent in *Dew in the Morning*, in which several conversations explicitly communicate the importance of education.[6] The family represented in the novel is split: the mother tends to the farm whilst the father works in town. Their separation represents the ruptures produced by colonialism, which split generations and families through the manifestations of colonial rule and labour displacement. However, their two incomes are required to pay for the education of their three children. Chinodya's text highlights a social reality, because the education of black Africans within Southern Rhodesia was woefully underfunded. This was because colonial education was

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[6] For an example of the didactic conversations, see Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001 [1982]), p.62.

engineered to produce the desired forms of economic labourers, as it was throughout the British Empire. The vast majority of black African students did not even finish primary school, let alone secondary school, because the nature of colonial society did not require it. Farm labourers, and mine workers, did not need a full education to be of use to the settlers. This was true in the early years of the education system, and in the last decade of colonial rule. Ian Smith's administration promoted the need for a practical education for black Africans even after the unilateral declaration of independence in 1965, with focus placed on agricultural and industrial skills at the cost of academic studies.[7] Funding figures from the period endorse this notion. Shizha and Kariwo have reported that in the 1970s the annual budget for European education was 'at least 10 times more than that spent on Africans who represented 99% of the school population'.[8] The huge funding disparities demonstrate the fictionality of any notions about a move to equality, because the administration was not concerned with equal opportunities, but determined to preserve the colonial hegemony. Those Africans that continued in education were reliant on wealthier family members, or on church based scholarships and the benevolence of individual missionaries.

The education system was predominantly run by missionaries in Southern Rhodesia, and consequently education was inextricably tied to Christianity. Christianity was institutionalised through schooling, and within all aspects of society, as British religious norms structured the ideas, attitudes, and laws of the settler context. Imported moral norms directly refuted pre-existing local African customs and

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[7] Edward Shizha and Michael T. Kariwo, *Education and Development in Zimbabwe: A Social, Political and Economic Analysis* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), p.18.
[8] Ibid, p.17.

beliefs, as I discussed in my introduction through a brief analysis of early colonial

legality. These changes cut to the core of African life because long standing Shona

and Ndebele ancestral belief systems had informed, and structured, precolonial

society. Those seeking an education were also generally forced into baptisms, which

represented one of many culturally dislocating manifestations of a coercive system.

Whilst baptisms may have only represented a mere spectacle in form for some, as a

performance of obeisance to a colonial authority without a true basis in changing

belief, they came at a price. Baptism rituals generally required Black Africans to take

British first names, which were also used during schooling.[9] Several Zimbabwean

authors were subjected to this practice. Marechera was baptised as Charles and was

known by some as Charles through his adolescence, although he reassumed the name

Dambudzo later in life.[10] Marechera's new name, like those of so many colonial

subjects, surely served as a constant reminder of colonial power and cultural

displacement. It represented the right to rename, and to reclaim. Marechera

references the signification of the colonial process of renaming in *The Black Insider*,

as a manifestation of colonial hegemony with clear autobiographical dimensions:

> To know the name of a demon is supposed to give one power over it...others
> like myself chose other facets of English hegemony and were christened
> Charles, William, Patrick, or Dereck, etc. The English language has certainly
> taken over more than the geography of the African image.[11]

As the extract relates, the act of renaming was about much more than merely taking

over the geography of the African image, but colonising the land, bodies, and minds

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[9] Nkuzi Nnam, *Colonial Mentality in Africa* (Lanham, Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2007), pp.200-201; and Peter P. Ekeh, *T.E.A. SALUBI: Witness to British Colonial Rule in URHOBOLAND & NIGERIA* (Ikeja, Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society, 2008), p.6.
[10] Notably, several childhood friends still referred to Marechera as Charles, instead of Dambudzo, in interviews. For examples see Flora Veit-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work* (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), pp.52 and 58-60.
[11] Dambudzo Marechera, *The Black Insider* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992 [1990]), p.60.

of Africans subject to imperialism. Just as Christianity produced religious conflict, so in turn did the act of renaming signify a cultural contestation which underlined the imperial enterprise. Two names, two identities, and two cultures were forced into an unequal conflict. Education was at the centre of this, as a means of promoting discursive ideas and reinforcing the colonial hegemony.

Colonising the Mind: Educating Racism

Practically all early postcolonial Zimbabwean writers explore mental colonisation. Some texts describe this as a conscious conflict, as I will explore later, as protagonists struggle with the realisation that they cannot escape the binds and legacies of colonialism and cultural alienation. But for others, this is less clear. Some protagonists are represented as subsumed by the colonial context, and conform, seemingly unconsciously, to the expectations of obeisance and the normative values promoted by the colonial authorities. Central protagonist Tambu (Tambudzai) of Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not* is perhaps the best example of ostensible unconscious mental colonisation in Zimbabwean fiction, although her characterisation is markedly different in the two novels.[12] *Nervous Conditions* centralises a more openly transgressive protagonist, and the story is about Tambu's changing understanding about what her uncle represents, and his complicity in the promotion of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Contrastingly, *The Book of Not* is predominantly about race and colonialism, and follows a beaten protagonist searching for a sense of self in a fractured society. The works are not

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[12] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004 [1988]); and Tsitsi Dangarembga*, The Book of Not* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006); and I will refer to Tambudzai as Tambu throughout, to reflect the general representation of her name in Dangarembga's novels.

unrelated, because read together they illustrate how intersectional heteronormative and racial discourses oppress Tambu, and cause her to reject her body. However, for the purposes of this section I will only discuss *The Book of Not*, in view of the text's overt engagement with the material and psychological effects of colonialism.

Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* engages with the racial discourses which underline colonialism, and the illusions which conceal these discourses. These are a product of the same discursive configuration, but it is useful to separate them for the purposes of discussion and understanding. The lyrics of a Woody Guthrie Song, sung by the girls in the white majority convent school in which most of the novel is set, perfectly represent this illusory production: 'This land is your land. This land is my land.'[13] Whilst Guthrie's original version was a critique of an American capitalistic order, the recontextualised lyrics represent a form of imperialistic propaganda as Gugu Hlongwane has claimed.[14] They support the façade of white minority rule, and are part of an indoctrinating discourse that influences both white and black characters. The image is a powerful one: six black Africans, in a school full of seemingly hundreds of white girls and staff, sing a song of false equality. The gesture, and the illusory promotion of equality, is effective, evidently informing not only the white characters' beliefs but also Tambu's attitudes. The protagonist believes, or chooses to believe, in the myth of equal opportunities. She is fooled by an illusion.

Tambu's belief that she can progress within the colonial system is depicted by her primary objective in the novel: to get onto the school's honour roll and to win the

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[13] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.160.
[14] Gugu Hlongwane, '''A Piece of Person'': Fractured Selves and Colonial Education in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.5 (December 2009), p.455.

annual trophy given to the student with the best grades. It is a familiar objective in view of the hallowed status of education in both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwean life. Tambu's aim is an attempt at 'recognition', as Rosanne Kennedy has noted, but also at belonging in a fractured society.[15] By achieving success, she believes that her name will be inscribed on a copper plate, which will give a sense of permanence to a character suffering from the ambiguity and liminality of the colonial condition. This ambiguity is intensified by the events of the liberation war referenced in the novel, as the sound of bombs are heard at the school, and Tambu witnesses Babamukuru's violent assault as an accused sell-out, which is interrupted when her sister is badly injured after stepping on a mine. Yet Tambu's attempt at mimicry is doomed because she seeks recognition on the terms of the white colonisers. She is a naïve protagonist, and Dangarembga makes this clear. The apartheid conditions of the school demonstrate that Tambu cannot belong because the colour of her skin denies it. A mere six black Africans are crammed into a dormitory meant for four, and are denied access to certain toilets reserved for white students. Various interactions between white school teachers, white pupils, and black Africans reassert the racism which underpins the settler context.

In one episode, the exchange of Nesquik chocolate powder is used to examine the unspoken rules of racial relations, and the normative obeisance expected from the black African students. The exchange is preceded, and motivated, by white student Bougainvillea's fetishisation of racial difference, as she compliments Ntombi's 'fine hands' and 'amazing fingers' and declares these to be a characteristic of 'all of

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[15] Rosanne Kennedy, 'Mortgaged Futures: Trauma, Subjectivity, and the Legacies of Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*', *Studies in the Novel* 40.1 (2008), p.96.

them'.[16] By conceptualising and homogenising the black African students, Bougainvillea strategically performs her power over the black girls, but this is undercut by Ntombi's readiness to ask for, and reach for (but not take), some of Bougainvillea's chocolate powder. Bougainvillea cannot refuse, having just given some to a fellow white pupil, because to do so would be to visualise the implicit racism. She is also threatened by Ntombi's readiness, her 'temerity', to reach for the powder.[17] Unfortunately, the transgression is only partial, as Bougainvillea once more manipulates the racism which underlines the exchange. She condescendingly compares Ntombi's unwillingness to take the powder to the 'guys' who work on her mother's farm and wait for rations. This is emphasised by subsequent repeated dehumanising references to the 'cow'-like eyes of the black students, which reasserts the underlying power disparity.[18] Throughout the exchange, Tambu is notably passive – a part of her yearns for Ntombi to transgress and take the powder, but her prevailing response is one of fear. The whole episode reiterates that Tambu exists in an environment of institutional and interpersonal prejudice, and it is indoctrinated into her by a school system that promotes the concerns of the settler patriarchy. She struggles throughout with a failure of analysis: she believes in the mythical status of whiteness, which is never a reality but merely an idea – a force which subjugates Tambu's mind and body. However, this is produced by discourse. As the protagonist narrator recalls in 'The Underdog', a short story by Barbara Makhalisa, some Africans had been 'fooled into thinking a white skin was a god, never to be challenged'.[19] Few, if any, characters in Zimbabwean fiction better represent this state of mental colonisation than Tambu.

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[16] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.37.
[17] Ibid, p.39.
[18] Ibid, pp.44 and 46.
[19] Barbara Makhalisa*, The Underdog and Other Stories* (Harare: Mambo Press, 1984), p.21.

Tambu remains a mentally colonised protagonist, even after the school trophy is given to a white character with inferior grades. The moment poignantly illustrates the duplicitous nature of the context and education system: a black African has triumphed over a white student despite the huge disparities in number, but that triumph can never be performed. It remains unrecognised, and the education of Africans remains only an illusion of progress and equality maintained by a white administration striving to contain the threat of a subjugated people. Tambu is isolated before and after this moment. She has a combative relationship with her fellow African students, and is involved in a physical fight with a nemesis of sorts – roommate Ntombi, who insults her for her 'love' of Europeans.[20] Ntombi's accusation is seemingly proven true later in the novel by the ridiculous spectacle of Tambu volunteering to help sew items for the soldiers fighting for Rhodesia. Her exaggerated act of mimicry illustrates the extent of her mental colonisation, because she has been taught to reject herself and long for an idealised construction of European whiteness. She adheres to the notion of racial dislocation similarly represented in Marechera's writing, as numerous depictions of abjection and self-hatred, which I will discuss in the final chapter, illustrate. At the end of the novel Tambu remains isolated even in the postcolonial context, which is still defined by racial disparities and the legacies of personal and national trauma.

Tambu's characterisation is a product not merely of what she is taught to think, but how she is taught to think. Her understanding of education conforms principally to a regurgitation of facts and attitudes. Whilst Tambu's cousin Nyasha transgresses

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[20] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.107.

expectations and social norms, the protagonist seems incapable of doing so precisely

because she regurgitates constructed European notions of blackness. The question of

how to think is considered by several Zimbabwean authors, and related to the

discursive construction of Africanness which supports the colonial hegemony. In the

short story 'The Ten Shillings' Charles Mungoshi explores the realities of education

through his protagonist's fruitless search for work in the late colonial period.[21]

Eventually, protagonist Paul, who holds a junior certificate (JC), beats fifteen other

Africans to a job.[22] However, when arriving to begin work it soon becomes clear that

it is not his mind that is required, but his body. Within moments he is reprimanded

by his new boss who drums Paul's chest with a podgy index finger and exclaims:

> I don't want any bloody thinkers here. I want somebody to listen and obey
> orders and do what he's told. Don't tell me you think. I do all the thinking for
> all of you bunheads here…[23]

The moment stages an underlying concern of the settler administration: thinking, in

certain forms at least, is dangerous because it may lead to the repudiation of

oppressive social conditions. Indeed, various colonial histories have illustrated the

importance of ideas and counter-discourses in resistance movements. The

disappointed protagonist leaves the job and goes back to the institution which hired

him to complain, and receives an ostensibly sincere apology by a white manager,

who also gives him ten shillings. Forced by poverty to take the money, the

protagonist seemingly believes in the performance of sincerity, which, whether real

or not, is part of a machinery of emotion and materiality that enables the subjugation

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[21] Charles Mungoshi, 'The Ten Shillings', *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989 [1980]).
[22] A junior certificate was not the highest form of secondary qualification in Southern Rhodesia, but still represented a level of education achieved by only a minority of Africans, whilst even those with higher qualifications struggled to find work.
[23] Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun*, pp.100-101.

of black Rhodesians. By choosing to believe in the sincerity of the gesture, the protagonist also chooses to believe that such a person may one day give him a job. Yet perhaps it is less a question of choosing but rather one of being forced to accept this potentiality, because social normativity and the colonial conditions offer little else. He is trapped by the racial conditions of colonialism and by an education which will likely benefit that system in one way or another. In this regard, he in some ways represents a less exaggerated version of Tambu, as both protagonists struggle to come to terms with the material and discursive limits of colonialism.

## The Violence of Discourse: The Representation of Education in the Writing of Dambudzo Marechera

Dangarembga's representation of mental colonisation, and to an extent Chinodya's, is more restrained and subtle than that of some Zimbabwean writers. Dangarembga gradually expresses Tambu's dislocation and alienation, even if some of Tambu's exaggerated actions and acts of mimicry leave little doubt about the author's intention. The most stylistically contrasting examples are found in the writing of Marechera, who explores mental colonisation throughout his oeuvre. Marechera's representation of mental colonisation, and the educational system which in part produces it, is explicitly violent and related to intersectional societal discourses. This is characteristic of Marechera's writing as he overtly resists and subverts the realities and foundations of oppression which inform his literary output and life. His textual violence responds to the violence of colonialism and other forms of oppression; he unrelentingly forces this brutality into his texts, unwilling to veil its horrors. *The House of Hunger* provides several examples of representative violence, which offer a

means of understanding the stylistic and counter-discursive differences that separate

Marechera from Dangarembga and other Zimbabwean writers. A fitting example

takes place in the short story 'The Writer's Grain', when the protagonist violently

murders a cat using English language canonical texts:

> Bloody cats used to vicious white racist cunts! Shakespeare dazed it. Wilde was wide of the mark…Hardy made it scream like an innocent being tortured. And the *Concise Oxford* drugged it enough for me to raise my foot and crash it once, twice…I couldn't decide to which author or poet to give the privilege of finishing the little shit...These feline shits are so used to being treated better than we blacks…I picked up a volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and bashed the shit to death and then flung it through the window.[24]

The use of texts as weapons indicate the ways in which literature, and education,

contribute to the mental colonisation of the protagonist. Through translated violence,

Marechera also exposes the dehumanising treatment of his protagonist for whom the

cat is not a domesticated pet, but a subject of envy. 'House of Hunger' began with a

dead cat being flung through a window, and this connection is not coincidental but

indicative of the tapestry of ideas that inform Marechera's literary output. They are

part of the same story perhaps – the same cat used as an outlet for the traumas caused

by a form of disempowerment that binds the oppressed subjects together.

The symbolic critique of English literature is paralleled by other explorations of the

colonial education system in Marechera's next two texts, *Black Sunlight* and *The

Black Insider*.[25] Both texts, which are very similar in form, style, and theme,

examine the nature of an education system which resists dissent and promotes the

passivity characterised by Dangarembga's Tambu. In *The Black Insider*, the

protagonist describes the linear and restrictive nature of his education:

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[24] Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993 [1978]), p.110.
[25] Dambudzo Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

> Thoughts that think in straight lines cannot see round corners; the missionaries and teachers saw to that. We were taught to want to go where a straight line goes and to look back over the shoulder to where straight lines come from.[26]

The construction depicts how subjects of colonialism were taught to think, specifically with a constrained linearity which endorsed the established hierarchy. This is demonstrated by Tambu's process of regurgitating facts, which is about accepting, rather than rejecting, ideas. Such thinking is the antithesis of the writing of Dambudzo Marechera, which is marked by insistent digressions and omissions, and jumps forwards and backwards in time. His writing is carnivalesque at points as critics have argued, and he persistently seeks to reject, deconstruct, and at times destroy the hegemonic expectations and ideas forced upon him by colonialism and postcolonial nationalism.[27] The depiction of the cat offers an example of this, as it exists in one story and in another, as an apparent random aside in 'House of Hunger' which can only fully be understood by reading a later short story. Structurally then, Marechera opposes the construction of linearity offered in the extract, which functions as an illusion and not a truth. Form becomes not merely a means of representing content but also a means of rejection and destabilisation which parallels and confirms content.

In *Black Sunlight* Marechera's representation of education is institutional as Mark Stein has argued, and conceived of as part of a discursive terrain.[28] Marechera's

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[26] Marechera, *The Black Insider*, p.51.
[27] For a discussion about Marechera's carnivalesque approach to writing, and its anti-hierarchal implications, see Flora Veit-Wild, 'Carnival and Hybridity in Texts by Dambudzo Marechera and Lesego Rampolokeng', *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, ed. by Anthony Chennells and Flora Veit-Wild (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), pp.93-104.
[28] Mark Stein, '*Black Sunlight*: Exploding Dichotomies – A Language Terrorist at Work', *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, p.65.

concern is with the ways in which institutions dampen individuality by prescribing normative ways of being and thinking:

> All the forces of social and national man have been levelled against that tiny spark within us and seek to snuff it out with types of religion, education, legislation, codes and in the last resort, jails and lunatic asylums.[29]

There is something Foucauldian about this depiction, because all institutions are joined as part of a discursive chain. Each in turn, and through intersections, is concerned with stifling the subject and counter-discourses. Each regurgitates a prior construction, and naturalises that construction, which in the context of European colonialism is the superiority of one race over another, and the right of that 'organism to [live] on and at the expense of another'.[30] It is more than this too, and the intersections of normativity are complex, as Marechera's writing and melding of heteronormativity and colonialism demonstrates. But it is the institutional distrust which is telling, and indicative of a poststructural response to normative discourses and institutions, which Marechera resists through both content and form. *Black Sunlight* continues the assault on education by encouraging a parallel between schooling and prison, which reinvokes an institutional connection. As the protagonist sits in a classroom, with his head being 'jammed full with ideas', he looks through a window and observes prisoners dressed in khaki standing in a line next to an armed guard carrying a rawhide whip.[31] The comparison between the prison outside and the school inside is reinforced when the protagonist declares that his backside hurts. In this moment, the implied whipping of the prisoners is compared to the caning of the

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[29] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.66.
[30] Marechera, *The Black Insider,* pp.45-46.
[31] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.17.

students, suggesting the punishing authoritarianism of both institutions.[32] The

soldiers of the prison are then transported inside by the narrator protagonist:

> A truckload of soldiers roared past...they were there in the classroom with us,
> marshalling facts, categorizing, reciting, and absorbing the knowledge
> handed down through the ages. All these meanings that had a hard and
> unyielding face! How did one escape?[33]

The walls of the prison become the walls of the school, and of ideas. The critique of

institutions extends to a logic which defines the limits of thinking, of discourse, and

therefore of materiality across time. This educational system creates mentally

colonised subjects, such as Dangarembga's Tambu, but it also creates her oppressors

because the white colonial subjects are similarly exposed to a dominant discourse

which informs their social spaces and intersections. They may be empowered, but

are nonetheless socialised into differential roles which are predicated on an illusion

of racial difference.

Searching for a Negated Self: Language, Conflict, and Hybridity in the Writing of
Marechera

It is impossible to explore the nature of education in Southern Rhodesia without

discussing the role of language. After all, English was the language of education.

Missionaries taught and preached in English, and English was imposed throughout

the settler context. The pervasive nature of English in various postcolonial contexts,

especially among the wealthier classes, testifies to the extent of the colonisation of

language. Accordingly, the English language has remained a site of contestation in

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, p.21.

the postcolonial world, inextricable from the histories of exploitation it supported

and the project of cultural imperialism. The cost of displacing language is perhaps

best expressed through its importance: language is the primary means of

understanding and documenting one's world, and ideas are embedded in the use and

relativity of words. To displace a language then was to replace the essential tools of

communication and definition, whilst demonstrating the power and reach of

colonialism. English was imposed with violence in Africa, with the mandatory use of

English at school supported by strong disciplinary practices for those speaking local

languages. For example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o has discussed how Kenyans who

accidentally spoke Gikuyu at school were not only caned, but forced to carry around

a metal plate inscribed with messages such as 'I AM A DONKEY', or 'I AM

STUPID'.[34] In this respect, the use of language was not only policed physically but

mentally too, in view of the humiliating and dehumanising spectacle referenced. By

provoking shame, the story provides a micro example of the interpersonal practices

which replicated and enforced a discourse of inferiority that relegated African

culture and produced sensations of cultural alienation.

The imposition of English at school meant that the language of education, as

Thiong'o has argued, was divorced from the spoken language of home.[35] Children

were disassociated from their social and familial environment through the

displacement of language, whilst simultaneously changing this environment,

resulting in what Thiong'o describes as 'colonial alienation'.[36] A fissure was

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[34] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p.290.
[35] Ibid, p.294.
[36] Ibid.

therefore created between those who understood English and those who did not, which would have impacted on the cross-generation familial unit essential to social organisation and non-institutional education. Such disjunctures are frequently explored in Zimbabwean literature, often through an account of the return of an educated son from the city to his rural based family. These narratives rarely focus precisely on the role of language, but rather consider spatial and economic changes viewed through antithetical readings of urban and rural environments.[37] Yet Marechera's 'House of Hunger' provides a fitting example of the role of language as an instigator of the familial and cultural disconnections which accompanied economic transformation in Southern Rhodesia. This occurs when the mentally disoriented protagonist accidently speaks to his mother in English, who hits him before exclaiming:

> How dare you speak in English to me...You know I don't understand it, and if you think because you're educated...' She hit me again. 'I'm not speaking in Eng...I began, but stopped as I suddenly realised that I was talking to her in English.[38]

The protagonist's inability to realise that he is speaking in English demonstrates his successful assimilation into bilingualism. His disorientation expresses the extent of his mental colonisation and cultural conflict. The protagonist's reaction to this moment reiterates his conflict: he collects his English text books and rips them to shreds. He then purchases blank books and copies out the notes of his friend. The action represents the paradox of his position: he is forced to learn, and must learn English for his advancement but it alienates him from his African cultural identity. His act of destroying and writing again is masochistic, as an attempted unbecoming

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[37] Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* offers a representative example of this type of narrative (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1999).
[38] Marechera, *The House of Hunger,* p.13.

which is denied by the necessity of learning and subscribing to this articulation of cultural imperialism. When the father returns from work he punches the protagonist, and in the process both reiterates and supersedes the mother's earlier slaps in highly gendered terms, emphasising the son's alienation from his parents.

There is a tendency, which is overly apparent in related criticism, to read Marechera autobiographically. I am reluctant to endorse autobiographical approaches for fear of subjectivising readings and blurring writer and narrator in the search of prescribed conclusions. This is especially relevant to Marechera because so many of his representations express or expose paradoxical ideas and demand multiple readings. Yet autobiographical readings should not be cast aside in relation to Marechera either, because he so self-evidently manipulates autobiography in his writing. Characters are called Dambudzo and Marechera, and autobiographical moments are played out and manipulated in his stories. The autobiographical relation of Marechera's prose then is a topic to be approached with caution and an awareness of the writer's readiness to collapse self, fact, and fiction. I raise this point now, because certain comments and stories about Marechera facilitate an understanding of the relation between his texts and his experience of a culturally dislocating and alienating colonial process. For example, in an interview with the Dutch journalist Alle Lansu, Marechera described his relationship with the English language in terms of distrust. He acknowledged that it offered a potential for escape via the education system, but that he, by learning English, was self-consciously 'a keen accomplice and student' in his own mental colonisation.[39] Such ambivalence permeates his

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[39] Dambudzo Marechera, 'Slow Brain Death can only be Cured by a Literary Shock Treatment', interviewed by Alle Lansu, *A Source Book*, pp.3-4.

fiction, and, of the many examples that could be selected, one passage taken from 'House of Hunger' is perhaps the most representative of this idea:

> It was like this: English is my second language, Shona my first. When I talked it was in the form of an interminable argument, one side of which was always expressed in English and the other side always in Shona. At the same time I would be aware of myself as something indistinct but separate from both cultures. I felt gagged by this absurd contest between Shona and English.[40]

The description stresses a relationship of conflict. The protagonist's disconnection from both Shona and English culture implies a sense of 'colonial alienation' and powerlessness. He occupies an in-between space of ambiguity. Marechera is pessimistic about the possibilities of transcending this state in his writing and life, and he does not echo the views of some who support forms of cultural reclamation or describe an authenticity which predates colonisation. However, as Laurice Taitz has remarked, the narrator protagonist in 'House of Hunger' still searches 'for a definitive sense of self', even whilst rejecting discourses which promote notions of authentic belonging or singular identity.[41] The 'Hunger' referenced in the title to Marechera's short story collection perhaps refers to the search for belonging, as a response to the rootlessness which characterises Marechera's conception of the colonial condition.

Throughout Marechera's body of work notions of rootlessness, hybridity, and loss are reinvoked in various ways. *Black Sunlight* begins with the protagonist hanging and 'swinging' upside down, lamenting the fruitlessness of his search for his 'true people' with 'Europe...crammed together with Africa, Asia and America. Squashed

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[40] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.30.
[41] Laurice Taitz, 'Knocking on the Door of the ''House of Hunger'': Fracturing Narratives and Disordering Identity', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.24.

and jammed together in my dustbin head'.[42] The physical swinging parallels an

internal oscillation between partial identities, and stresses a ceaseless longing for

completeness. There is a sense that something has been lost – removed by the

unequal melding of cultures. This notion of loss is explicitly rendered in Helen's

conceptualisation of identity in *The Black Insider*:

> You know about changelings? she said. I feel them all the time as though we
> were all changelings and not exactly what we appear to be – what I've been
> trying to draw all these days. There's so much missing inside where things
> ought not to be missing as though something indefinable was taken out of us
> long ago.[43]

'Changeling' functions in this passage as symptomatic of the ambiguity of the

colonial condition. Helen grasps at a form of imitation, of an incomplete replication

which invokes Homi Bhabha's conception of the 'partial' or 'virtual' colonial subject

created by mimicry.[44] It is a manifestation of hybridity conceived in terms of

domination and loss. The colonial context is undeniable, not only because it informs

the text and Marechera's oeuvre in implicit and explicit terms, but because Helen's

reference to 'something indefinable' being taken out 'long ago' traces this cultural

dislocation back to the colonial encounter. This sensation of loss is a direct result of

the material processes of colonialism, and of a discursive production which not only

promotes the inferiority of black Africans, but negates identity. The ambiguity and

conflict is enhanced by another literary motif in Marechera's writing, which is also

found in Yvonne Vera's narratives: doubling. Whilst doubling in Vera's writing is

always gendered, and related to the double colonisation of women because of

gendered and colonial oppression, in Marechera's writing it is principally used to

explore mental colonisation and colonial discursivity. In *Black Sunlight*, in which

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[42] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, pp.3-4.
[43] Marechera, *The Black Insider,* p.137.
[44] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p.123.

various articulations of protagonist Christian in 'Devil's End' explore a nightmarish vision of schizophrenic trauma, one statement epitomises a prevailing concern in Marechera's writing: 'You never quite know if they invented you or you invented them'.[45] It is a cliché perhaps to consider postcolonial fiction as a response to the question: 'Who am I'? But for so many early postcolonial Zimbabwean authors the search for a fixed identity remained a prevailing concern, even if some of these authors rejected notions of authentic and singular identities.

The schizophrenic contestations in Marechera's writing express various conflicts, whether it be in response to rigid nationalistic identity discourses, or the oppressive expression of gender normativity. Throughout, however, there is a struggle with racial oppression directly related to colonialism. This is particularly apparent in the other short stories which constitute Marechera's *The House of Hunger* collection, beginning with 'Burning in the Rain'. The protagonist struggles with a perception of himself as an 'ape in the mirror', because he has internalised the racist European discourses which stressed his innate atavistic savagery as a black African.[46] After seeing himself as an ape the protagonist begins to suffer from blackouts, waking up after one episode to find himself painted with whitewash and wearing a European wig. The rejection of one's own skin and constructed racial identity is repeated in another short story in *The House of Hunger*, 'Black Skin What Mask', in which the central character repeatedly washes himself as he attempts to 'scrub the blackness out of his skin'.[47] The channelling of Fanon in the story's title illustrates Marechera's interest in the psychological traumas caused by colonial subjugation, which some

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[45] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.61.
[46] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.83.
[47] Ibid, p.93.

critics have argued is largely what *The House of Hunger* is about.[48] Such

exaggerated acts of self-hatred and abjection, which are commonly found in the

writing of Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga, bind the physical and the mental.

The body is rendered abject and is rejected, because it entraps and produces social

disenfranchisement. High sales of skin bleaching lotions in Zimbabwe and other

African contexts, which are referenced in so many texts discussed in this study,

testify to the physical and psychological legacies of colonial era racism, and its

differing but continuing manifestations today.[49]

The conception of mimicry, of attempting to erase a conceived identity via an

imitation of the white colonising European, stresses the effects of colonial

discursivity on the protagonist in 'Burning in the Rain'. By using a mirror to engage

with this idea, Marechera also toys with a relationship between Self and Other which

is subverted when the mirror is broken. The smashing of the mirror has been read by

Akiko Mizoguchi as a metaphoric representation of identity which is continually

fragmented into multiple selves, undermining 'the supposed notion of an ''authentic''

or ''unified'' self'.[50] Whilst this reading correlates with Marechera's desire to free

identity from unifying discourses, it ignores the protagonist's state of mental

colonisation and his struggle because he internalises racist discourses. He is depicted

as powerless in the story, and it is notably his partner, Margaret, who smashes the

mirror. The protagonist's inability to do this himself, to personally reject the Self-

and-Other binary, testifies to the psychological consequences of his colonial

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[48] For example, see Maurice Vambe, 'The Instabilities of National Allegory: The Case of Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and *Black Sunlight*', *Current Writing* 13.1 (2001), p.71.
[49] For examples, see *The House of Hunger*, p.23 and Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p.56.
[50] Akiko Mizoguchi, 'Monkey Unbound? Dambudzo Marechera, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Journey to the West', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33.2 (September 2007), p.67.

condition. Conversely, that Margaret is able to do so also invites a gendered reading.

The reason for this is ambiguous, but it is perhaps fitting to argue that the colonial

male is differently afflicted by gender discourses which emphasise the emasculatory

consequences of colonialism. That the protagonist begins seeing the ape in the mirror

at 'the threshold of manhood' supports this reading, as his reluctance to embrace his

adult male identity perhaps expresses the impossibility of acting as a man in a

society ravaged by the discursive and material effects of colonial rule.[51] Whilst this

may be a consequence of colonialism, Marechera's story also implies a critique of

intersectional heteronormative constructs, and notions of gender which promote

singular conceptions of masculinity that require a man to hold socially embedded

authority.

Moving beyond Binaries: Marechera's Nationalistic Confrontations

Marechera's prevailing attempts to represent the violent and devastating effects and

legacies of colonialism do not have an optimistic conclusion. He does not celebrate

independence as an end to domination, not merely because of the legacies described

in his writing but because forms of oppression continue and are engendered in the

post-independent space. A notion of postcolonial pessimism began my introduction

through the depiction of the cannibalistic Chief, which was intended to illustrate

Marechera's readiness to parody racist stereotypes whilst simultaneously critiquing a

heteronormative, and, as Veit-Wild has commented, 'nationalist' celebration of a

fictional past.[52] The complex conflation of the worst abomination of Orientalist and

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[51] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.85.
[52] Flora Veit-Wild, 'Carnival and Hybridity', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.95.

nationalist strategies combines, as Gerald Gaylard has remarked, past and present,

suggesting that the antithetical and competing discursive configurations have a

comparable basis.[53] An explicit parallel between a precolonial vision of the past and

the post-independent space is represented by another description of Marechera's:

'Was there a difference between the chief on his skull-carpentered throne and the

general who even now had grappled all power to himself in our new and twentieth-

century image?'[54]

Marechera's appropriation of a racist stereotype conflates the mythology of colonial

discourse with the mythology of the postcolonial. This inter-relation brings to the

fore the political processes which necessarily impact on discursive formations.

Marechera's counter-discursive strategy targets the basis of the 'twentieth-century

image' which correlates only to a constructed reality, defined by an autocratic use of

power which Marechera resists. The anachronistic and digressionary nature of

Marechera's prose structurally conflates past and future in his writing, suggesting his

desire to destabilise any linear and segregated conception of history and historical

processes, whether they inform colonial or postcolonial identity discourses.

Accordingly, as the past bleeds into the future and as the future bleeds into the past,

Marechera persistently rejects the hope offered by the post-independent

administration in a society ravaged by the material, psychological, and discursive

legacies of colonialism. His post-independent pessimism is also invoked through

recurring images of 'gut rot' and abortion. Anna-Leena Toivanen has rightly posited

that the abject notion of 'gut rot' expresses a disillusionment with having lost not

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[53] Gerald Gaylard, 'Marechera's Politic Body: The Menippeanism of a ''Lost Generation'' in Africa?', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.76.
[54] *Black Sunlight*, p.13.

only the past but the future also, and is suggestive of a festering intangible trauma which Marechera returns to repeatedly.[55] Abortion, which is most strongly represented through Marie's persistent miscarriages in *Black Sunlight*, invokes the family in the rejection of the future. This specific image may be related to the heteronormative potentialities of nationalisms based around 'traditional' gendered familial roles, which are rejected in the act of articulating a deeply physical response to mental trauma. Once more, colonial and postcolonial discourse are conflated. This is not an attempt to straightforwardly compare colonial and postcolonial contexts because they are so clearly and markedly different, but to demonstrate a discursive parallel. A logic of binarism, and of inclusion and exclusion prevails, even if it is differently articulated, whilst the domination of heteronormativity continues, although its intersectional relationships altered with the end of colonialism. By attacking the mythological nationalist configuration of post-independent identity and invoking parallels across time, Marechera suggests that independence was not truly independence for all, as the heteronormative conditions and racial violence of the 1980s demonstrated.

Marechera's pessimism about the post-independent space, and the individualistic and abstract nature of his prose, clashed with a form of post-independent ideology in African literature which emphasised the didactic role of the author, and an associated notion of community. Chinua Achebe represents this view in 'The Novelist as Teacher', arguing that the 'writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration'.[56] Writers were expected to align themselves with a task

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[55] Anna-Leena Toivanen, 'Grotesque Intimacies: Embodiment and the Spirit of Violence in ''House of Hunger''', *Reading Marechera*, ed. by Grant Hamilton (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013), p.43.
[56] Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, p.103.

of communal healing, as represented again later in the essay through Achebe's

advocation of the need to 'help society regain belief in itself and put away the

complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement'.[57] This politicisation of

communality had binary and restrictive manifestations, as illustrated by Thiong'o's

resistance to writing in English. [58] The nationalistic configuration of identity was

positioned in opposition to an individualistic European idea. The binary may have

been inverted, and engaged in differing relationships of power, but it subsisted in

form: Zimbabwean/African and European identity were separated and constructed as

antithetical. To be African was to support the communal project of reconstruction,

and to fail to support it was to align oneself with the colonising European. Criticisms

of Marechera's writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s highlighted this logic of

opposition and its consequences. Marechera was labelled as bourgeois and elitist and

attacked for influences identified as European. His postmodern style was a particular

area of contention, as it clashed with a contemporaneous realist trend in African

literature.[59] Marechera has referenced the nature of this critique in an interview with

Alle Lansu, remarking: 'They considered [my writing] as an indulgence, they said

that I must write socialist realism, write about things which will build our people'.[60]

Marechera's marginalisation by such narratives stresses the authoritative capacity of

postcolonial cultural nationalism, which, like the more aggressive cultural

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[57] Ibid, p.105.

[58] For Thiong'o's discussion of the use of English and African languages in African literature, see 'The Language of African Literature', Ibid, pp.285-303.

[59] Juilet Okonkwo's review of *The House of Hunger* epitomises the reductive criticisms of Marechera's writing. She attacks his 'decadent avant-garde European attitude' and argues that 'Africa, in which years of expectation are beginning to flower into full promise, cannot afford the luxury of such distorted and self-destructive "sophistication" from her writers.' Anna-Leena Toivanen '"At the Receiving End of Severe Misunderstanding": Dambudzo Marechera's Representations of Authorship', *Research in African Literatures* 42.1 (Spring 2011), p.21; and see also Senda Wa Kurayera's report on the unpublished 'A Bowl for Shadows', which criticises it, and *The Black Insider*, for a lack of social relevance, and their persistent abstractions. Flora Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, pp.203-204.

[60] Marechera, *A Source Book*, p.34.

imperialism of the colonial period, sought to prioritise specific forms of subjectivity and enforce normative identities. That critics have credited Marechera with breaking the 'iron grip' of realism in the African novel not only demonstrates his considerable influence on the literary terrain, but illustrates how his individualistic style predicated, or anticipated, a postmodern African literary scene which became increasingly accepting of a hybrid and heterogeneous approach to writing.[61] Yet the impact of African cultural nationalism has not lost relevance, and Marechera's interrogation of these debates and his resistance to realism are crucial to understanding Marechera and his socio-historical mien.

Marechera explores nationalistically defined artistic expectations through the story of Stephen and Edmund in 'House of Hunger', as Katja Kellerer has observed.[62] Stephen represents the nationalistic subject, believing in the distinctive nature of African writing and experience, and rejecting foreign influence as un-African. He resents Edmund, who contrastingly admires foreign writers and music, and, in this regard, has autobiographical links to Marechera. Eventually, Stephen's bullying causes Edmund to retaliate, as he challenges the larger Stephen to a fight, in part because expectations of masculinity necessitate it. When the victorious Stephen emerges from the challenge his shirt is stained with Edmund's blood, which 'seemed in outline to be a map of Rhodesia' to the protagonist.[63] This representation of Rhodesia both refers to the internal divisions produced by the events of the liberation

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[61] Bill Ashcroft, 'Menippean Marechera', *Reading Marechera*, ed. by Grant Hamilton (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013), p.77.

[62] Katja Kellerer, '"House of Fools": Madness and the State of the Nation in Marechera's "'the House of Hunger'" and Ignatius Mabasa's *Mapenzi*', *Moving Spirit: The Legacy of Dambudzo Marechera in the 21st Century*, ed. by Julie Cairnie and Dobrota Pucherova (Zurich and Berlin: LIT VERLAG, 2009), p.150.

[63] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.65.

war, and implies that authoritative nationalist cultural discourses risk furthering the bloodshed which characterised the 1970s.

The anticipation of a future historical moment had come to pass by the time Marechera had finished writing *Mindblast*, which, like *The House of Hunger*, examines nationalist discourses and the role of the creative persona through a thinly veiled critique of the increasingly authoritative and corrupt Zimbabwean administration.[64] The second section of *Mindblast* begins with a prologue which uses an abstract allegory to criticise oppressive systems of government and cultural imperialism. It is hardly necessary to reiterate the obvious autobiographical links, but they are played out in the story through the narratives of protagonists Buddy and Tony. Artist Tony's sculptures are criticised for their incomprehensibility and perhaps Marechera ironically channels this critique through his abstract prologue, which once more uses literary form to resist the logic of a restrictive discourse. Tony's sculptures are also found to be 'not of the people', or reconcilable with a national historic tradition determined by the invisible mechanisms of the state.[65] Buddy's work is similarly denounced, as his poems are rejected by publishers as 'capitalist trash', which have 'nothing to do with our socialist purposes', and which will not 'uplift the people'.[66] The repeated references to the people illustrate the ways in which a homogeneous label denies the potential for individual choice and autonomy. It promotes a logic of binarism, rejecting the rights of Tony and Buddy to belong because they do not subscribe to the normative framework defined by the state.

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[64] Dambudzo Marechera, *Mindblast; or The Definitive Buddy* (Harare: The College Press, 1986 [1984]).
[65] Ibid, p.59.
[66] Ibid, p.52.

Marechera's richly autobiographical criticisms of censorship and nationalism illustrate his personal struggles with marginalisation in Zimbabwe. His work, which invokes sensations of ambiguity, hybridity, and liminality in both colonial and postcolonial depictions, invites the exploration and deconstruction of a prevailing logic of binarism. This logic renders an inside and outside, a normative and non-normative, with clear psychological ramifications for those falling outside of the normative parameters. Marechera's self-conception as an outsider in 'The African Writer's Experience of European Literature' demonstrates his prevailing conceptualisation of his liminality: 'I have been an outsider in my biography, in my country's history'.[67] This depiction of being outside of the country's history in part articulates the powerlessness of the colonial subject, and a vulnerability in the face of a violently alienating colonial process. However, it also depicts Marechera's literal distance from historical events as an 'exile' of the Zimbabwean intelligentsia studying in England during the fall of Rhodesia. As David Pattison has remarked, Marechera was criticised along with other 'exiles' for being absent during the fight for independence, and this struggle with the reality and connotations of exile is a theme in Marechera's work.[68] This is most prominent in *The Black Insider*, which recollects the difficult experiences of the narrator protagonist, named Marechera, in exile in London. The protagonist laments the 'racial colour-conscious' climate and the artificiality of his hybrid and diasporic condition, which he likens to 'feeling like hippopotami...doped with injections of English culture'.[69] His conception invokes a prevailing theme of incomplete identity, and the attempts to find a sense of belonging

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[67] Dambudzo Marechera, 'The African Writer's Experience of European Literature', *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, p.188.
[68] David Pattison, 'Call No Man Happy: Inside *The Black Insider*, Marechera's Journey to Become a Writer?' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20.2 (June 1994), p.236.
[69] Marechera, *The Black Insider*, p.87.

which is also implied by the protagonist's struggle with language: 'I still speak English and sound quite foreign to myself'.[70] The protagonist's exclusion is pronounced because he is also rejected by other exiles, as demonstrated through an altercation with a former friend, who alleges that he 'hate[s] being black'.[71] This illustrates his exclusion from a specific articulation of black identity because of his Europeanisation, and simultaneously Marechera's rejection of such 'racial taxonomies' which confer damaging specific and rigid identities, as Chennells and Veit-Wild have argued.[72]

In *The Black Insider* the character of the 'African Schweik' is also used to explore the consequences of exile and marginalisation. He suffers from both mental and physical assaults, as he is beaten in one episode and rhetorically asked: 'Can't you see you can't reject everything and everybody?'[73] The autobiographical dimensions again appear clear, and can be related to Marechera's own destructive and at times nihilistic prose, which seeks to destroy but not to promote any firm sense of belonging or identity. Following the assault, the Schweik considers the conflict between his own ideology and the collective national one: 'I ponder every day where I should stay; whether, solidly in my own mind or in the real Africa of give and take'.[74] Yet he conquers his conflict, remaining resolute in his refusal to accept a political position which denies choice:

> But to play their game to the grimy end of definitions and counter-definitions of Africanness requires a zest and stamina I do not have. Only one path remains, insider, through the hardy water of faceless oases toward the harsh

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[70] Ibid, p.35.
[71] Ibid, pp.93-4.
[72] Anthony Chennells and Flora Veit-Wild discuss Marechera's rejection of racial taxonomies of all kinds, and therefore his refusal to 'claim peculiar merits for blackness'. 'Introduction: The Man Who betrayed Africa?', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.xi.
[73] Marechera, *The Black Insider*, p.102.
[74] Ibid, p.102.

and arid aurora where love and hope are dimmed only to their unrefusing core.[75]

This refusal reiterates Marechera's own desire to reject identity politics, and binary definitions which subsist in the postcolonial, whilst accepting that this choice will not be without personal struggle. Indeed, the violence endured by the Schweik, and the death and destruction which ends *The Black Insider*, emphasise the necessity or inevitability of this personal martyrdom and Marechera's rejection of homogeneous discourses.

The chapter so far has generally concentrated on forms of victimisation. Writing by Dangarembga, Mungoshi, and Marechera has emphasised the violence of colonisation and later postcolonial forms, illustrating the continued oppression of the individual. However, as I have briefly referenced at points, this is not something merely accepted by the writers. The acts of victimisation depicted are representative, intended to reject modes of domination through the politicisation of the consequences of these modes. Yet none of these writers, and most especially Marechera, resist merely by detailing the consequences of victimisation. Marechera is complex in his resistance, and it is his complexity which renders him so pivotal to my research. He is digressionary, manipulates time and space, and plays with the relationship of author and narrator in the act of subverting contemporaneous literary expectations. Violence surges through his texts and punctuates narratives in occasionally digressionary accounts, producing a disarming anxiety intended, ostensibly, to communicate the uncertainty of life in a brutal and dehumanising colonial context. There is no rigid structure or plot, and in some ways his writing

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[75] Ibid, pp.102-103.

invokes an orality which hints at a pre-colonial mode of story-telling that resists linearity. Marechera was unique in Zimbabwean literature, at least until Yvonne Vera began publishing in the early 1990s. Her work also manipulates time, jumping backwards and forwards in a digressionary fashion which amplifies a specific orality in her work. She also engages with intersectional discourses and like Marechera seeks to show the oppressive nature, and deconstruct the illusory basis, of colonial and heteronormative modes. Vera's work is also explicitly violent. Her writing represents rape, abortion, mutilation, assault, and murder. Neither Vera nor Marechera seek to contain painful realities but force them onto the page and into a counter-discourse that was historically protected by censorship and a culture of discretion which determined what could and could not be said. I will introduce Vera more thoroughly later, but her presence is important as a means of illustrating Marechera's influence on Zimbabwean literature, and of showing the importance of literature as a counter-discourse which resists not merely through content but also through form. Through his stylistic choices, Marechera paved the way for the writing of Vera.

Bhabha has emphasised the reconstitutive capacity of the hybrid and/or diasporic subject caught in the 'in-between' spaces, or 'interstices' produced by hybrid alterity.[76] Whilst no individual can be free of restrictive discourses, the circumstances of liminality may engender a different perspective and possibility for the outsider looking in. This notion has informed discussions of hybridity in postcolonial literature and readings of Marechera's writing. For example, Grant Hamilton has argued that Marechera, by virtue of his personal circumstances, was freed from the

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[76] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

constraints of political ideology, which enabled him to say what can be said, rather than 'what ought to be said'.[77] This idea is similarly espoused by Elleke Boehmer, who has remarked that the state of exile - and Marechera is a persistent exile - often turns 'third world writers' into 'vocal interrogator[s] of nationalist doctrine'.[78] Whilst personal circumstance cannot engender a consistent political state, one autobiographical episode from Marechera's time in exile in England emphasises the reconstitutive possibilities of liminal identity so often explored in his writing. In 1980 Marechera celebrated Zimbabwean independence at the African Centre in London garbed in the full riding attire of an English gentleman.[79] It was a characteristic act from an individual acutely aware of the effects of performance, and in this context irony. Marechera's sartorial choice lampooned a certain imperial regalia, and an image of English gentlemanliness subverted by the author's recontextualised mimicry.[80] Yet Marechera also distanced himself from the patriotic moment by his clothing choice. These identity constructs – the imperial image and Zimbabwean nationalism, were forced on Marechera. He was a victim of a fracturing and racist colonial process, and was forcibly marginalised because of his self-conscious refusal to adhere to the conventions and identity prescribed for him by postcolonial nationalism. His location in this in-between space perhaps engendered the reconstitutive and resistant urge which permeates all his texts. However, the aforementioned episode, despite the amusement and shock it surely created, also melancholically invokes a question which haunts Marechera's highly autobiographical prose: who is the writer beneath the performance of mimicry?

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[77] Grant Hamilton, 'Introduction: Marechera & the Outside', *Reading Marechera*, p.3.
[78] Elleke Boehmer, 'The Nation as Metaphor in Contemporary African Literature', *English Studies in Transition: Papers from the Inaugural Conference of the European Society for the Study of English,* ed. by Piero Boitani and Robert Clark (London: Routledge, 1993), p.322.
[79] Flora Veit-Wild, 'Carnival and Hybridity', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.93.
[80] Veit-Wild, among others, has similarly argued for the dual possibilities of this act. Ibid.

The question of who Marechera was is to an extent an unwelcome question, because the 'who' would necessarily be a construct. It would be a search for an answer, a fixed identity, and for permanence. The search itself is therefore problematic, as an attempt to prescribe and constitute a fixed identity that would restrict in one way or another. This is central to Marechera's literary project, which resists acts of constitution and maintains a gap between representation and truth, and interpretation and meaning. His philosophy, if a philosophy can be said to exist, resides in rejection, and is partly characterised through one line from Susan, a central protagonist in *Black Sunlight*: 'The impulse to destroy, that's all we have left'.[81] It is tempting to render Susan the mouthpiece of Marechera's literary impulses, given her anarchic constitution and the digressionary violence which she engages in, and which permeates every Marechera text. She is also Marechera's most transgressive female protagonist, and is notably a perpetrator and not a victim, illustrating Marechera's readiness to engage with both powerful and victimised women in his writing. Susan is a figure of contemporaneity and fracture. She rejects both the past and the family, exclaiming that 'Each generation has to kill the one that precedes it', dismissing in the process the restraints of family and tradition which defined contemporaneous nationalisms.[82] Marechera's readiness to define his own approach as 'short-circuit[ing] people's traditions and rituals' once more suggests a comparable basis and the author's own contemporaneity.[83] Yet, Susan has a singularity of vision and means of resistance which is notably less complex than Marechera's own literary vision. Whilst Marechera destroys and resists, he also

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[81] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.50.
[82] Ibid, p.47.
[83] Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, p.40.

deconstructs, as I will discuss later, as a means of provoking the instability, impermanence, and illusory nature of normative constructs. He remains steadfast in his refusal to 'build anew' as Tinashe Mushakavanhu has argued, and induces questions and anxieties but not answers.[84] If answers or hope are to be found in Marechera's writing they come in the form of deconstruction and at times destruction; in the death of the monolith, the normative, and the oppressive there is a hope of something new. Marechera does not describe these potential future conditions or realities, because to do so would be to construct, to promote something with potentially rigid dimensions, which would enforce a particular way of being or existing. Rather, Marechera merely rejects. Criticisms of him for doing so perhaps miss the point. Marechera rejects because it is necessary, and this rejection, this deconstruction and at times destruction, is invariably political.

Gendering Colonialism: The Emasculating Problem

Notions and depictions of emasculation pervade Marechera's writing and Zimbabwean fiction. The use of emasculation in Marechera's work perhaps appears paradoxical: the author subverts heteronormativity and particularly restrictive masculine modes but also genders colonialism at points. As I will discuss in later chapters, this is in part a product of the trap of heteronormativity and of attempting to resist a discourse which is constitutive. Yet this emasculatory notion demands explanation, contextualisation, and an awareness of the ways in which it both reiterates and disturbs a male centred social vision. *The House of Hunger* explores

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[84] Tinashe Mushakavanhu, 'A Brotherhood of Misfits: The Literary Anarchism of Dambudzo Marechera & Percy Bysshe Shelley', *Reading Marechera*, p.16; and Marechera: 'As you know, I provide no answers, except only a rigorous re-evaluation, especially of Western intellectual thought'. Flora Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, p.31.

this emasculatory conception, both through the title novella and in the short stories

which complete the collection. Two of these stories engage with a theme of adultery

which links individual familial infidelity with the national condition. In 'Thought-

tracks in the Snow' the protagonist narrator's wife is involved in an openly

adulterous affair with a Nigerian man. The wife describes her lover as 'a man, a real

man. Not an impotent bastard like you', referring to an impotency implied by the

declaration earlier in the story that the protagonist and his wife had only had sex for

the first five days of their marital life.[85] Notably the Nigerian man is from an

independent country, and the implied connection between the national context and

masculinity becomes explicit when the Nigerian taunts the protagonist after striking

him: 'Fucking Rhodesians – get independence first, then perhaps you'll learn how to

fight'.[86] Through the invocation of the colonial context the circumstances of white

minority rule are linked to the loss of traditional signifiers of masculinity, in this case

the ability to fight and to fuck. The protagonist is unable to do either, and is rendered

a manifestation of national embarrassment and emasculation.

The complex relation between colonialism and sexuality is explored in depth in 'The

Writer's Grain', the longest of the short stories in *The House Hunger*. The unnamed

protagonist struggles with the appearance of a double, depicted as his twin brother,

who threatens the protagonist's perception of reality and publicly embarrasses him.

His embarrassment evokes a sensation of powerlessness and helplessness which

permeates the narrative. The double is a consistent manifestation of this, as an

uncontrollable aspect of self, related to forms of double consciousness produced by

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[85] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.146.
[86] Ibid, p.147.

the disparate relation of coloniser and colonised. Powerlessness is not only rendered

psychological but physical also. In one episode the protagonist loses control of his

body, beginning with the ability to speak as his throat feels 'packed with cement'

that is being 'ramm[ed]' down by the double's comments.[87] It is tempting again to

read this biographically in view of Marechera's struggle with a stammer in

childhood, although the inability to speak ostensibly transcends this incidental fact

and is better related to the discursive conditions which deny colonial subjects a

voice.[88] The loss of speech is followed by uncontrollable laughter, as onlookers stare

sympathetically at the double, before the protagonist's nostrils flare and he begins to

bray like a donkey. His helpless physical reaction has a clear dehumanising

manifestation, and compares with Thiong'o's recollection about how those who

spoke English at school were forced to wear a sign stating: 'I am a Donkey'. The

laughter is particularly significant, as the protagonist is the subject of the mockery of

others and his own, as he is dislocated from, and loses control of, his physical self.

The emasculating possibilities of the dehumanising and alienating narrative are

suggested by ongoing references to sex and sexuality, which culminate in adultery

after the protagonist interrupts his wife having sex with a student named Marechera.

A physical fight follows between the protagonist, his double, his talking dog, his

wife, and the student. The peculiar fight is sexually violent: the wife grabs and

squeezes the protagonist by his 'balls', and the dog bites the wife in her 'rump',

'breasts', and between the legs.[89] Sexual organs are targeted throughout whilst the

protagonist tries to kiss his wife on one occasion and is punched in response, before

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[87] Ibid, p.107.

[88] Marechera has discussed his stammer in interviews. For an example, see Alle Lansu interview, *A Source Book*, pp.47-48.

[89] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.114.

the student Marechera 'mounts' the wife in the middle of the melee.[90] The fusion of

sex and violence combines gender performance and adultery with the experience of

psychological trauma produced by colonialism. At its centre is a complex conception

of an emasculating colonial process told from the perspective of the colonised man,

which largely negates the figure of the wife. Like so many of Marechera's stories, it

is not merely a response to colonialism but to the post-independent space as well.

Various references to the 'Brave New World' ironically invoke a European textual

canon in the act of articulating a dystopian future marked by forms of sexual

violence which saturate Marechera's texts.

Renditions of history and the colonial encounter in 'House of Hunger' also

communicate an emasculating perspective which links individual experience and the

national state. The protagonist's fruitless search for 'heroes' in the narrative is

motivated by the effects of defeat, invasion, and subjugation on his psyche. His

history is stained by the memory and legacy of colonialism, and he is unable to

conceive of a history outside of a colonial context:

> Is this all there is to our history?...Where are the bloody heroes?...Do you
> remember the words of that dying warrior at Mbembezi: 'Wau! To think the
> Imbezu regiments were defeated by a lot of beardless boys!'[91]

This is not the past or the heroism of the nationalistic postcolonial imagination. It is

not reconcilable with the period of the 1970s either, in which articulations of 'hyper-

masculine' combatants were rife, as Jane Parpart has argued, because of the

liberation war context.[92] Rather, Marechera's vision is resistant and emasculating, as

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, p.43.
[92] Jane Parpart quoted in Touria Khannous, *African Pasts, Presents, and Futures: Generational Shifts in African Women's Literature, Film, and Internet Discourse* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), p.86.

the celebrated warriors of Mbembezi are defeated by beardless boys. Yet Marechera

also inverts the masculinising discourse of colonialism, by conceiving of the

colonisers as boys and thus as unmanly, even if it pronounces the embarrassing

connotations of Lobengula's defeat in the process. Notably, 'boys' was a term

commonly used by the settlers to refer to colonised men, illustrating the lived

realities of face to face emasculation in Southern Rhodesia and other settler contexts,

and the ways in which colonialism informed masculinities.[93] The emasculating

conception is enhanced by various abject images in the novella, and in particular the

recurring use of 'stains'.[94] Stains are used to signify both sex, specifically a post-

ejaculatory state, and history. Once more the individual and the nation are fused.

History is linked to sex, to gender, and to constructions of masculinity informed by

the experience of colonialism.

Various articulations of the nation as a prostitute in 'House of Hunger' reiterate a

gendered reading of colonialism, and express an intersectional relationship between

heteronormativity and the conception and experience of subjugation. An early

description of prostitute Julia's breasts bearing the legend of Zimbabwe upon them,

in the same episode in which she is called a whore, sexualises the nation and

suggests an association between prostitution and the colonial context. This is

enforced through Marechera's representation of a prostitute with 'splotches and

stains of semen...dripping down her leg' as a symbol for Rhodesia.[95] As I argued in

my introduction, this configuration repeats a trend of appropriating women as

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[93] Chenjerai Shire, 'Men Don't Go to the Moon: Language, Space and Masculinities in Zimbabwe', *Dislocating Masculinity, Comparative Ethnographies*, ed. by Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.149.
[94] See Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, pp.49 and 78 for examples.
[95] Ibid, pp.19-20 and p.49.

national symbols, reiterating a gendered practice similarly endorsed by the clear

emasculating signification of the image. This abject vision of nationhood is

undeniably gendered, because the prostitute is a woman observed by boys within the

story and by the male narrator and author, and because of the relation between this

image and Marechera's textual practice. A later articulation of the nation as a

prostitute provides greater contextualisation of this relation, whilst resignifying the

heteronormative expectations:

> We were whores; eaten to the core by the syphilis of the white man's
> coming...screwing pussy as though out to prove that white men do not in
> reality exist.[96]

By describing men as whores Marechera conceptualises colonialism as emasculating,

providing an exclusionary male-centred perspective. 'Screwing' functions as a

reclamation of masculinity lost during the emasculating colonial process, connecting

heteronormative forms to a gendered conception of the national condition. But what

of women? What is their response? The passivity of women, seemingly, is taken for

granted and a form of double colonisation is assumed by the one-dimensional

representation. Intriguingly, however, the passage also manipulates heteronormative

expectations. The whores are men because they 'screw pussy', but whores engage in

sexual practices with men in the heteronormative context addressed. The white

man's 'coming', and syphilis', hint at a same-sex relation which disturbs the

heteronormative foundation of Marechera's gendered construction. This extract

illustrates the complexities of Marechera's approach and the limits of a constitutive

discourse. At once Marechera destabilises heteronormativity while at the same time

showing, and arguably reiterating, its consequences.

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[96] Ibid, p.75.

The use of sex and gender relations as a means of reclaiming masculinity is not

confined to the pages of Marechera's writing, but is represented in various

Zimbabwean and African texts. One of the most explicit examples is found in

Sudanese author Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, in which the

emasculated protagonist Mustafa attempts to 'liberate Africa with his penis'.[97] As he

travels from Sudan, to Egypt, and then to England Mustafi seduces women in highly

symbolic passages, but finds an adversary in Jean, a British woman. She humiliates

Mustafa and subjugates him, forcing him to relive the emasculated condition that

motivated his quest. Eventually Mustafa murders Jean, penetrating her with a dagger

in a highly sexualised and violent episode that engages with forms of gender

violence which also permeate Zimbabwean fiction. Mustafa's attempt to wrestle

back power through gender reactions depicts a carnal reaction to social

disenfranchisement. Similar narratives in Zimbabwean literature are often also

accompanied by male protagonists turning to drugs and alcohol in an attempt to

numb social realities, generally to the detriment of marginalised female characters.

Drugs, alcohol, and gender violence populate so many of Marechera's stories, and

are also combined in two comparable Mungoshi short stories in *The Setting Sun and

the Rolling World* Collection. In 'Some Kinds of Wounds', two friends argue about

the conduct of one of them, a womaniser and misogynist, whose actions, including

drug and alcohol use, are related to his failure to find work and his desire to 'jump

out of [his] skin'.[98] The story ends with an abstract schizophrenic moment that could

have been lifted out of a Marechera story, as the protagonist narrator observes broken

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[97] Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North,* trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (Oxford: Heinemann, 2008 [1966]), p.95.
[98] Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun*, p.122.

glass in the eyes of his womanising friend, and sees his own reflection in a window pane shortly after. In this moment the antithetical relationship between the two characters breaks down, but their perspective dominates a story in which women are appropriated as sexual images in the process of regurgitating a familiar rhetorical argument. In another story, a young student visits his brother in search of school funds. Whilst staying at his home he observes his brother's true reality: alcohol, sex, drugs, and anger. Women are violently beaten and lied to. The brother sleeps with a fifteen-year-old girl under false pretences, and then refuses to drive her home as promised, leaving the younger brother to pay her bus fare. The nihilism of male characters, and their responses to alienating and subjugating social conditions, are translated into violence and sex which leads to the violent oppression of women. Unfortunately, Mungoshi fails to adequately depict female characters in his collection, with several of them being peculiarly villainised for acts of adultery and emasculation.

Chenjerai Hove also engages with emasculation in his writing, but in less male orientated narratives. Hove persistently centralises female characters, unlike most of his male contemporaries, and his writing is overtly feminist although he fails to combat the normativity of heterosexuality. The relationship between gender relations and colonialism is most prominently explored in *Bones*, which is set during the liberation war era.[99] Hove's novel focuses on the experiences, and relationship, of two women: Marita and Janifa. Janifa, the younger of the women, had exchanged love letters with Marita's son before he departed to fight as a guerrilla in the war. Their mutual bond engenders a quasi-familial relationship, and is notably far more

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[99] Chenjerai Hove, *Bones* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990 [1988]).

nurturing and equitable than the relationship Janifa enjoys with her own mother.

Marita works, along with most of the other major characters in the novel, on the farm

of a white settler known as Manyepo. Manyepo, an alcoholic, rules with severity. He

is an oppressive character, and persistently emasculates his cook, Chisaga. Chisaga

wrestles with the psychological consequences of these relations, as he describes:

> I run around like a boy, cleaning everything, cooking his favourite food
> before telling him that all is well. Then he tells me to go out and play while
> they eat.[100]

> Have you heard Manyepo saying we are liars, we lie like children all the
> time? It is not good for a man like me, with children filling the compound, to
> be called a boy.[101]

Chisaga's self-conception, and in particular his sense of masculinity, is threatened by

Manyepo's actions and words. He is rendered infantile, less-than-man, and less than

Manyepo. These feelings are intensified by Chisaga's employment as a cook,

because cooking was the domain of women, as Chisaga appears to relate when he

claims that 'cooking isn't a good thing for a man'.[102] However, Manyepo's

constitution also expresses a fragility of identity in the colonising man. Manyepo is

also reliant on a performance of gendered authority which necessitates reiteration.

His need to emasculate then suggests a need to confirm his colonial masculinity and

authority, suggesting that gender destabilisation could disrupt not merely internal

gender relations, but forms of colonial power predicated on gender normativity.

Chisaga harbours affection for Marita, believing that she will one day sleep with

him. He is 'greed[y]' for women, as Marita claims, seemingly responding to the

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[100] Ibid, p.37.
[101] Ibid, p.38.
[102] Ibid, p.29.

emasculatory social conditions through a form of hyper-sexuality which appeals to a different signifier of normative masculinity: the ability, and readiness, to sleep with women.[103] Marita manipulates this affection, and gets Chisaga to steal money for her before she leaves the farm, and her husband, in search of her missing son. Her readiness to manipulate Chisaga illustrates a certain power which Marita wields, and she is certainly a transgressive protagonist unwilling to abide by normative conventions. On her journey Marita is captured, brutally beaten, raped, and murdered. The moment communicates the horrific realities of the liberation war period, and the enduring precarity of women due to gender conditions. An elderly 'unknown woman' that Marita befriends on the journey attempts to retrieve her corpse from the authorities, but is murdered for her resistance. The woman notably challenges an authoritative police sergeant by exposing her breasts, demanding that he shoot her dead so that she can be buried alongside Marita. Her strategy of resistance, and her accompanying threats, engage with her body as a means of defiance, rearticulating the powerlessness of gender disparity, although it is paradoxically only possible because her age has lessened her sexual vulnerability. Yet the bond between the elderly woman and Marita, as well as that between Janifa and Marita, hints at the possibilities of what Annie Gagiano has described as a form of 'mutual mothering'.[104] Gagiano's definition is, however, reliant on the register and signification of gender normativity, suggesting the difficulty for writer and critic alike to transcend deeply embedded terms, whilst demonstrating the ways in which language limits the expression of ideas. There is certainly something quasi-maternal to these interactions, but female companionship would be a better expression of a

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[103] Ibid, p.27.
[104] Annie Gagiano, '''I do not know her, but someone ought to know her'': Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 32.2 (1992), p.38.

form of embattled solidarity which responds dually to gender and racial oppression.

Chisaga, angered by Marita's abandonment, turns his affections to Janifa. He reads Marita's gift of pots and pans to Janifa as symbolic, and as a passing of Marita's 'womanhood'. Hove does not endorse this idea but merely represents it, illustrating that normative femininity is constructed around a domestic base, which Marita rejects when she departs in search of her son and abandons her cooking utensils. The novel ends with the sexual violence the narrative had foreshadowed: Chisaga rapes Janifa. He follows her into nearby woods, and threatens to kill her, before his deed is sealed with a mock performative utterance which unveils the relationship between family, gender normativity, and precarity: 'You are my wife and I will sleep with you now.'[105] Whilst the physical details of the rape are not described with the intensity and brutality which marks the descriptions of some other Zimbabwean writers, most notably Vera, the horror of the moment is intensified by the lack of reproach or punishment for Chisaga. Janifa's parents send the police away, describing Chisaga as a friend, and explaining their daughter's story as merely a response to the 'first pains of pleasure'.[106] Manyepo also sends the police away, demanding that they do not take his cook. Janifa breaks down psychologically after the attack, as her isolation is confirmed by her parents' betrayal, and their reiteration of a normative framework which predicates and enables her violation. Underlining the story is the enduring authority of Manyepo, whose emasculation and subjugation of Chisaga both implicitly and explicitly contributed to the latter's actions. Chisaga confirms this when he describes himself as 'the tree that never forgets its wounds whilst the axe

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[105] Hove, *Bones,* p.92.
[106] Ibid, p.93.

sits at home smiling after a day of eating into the tree's flesh'.[107] In this moment the relation between words, ideas, discourse, and materiality are confirmed, and the consequences are represented through the violations of both Marita and Janifa.

Colonialism did not engender heteronormativity in Southern Rhodesia, but it influenced its conceptualisation and expression during the colonial period. Rigid gender expectations, especially for men, emphasised the disempowerment of the colonial process. Traditional gender norms, which were promoted through colonial discourses, laws, and practices, rendered a dominant and empowered conception of masculinity which was unattainable for African men subject to racial subjugation. Every social institution enforced racial disparity, from educational practices to religious teaching, whilst labour displacement and inter-personal relations also produced discursive and material inequality. Accordingly, the emasculatory notions that permeate Zimbabwean literature may be understood as a response to racial disempowerment through a gender perspective which informed, and was informed by, colonialism. Various writers depict emasculated characters translating their oppression through relations with women. Women are subject to consistent and brutal physical and sexual violence, whilst also suffering under the yoke of colonial rule, as Dangarembga's depiction of the mentally colonised Tambu illustrates. Accordingly, some writers describe a form of double colonisation which did not end with independence, because heteronormative forms persisted, as did the material and psychological legacy of colonialism. The gender violence represented in so many male authored texts, alongside misogynistic and sexist sentiments, also invites questions about the role of male writers in promoting heteronormativity. Marechera

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[107] Ibid, p.92.

has been accused of sexism and misogyny, whilst Chinodya's and Mungoshi's writing appears even more vulnerable to criticism. To what extent then, do Zimbabwean authors unwittingly reiterate damaging products of heteronormativity, even in texts ostensibly designed to reject gender disparity? Is this a necessary product of a constitutive discourse? These questions will be addressed in my next chapter, which will also analyse the relations of men and women in Zimbabwean literature, and the social constitution of normative masculinity.

**<u>Chapter Two: Depicting or Constituting Normative Masculinities?</u>**

**<u>Contextualising Zimbabwean Male Authors' Representations of Women</u>**

Since the 1990s gender studies has shifted focus from the study of masculinity to the study of masculinities.[1] This change is a product of the movement away from singular monolithic conceptions which began with the emergence of poststructuralism in the 1960s. It is an essential transformation, because the monolith is oppressive in its singularity. It is homogenising, and it is the logic of homogenisation and binarism which has underlined normative and exclusionary racial, gendered, and sexual forms in various contexts. Whilst gender theorists have attacked the logic of singular identities, and seen masculinities where before there was masculinity, contextually specific forms of normative and oppressive masculinities are predominant in societies across the world. This is especially relevant to the Zimbabwean context discussed, and to Southern Rhodesia. The prominence of normative masculinity is enhanced by the intersectional relation between gender and colonial modalities, and its consequences are staged repeatedly through the violated, beaten, and murdered women strewn through the pages of Zimbabwean literature. Various misogynistic and sexist notions also infuse male authored stories in particular, and at times the relationship between representation, destabilisation, and reiteration is unclear. A question demands to be asked: to what extent have certain male authors been complicit in the reiteration of heteronorms,

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[1] R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* was primary in this change. The text explores the various forms of, and relationships between, masculinities (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

even in texts ostensibly designed to reject them? And is this a limitation of a constitutive discourse?

Dambudzo Marechera is primary in this discussion, because of his violent textual environments and his preoccupation with gender performances. As he made clear in interviews, Marechera attempted to depict a 'social reality' in his fiction, and the victimisation of women is shown in its most brutal form in his writing.[2] Yet Critics and writers have taken issue with Marechera's representation choices, with Chenjerai Hove most prominently highlighting a disturbing misogyny, remarking that in Marechera's writing woman is the 'mother of ''bastards'', the ''bitch'' or the ''wench'''.[3] Contemporary writer Petina Gappah has also described Marechera as 'shockingly sexist' and 'misogynist'.[4] Does Marechera indeed deserve such criticism? And has he, as Hove has argued, betrayed 'the struggle to improve women's position in society'?[5]

This chapter will engage with the criticisms levelled against Marechera, and compare the representational practices of other male authors. I will analyse the writing of Marechera, Shimmer Chinodya, Charles Mungoshi and Chenjerai Hove principally, because of their prominence in Zimbabwean literature in the late 1970s, 80s, and early 90s. I do not wish to establish a gender binary, and female authors will not be forgotten in this section. However, my concern will be primarily with male writing

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[2] Dambudzo Marechera, 'Slow Brain Death can only be Cured by a Literary Shock Treatment', interviewed by Alle Lansu, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work*, ed. Flora Veit-Wild (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992), p.13.
[3] Ibid, pp.350-351.
[4] Bruce Ndlovu, 'Marechera's Spirit Lives on', *Chronicle* (online), 9th August 2014, www.chronicle.co.zw/marecheras-spirit-lives-on. Last accessed 04.04.2017.
[5] Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, p.351.

and with male representations of gender relations. This focus is a result of my desire to investigate and contextualise the accusations of sexism and misogyny levelled against Marechera, and to examine the effects of constitutive discourses. After all, the heteronormative discourses which influence the constitution of male identity depicted in texts also constitute the very authors seeking to portray these forms. I therefore intend to investigate parallels between male writing, as a means of understanding the normative conception of gender and the prevailing tropes that inhibit its destabilisation.

This chapter will begin by discussing the social construction of normative masculinity. I will analyse Marechera's depiction of masculinities (normative and non-normative), and consider how his representational practices compare with other writers. My work will therefore address both normative masculinity (as a representation of a discursively constituted and performed archetype) and masculinities. Any singularity of language will aim to address the depiction of a normative constitution, and should not be read as suggesting that only one form of normative masculinity, or non-normative masculinity, exists. This chapter will seek to undermine this singularity, in part through the discussion of Marechera's contestations and destabilisations of gender constructions. The second half of the chapter will shift focus to the ostensibly sexist and misogynistic depictions which permeate male writing of the period. I will engage with objectification, sexualisation, the discourse of animality, and the representation of mothers. Whilst the focus of the chapter will primarily be on gender, I will also necessarily discuss sexuality at points. Heterosexual and gender normativity are inter-related within the

heteronormative context examined, and these discussions will precede a more thorough interrogation of heterosexual normativity in the next chapter.

Representing Normative Masculinity/ies in Zimbabwean Literature

Violent and oppressive forms of masculinity permeate practically every text I discuss in this study. Whether authors describe these forms to critique them is not always clear, and will be dependent on both the context of the representation and the response of the reader. Yet certain characteristics of masculinity are repeated across various texts. Normative masculinity is generally expressed in terms of an inter-relation with an antithetically positioned femininity. This binary means of understanding may be problematic, for analysis can constitute and enact normative scenarios. The critic and writer alike must be wary of this potential problem, and seek where possible to denaturalise and unmask the illusory basis of binary gender relations. Yet this construction of the relationship between masculinity and femininity is accurate, for a man was defined in part by relations with subordinated women in the context discussed. Authentic masculinity necessitated heterosexuality also – which is performed both in the presence of women, and in homosocial spaces in Zimbabwean fiction. The hegemonic function of masculinity renders the performance of authority over women normative, and so binary formations of masculine strength and power and feminine notions of passivity are reaffirmed. These are partial and incomplete truths: characters and people transgress social expectations and discourse is not a consistent manifestation. However, the hegemonic function of masculinity was and still is normative. It oppresses both men

and women, and the physiological and physical consequences are a characteristic of Zimbabwean literature.

No text more thoroughly engages with masculinity and its intersections than 'House of Hunger'. The narrative documents the narrator protagonist's childhood and adolescence, and his experiences of sex and sexuality within the colonial context discussed in my last chapter. The narrator's experiences are explored in part through the characterisation of his older brother Peter, who conceptualises a form of aggressive hegemonic masculinity which contrasts with the narrator's more passive conception. Peter's aggression is depicted from the very beginning of the novelette, with his 'hunger' for a fight linked to the 'bloody whites' which 'seemed to be roasting his mind', as the disempowerment of white minority rule is used by Marechera to help explain Peter's conception.[6] Immaculate, Peter's girlfriend, is most commonly the outlet for his anger. Her victimisation begins the narrative, as she is brutally beaten whilst the narrator watches on. Immaculate is victimised by Peter throughout, and the violent treatment meted out is not a response to her actions, but is about Peter's own fractured sense of self. In this regard, Peter's actions respond ostensibly to an anxiety of masculinity, which is pronounced by the emasculating representation of colonialism discussed in my last chapter. Accordingly, Peter's conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity demonstrates how the treatment of women partly constitutes the heteronormative male in Marechera's contemporaneous society, because notions of hegemonic masculinity rely on the sexual and even violent denigration of women. Peter's actions are consequently both a product of his heteronormative environment and simultaneously reiterative acts

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[6] Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993 [1978]), p.2.

which contribute to the stability and illusion of the normative discourse. This reading illustrates how, as Butler has posited, gender constructions produce the effects on which they rely, and come into being as normative.[7]

Marechera does not merely represent the act and leave the reader to condemn the brutality enabled by normative forms, but seeks to denaturalise it – to attack the very logic and illusory foundations of gender roles. This is achieved through the description of the attack as a 'show for me'.[8] Peter's actions are afforded no natural basis, no biological foundation, but are related to a need to perform a constructed and artificial vision of masculinity. By representing Peter's actions as a performance, the narrator illustrates that Peter's performance is only one possible means of acting as, and being, a man. This act of denaturalisation draws attention to the ways in which the naturalisation of gender 'masks the…violence of gender norms'. Marechera's collection acts to remove this mask, by showing that gender is constructed rather than natural, and by describing its brutal realities.[9] That Peter must perform also illustrates that gender roles derive power from reiteration and necessitate reiteration, and are therefore fragile and imperilled. As Butler argues:

> the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means…through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures [and] these excluded sites come to bound the ''human'' as its constitutive outside, and to haunt these boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation.[10]

Any normative system is haunted by the threat of rearticulation represented by the non-normative, and by the very relationship of exclusion on which normativity

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[7] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp.2 and 95.
[8] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.4.
[9] Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver have discussed this idea in relation to Butler's work. *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p.81.
[10] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.8.

relies. In this episode Immaculate, as the repressed woman, and the narrator, who resists heteronormative expectations, are the excluded entities who threaten the normativity of Peter's gender identity. Their exclusion is not only demonstrated through their victimhood, but by images of abjection, as Immaculate is described as having 'animal-like eyes', and the narrator is spat on by Peter, as bodily matter symbolises the narrator's abjection.[11] Peter's actions therefore represent a literal manifestation of the regulatory nature of heteronormativity, which polices, sometimes violently, the non-normative. The description of Peter's assault as a 'show' also represents the didactic power of his performance, which is a natural effect of normativity. In the context of the novelette Peter's actions may also be read as intentionally educational. He disapproves of his brother's constitution and particularly his intellectualism, describing him as a 'bookshit' early in the novelette.[12] Peter also mockingly addresses his brother as 'Shakespeare', referencing the canonical English writer in a thinly veiled anti-colonial critique.[13] Peter's actions suggest his desire to reform his brother's behaviour, whilst illustrating the complexities of masculine forms related to both colonialism and retaliatory forms of nationalism.

The performance of sexual virility is an intrinsic part of Marechera's textual environments and his contemporaneity. To be 'a man' was and is to have sex with women. This notion has various oppressive potentialities, as it forecloses alternative gender choices by promoting fixed notions of heteronormativity and relates rigidly to traditional binaries of gender, which render the man the active penetrator, and the

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[11] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.4.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, p.5.

woman the passive penetrated.[14] This relationship between sexual potency and masculinity is epitomised by the representation of one episode in 'House of Hunger', when the adolescent Peter publicly masturbates in front of the narrator and a gang of township boys. The event is framed as a rite of passage, as Peter's ability to ejaculate inaugurates his manhood:

> He was going to prove to us infants that he had actually become capable of making girls – any girls – pregnant...We were going to see the thing that divided the men from the boys.[15]

Marechera's phrasing choices demonstrate the assumed passivity and vulnerability of all women. The reference to the ejaculating penis, as that which 'divided the men from the boys', also divides men from women, illustrating the discursive power of the representative phallus, which is both a signifier of manhood and a signifier of the lack of a phallus in relation to women.[16] The episode demonstrates how Peter's actions are a product of normative sexual discourses, and simultaneously didactically influence normative discourses through a form of 'street education' which connects masculinity with sexual potency.[17] The on-looking boys are not only subject to this normative performance, but simultaneously validate Peter's quasi-ritualistic assumption of manhood via their spectatorial participation. The ritualistic connotations of this episode have socio-historical relevance. As Chenjerai Shire has documented, similar performances were an intrinsic part of his rural Shona childhood, and defined the relationship between sexual potency and masculinity, and

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[14] Hélène Cixous has discussed the constitution of the gender binary in her essay 'Sorties'. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman,* trans. Betsy Wing (London: Tauris, 1996), p.63.
[15] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.48.
[16] Annie Potts, '''The Essence of the Hard On'': Hegemonic Masculinity and the Cultural Construction of ''Erectile Dysfunction''', *Men and Masculinities* 3 (2000), p.86: 'The very sexualization of bodies – that is, the differentiation of bodies into two types, male and female – is not based on anatomical difference per se, but a division created within/by phallocentric discourse; a division represented by presence or absence of the phallus'
[17] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.48.

distinguished sexual differences, at an early age.[18] Shire relates one particularly

relevant practice in which boys would compete to see who could urinate the

highest.[19] The success or failure depended on an erect penis for elevation,

establishing a relationship between sexual virility and success, whilst the custom

also naturally excluded girls. Shona boys would also engage in ritualistic practices

involving certain fruits and pods which signified sexual potency. As Shire again

relates, one such custom involved inserting a penis into a ripe mumveva fruit which

was associated with masculinity.[20] If the fruit subsequently grew to maturity it was a

sign of sexual competence, but if the fruit died or became deformed, it foreboded a

threat to sexual potency.[21] These practices relate how sexual virility was rendered

integral to male identity, whilst also illustrating that discourses are promoted via

inter-personal and ritualistic performances. As I have observed, discourse is not

merely an institutional mode, but is actualised through relations between individuals

and via regulated practices.

Peter's masturbation is followed in the narrative by a public marital rape. This

textual arrangement suggests a link between the two episodes, implying that the

nature of Peter's adolescent performance, which connects hegemonic masculinity

and sexual potency, predicates the violent subordination that follows. This

demonstrates the oppressive future realities of adolescent, or childhood, gender

rituals, whilst illustrating how heteronormativity is ritualistically constituted. The

representation of rape is brutal and sudden. Its spontaneity perhaps reflects the

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[18] Chenjerai Shire, 'Men Don't Go to the Moon: Language, Space and Masculinities in Zimbabwe', *Dislocating Masculinity, Comparative Ethnographies*, ed. by Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.155.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

precarity of life for women in a violently heteronormative environment. Marechera's

depiction notably emphasises the death-like state of the oppressed woman:

> The most lively of them ended with the husband actually fucking – raping –
> his wife right there in the thick of the excited crowd…And he seemed to
> screw her forever – he went on and on…until she looked like death. When at
> last – the crowd licked its lips and swallowed…When at last he pulled his
> penis out of her raw thing…I think she seemed to move a finger.[22]

The abject description renders the female subject corpse-like: she is screwed

'forever', both in the uncertain temporality of the trauma, and through the ongoing

social conditions that enable her vulnerability. As with other Marechera depictions,

the use of the crowd is notable. The members of the crowd are rendered complicit in

the act, voyeuristic to the point of passive participation, as is the reader who is so

suddenly and intimately invited into the brutality of the moment. No onlooker

intervenes, the reader cannot intervene, and the victim is powerless, utterly subject to

the apparently motiveless violence of her husband. By mobilising the crowd,

Marechera reiterates the potential of the act as performance – this is a public display

of the extremities of masculinity, and of the complete authority of husband over

wife. At the centre of the performance is the female body, voyeuristically

appropriated, and rendered the 'visible evidence of suffering' which acts, in Jane

Bryce's words, as 'a concrete expression of all the abstractions by which the

powerful…oppress the powerless, the voiceless'.[23] In this case, the oppression is

gendered – the wife is rendered wholly the object of her husband and reduced to her

barest materiality. It is a moment of discipline and a performative lesson to her and

to all those watching.

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[22] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.50.

[23] Jane Bryce, 'Inside/out: Body and Sexuality in Dambudzo Marechera's Fiction', *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera*, ed. by Anthony Chennells and Flora Veit-Wild (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), p.225.

The brutality and frequency of attacks against women in Marechera's writing is extreme, but only emphasises a reality portrayed in the work of many authors. In most of the writing I discuss, violence against women is more common than violence between men, even though violence between men is also a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. In Vera's writing, female protagonists are subjected to horrific physical and specifically sexual assaults. Hove's female characters are too, and Chinodya also stages this gendered vulnerability, although more through ideas than in the raw brutality that marks Vera's and Marechera's writing. Mungoshi's writing also depicts gender violence and rape, especially in the short story collection *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World*.[24] The collection is not dissimilar in content to Marechera's 'House of Hunger', yet lacks the stylistic innovations and deconstructive turns so apparent in Marechera's writing.

Mungoshi's novels and short stories commonly engage with gender within a familial context. Various hostilities and conflicts are played out in his stories, as the imbalances and ruptures of the late colonial and early colonial period are actualised in the familial space. Accordingly, the family is often representational, as interpersonal violence reflects a societal brutality inextricably related to the colonial context and the generally unmentioned liberation war. However, the institutional force of the family is not routinely subverted or undermined, as it is in Marechera's writing, and Mungoshi does not consistently engage with the strategies of denaturalisation which threaten and refuse the stability of gender roles. A comparison is nonetheless encouraged, even if it reveals differences, because

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[24] Charles Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989 [1980]).

Marechera and Mungoshi are both concerned with the family and related gender roles. Mungoshi's 'The Brother' provides the most fitting comparison, and offers a means of expanding the discussion of gender relations in literature of the period. Like 'House of Hunger', the story focuses on the relationship between a younger sibling, Tendai, and his older violent and angry brother Magufu. Narrator protagonist Tendai visits his brother to collect his school fees, but Tendai's presence irks Magufu. He does not pay Tendai's fees, and does not seek to educate him like Peter does with the narrator protagonist, but openly rejects any form of familial obligation and belonging. Rather, the story focuses on Tendai's reception of the gender violence and sexual coercion he observes whilst visiting his brother. Early in the story, whilst trying to sleep on his brother's floor, Tendai witnesses Magufu coerce a fifteen-year-old girl into bed despite her clear reluctance. The girl, Sheila, struggles to suppress her tears, and fearfully responds to the 'menacing' voice of Magufu.[25] She expects violence, fearfully asking if he will 'beat her' if she is a disappointment, and it is no surprise when Magufu, angered by Sheila's questions and sexual reticence, strikes her in the face.[26] Tendai leaves the house when Magufu and Sheila begin to physically fight, and violently punches a lamp-post in anger. His physical reaction perhaps forebodes his integration into a form of social relations which establish violence as a means of recourse.

When Tendai returns to the house the next morning he finds Magufu, his friend Sam, and several women amid left over sadza, empty beer bottles, and the stench of vomit. He soon observes a second episode of gender violence, after Sam threatens to 'ram'

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[25] Ibid, p.50.
[26] Ibid.

his partner Martha's teeth 'back through [her] mouth', invoking the gendered

vulnerability exposed earlier in the story through Sheila's frightened persona.[27]

Sam's anger is not only response to his girlfriend's actions, but to Magufu's attempts

to calm him down, and the assault that follows is as much about performing his

authority over his partner, as it is about performing masculinity within a homosocial

space. Mungoshi's description stresses the extent of the violence: after the assault

Martha lies 'very still', before reclining into the sofa with a mouth 'looking as if she

was eating raw liver', and with a 'fast-swelling lip'.[28] This compares with

Marechera's descriptions of the public marital rape. Both assaults are marked by a

stillness which suggests death – a corpse-like state that is symbolic of the

disembodying act. This is enhanced by both writers' use of 'raw', which responds

both to the carnal nature of the physical act and reduces the women to meat,

animalised and dehumanised by their physical subordination. It is this

dehumanisation, which is also a product of colonial discourses, that predicates the

violent treatment of women: by being made less than man, and less than human,

inhumane violence is enabled. Notably, Martha's powerlessness correlates with that

of Sheila's, and relates to the constitution of a form of masculinity which predicates,

and even normalises, such gender violence. As the story ends, a question remains

unanswered: what has happened to Sheila? She sheepishly leaves Magufu's room in

the morning, and the violence described during the previous night, and differently

realised in the relations between Sam and Martha, suggests that she was raped. By

refusing to define this, Mungoshi explores the lack of recourse for women in a

context in which their vulnerability is enabled. As critics have noted, rape is a topic

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[27] Ibid, p.64.
[28] Ibid, p.65.

often 'shrouded in silence' in this context.[29] This socially produced silence is inextricably related to the gendered vulnerability depicted in the relations between Sam and Martha. These inter-related episodes reveal a societal reality to Tendai, and force an acknowledgement of the violence of gender disparity.

Mungoshi's depiction of violence, which is repeated in so many Zimbabwean authors' works, establishes gender violence as a characteristic of gender roles. It is part of everyday life for both men and women. Marechera similarly establishes the quotidian nature of gender violence, by rendering it arbitrary and routine. In Marechera's *Mindblast*, two men refer to violence against prostitutes as a synonym for something normal: 'Like a whore, you know, you fuck the shit out of her and then beat her up'.[30] The depicted normality of this expression illustrates how discourse informs lived experience via the use of language that is both synonymic and symptomatic – which informs, and is informed by, gender. The routine sexual vulnerability experienced by some women is repeated through a digressionary reference to a white homeless woman who took 'rape and assault for granted', reiterating a troubling association between violence and sex seemingly related to the constitution of normative masculinity.[31] The everyday dimensions of gender violence are rendered a characteristic of the narrator's environment in the short story 'Night On My Harmonica': 'Outside, the thunder of trucks, cars, loud heavy metal music. Screams as some prostitute was being beaten up'.[32] In every Marechera text, the

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[29] Dirk Naguschewski and Flora Veit-Wild, 'Introduction: Lifting the Veil of Secrecy', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), p. xii.

[30] Dambudzo Marechera, *Mindblast; or The Definitive Buddy* (Harare: The College Press, 1986 [1984]), p.158.

[31] Ibid, p.153.

[32] Dambudzo Marechera, *The Black Insider* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992 [1990]), p.171.

sheer frequency of references, often depicted through digressions, and the routine

and arbitrary nature of so many of them, establish the victimisation of women as a

fact of existence. It is normal, and it is this normality that is truly shocking. Women

are made to bear the burden of this violence, and even come to expect this violence.

Minds and bodies bear the wounds and anticipated wounds of a violent patriarchal

context, suggesting a colonisation of both mind and body. This is exemplified by a

description of Marie in *Black Sunlight*, who is represented with head angled 'as if

[expecting] a blow' as her body anticipates the violence which marks the

heteronormative environment.[33] The description stresses a disembodying quality, as

Marie's physiology and psychology respond to the oppressive circumstances of her

existence. Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga have also engaged with symbolic

and literal forms of disembodiment and dismemberment throughout their writing, as

I will discuss in the final chapter. This disembodiment suggests the lack of autonomy

for women, whose minds and bodies are colonised by patriarchy and colonialism.

Marechera's quotidian representation of gender violence does not, when read in

context, reiterate a norm. Rather, by showing violence at its most dangerous and

brutal, Marechera reveals and emphasises the painful realities of gender norms,

whilst attempting to destabilise the logic and processes that produce such violence.

His resistance to oppressive gender roles and relations is suggested by the generally

passive roles of his narrator protagonists. They are not willing conformists, but also

suffer from the binds which restrict both women and men, albeit differently. In

'House of Hunger', the narrator protagonist is not violent towards women, and

although he does fight with men he is more often a victim or spectator than an agent.

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[33] Dambudzo Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p.20.

He also does not perform his heterosexuality, contrasting the hyper-sexual renditions of his brother Peter. This is emphasised by a peculiarly misogynistic reprimand from his mother, who criticises him for masturbating instead of having sex:

> She would contemptuously give me a long sermon about how girls are 'easy' and 'why don't you get on with laying one or two?' Or three. Or four. Or five...Why don't you get on with laying one and stop messing my sheets? You were late in getting off my breast...Now you're late jerking off into some bitch.[34]

The mother's comments suggest her desire to uphold the heteronormative conditions which constrain women, and accordingly demonstrate how women, as well as men, police heteronormativity. That she criticises the narrator for being 'late' also rejects the possibility of the protagonist wilfully resisting heteronormative discourses, and assumes his inevitable integration into the network of norms which determine normative masculinity. The expectation to conform heterosexually then illustrates how heteronormative discourses entrap and determine the male subject, as demonstrated by the language used by the narrator to describe his first sexual experience and contraction of VD:

> I was at that point where it's no use fussing and fretting whether one could with a will find some money and dare the unknown terrors of VD – with a little help from dagga. I braved it one stormy night and survived to regret it. Peter of course understood.
> 'You aren't a man until you've gone through *it*', he said.[35]

The uses of 'brave' and 'dare' suggest the narrator's reticence, revealing a fear or apprehension about sex. 'Dare' has dual significance, because the '*dare*' in Shona denotes a homosocial space in which sexual advice and stories are exchanged, and consequently where constructions of masculinity are established, reiterated, and

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[34] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, pp.78-79.
[35] Ibid, pp.2-3; and dagga is a local term for cannabis.

performed.[36] The allusion to this specific aspect of Shona culture illustrates how masculinity was closely policed in Marechera's society, whilst the socio-historical realities are also illustrated by the supposed autobiographical dimensions of the episode. As he has related in an interview, Marechera caught VD from a prostitute, who he was pressured into having sex with by his brother after he had discovered that Marechera was still a virgin in his first year of University.[37] This conception of heteronormativity, as represented through Shona culture and his brother's actions, signifies that heterosexual potency is perhaps the defining characteristic of hegemonic masculinity in Marechera's society, for 'a man' must have sex with women, and must suffer VD. This association is further reiterated in the story when Peter's father gives his son a VD set for his twenty-first birthday, rendering sexual infection a form of initiation for 'a man'.[38] The familial connotations of both these textual episodes also demonstrate how the family acts as an integral source of education, perhaps explaining in part an anti-familial trend in Marechera's writing.

The short stories that complete *The House of Hunger* collection more directly resist and critique the masculine norms explored in the eponymous short story. Whilst this directness may be a product of the short story medium, it also suggests Marechera's desire to use the entire collection to represent differently, and contest, oppressive constructions of masculinity. The most overt criticisms are found in 'The Christmas Reunion', which considers and resignifies a cultural practice of slaughtering a goat for Christmas dinner. In a typically abstract turn, the goat is used to invoke dehumanisation in the context of war and colonialism, and to consider the precarity

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[36] Shire, pp.150-151; and the dare also acted as a type of local court.

[37] Marechera, 'Slow Brain Death can only be Cured by a Literary Shock Treatment', interviewed by Alle Lansu, *A Source Book*, p.13.

[38] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.78.

of life during the liberation war era. However, the practice is also used to explore the manufacture of gender normativity, for killing the family goat was 'supposed to be a man's job'.[39] It is not an innocent or isolated practice, but informs sexual differentiation and the constitution of a man as a hunter, killer, and fighter, which is related to the forms of societal violence plaguing the contemporaneity:

> And fighting is not a different business: you raise your fist at somebody and at once you are a potential killer – there is nothing manly in that. This business about 'being a real man' is what is driving all of us crazy. I'll have none of it.[40]

The focus is on the constitution of the 'real' man, paralleling the representations and critiques of singular masculinity discussed in 'House of Hunger'. By rendering a 'real' man, inauthentic masculinities are also constituted. The inauthentic are those who do not conform to a heteronormative vision – who are policed and shamed for refusing to kill a goat, or to fight, or to fuck a woman.[41] The narrator resists this prescriptive turn by rendering it artificial. It is an illusory construct with no biological basis, as the narrator precedes explicitly to relate: 'There's nothing different between you and me except what's hanging between our legs'.[42] By referencing the penis, Marechera acknowledges the representative power of the 'phallus'. He rejects the conflation of sex and gender, illustrating his desire to depict gender as a constructed, rather than a natural, entity, and to undermine the logic of naturalisation.

Marechera explores the inter-relation between patriarchal and colonial domination

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[39] Ibid, p.138.
[40] Ibid, p.139.
[41] This notion is backed up by Judith Butler's claim that sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender. Butler, p.238.
[42] Ibid.

throughout his oeuvre, as I discussed in my introduction. Discourses do not function in isolation, but are inter-related because domination is a multi-faceted and intersectional enterprise. Marechera has discussed this in interviews, citing a form of double-colonisation which has informed many of the feminist interpretations of his work.[43] For example, critic Huma Ibrahim has described the 'doubly colonised' African woman in Marechera's writing, whose exclusion from a male centre invites a comparison between colonial and gender hegemonies.[44] This is an interpretation explicitly encouraged by Marechera's readiness to parallel the oppressive constraints of gender and racism. In doing so, Marechera also engages with, and anticipates, violent forms of heteronormative nationalism which associated non-normative gendered and sexual forms with European and American societies.

By depicting an intersectional relationship between heteronormativity and colonialism, Marechera encourages an alliance with oppressed women, and seeks to dissect the gender constructions which produce this oppression by examining masculinity, femininity, and the heterosexual assumption that underlines regulated gender relations. This intersectional relation is established from the outset of 'House of Hunger' through Immaculate's treatment, and specifically through the brutality of a form of gendered oppression which is both psychological and material, and which is related to colonialism. This relation is also encouraged by the description of Immaculate's gaze, which notably contradicts her generally passive presentation in the narrative:

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[43] In one interview with Alle Lansu, Marechera described women as the 'ultimate victims' of racism in Zimbabwe, because the black men who were used to being slaves of the whites could only make slaves out of their women. *A Source Book*, p.13.

[44] Huma Ibrahim, 'The Violated Universe: Neo-Colonial Sexual and Political Consciousness in Dambudzo Marechera' *Research in African Literatures* 21.2 (Summer 1990), p.80.

> though he finally beat her until she was just a red stain I could still glimpse the pulses of her raw courage in her wide animal-like eyes...But Peter with his great hand swinging yet again to smash – those eyes stung him to greater fury.[45]

The gaze is read as, and/or represents, a form of resistance: it signifies a refusal on the part of Immaculate. It visualises an internal self, which Peter's bodily brutality cannot control. The importance of the gaze in colonial discourse is well documented. It is in part a voyeuristic fascination, related to the desire to own and control the enigma of the exotic Other's gaze.[46] It is also related to the process of Othering, for to gaze upon is to constitute, to make Other, and to make lesser. In turn, returning the gaze reveals the potential of resignification. It reveals a possibility, for the power of the constituted may become the power of the constituting. In this there is an inherent anxiety which underlines all normative conceptualisations, rendering the perception of self, of the constitutor, in doubt. It is in the very process of constitution that resistance is inscribed, as Meyda Yegenoglu has argued in relation to colonial discourses, and it is this instability which poststructuralists have attempted to visualise and manipulate, for, as Foucault has claimed, wherever there is power there is the possibility of resistance.[47] Peter can destroy Immaculate but he cannot destroy this possibility: he cannot destroy the anxiety of disempowerment which is also a characteristic of the colonial condition. The gendered signification is clear, and has become a feature of work on the imperial gaze, as Ann Kaplan has discussed through a phallocentric reading of colonialism:

> The imperial gaze reflects the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject.[48]

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[45] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.4.

[46] Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.60.

[47] Yegenoglu, p.60; and Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*: *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), pp.101-102.

[48] Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (New York and

Kaplan's rendition is intersectional, and engages with an assumption which is necessarily normalising. The gaze is at once gendered and racialised, because colonialism was a patriarchal manifestation. Immaculate's gaze may therefore be read not just as a challenge to Peter and his gendered authority, but as a signifier of her resistance against colonial processes which Other her and reinscribe heteronormativity. This intersectional vision began the thesis through the often-mentioned appropriation of the prostitute as a symbol for Rhodesia. Yet, just as the resistant potential of that image of double colonisation was haunted by the constraints of heteronormativity, and a related practice of reducing women to national symbols, so is the writing of Marechera and other Zimbabwean writers haunted by the legacies and tropes of heteronormativity. Marechera is certainly a resistant writer, and those that criticise him overlook the nature and complexity of his representational practices. Yet problems remain, and understanding them will further an understanding of contextual forms of heteronormativity and the limits of a constitutive discourse.

Objectifying Women: a Representational Paradox?

Women are habitually sexualised in early postcolonial men's writing. Whilst this sexualisation may be a representative mode at points, ostensibly intended to document objectification, the persistency and nature of depictions risks contributing to its normativity. It is tempting to suggest, when encountering some of the most overly sexist descriptions, that the writers themselves perform normative

London: Routledge, 1997), p.78.

heterosexuality. Sexualised and often sexist representations are found even in overtly feminist texts. For example Hove, who criticised Marechera for his representational practices, is not free of criticism, despite the relatively didactic and conservative nature of his writing. In *Shadows*, the initial delineation of protagonist Johanna focuses on one physical characteristic: her 'breasts which refused to fall'.[49] The partial depiction appears sexual – it represents the female protagonist through bodily fragmentation; the breasts signify the person and reduce Johanna to only her breasts. Shortly after in the narrative dancers from the village are sexualised too: 'their waists twisting, their breasts jutting out to provoke the boys'.[50] Breasts and waists are eroticised: they become means of provocation – the women dance to be attractive, as their assumed sexual desire underlines their objectification. Numerous depictions of breasts infuse Hove's other novels, as breasts are continuously rendered emblematic of women. This process of sexualisation is not altogether different to the imperialistic reduction of the colonised selfhood to merely a body, or in this case, a bodily part. Carol J. Adams has notably compared this process of fragmenting women (thighs, breasts) to the fragmentation of animals (wings, ribs).[51] Her study illustrates the dehumanising mechanisations of this representational strategy, which are rendered more prominent by persistent comparisons between women and animals in Zimbabwean fiction. Hove is certainly a feminist writer, and provides some of the most thorough explorations of female subjectivity in Zimbabwean literature. He centralises female protagonists in his writing, contrasting most male Zimbabwean authors who predominantly rely on male perspectives and marginalise women. One should also not assume intentionality and conflate author and text. Yet, irrespective

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[49] Chenjerai Hove, *Shadows* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1992 [1991]), p.10.
[50] Ibid, p.11.
[51] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

of the feminist intent, these incongruous acts of sexualisation and fragmentation are not easily reconcilable. Hove's representations, to a degree at least, reiterate a normative gendered discourse which sexualises, objectifies, and fragments women's bodies.

In contrast to the more conservative Hove, Chinodya is an erotic writer, and women are persistently sexualised in his narratives. His short story collection *Chioniso and Other Stories* opens with a representative sexualisation, as a senior combatant harasses and eventually rapes a younger fighter, stroking her 'raw-avocado-pear-firm' breasts whilst clawing hungrily at 'her slender thighs'.[52] This depiction relates the voyeurism of the combatant, and his sexual aggression and greed – sexualisation, in this moment, produces and predicates the rape that follows. The act of comparing breasts to fruit is not unique – Hove refers to breasts as 'pumpkins', and negatively compares 'flat', 'drab' breasts to rotten fruit.[53] Whilst natural similes may be a product of the rural environments described, the naturalisation of women's body-parts portrays female sexuality as something to be consumed. This consuming gaze, which is necessarily patriarchal and gendered in this context, also invokes the dehumanising voyeurism of colonial rhetoric and the images of engulfment which accompanied the imperialist enterprise.[54] In this regard, the hegemonic force of gender and its intersectional relations prevails in anti-colonial and postcolonial spaces, in explicit and implicit terms.

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[52] Shimmer Chinodya, *Chioniso and Other Stories* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2012), p.2.
[53] Chenjerai Hove, *Ancestors* (London and Basingstoke: Picador, 1996), pp.104 and 146.
[54] Anne McClintock relates this notion of engulfment to the gendering of the land and the control of space under colonialism. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.24 and 27.

Chinodya's other texts similarly sexualise women. In the short story 'The Waterfall'

the 'strong young breasts' described by the voyeuristic narrator repeat a typical

fascination with breasts in male fiction.[55] In *Dew in the Morning*, repeated references

are made to breasts as little 'horns', which is a representational trope repeated in the

writing of Hove and Musaemura B. Zimunya.[56] In relation to Chinodya's writing,

one overtly sexual description epitomises a characteristic eroticism:

> Her dress kept moving up her thighs as she raised the pestle, shaking her
> breasts...I caught the scent of her body as I passed. It was the smell of sleep –
> of blankets, perspiration and virginity, I decided.[57]

There is a specific intentionality to this description: her breasts do not shake but she

shakes her breasts. She is rendered complicit in her sexualisation, disguising the

clear voyeurism of the description. However, the closing reference to 'I decided'

complicates the description. The scent, the fetishisation of virginity by the

protagonist, is explicitly emphasised as his reading and it is subjectified by his clear

sexual desire. It is necessary to contextualise this moment further, because Chinodya

sexualises both women and men. As I will discuss in the next chapter, his writing is

infused by homoerotic descriptions which sexualise male bodies in intimate

situations and contexts. These undercut overtly heteronormative displays in the

novel, which are ostensibly exaggerated as a means of criticism, and illustrate the

importance of contextualising representational techniques. Chinodya offers various

revealing insights into masculine forms, exposing anxieties alongside oppressive

expressions which subordinate and sexualise women, as described in the

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[55] Shimmer Chinodya, *Can We Talk and Other Stories* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1998), p.50.
[56] Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning* (Oxford, Heinemann, 2001 [1982]), pp.155 and 166; Hove, *Bones*, pp.7 and 92; and Musaemura B. Zimunya, *Nightshift* (Longman: Zimbabwe, 1995 [1993]), p.51.
[57] Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning*, p.196.

aforementioned examples. Yet this incessant focus on male psychology risks marginalising women, who are generally peripheral in male-centred narratives.

It is also important to relate that female authors also sexualise women, albeit differently so. Sexual descriptions are particularly abundant in Vera's writing, although these are a feature of a uniquely tangible and bodily writing style. Touch, feel, and physicality are communicated throughout, often in a non-sexualised fashion. However, rape and dismemberment also undercut instances of sexualisation, which are a transient feature of novels that always end with violence. The specific manifestations of this violence counter the fragmented sexualisation found in some writing: dismemberment and disembodiment render such fetishisation abject, desexualising a practice and logic which renders women's bodies vulnerable. Dangarembga is not a particularly erotic writer, although there are instances of homoerotic descriptions in her two novels. These disturb, rather than reiterate, the heteronormative foundation for the appropriation and sexualisation of women found in male authored works. Accordingly, the major early postcolonial male and female Zimbabwean writers do not comparably sexualise women, even if a preoccupation with the body and the bodily is an enduring trope of representation.

Marechera's writing is overly sexual. This is a characteristic of his violent sexual environments – most characters in his fiction are either sexualised or have sex. Sex also functions symbolically in his writing, representing Marechera's attempts to link heteronormativity to inter-related discourses and contextual manifestations. Notably, the hypervisibility of sex and sexuality rejects conservative morality and a deeply embedded culture of discretion which silenced a discussion of sexual oppression. As

I have discussed, sex is also related to the constitution of the masculine self in

Marechera's writing. It responds to an anxiety of identity, which causes men to use

sex and the performance of heterosexuality to reassert themselves. Repeated

references are made to sex as 'possession', with sex rendered a response to the

dispossession of economic inequality and colonial era racism.[58] Marechera has

spoken in some depth about the links between dispossession and sexuality in his

writing, discussing how 'poverty can drive one into obscure sexual passions',

because the impossibility of asserting oneself economically engenders a desire to

assert oneself sexually.[59] The gender dimensions to this drive are critiqued in

Marechera's writing, most notably through Grace in *Mindblast*. She attacks the 'lust'

to possess, relating it to the 'genital centred dreams' which subordinate women for

the benefit of men.[60]

Marechera's readiness to depict and critique the constitution and performance of

masculinity does not, however, negate accusations of misogyny and sexism.

Throughout his writing Marechera sexually objectifies women. This is often

representational, but nonetheless some incongruous depictions risk affirming and

normalising the objectification of women. One passage from *Mindblast* illustrates

the vulnerability of the author to feminist critiques:

> There is nothing more dispiriting than the sight of a woman in old age. Is that
> perhaps the intriguing tragedy of female youth, delicacy, fragility, beauty
> combined in one chance amazing frame? [61]

In this passage, the 'tragedy' is conceived of as the loss of beauty, and consequently

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[58] For examples see Marechera, *The Black Insider*, pp.148 and 170.
[59] Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, p.13.
[60] Marechera, *Mindblast*, p.68.
[61] Ibid, p.127.

the worth of a woman as directly related to her physical conception. It also occurs in

an overtly autobiographical section of *Mindblast*, blurring the distinction between

author and character. Earlier in *Mindblast*, the exchanges between Drake and Spotty

(both white characters) had demonstrated a similar objectification of women:

> I used to hand down to you girls I had tired of. And now I think of it, those
> hand-me-down girls were probably the only reason you tied your apron
> strings to my heels.[62]

Drake's description of 'hand-me-down girls' reduces women to objects to be

exchanged in homosocial relations. Although the exaggeratedly villainous and

pathetic representations of Drake and Spotty have obvious satirical implications

related to gender and race, this objectification nonetheless repeats a theme of

assumed female passivity which permeates Marechera's fiction. The connection

between this perception of women and construction of masculinity are suggested by

the emasculating rhetoric applied to Spotty, whose denigration using signifiers of

femininity expresses a conception of femininity as inferior to masculinity.

Marechera, who so self-consciously engaged with constrictions of heteronormativity

in his writing and interviews, was certainly aware of potential ambivalences in his

writing. These ambivalences are seldom engaged with directly, in part because

Marechera rejects didacticism, as his chaotic and complex writing style promotes the

heterogeneity of interpretation. Yet, in the overtly autobiographical journal section of

*Mindblast*, Marechera appears to engage with the restrictions of gender discourses,

and the possible emergence of an attitude of misogyny which his writing seeks to

refute. This is discussed in relation to the white female homeless woman who 'took

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[62] Ibid, p.12.

rape and assault for granted':

> I felt her humanity but – and it is macho – despised her female vulnerability. Her white European female vulnerability. Feeling shit even as I felt this. Feeling that in some gruesome way I was betraying the very source of all writing, spurning and rejecting her this way.[63]

Marechera recognises the 'macho'/masculine basis for his expression of hatred. This articulation is intersectional, related to the woman's European whiteness and therefore to the legacy of colonialism, but also to her gender. He, in this moment, responds to a misogyny which permeates constructions of masculinity and the representation of these constructions in Zimbabwean literature. Marechera's feeling of betrayal acknowledges a disjuncture between ideas and feelings, between his authorial support for marginalised individuals and a distaste for female vulnerability which is perhaps engendered by the notions of hegemonic masculinity so often deconstructed in his work. In this paradoxical expression or struggle, Marechera exposes the difficulties of engaging with constitutive discourses. Yet this moment and the misogyny discussed in relation to *Mindblast* are subverted by other depictions in the collection, illustrating Marechera's refusals to adhere to heteronormativity. In the play involving Drake, the characterisation of Lydia inverts expectations of female passivity which the characters of Drake and Spotty promote. Lydia, a black African married woman, 'assaults [Drake's] lips forcefully and lingeringly' when finding time alone with him, subverting, as Shaw has claimed, the 'stereotype of the submissive black woman and the dominant white man'.[64] In doing so, Lydia not only contravenes gender expectations, but the marital bonds and norms which underline both the European and African society depicted. Marital subversion

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[63] Marechera, *Mindblast*, pp.152-153.
[64] Marechera, *Mindblast*, p.34; and Drew Shaw, '''Deviant'' Innovations in Zimbabwean Writing: From the Racial Divide to Same Sex Desire', *The Round Table* 95.384 (April 2006), p.27.

is also exhibited by Grace's same-sex affair with Rita, which rejects institutional expectations of heterosexuality. Grace's affair and her combative nature represent a 'queering' of heteronormativity, in terms of Nikki Sullivan's conception of queer as a 'radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality and the family'.[65] Marechera's engagement with the taboo of same-sex sexuality then contests the foundational nature of heteronormativity and its intersectional reality, which informs the misogynistic attitudes performed in *Mindblast*.

The symbolic function of sex in Marechera's work has been discussed in the introduction, but necessitates a brief mention here because of its relevance to this section. Women are often rendered symbolic, but men are not similarly appropriated. This symbolic gesture is often sexualised, reiterating the normativity of a woman as a sex object. This is explicitly demonstrated by the nature of the description of the prostitute with semen dripping down her leg, who is observed by a gang of boys and the male author, and reduced to a symbolic role. The normativity of such representational turns in Marechera's writing correlates with the characteristic symbolic appropriation of women noticed in criticism. This is often a disembodying mode, as it divorces bodily suffering from a material basis, and promotes the appropriation of women's bodies.

The potentially disembodying consequences of symbolism are illustrated through Marechera's misogynistic use of the word 'cunt', which is dominant in texts also

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[65] Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p.43.

littered with gender denigrations such as 'whore', 'bitch', and 'wench'. 'Cunt' is

particularly notable because it reveals a logic of fragmentation embedded in

language and in the sexualised depictions discussed, and because it is used

symbolically in Marechera's writing. In 'The Writer's Grain' the narrator describes

the racist white Europeans as 'cunts', whilst 'the great cunt' is used by rebel forces in

*Black Sunlight* to describe, as Pattison has argued, colonialism and the effects of

colonisation.[66] That 'cunt' functions as an aggressive synonym for colonialism

illustrates how the female body is negatively conceptualised in Marechera's society,

and how female subjection is written into the language of the period. The gendered

and sexual connotations of the term are reiterated through the synonymic use of 'the

great whore' shortly after, as Marechera's misanthropic social vision is once more

feminised.[67] It is important to note however that the mouthpieces for these sexualised

comments are criticised. The rebel forces in *Black Sunlight,* and specifically the

leader Chris, are parodied, and used to demonstrate Marechera's resistance to

unifying discourses which function to restrict identity. Similarly, the protagonist of

'The Writer's Grain' is suffering with the effects of his disintegrating psyche, which

is directly related to the emasculating effects of colonialism. His use of 'cunt' can be

read as relating directly to his struggle with self-loathing, and as a projection of

postcolonial angst. Yet, a paradox persists: In his attempts to resist sexism and

gender normativity, Marechera still recalls the language of that normativity.

Sometimes it is deconstructed, but at other times it incongruously signifies gender

difference. After all, it is almost always a woman's body that becomes the vessel for

postcolonial, or anti-colonial frustrations. It is a woman's body that is rendered

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[66] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.110; and Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, pp.56, 59 and 70; and David Pattison, 'The Search for the Primordial I in *Black Sunlight* and *The Black Insider*', *Emerging Perspectives*, p.200.
[67] Marechera, *The Black Sunlight*, p.70.

symbolic. This is not to dismiss or relegate Marechera's incredibly progressive engagement with heteronormativity, or to validate some of the rather simplistic allegations of sexism directed towards him, but to illustrate that this paradox exists. Marechera is not entirely innocent, and is perhaps constrained by a register of gender written into his context and language, and by the constitutive effects of a discourse. This idea will be discussed in more detail through the discourse of animality which permeates Zimbabwean literature, and which incessantly renders gender difference and disparity.

## The Discourse of Animality in Zimbabwean Male Writing

The dehumanising dimensions of voyeuristic processes of objectification and fragmentation are emphasised by a gendered discourse of animality in Zimbabwean fiction. This discourse is not specific to Zimbabwe, and gendered animalisation notably infuses other contexts as well as the English language. For example, description of women as 'bitches' or 'cows' police non-normative or non-conformist behaviour through recourse to dehumanising and threatening terms. The normativity of such rhetoric reveals a deeply embedded culture of disparity, and a peculiar association between women and animals. Whilst animalising similes and metaphors may be a response to natural environments, especially in rural contexts, it is important not to diminish the ways in which the use of language normalises gender difference. Images and tropes of representation are never arbitrary, but are always involved in relations of power which are specifically gendered in this respect. Men and women are not comparably depicted, because of an association between female sexuality and nature – both of which become, in the context of a violent

heteronormative environment, domains to be conquered by men. This has a relation to the gendered nature of phallocentric imperialist narratives and to the dehumanising function of colonial discourses. Fetishisations of atavistic female sexuality in European accounts reveal a logic of gender difference which underlines postcolonial formations and illustrates a continuation of a means of conceptualising and denigrating women.[68]

The animalisation of women in Zimbabwean literature frequently stresses victimhood, sometimes as part of resistant strategies. For example, Marechera's depiction of Immaculate's 'animal-like eyes' when she is assaulted by Peter, and the comparison between her beaten form and a murdered cat, stress her dehumanisation in the violent patriarchal colonial context. Likewise, in Chinodya's short liberation war story 'Martha's Hero' the protagonist is separately described as a 'wounded' and 'trapped' animal as a means of emphasising her physical precarity after she is raped by a senior combatant.[69] Throughout Chinodya's writing, animality is mobilised in a similar fashion. Often it reveals the dangerous potentiality of masculinity, although at times the difference between representation and normalisation is unclear. The violence inherent in the discourse of animality is represented in Chinodya's short story 'Strays', in which the sexually aggressive narrator describes his partner's 'slender neck' as 'whimpering for a leash'.[70] 'Slender' stresses a vulnerability, similarly depicted in the aforementioned examples, but this vulnerability is articulated as a need to be controlled and owned. It is a constitutive turn underpinned by the protagonist's desire to dominate and control his wife. This emerges from the

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[68] Anne McClintock has discussed this perception of eroticised atavism in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.41-42.

[69] Chinodya, Chioniso, pp.2 and 7.

[70] Chinodya, *Can We Talk*, p.71.

protagonist's frustration about an inability to control his own sexual desire, and is therefore about control of the body and about power. This power is communicated, and perhaps reconstituted, through the sexualisation of the female party. References to her as 'yawning widely…deeply', to her 'condom mouth', and to her as 'tight' all emphasise her objectification, whilst reducing her to the sum of her bodily parts.[71] The violent potentialities of this threatening objectification are enforced by the implied relation between the wife and a domesticated dog, and by the depiction of dogs in the narrative. Sam earlier describes an African dog as a 'creature to be kicked, scolded and have missiles thrown at it', whilst his violent mistreatment of the couple's dog materially enforces this violence, and the dangerous potentialities of gendered animalisation.[72]

The menacing possibilities of dehumanising logic is emphasised in Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*, in which two combatants, including the protagonist, are accused of rape. During one of these encounters the female party is depicted as a 'bird-like girl', who is 'eager' to 'please' the narrator.[73] Her animalisation suggests a feebleness which is gendered and gendering; the conception reinscribes a gender binary that defines weakness as characteristic of the female party, even if her eagerness counters an assumption of passivity. Her sexuality and desire are read through the male narrator's wants and needs – she becomes something to 'please' him, and is rendered auxiliary in a story that is predominantly male centred. This conception of female weakness is repeated in 'Why Not', in which the narrator describes a woman's 'tiny' body as like a 'wingless insect silhouetted against the

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, p.61.
[73] Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990 [1989]), p.210.

sun'.[74] Her feeblesness, as in *Harvest of Thorns*, is set in the context of a liberation war period rife with gender violence and especially rape. Once more it invokes the constructions of gender which normalise and facilitate the vulnerability of women.

Animalisation is also used to promote disgust, in abject constructions related to normative ideals of beauty. Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* provides a fitting example, after a group of hungry guerrillas milk a stray cow, whose empty udder is described as 'swishing from side to side like an old woman's breasts'.[75] Such abject desexualisation is pronounced in a writer as overtly erotic as Chinodya, as the description renders the old woman as useless as the empty udder of a cow. She is reduced to her bare materiality, and to a worth determined by (lost) attributes of youth, sexuality, and maternity. The cow comparison is repeated in Mungoshi's short story 'Who Will Stop the Dark', after the young male protagonist compares his mother's features to that of a cow:

> Her mouth wrinkled tightly into an obscene little hole that reminded the boy
> of a cow's behind just after dropping its dung.[76]

The description stresses animalisation, but also scatology and abjection. 'Dung' manifests a filth associated with cattle, and highlights a disturbing misogyny that punctuates Mungoshi's collection of stories. Intriguingly, the cattle based simile has a specifically gendered relationship in a context in which Lobola commonly involved the exchange of livestock. Perhaps this practice reveals a logic of ownership similarly transmitted through the discourse of animality in Zimbabwean literature.

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[74] Chinodya, *Chioniso*, p.17.
[75] Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns*, p.168.
[76] Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun*, p.7.

The abject connotations of animalisation are evident in Marechera's writing, whose highly sexual environments provide a different articulation of the discourse. Marechera's most incongruous use of animalisation relates to the prostitute Julia, a relatively minor character in 'House of Hunger'.[77] The 'snorting' Julia is repeatedly described as having 'painted claws' in the novelette, and this animal or lizard like conception is rendered explicit when the narrator compares her to a series of animals:

> Her painted claws reached out and closed over my fist. The hyena, the wild dog, the vulture had finally seen that I could not defend myself because the lions before her had already picked my bones clean.[78]

Julia becomes death and the consumer of death – an animalistic scavenger who threatens the narrator protagonist. It is an abject image, correlating with Bill Ashcroft's representation of thematic use of abjection in Marechera's writing as the region in 'which our humanity itself becomes open to question'.[79] This ambiguous conception of humanity perhaps responds to the regulated relationship between life and death which the abject threatens, as the space in which meaning collapses.[80] The abject constitution of women threatens the normativity of sex and procreation – sex and femininity are made into death rather than life. Accordingly, the normativity of the woman as mother, as bearer of life, is disturbed and inverted, reflecting Marechera's nightmarish textual environments in which violence and death surround and penetrate narratives. The repulsive connotations, similarly related in Mungoshi and Chinodya's work, also resist the normative process of sexualising women,

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[77] See Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, pp.41, 44, and 47 for examples.
[78] Ibid, p.44.
[79] Ashcroft, 'Menippean Marechera', *Reading Marechera*, p.93.
[80] Julia Kristeva refers to the abject as a site where 'meaning collapses'. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.2. The notion of abjection will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

although this is not perhaps a conscious turn but hints at a contradiction inherent within a heteronormative context in which women are both habitually sexualised and dehumanised. This conception correlates with Butler's contention that heteronormative forms are constituted via an inter-relation with, and repudiation of, the abject sites. These are identifications which are activated and 'disavowed' simultaneously.[81]

Julia's animalisation compares to that of Patricia's in *Black Sunlight*, who is praised by the narrator because of her 'sheer animality', just after she takes Stephen's hand and drives it between her skirts.[82] Animalisation in both examples correlates with the role of the woman as the active sexual party – as the seducer rather than the seduced. The constitution contradicts traditional passive conceptions of femininity. Whilst this exaggerated manifestation prescribes a norm but not a reality, it is perhaps telling that animalisation is related to the transgression of social expectations. Perhaps, animalising the sexually powerful woman functions as a means of regulation and modulation, related to traditional gender roles and even to the effects of Christian morality. Patricia's 'animality' also invokes another association with colonial discourse: the expression of an atavistic sexuality.[83] She is rendered hyper-sexual, as her eroticism and desire are specifically animalised. There is something voyeuristic and even imperial to this conception, as the Othered woman's sexuality becomes the site of intrigue and enigma. It is impossible to ignore the legacy of colonial discourse, for dehumanisation and sexualisation were products of the Orientalist tropes described by Said and others. This form of racial dehumanisation is invoked

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[81] Butler, p.3.
[82] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.24.
[83] For a discussion of atavistic sexuality and colonial discourses, see Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p.138.

in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* when a Black African girl is abused for her

'cow' like features.[84] This conflation of animality and black womanhood is

mobilised in male productions, and stresses a sense of dehumanisation which is

gendered and perhaps unwittingly racialised, in terms of the signification of

animalisation within European racial discourses. It cannot be reconciled, and it does

not go both ways: men are not comparably or as routinely animalised. The discourse

of animality remains a manifestation of gender differentiation, prescribing difference

and rendering the unintelligibility of the female subject, which is a hallmark of

traditional gender constructions of femininity.[85] This idea is demonstrated by

Marechera's representation of the Bishop's comments in *The Black Insider*: 'Who

knows what women are? Certainly men do not. And I think the women do not know

either'.[86] The highly satirical critique of the Bishop, who is likely meant to represent

Abel Muzorewa, presents the normalisation of gender difference. Whilst Marechera

critiques this normative construct, the discourse of animality emerges from it,

propagating difference even in works ostensibly designed to reject that difference.

Rejecting and Negating the Mother

There is a peculiar disregard for mothers and motherhood in Zimbabwean fiction.

Detestable and villainous mothers abound, whilst a series of literary protagonists

reject the mother and child relationship. This contradicts the heteronormative

nationalism of the early postcolonial period, which normalised and even idealised

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[84] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006). pp.44 and 46.
[85] For an example, see Catherine Lutz, 'Cultural Politics by Other Means: Gender and Politics in Some American Psychologies of Emotions', *Historical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse*, ed. by Carl F. Graumann and Kenneth J. Gergen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.128.
[86] Marechera, *The Black Insider*, p.56.

motherhood. Renate Papke has claimed this is true of postcolonial literature written by men, which 'has treated women as symbols of earth, nation and state and idealised motherhood', with only postcolonial 'women writers' beginning to 'question this romanticised view of motherhood'.[87] Whilst this symbolic appropriation is a characteristic of Zimbabwean literature, it is far less binary and more complex than Papke's rendition presents. Rather, the various portrayals of mothers in Zimbabwean fiction appear to visualise sexist undercurrents, police non-normative behaviour, and reject the connotations of being and history rendered representative of the mother. Few idealised notions of motherhood are to be found – rather, the mother is rejected, abjected, and negated. Sometimes this rejection is violent. Vera's fiction repeatedly refuses the mother and daughter bond, using taboos of abortion and infanticide to reject motherhood in the most brutal terms. Dangarembga's Tambu also rejects her mother. She fosters dislike, and later shame, for her mother who increasingly becomes a pathetic and oddly villainous character. These renditions will be discussed in detail in my final chapter, in relation to the dual bodily and feminist concerns which permeate the works of both authors.

The repudiation of mothers is also a characteristic of male writing, but it demands to be read differently in view of the gender of the writers, and the sexist depictions evident in some works. Of the writers discussed, the sexist undercurrents of maternal representations are most overt in Mungoshi's writing. I introduced this idea through the incongruous comparison between a cow's bottom and the mother's mouth in 'Who Will Stop the Dark', which focuses on a young male protagonist's relationship

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[87] Renate Papke, *Poems at the Edge of Differences: Mothering in New English Poetry by Women* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2008), p.40.

with his mother and grandfather. The mother is an authoritarian and oppressive

figure, and is rumoured to be a 'witch' who rides with 'hyenas' at night.[88] The

characteristic use of hyenas reinvokes the abject association between women and

nature addressed in the discourse of animality section of this chapter. Witchcraft is

also a familiar trope, and is often mobilised in Zimbabwean fiction to address non-

normative femininity, especially in relation to motherhood. Various protagonists

bemoan their marginalisation, and damaging allegations of witchcraft, because of

problems with infertility.[89] This illustrates how the notion of witchcraft could be

used to explain socially contextualised biological problems, and in turn how gender

transgressions were policed. In the context of the story, the allegations of witchcraft

reinforce the monstrous nature of the mother who dominates her disabled husband.

In one episode she lashes her son repeatedly with a piece of leather, and then attacks

the husband when he tries to intervene. Her actions manifest a certain emasculatory

fear, as the transgressive mother emasculates the dominated man, inverting gender

expectations of strength and passivity. Whilst the mother breaks down in tears after

the assault, and is humanised to a degree by her emotions, she is still an oddly

villainous character.

The vilification of the mother figure is replicated in a later short story. In 'The

Victim', the protagonist brings home a victim of assault, Mangazva – a rather

pathetic character disliked by fellow workers for his relationship with a white

landowner. Mangazva lives with his parents, leaving his wife to tend to the children

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[88] Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun*, p.20.
[89] Marita suffers from accusations of witchcraft in Hove's *Bones* because of infertility problems, p.8; and Zhizha's grandmother in Vera's *Without a Name* is also accused of witchcraft and socially shunned because of infertility problems and due to the death of her infant child. Yvonne Vera, *Without a Name* [1994] and *Under the Tongue* [1996] (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), pp.183-193.

alone in a nearby dwelling. His immaturity is linked explicitly to his domineering mother, a matriarch who also oppresses a ghostly and ill husband. The mother intimidates Mangazva's fearful wife, who warns the frightened protagonist about the mother's power. She is another example of witchery and her otherworldly threat is emphasised through references to her 'hissing' and her 'wrath', and by her mysterious threat to kill her son's attacker if he refuses to leave the area.[90] Mangazva's mother represents a figure of familial subversion, and the emasculated personas of husband and son are directly related to her monstrous characterisation. In this regard, witchery is ostensibly used to police a matriarch in a story in which normative constructions of masculinity are left unchecked.

'The Day the Bread Van Didn't Come' continues the demonisation of the dominant woman, although the female protagonist in this case is a wife but not a mother. Mrs Pfende is another oppressive figure, who beats and emasculates her frightened husband. She mocks his apparent infertility and 'barks' orders at him, whilst engaging in an ongoing affair with a delivery driver.[91] She makes little attempt to conceal her openly adulterous activity, and the victimised husband's only recourse is his inner thoughts. This notion is similarly addressed in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, as protagonist Tongoona describes the sanctum of his silence and inner thoughts as a relief from his nagging and critical wife.[92] The denounced women all share an essential trait: they emasculate their husbands. Mungoshi critiques the domineering woman but perhaps also the logic of emasculation, which enforces a normative and rigid notion of masculinity that is hegemonic and often violent. These

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[90] Mungoshi, *The Setting Sun*, pp.144-147.
[91] Ibid, p.152.
[92] Mungoshi, *Waiting for the Rain* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1991 [1975]), pp.8-9.

portrayals of oppressive femininity also correlate with the collection's clear aim to promote familial rupture, which is a feature of Mungoshi's writing and implicitly related to the fracturing consequences of colonialism. Yet the stories fundamentally reject transgressive women, who are pushed to the margins of male centred narratives. Mungoshi often villainises women in a way that he does not with men. He polices difference, renders women otherworldly at points, and makes little attempt to directly link the characterisation of women to a dehumanising and oppressive colonial context. In the process, normative notions of femininity are ostensibly confirmed through the repudiation of non-normative women. As familial rupture correlates with colonial rupture, there is a sense that the corruption of the nation and of the family are linked, and so the reintegration of the nation free from European interference would enable the reintegration of the family. Accordingly, Mungoshi is less inclined to disengage with traditional familial femininity than some of his contemporaries, and he does not explicitly resist the heteronormative nationalism overtly depicted and contested in Marechera's writing. His writing also lacks the positively conceived transgressive women depicted in other fiction, as his critiques of gender are, to an extent at least, one-sided.

Hove's *Bones*, as I discussed in my introduction, subverts the mother-daughter relationship. Janifa is notably closer to her friend Marita than she is to her own biological mother, whom she reviles. James Graham has conceived of the relationship between Janifa and Marita as matrilineal, but also related, predominantly through the characterisation of Marita, to the land.[93] Marita is described as the 'old

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[93] James Graham, *Land and Nationalism in Fictions from Southern Africa* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009), p.48.

mother plant', and various other symbolic gendered depictions problematically render nature maternal, correlating with contemporaneous patriarchal and nationalistic rhetoric, as Graham has argued.[94] Yet, whilst nationalistic rhetoric was notably familial, the narrative rejects the biological family. Janifa is disconnected from her mother, disdains her, and even goes so far as to claim that she does want to know the place of her death. When Janifa's mother later normalises Chisaga's attack on her daughter and the cover up of the rape, the rupture between mother and daughter is confirmed. Janifa's mother, in her readiness to normalise the rape, represents an exaggerated conception of passive femininity which objectifies women, and renders women subordinate to men. Her conception contradicts Marita's, who is a maternal character but a transgressive woman. She uses her sexuality to manipulate Chisaga, and leaves her husband behind in search of their son. Marita's actions even express a potential paradox in the construction of normative gender roles, for her maternal desire to find and protect her son contradicts her assumed passivity and domestication as a wife. Conversely, Janifa's mother condemns her daughter, and thus contributes to her mental collapse, contrasting the collaborative relationship between Janifa and Marita, which is perhaps more akin to companionship than a mother-daughter relationship. Yet Graham's assertions about the relationship between Marita, motherhood/reproduction, and the land still ring true. Marita is another example of a woman rendered symbolic in gendered terms and, despite Hove's feminism, he still contributes to a practice and an idea which renders women auxiliary. The apparent paradox once again illustrates the constraints of a constitutive discourse. Whilst Hove's centralisation of women and his partial abstraction of the mother-daughter

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[94] Ibid, pp.48-51.

bind have obvious destabilising potential, *Bones* seems to affirm at points a naturalised association between reproduction and the land which is integral to a heteronormative nationalistic doctrine.

Zimunya's short story 'Mother' abstractly symbolises the anti-maternal misogyny evident in some literary productions. The story revolves around a relentless chase – a son hunts his mother with an axe, threatening murder. Zimunya links the mother to nature throughout the story, both through plot and language. The wilderness is 'impregnated' with horror, tears cascade down the helpless mother's cheeks like 'waterfalls', whilst nature intervenes to help the mother after she begs for aid.[95] The chase stops for a period after the son is transformed into a baby monkey, who becomes human after his mother nurtures him once more, suggesting her undying love and maternal instinct. Yet, when the boy reaches adulthood again, he makes another axe and recommences the chase. The story ends with the alliance of mother and nature, as she is saved by a water-goddess who strips the son of his memory and causes a deep fog to descend, concealing the mother. The story's cyclical nature suggests an inevitability: mother will nurture son, and son will hunt mother. Seemingly, Zimunya suggests that the gender conditions which constitute the maternal mother also constitute the oppressive and violent son. In turn, the mother and son are involved in a binary and self-destructive relationship, which can only be undone with a reformation of connected gender roles and behaviours. This feminist intent is characteristic of a collection which represents gender violence and rape, but which also animalises and objectifies women at points. The feminisation of nature is particularly evident and gendered. Nature is feminised, and the mother's maternal

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[95] Zimunya, pp.26-27.

feelings are naturalised, suggesting a conflation of sex and gender. It is a difficult story to unpick, because its abstractions prevent singular readings. Yet Zimunya appears to reiterate a naturalised gendered essence via his use of symbolism, even though his story and collection contest gender violence and hegemonic forms of masculinity.

The depiction of the protagonist's mother in 'House of Hunger' as severe and authoritarian begins a combative relationship with mother figures in Marechera's fiction. She is notably a figure of discipline and regulation – she beats her son and polices his sexual reticence, enforcing normative roles and illustrating the function of familial education in the constitution of social values. However, unlike the women described in Mungoshi's short story collection, she is not linked to an emasculated partner and/or father. The protagonist's father vacates the narrative, and fathers are usually absent in Marechera's stories. There is a tendency to relate this to Marechera's life. He lost his father in his early teenage years, and the death was said to have prompted the adolescent Marechera's struggle with a stammer.[96] Marechera has offered numerous contradictory accounts of his father's death in his interviews, illustrating his readiness to play with fact and fiction whilst also suggesting his inability to engage with the actuality of the death.[97] Yet such an autobiographical reading seems a partial explanation at best, and perhaps the absence of father figures might be understood symbolically. It is reconcilable with the prevailing theme of emasculation in Marechera's writing, with the African paternal figure displaced by

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[96] See Veit-Wild, *A Source Book*, pp.2-3.
[97] Ibid, pp.6 and 11.

the European colonising one. The absence, then, is an absence of masculinity, arguably related to the gender conventions which Marechera's texts contest.

The absence of fathers in Zimbabwean and Southern African communities was, and is, also a contextual reality. Various demographic and health surveys in Southern African contexts have documented the statistically high levels of paternal absence, which may be linked both to gender roles and to the migrationary economics and legacies of European colonialism. For example, in South Africa the 2005 General Household Survey showed that 46.5 percent of fathers of children under the age of 15 were not living in the same household, whilst 14.5 of fathers were deceased (a high mortality rate undoubtedly related to the prevalence of aids in the region).[98] Figures compiled from Zimbabwe at the start of the decade show that 34.5 percent of fathers were absent, and 11.4 percent deceased.[99] These statistics unveil the mythological nature of the nuclear family, and illustrate the relative freedom enjoyed by men, which must be attributed in part to differing gender roles. Accordingly, paternal absence surely necessitates a reimagining of stable notions of motherhood. Indeed, as Lauretta Ngcobo has argued, 'women often ha[d] to combine the roles of motherhood and fatherhood in bringing up the children' because of the absence of fathers and partners.[100] This conflation of gender roles suggests the relationship of context to discourse, and demonstrates that discourse and gender roles are necessarily fluid manifestations. The characterisation of Masiziva in Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* who brings up the children in a rural space whilst tending to the

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[98] Linda M. Richter and Robert Morrell, 'Fathering: The Role of Men in Raising Children in Africa – Holding Up the Other Half of the Sky', *Africa's Future, Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. by Marito Garcia, Alan Pence, and Judith L. Evans (Washington: The World Bank, 2008), p.153.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid.

farm in 'blazing sun' and 'driving rain', and the violent and authoritative representations of the protagonist's mother and Nestar in 'House of Hunger' illustrate this reality.[101] It could be argued that these women assume traditionally male characteristics, in terms of the fictional gender differentiation of men and women. Yet it could also be argued that the authority of these women exists only in the absence of men, and relates to this absence. In this regard, the authority is transient, with any normative gender transgression overwritten by the return of the father, or else the maturation of sons into adulthood. That mothers were also responsible for policing and normalising gender differentiation also undercuts the potential for normative resignification produced by single parent scenarios. Yet the contradictions produced by contextual change nonetheless hint at the paradoxes inherent in discursive constructions, which contain the circumstances for change.

In Marechera's writing, mothers are not merely violent and transgressive, but are almost always repudiated, and become subject to individual and politicised forms of hatred. The nation is often configured as maternal, as it is in many nationalistic productions which rely upon, and promote, traditional values. An example of this representational trend begins *Black Sunlight*: 'That fucking bitch, my mother, why did you open up to receive him?'.[102] In one reading, the mother becomes the embodiment of the nation. Her opening up is rendered voluntary, as she accepts the penetration of the European, representing a distortion of the strategies and violence which enabled colonial occupation. In this regard, domination is conflated with desire – the mother as nation becomes complicit in her own violation, invoking the

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[101] Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning*, pp.140-141.
[102] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.3.

logic which underpins and normalises rape rhetoric. This correlation hints at the

complexities of Marechera's gendering of nationhood, and his readiness to unpick

intersecting contradictions in the construction of individual and nationalised gender

roles. Yet the intimacy of this description of misogyny also alludes to the narrator's

personal moment of genesis – to his conception as a human being, and therefore also

as a product of colonial racism. The rejection of the mother becomes the rejection of

life – the mother is made to bear the angst of the poverty of experience and racism.

This configuration is reprised in *Mindblast* through Grace's contention that Tony

hates maternal figures, because he 'believes it was the mother who ''lost'' him by

giving him life'.[103] Tony's anger is manifested as a form of artistic misogyny

through the 'savagely gleeful mutilations of the female frame' in his work.[104] Artistic

violence invokes material violence, suggesting a relationship between colonial or

postcolonial melancholia and the violent treatment of women. Accordingly, the

mother becomes more than metaphor: she becomes a manifestation of self-loathing,

of the hatred of the something 'which is also in us'.[105] She becomes a part of the self

which is made Other, which is rejected, often violently, and so the mother becomes a

means to express a form of violent unbecoming. This is not merely the plight of one

mother figure, but all women, because gender conformity relies upon an assumption

of motherhood for women. Femininity becomes motherhood, or eventual

motherhood, and this motherhood is normalised and idealised but also rendered

abject.


The expression of motherhood by female characters in Marechera's writing offers a

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[103] Marechera, *Mindblast*, p.67.
[104] Ibid.
[105] The protagonist in 'The Writer's Grain' represents this relation between self-hatred and violent acts through his irrational hatred of animals. *The House of Hunger*, p.109.

different rendition of anti-maternal sentiment. This is particularly apparent through

Olga's characterisation in *Mindblast*. She is one of Marechera's most transgressive

women. She resists social conventions and condemns the prescriptive educational

and cultural discourses which restrict individual freedoms. Whilst her extreme

ideological perspective nears parody at points, her conceptualisation compares with

Marechera's authorial vision, and specifically his rejection of institutional influence

and his extreme individualism.[106] Olga is especially critical of constructions of

femininity, and rejects 'becoming' a woman, or rather adhering to prescribed gender

norms. This is expressed in the form of maternal hatred:

> I hated my mother. I've never hated anyone so physically before. Hating her
> for she was what I would be when grown up.[107]

The hatred of motherhood is undeniably gendered: this is not a resistance to being, as

discussed in Tony's representation, but to being a woman. The mother becomes the

future self, as defined by her expression and articulation of normative femininity

endorsed by Olga's very existence. There is something material about this hatred,

which is also invoked in the physicality of self-mutilation, abortion, and suicide in

Vera's writing. After all, it is this biological materiality which is socially

contextualised, and which naturalises notions of the passive nurturing female

presence. Jack/Judith Halberstam has engaged with the violence of the 'radical

negation' of the mother figure in her/his writing, which becomes a means of

resistance against 'becoming' woman.[108] So the rejection of the mother, and of the

mother-daughter relationship, expresses a refusal to become the woman, and the

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[106] Marechera's representation of Olga's extreme anti-capitalist mindset offers an example of his desire to parody her ideological perspective: 'People who drank Coca Cola with a smile were fascist – you denounced them or you slipped a few grams of belladonna into their tea'. *Mindblast*, p.156.
[107] Ibid, p.157.
[108] J Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp.124-126.

daughter, and the mother, and therefore the subjugated.[109] Because the representation

of mother operates, as Alison Ainley has argued, as a site of 'constraint and

exploitation', a reconfiguration of the role of woman is perhaps predicated by a

rejection of the mother.[110] As Susan posits in *Black Sunlight*: 'Each generation has to

kill the one that precedes it. It's the only way'.[111] This destructive social view not

only challenges the normativity of any prior reality, but refuses the constrictive

legacies of tradition and the family.

This notion of familial rejection is also expressed through another motif of abjection:

incest. Susan suggests that she was victim to her father's incestuous desires, and she

and the narrator make other incongruous references to incest in the narrative.[112] In

doing so, she has both literally and metaphorically become victim to the institution

of the family. Notably, the taboo of incest structures the family – it is the

'constitutive outside' which determines what the family is, and how family members

may intelligibly engage with each other. Mobilising the taboo of incest therefore

threatens the notion of the family, and the structures of society underlined by the

family, and places the very identity of those who engage in incest in doubt. After all,

incest is a signifier of abjection, and associated with the unintelligibility represented

by abjection. Susan then invokes unintelligibility, as a signifier of incest and as an

anti-familial figure of transgression who threatens the very essence of the family.

Accordingly, Marechera's invocation of incest strategically informs the anti-familial

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[109] Ibid, p.129 and pp.144-145.
[110] Alison Ainley, 'The Ethics of Sexual Difference', *Abjection, Melancholia, and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p.53.
[111] Marechera, *Black Sunlight*, p.47.
[112] Susan says about her father: 'He was a very handsome man. Not like all the spotty gum chewing youths who hung around my skirts. Besides he was very good. At it...But not as good as you, you know. Do you always screw like a circular saw?' Ibid, p.47. See pp.29 and 94 for further references.

force of *Black Sunlight*, and the ambiguous but threatening status of Susan.

The characterisation of Olga, and the destructive representation of Susan, illustrate the transgressive nature of some of Marechera's female characters. Susan, as I discussed in the last chapter, exemplifies Marechera's often anarchic and destructive social vision. She is a figure of violence who brutally assaults a man, a leather jacket wearing 'specimen' who 'owns things', because he appears emblematic of a form of oppressive hegemonic masculinity.[113] She rejects her father too, beating him up after he calls her a 'conniving cunt', as she mobilises the violence inherent in his misogynistic language and in his incestuous behaviour.[114] Her revolt against language is also illustrated through an incongruous episode in which she commands the protagonist to stop the car they are driving in, so that she can destroy a sign. This act literally demonstrates her iconoclasm, which she shares with Marechera, as her 'impulse to destroy' is directed towards social constraints and gender prescriptions.[115] She also rejects the relationship between femininity and maternity, for she does not 'deal out death…every nine months but every day, every hour, every instant'.[116] Her conflation of birth and death represents a misanthropic social vision which also rejects maternal associations, illustrating her readiness to repudiate social constructs, to deal out forms of social death via the performance of a non-normative gender identity. Susan, like Olga and Grace, demonstrates that women are not merely passive victims in Marechera's fiction. They are examples of autonomous sexually liberated women who reject the constraints of socially manufactured femininity and maternity, often in violent ways. This is not merely social but

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[113] Ibid, p.102.
[114] Ibid, pp.49-50.
[115] Ibid, p.50.
[116] Ibid, p.51.

biological: Olga and Grace cannot have children, whilst Susan has not had sex since being shot. Significantly, Marechera's three most transgressive female protagonists are all seemingly incapable of bearing children. Whilst this fact may problematically suggest that social difference emerges from the biological, this seems contradicted by the denaturalising intent in Marechera's writing, and rather reiterates the anti-maternal sentiments of the characters. Accordingly, it is not possible to prescribe any singular state for women, or indeed for motherhood, in Marechera's fiction. There is a trend of anti-maternal sentiment which is gendered at points, but which is also appropriated to contest the maternalisation of women. The incessant reduction of women to symbols is problematic, yet it is nonetheless countered to a degree by radical articulations of femininity which contest, rather than uphold, normative gender constructions.

Resisting gender requires a reconstitution of both normative masculinity and femininity, because of their inter-relation within the heteronormative context addressed. It requires a destabilisation of the signification of these terms, and their existence as binary labels which necessarily constrain in one way or another. Marechera's articulation of masculinity expresses the violent disparity of contrasting gender roles. Men fuck women, but women rarely fuck men. Men perform their heterosexuality, whereas women are rendered vehicles for these performances. Men hit and physically subjugate women, who are victimised by the actions of men and appropriated. Women who contradict normative expectations are often policed. They are made into witches, or animalised, as superhuman or subhuman manifestations of an anti-familial nature.

Oppressive gender manifestations are contested in male writing. Hove resists the marginalisation of women by consistently centralising female protagonists, and by exploring the contextual and historical nature of their victimisation. Marechera strategically engages with performance to provoke the artificiality of heteronormativity, and to denaturalise gender. He attacks the logic of heteronormativity, especially in *The House of Hunger* in which the dual critique of gender and heterosexual normativity is clearest. Yet Marechera's deconstructions and the clear feminist intentions of several male writers are countered, to an extent at least, by the sexist and misogynistic notions which infuse their writing. Whilst the interpretation of these will be dependent on the reader and on questions of representation, certain incongruous and unequal representational tropes persist. Women are persistently sexualised, often through fragmentation, which leads to a fixation on the body and invokes the dehumanising colonial strategies of disembodiment. This dehumanising manifestation is also illustrated by a discourse of animality which incessantly stresses gender difference. Its incongruous manifestations both reiterate binary ideas and discipline transgressive women. Mungoshi's writing is especially critical, whether voluntary or involuntarily, of dominant women, and there are sexist undercurrents which cannot not be reconciled. The emasculatory rhetoric of these women seems to respond to an anxiety of masculinity which tightly upholds the normative masculine, and is more critical of dominant women than it is of dominant men. There is also a peculiar distaste for mother figures in Zimbabwean literature, which contradicts heteronormative nationalisms, but nonetheless villainises a socially constrained notion of motherhood. Mothers are made to bear the burden of colonialism, of being racially

disenfranchised individuals, and of the gender constructions which preceded and produced them as subjects.

Zimbabwean male writing of the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s is progressive at times, especially in the poststructural engagement of Marechera. Marechera is certainly not deserving of some of the censure he has received, for he did so much to reconstitute the literary terrain, and to complexly challenge a nationalistic and heteronormative hierarchy. Yet he, and to differing degrees all male writers discussed, are vulnerable to criticism and seem to bestow gender difference in the very texts which seek to undermine normative oppression. This is the challenge of a constitutive mode, which is rendered more difficult by the need to represent, but not reiterate, punitive gender realities. Poststructural strategies of destabilisation, such as those related in Butler's writing, are often the target of criticism because they are so careful, yet they illustrate the need to deconstruct and undermine the logic of normativity without reiterating its effects or reconstituting a different oppressive reality. Marechera, and to varying degrees the other writers discussed, changed the literary terrain. They challenged hegemonies of race, gender, and very occasionally sexuality, and Marechera paved the way for the emergence of a writer as violent and transgressive as Vera. Yet the limits and paradoxical sexisms of their work must be acknowledged and contextualised. It is only through this acknowledgement that normative constructions may be undone, for normativity must be challenged in all its forms and intersections.

## **Chapter Three: Revealing Same-Sex Desire and Sexuality in Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe**

The gender norms represented in early postcolonial Zimbabwean literature, and replicated in colonial and postcolonial society, relied upon, and normalised, an assumption of heterosexuality. The practice of sexualising women in Zimbabwean literature represents a notably heterosexual form of voyeurism – men appropriate women, and assume their heterosexual desire, or at the very least their passivity in the face of male heterosexual desire. Childhood and adolescent rituals, such as those discussed in relation to *The House of Hunger*, also assume and normalise heterosexuality and emphasise the heteronormative constitution of the family.[1] This familial notion underlines conceptualisations of the nation in postcolonial nationalisms, and illustrates one of the many intersectional dimensions of gender and sexual discourses. Notably, heterosexual and gender normativity infused the rhetoric of colonialism – of the notion of the white imperialist man conquering feminised lands.[2] Politicised forms of heterosexuality and European gender norms influenced the religious instruction and the education of Africans subject to colonialism in Southern Rhodesia. Relatable in part to a deeply embedded discourse of discretion, which corresponded with forms of British Victorian conservatism, homosexuality was an absent and invisible presence in public discourse. This illustrates the power of norms to 'govern our intelligibility', as Butler has claimed, and the relationship

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[1] Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993 [1988]).
[2] Edward Said has described this constitution of the 'Orient' in colonial discourses as a 'male power fantasy', illustrating the phallocentric force of the imperialistic project. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p.207.

between the discursive and the material.[3] Whilst the engagement was not entirely

consistent, homosexuality remained largely absent until the 1990s when local and

global movements produced discursive change, and prompted the public

homophobia of Mugabe and a changing context discussed in the introduction.

Discourses are, however, never utterly coherent or definitive. As intersectional and

necessarily fluid manifestations, they are marked by the constant possibility of

disruption. These possibilities are inherent in the differential production of meaning,

and in the processes and products of exclusionary but unstable normative forms. The

violence of discourses, and the reiterative and regulatory function of normativity,

hint at an inherent anxiety and the possibilities for the production or resuscitation of

new meanings and terms.[4] Yet normative discourses are constitutive, and are

proffered and protected by the illusory function of normativity. I have discussed this

constitutive constraint throughout this thesis, especially in the last chapter in terms of

the sexist and misogynistic ideas in the work of writers who ostensibly sought to

unseat oppressive gender constructions. This illustrates the potential limits of

discourses, and the difficulties in contesting deeply embedded and constitutive

norms. In this regard, the normativity of heterosexuality has been pervasive,

rendering homosexuality invisible and unintelligible. The literature of the 70s, 80s,

and early 90s, for the most part, reflected and shaped this discourse. Homosexuality

was absent, although some homoerotic depictions hinted at traces of desire repressed

by normative conditions. Yet the writing of Marechera provided an exception. His

portrayals of homosexual encounters were uniquely progressive, and informed a

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[3] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.57.
[4] Butler argues that the nature of sexual performativity is 'beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome', because it is haunted by the excluded domain of sexual possibility inherent in the differential production of heteronorms. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p.85.

fascinating counter-discursive affront which will be central to the concerns of this chapter.

Discourses are also involved in an inherently unstable relationship with context. Whilst poststructural theorists rightly depict discourse as defining the understanding of context, context also necessarily informs and defines discourses.[5] This inter-relation may be fractious at points, for contextual change may contradict normative discourses or expose the inherent contradictions within. In this regard, Derrida has addressed the 'incessant movement of recontextualization', which illustrates the indeterminacy of context.[6] Context is not stable but fluid, and is subject to recontextualisation and (limited) forms of decontextualisation, even if normative discourses promote singularity and rigidity. This is even more relevant to a global world, in which localised responses are subject to disruption by foreign discourses, or even politics and economics. My desire to investigate the relation of discourse and context focuses principally on one specific contextual phenomenon of colonialism in Southern Africa – the mining compounds essential to the economics of the period. These contexts, which were predominantly male spaces, witnessed the emergence of same-sex practices which contradicted the heteronormative conditions and performances of the period. As spaces which generally excluded women, the deferential normativity of gender identity was also disturbed. If the performativity of male gender identity was related to the treatment of women, what happened to

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[5] Jacques Derrida famously claimed that 'there is nothing outside the text' before elaborating his notion, in response to some misreadings, as 'there is nothing outside context'. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.136.

[6] Ibid.

gender performance when that relationary nature is disturbed by contextual change? And what of sexuality?

This chapter will begin by engaging with the depiction of homosexuality and same-sex desire in literature of the early postcolonial period. I will trace the depictions and potentialities of homoeroticism, whilst considering the contextual relation between homoeroticism and heteronormativity. My focus will largely be on the writing of Shimmer Chinodya in this section, because of the incongruous use of homoeroticism in writing that is liable to accusations of sexism at points, as discussed in my last chapter.

I will then move into a discussion of Marechera's writing, focusing primarily on 'House of Hunger'. This will relate to the earlier discussion of Chinodya's work, but focus on a differing strategic depiction and manipulation of homoeroticism in Marechera's novelette. I will deconstruct a specific passage, and consider how Marechera disturbs the deferential nature of heteronormativity, and denaturalises the normative gender and sexual roles which underline dominant discourses. I will then briefly engage with other representations of homosexuality in Marechera's work, to further contextualise his approach. I will follow my discussions of Marechera with an analysis of same-sex sexuality in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, in an attempt to engage with same-sex desire between women, which is notably less commonly represented than male homosexual desire and sex in Zimbabwean literature and society.[7] I will read these moments of homoerotic subversion alongside

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[7] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004 [1988]).

the clear feminist tendencies of the text, and consider the represented relationship between gender and sexuality.

I will then engage with the representations of same-sex sex and homosexuality which marked the changing context of the 1990s. This will begin with an analysis of Stanley Nyamfukudza's short story 'Posters on the Wall', which depicts hegemonic same-sex relationships which take place in a prison.[8] This will predicate and inform the discussions of mining compounds in the second half of the chapter. I will then analyse Nevanji Madanhire's *If the Wind Blew*, which openly describes an adulterous homosexual affair.[9] The affair will be discussed alongside the representation of governmental repression and gender disparity in the novel. I will conclude the section with a discussion and problematization of Charles Mungoshi's short story 'Of Lovers and Wives', which also explores the homosexual affair of a married man.[10] This section aims to define a changing relationship with homosexuality reflected in literature of the period.

My chapter will then shift focus entirely to a discussion of same-sex sexuality within mining compounds in both Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. This section will consider how contextual change may undercut pre-existing discourse conditions and gender and sexual expectations. I will not engage with literature during this section in any depth, save for a brief discussion of Mark Mathabane's memoir of apartheid, *Kaffir Boy*, because of the lack of depiction of same-sex mining relationships in the

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[8] Stanley Nyamfukudza, *If God was a Woman* (Harare: The College Press, 1992 [1991]).
[9] Nevanji Madanhire, *If the Wind Blew* (Harare: College Press, 1996).
[10] Charles Mungoshi, *Walking Still* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1997).

literary record.[11] This absence perhaps relates to the regulatory condition of heteronormativity I have discussed, which has effected the discussion and documentation of sexual practices within mining compounds. Yet these compounds offer a uniquely recontextualised space which allows for an analysis of the relationship between context and discourse, and are also a manifestation of the colonial encounter which informs my work. A failure to engage with the significant scholarship of the last twenty years then would be to ignore a significant presence of same-sex sexuality within Southern Rhodesia, and would risk underwriting the unintelligible effects of heteronormative discourse which my work seeks to resist. My chapter will accordingly discuss this recent research, and will also consider a neighbouring South African context because of the comparable if different nature of compounds. Some African Rhodesians also worked in South Africa, whilst the greater depth of research in a South African context aids the understanding of the nature and effects of same-sex sexuality within the mines. This section will specifically dissect the nature of these dissident acts, as I will attempt to understand the social signification of same-sex relationships, and their destabilising possibilities. I will therefore consider how reconcilable these incidents of same-sex sexuality were, and I will also use these relationships to analyse the suitability of contemporaneous discourses and European and American orientated gender theory. It is not my intention merely to claim that same-sex acts were homosexual, just as homoeroticism may have no relationship to homosexuality. To do so would be overly assumptive and problematic, because it would represent a conflation of a sexual act with a relevant sexuality, and ignore the heterosexual relationships these

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[11] Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy: The True Story of a Black Youth's Coming of Age in Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

men may also have engaged in. Accordingly, I will attempt to avoid defining

sexuality in binary terms but consider how the same-sex acts correlate with, or

disturb, the heteronormative context depicted.

Shimmer Chinodya's Incongruous Homoeroticism

My discussion of Chinodya in this thesis so far has been relatively limited, and has

been concerned with situating and contextualising female sexualisation and a

discourse of animality in Zimbabwean literature. Yet it is necessary to discuss

Chinodya at greater length, because his work is more plotted than, and in many ways

offers a rich contrast to, the writing of Marechera and Vera. There is a didactic

element to some of Chinodya's writing, and this is most prominent in his novelette

*Tale of Tamari*, which was later turned into the film *Everyone's Child*.[12] This film

was directed by Dangarembga but funded and heavily influenced by American and

European backers and producers, who sought to stress the didactic nature of its

source material. Its exaggerated AIDS based storyline formed part of a quasi-

imperialistic act of postcolonial compassion, which reiterates the imperilled

'difference' of a homogenised African context. Whilst this reconstitution of *Tale of*

*Tamari* should not be used to condemn Chinodya, and was criticised by

Dangarembga who documented the interventions of the film's American backers, the

overt didacticism of the story lends itself to such appropriation.[13] This didacticism is

similarly represented in his early novel *Dew in the Morning*, which valorises and

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[12] Shimmer Chinodya, *Tale of Tamari* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2004); and Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Everyone's Child* (Zimbabwe: Media for Development Trust, 1996).
[13] Dangarembga famously claimed that *Everyone's Child* was 'not the film [she] wanted to make', Anne Ciecko, 'African ''First Films'': Gendered Authorship, Identity, and Discursive Resistance', *The Routledge Companion to Cinema & Gender*, ed. by Kristin Lené Hole et al (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p.243.

promotes the ideas of education which similarly informed ZANU-PF's early educational policies.[14] Labelling Chinodya as didactic is not intended to imply criticism of his body of writing, but to illustrate that he was a very different writer from Marechera, to whom he will be compared in this section. This difference is also illustrated by Chinodya's treatment of colonialism, which is far subtler than in the combative Marechera's stories. Colonialism underlines *Dew in the Morning*, through the idea of land repossession which informs the text, but colonialism is not explicitly invoked or criticised, even though the story takes place in a rural space demarcated by colonial authorities for the use of black Zimbabweans. The discreet presence of colonialism is similarly represented through the high fees Zimbabweans must pay for education, and through matters of religion. Chinodya's less combative approach may similarly be applied to his depictions of gender performances, which at times appear to endorse the heteronormative conditions depicted. Women are often sexualised and victimised and are usually marginalised, although not all his female characters are weak, as Masiziva of *Dew in the Morning* demonstrates. Yet there is certainly no Chinodya protagonist as independent and combative as *Black Sunlight*'s Susan, *Bones*' Marita, *Nervous Conditions*' Nyasha, or a string of Vera's protagonists.[15]

Chinodya's writing, however, includes several incongruous homoerotic moments which differentiate him from most of his male contemporaries. These should be acknowledged and read alongside the depiction of gender in his writing because of the relationship between gender norms and heterosexuality. For whilst homoerotic desire does not lead to same-sex sex in Chinodya's novels, the depictions invite a

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[14] Shimmer Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2001 [1982]).
[15] Chenjerai Hove, *Bones* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990 [1988]) and Dambudzo Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

recontextualisation of the voyeurism and assumed sexual intent of several male characters. In *Dew in the Morning*, hegemonic masculinity is depicted through the representations of various labourers who aid the young protagonist and his mother in farm work in the absence of the father/husband figure. The first of these male helpers, Boyce, represents sex with women as a socially entrenched right, irrespective of consent, as he tells Godi about an attempted rape of a young girl, and normalises resistance by telling him that 'Girls are always screaming. That's their way of saying yes'.[16] This characterisation illustrates how gender conventions enable the domination of women, whilst rendering the performance of this domination a signifier of masculinity. In this regard, the homosocial relations operate to 'perform' masculinity, and to discursively influence behaviour through face to face contact. The third labourer, the married Remoni, is a womaniser. He is unable to 'last two days without entering a girl's hut', and gleefully describes some of his sexual exploits to Godi, again illustrating a desire to declare and to perform his heterosexuality.[17] The activities of other villagers, such as a neighbour who beats his wife and sleeps with his hired help, reiterates a vision of heteronormativity which normalises the sexual and even violent subjugation of women by men.

The representations of hegemonic masculinity in Chinodya's text are disturbed by two incongruous depictions of same-sex desire in the middle of the narrative. These depictions are surprising intrusions into a text that is strongly representative of heteronormative conditions. The first instance of same-sex desire is directed towards the second labourer, the young Midu, after the protagonist invites him to share a

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[16] Chinodya, *Dew in the Morning*, p.115.
[17] Ibid, pp.179-180.

blanket with him one night. Whilst this invitation is not surprising, especially in a heteronormative context which does not account for same-sex sexuality, the descriptions of Midu's body queer both the moment and the motivation for the protagonist's invitation. Midu is described in extensive detail, as the protagonist details the smell of his thick and curly hair, the nature of his light and smooth skin, the shape and colour of his eyes, his boyish arms and his 'moist', 'gaping', and 'thick' lips.[18] No other character in the novel is afforded such meticulous description, whilst there is a sexually charged intimacy to the portrayal of Midu. The homoerotic possibilities of this passage are emphasised shortly after, when the narrator describes how he felt a 'vague sensation on touching [Midu's] dark, naked body', when covering him with a blanket.[19] The ambiguity of this 'vague' sensation appears covertly to reference homosexual desire, and perhaps illustrates the irreconcilability of this desire in the normative context of society and the novel. These homoerotic feelings are repeated later when Remoni is also rendered the subject of sexualised descriptions, in a fashion which mimics the voyeuristic gaze typically directed towards women:

> I looked at his tense, dark-skinned thighs, his bulging, tight-fitting shorts and his moist, dark, laughing lips. There was a bold aching sensuousness in his diminutive features, which many girls would no doubt find attractive.[20]

The sensuous and sexualised nature of the descriptions, and the veiled reference to Remoni's manhood, queer the protagonist's gaze. This parallels the objectification of women, as demonstrated by one particularly evocative passage, quoted in the previous chapter, in which the narrator fetishises the virginity of a village girl:

> A girl stood in front of the hut stamping mealies in a wooden mortar. Her dress kept moving up her thighs as she raised the pestle, shaking her

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[18] Ibid, p.157.
[19] Ibid, p.159.
[20] Ibid, p.181.

> breasts...I caught the scent of her body as I passed. It was the smell of sleep – of blankets, perspiration and virginity, I decided.[21]

Sexualisation is rendered part of the descriptions of both male and female characteristics, even if the depiction of virginity is specific to femininity. However, the homoerotic depictions of male characters do not lead to any material result. The only physical contact occurs when the narrator covers Midu with a blanket, and the novel does not engage with the ambiguous nature of the homoerotic descriptions. These depictions then appear to reflect the cultural unintelligibility of homosexuality, because same-sex sex is never admitted as a possibility or named, and only gestured toward.

The sexualisation of the labourers by Godi suggests a homosexual desire that renders his sexuality ambiguous, and defies a binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Additionally, this episode has a clear relation to gender. It is invariably women that are subject to the voyeuristic gaze of men, disempowered by the gender performance and the disparity inherent in the performance. Yet the normative relation of the voyeuristic gaze is reconstituted in this instance. The heterosexual assumption which underlines the referential gaze is threatened because the subject of the gaze is a man. So a contradiction appears (although it is inherent), born of the inter-relation between gender and heterosexual norms. How is hegemonic masculinity, which promotes the male domination of subjugated women, reconcilable with same-sex sexuality? Who functions as the dominant party within a male homosexual partnership? And similarly, what effect does same-sex female desire have on male and female specific heteronormative roles? These questions are invoked by a text

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[21] Ibid, p.196.

which gestures towards homosexual desire, and introduces homoerotic desire at the very moments in which the highly sexualised nature of the masculinity of the various male labourers is depicted. Importantly, this use of homoeroticism is not framed in a way which reiterates or valorises heteronormative values. It is not part of a performance of masculinity, and both examples occur in intimate settings which could predicate a same-sex act. The failure to represent this then may be a product of its unintelligibility within a society which necessitates the public repression of this desire, yet perhaps hints that such desire may be realised beyond the narrative space. It may be fitting, if overly speculative, to return to one of the central framing devices of the novel: the living situation of Godi's parents. The parents live apart because the costs of the children's education appear to necessitate two incomes. Yet, throughout the novel their living situation is represented as unnecessary. Godi doubts the financial necessity of their arrangement, and even explicitly bemoans the fact that the father must sleep alone in a large bed.[22]  There is nothing particularly abnormal about it nonetheless, as fathers would often work and live away from home, especially during a colonial period where labour was customarily displaced. However, there is a possibility that the living situation of Godi's parents is not the product of financial necessity but of a sexual irreconcilability. This possibility, which is highly speculative, is nonetheless an implied possibility because of Chinodya's failure or refusal to consider the possibilities and ramifications of the homoerotic/sexual desire he represents in the novel.

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[22] Ibid, pp.78 and 141.

Chinodya returns to the theme of homoeroticism in *Harvest of Thorns,* his account of

the liberation war and its aftermath.[23] The homoeroticism takes place in the

dormitory of a boarding school which one of the novel's protagonists, Benjamin,

attends. When Benjamin starts at the school, he is subjected to the mockery and

initiation rituals endured by the newcomer, which are led by an older bully known as

Chemhere. One evening, Chemhere and a group of boys converge on Benjamin's

bed, and strip him of his clothes and underwear. An 'eruption' of shrieks and hoots

follows with the discovery of Benjamin's clean pubis and after 'someone had popped

open his tiny penis'.[24] The episode depicts a form of mockery similar to that

illustrated through the representation of the snake in 'House of Hunger', as the

phallus becomes an object of derision, and a means to establish and reiterate

masculinities via its signification. Yet the language of Chinodya's text, and the

notable portrayal of 'eruption', as well as a later reference to the 'queer' Chemhere,

conflates the homoerotic with the homosexual.[25] A conception of the homoerotic is

also suggested by the characterisation of one student who liked to discuss

masturbation 'after hours', and another who 'took pride in showing off a bottle of

Vaseline filled with three months of sperm'.[26] Whilst these depictions of sexual

discussion may be an understandable part of adolescent conversation, the framing of

the events, and especially the peculiar desire to undress and see Benjamin undressed,

invokes the possibility of repressed homosexual desire. This is especially prominent

in view of the adolescent context, which, like in *Dew in the Morning* and 'House of

Hunger', associates homoeroticism with sexual development, and serves to queer, or

least invoke the possibility of, same-sex desire, via the rituals which serve to police

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[23] Shimmer Chinodya, *Harvest of Thorns* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990 [1989]).
[24] Ibid, p.90.
[25] Ibid, pp.90-91.
[26] Ibid, p.91.

and promote heteronormativity.[27] Whilst the public nature of these moments enables the homoeroticism to be framed as part of a heterosexual performance, Chinodya's language explicitly counters purely heterosexual readings.

Marechera's Counter-Heteronormative Strategies

Marechera's 'House of Hunger' was notably the first Zimbabwean text to depict a homosexual act, even if its representation has been overlooked in criticism. It is not a problematic representation, or a homophobic one, but informs a carefully nuanced strategy of denaturalisation, destabilisation, and recontextualisation which typifies the complexity of Marechera's approach. It is part of an ostensible attempt to disturb the force of heterosexuality as a foundation of gender difference in the novelette, which is essential because an assumption of heterosexuality predicates the construction of gender difference, as well as the production of forms of hegemonic masculinity reliant upon the performance of heterosexuality. In turn, Marechera's strategic engagement with the same-sex act should be read alongside his confrontations of gender norms.

The act of same-sex sex in Marechera's 'House of Hunger' is preceded by the highly homoerotic public masturbation scene. As I argued in Chapter one, this episode promotes heteronormativity via a form of ritualism, and is notably homosocial, as

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[27] Acts of homosexuality during adolescence have been documented in Southern African contexts. For example, Herbert Aschwanden has reported that mutual masturbation occurred between Karanga (Southern Shona) boys in Zimbabwe/Southern Rhodesia, and was regarded as part of a transitory phase. *Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), p.206; and Interviews of Shona chiefs by Shoko also reference the practice of 'homosexuality' between boys at puberty. Tabona Shoko, '''Worse than Dogs and Pigs?'' Attitudes Toward Homosexual Practice in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Homosexuality* 57.5 (May 2010), p.640.

the event occurs only in the presence of a 'gang' of boys. This homosocial space is also homoerotic – descriptions of Peter as 'oiled…all over', as 'lean and strong and handsome', and the portrayal of his penis as 'stiff' and 'huge', strongly sexualise the episode.[28] The spectating boys are not merely passive participants but move closer to Peter as he orgasms, and sweat and sigh as they mimic the responses of a sexual partner. In the process, the homosocial is infused with the homoerotic and even the homosexual. Once more the male voyeuristic gaze is resignified, as it is directed towards a man in a homosocial context. This is not dissimilar to Chinodya's queering of the male gaze, although it is notably less intimate and more performative in this instance. Intriguingly, the dislocation of this episode, which is perhaps a product of Marechera's fragmented and chaotic writing style, permits its recontextualisation. In the context of the period, this is a heteronormative performance used to promote the relationship between male gender identity and sex. Yet this performance is so readily transformed, because the ritualistic act could also inform the normalisation of homosexuality. It might even be argued that Marechera's framing of the episode reveals a repressed same-sex desire, which is a characteristic of highly regulated heteronormative environments. Whilst I have previously discussed Shona practices, different but not dissimilar forms of heteronormative ritualism, which require the absence but imaginary presence of a female subject, are present in societies throughout the world. These perhaps illustrate how the homoerotic elements of the homosocial allow, or cannot help but allow, for a partial emergence of homosexual desire as a form of control, or policing. After all, heteronormative forms are predicated on the exclusion or partial exclusion of homosexuality, sometimes through discursive strategies which render homosexuality unintelligible or invisible.

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[28] Marechera, pp.48-49.

This is not to promote the normativity of a binary position but merely to represent the differential nature of normative heterosexuality, which rarely admits fluidity.

Whilst notions of homosexuality and homoeroticism are more implicit in the episode of Peter's masturbation, and arguably could function to endorse heteronormativity, they are explicitly and differently invoked later in the text through Marechera's representation of a fight between Harry and the narrator. The fight is prompted by a trick of Harry's, who drops a rubber snake onto the narrator's open notebook:

> Something fell onto the open pages of my book; I choked back my scream when I realised what it was and swivelled round in anger…Harry was laughing sympathetically.
> 'It won't tempt you. 'It's not real, man,' Harry said.[29]

The snake is an overtly phallic symbol, which also invokes biblical connotations of temptation relatable to the colonial era education system described, which was underlined by Christian attitudes.[30] The phallic symbol is both threatening and tempting, suggesting Harry's desire to emasculate the protagonist through recourse to the socially abject homosexual. The use of the snake begins Marechera's play with social signification, and anticipates the actions which follow. Harry's use of 'real…man', which is interrupted by a comma, also invokes a singular conception of masculinity to illustrate how a conception of hegemonic masculinity is threatened by the emergence of homosexual desire. Harry's laugher, and the image of the detached phallic symbolic, metaphorically invoke a notion of emasculation present throughout Marechera's text. This emasculating rhetoric can act as a means of policing the heteronormative heterosexual matrix, but in this episode also reveals the presence of

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[29] Marechera, p.33.
[30] See Ralph Hood, 'Another Epistemic Evaluation', for a brief discussion of the phallic significance of snakes. *Psychoanalysis and Theism*, ed. by Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi (Maryland: Jason Aronson, 2010), p.148.

homosexual desire. Importantly, Marechera precedes the fight by describing that 'the girls had already gone', suggesting his desire to signal to the reader that this play of heterosexuality and homosexuality takes place in a male only space. [31] In this regard, it is also possible to read this incident not only as a joke which threatens the narrator's sense of masculinity, but as an implied invitation for sex.

The same-sex implications of Harry's emasculation become explicit as the fight develops. It is noteworthy that the narrator responds to Harry's actions by physically attacking him, because it suggests a desire to reassert a sense of masculinity in flux through the recourse to the physical violence which acts as a signifier of hegemonic masculinity. The effect of Harry's emasculation is also demonstrated when the narrator incongruously stuffs the rubber snake back into his pocket before chasing the fleeing Harry, reiterating the symbolic value of the snake as a signifier of both hegemonic masculinity, and the loss of masculinity. The fight continues outside in the crashing rain, as Marechera collapses the distance between heterosexuality, homoeroticism, and homosexuality, illustrating in the process the connections between all three:

> our blows seemed like a lover's teasing and our struggles had become embraces. Our kicks were mere coquetry. And then something supremely white, blindingly so, erupted at the heart of the storm...I began to laugh. Harry began to laugh...we shed our clothes as we laughed and began to paint each other's bodies with handfuls of mud. Earth to earth.[32]

The blows become the caresses of lovers, as the heteronormative fight turns into a homosexual embrace. The sexuality of the episode is emphasised through the white eruption which clearly connotes an ejaculation that symbolises not only an active

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[31] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.33.
[32] Ibid, pp.33-34.

sexual act, but a form of release, or freedom. This is illustrated by the laughter of the couple, which is no longer mocking but collaborative. Interestingly, the use of mud, the storm, and in particularly the line 'Earth to earth', highlights the naturalistic nature of the embrace, suggesting Marechera's self-conscious resistance to discourses which stress the unnatural nature of homosexuality. The performance aspect of this episode is also significant, as Harry and the narrator's embrace takes place on a road, in front of a car with headlights beamed upon the two characters, mimicking the spotlight of a stage, whilst illustrating that the event is witnessed by spectators. Consequently, the reader is invited to compare this episode of public performance with Peter's masturbation, and the public rape, although this performance destabilises notions of heteronormativity by unveiling the abject or excluded homosexual domain.

After his embrace with Harry, the narrator makes numerous references to a form of internal transformation, or even rebirth, which has religious relevance. He compares the new clarity he receives to the 'madness' which overcomes Pauline travellers on the road to Damascus, whilst the phantoms of the Black Heroes which plagued the narrator to this point in the story also disappear. This reference to St Paul is seemingly ironic, because Paul wrote rigidly about sexual practice and dissidence, and his writing in Romans commonly serves as the primary anti-homosexual argument in certain Christian denominations.[33] Consequently, the narrator inverts these sexual restrictions, and his transformation is rendered confluent with an obtained freedom, illustrating that it is sexual liberation, and the defeat of

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[33] See James Neill, *The Origins and Role of Same-Sex Relations in Human Societies* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), pp.219-222; and Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.133-134.

normativity, which has freed the narrator from the search for Black Heroes which consumes part of the narrative. This search is no longer needed because the heroism has been internalised, as the narrator conquers the forces of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity which repress identity and worsen the emasculatory effects of colonial rule which engendered the narrator's search for heroes in the first place. Marechera follows this section with a critique of a racist and misogynistic Roman Catholic Priest, elaborating on the religious dimensions to the repression of sexuality suggested by references to Paul and the Snake. The invocation of this religious dimension serves to critique an institution which valorises and regulates heteronormativity, and which thus contributes to the conditions that inhibit personal freedoms.

The implied comparison of the performance of Peter's masturbation with the same-sex embrace functions to retrospectively reconstitute the signification of the original act of masturbation. Whilst the homoerotic possibilities of the masturbation scene arguably queer the episode, it is still initially framed as heterosexual, because Peter's homoerotic performance illustrates his ability to make 'girl's pregnant'.[34] In the process, the erect phallus is rendered heterosexual because of its contextual signification, and because heterosexuality is assumed because of the context. Yet Marechera's later representation of the transition from a homoerotic to homosexual encounter alters the signification of the phallus, by first decontextualising it through its representation as a snake, and then through an act of homosexuality which disturbs the relationship between homoeroticism and heteronormativity.[35] The erect

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[34] Marechera, *The House of Hunger*, p.48.
[35] Ibid, pp.33-34.

phallus is then reconstituted from a symbol of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity to homosexuality, encouraging a rereading of Peter's masturbation because the erect penis may be used to make girls pregnant, or may be used for acts of sexual pleasure between men. This readiness to visualise homosexuality then alters the social signification of homoeroticism, and challenges the apparent coherence of heteronormativity, suggesting the potential repression of same-sex desire. This is gestured towards in Chinodya's text, but ultimately unfulfilled, because the significance of homoeroticism is overwritten by the regulating conditions of heteronormativity, and specifically by the unintelligibility of homosexuality within a contemporaneous heteronormative culture of discretion. Marechera's writing techniques specifically challenge this cultural unintelligibility through a process of deconstruction which forces a resignification of homoeroticism, and of its referential effect. In the process, heterosexuality and homosexuality are not rendered as binary normative and non-normative states, but as comparable ways of being and existing, especially because the protagonist also engages in heterosexual sex. However, the protagonist is coerced into acts of heterosexual sex by his brother, and by a mother who criticises his masturbation habits, but he wilfully engages in an act of same-sex sex.

The representation of same-sex sex in 'House of Hunger' is not unique in Marechera's writing. Rather, it begins a trend of representation in the work of an author self-consciously determined to resist heteronormativity. Drew Shaw, who has also sought to address the dearth of criticism dealing with homosexuality in Zimbabwean literature, has identified references in at least eight different stories (and has ignored or missed the clear homosexual implications in 'House of

Hunger').[36] These are not always straightforward depictions, but are acutely engaged

with the contemporaneous realities of heteronormativity. Perhaps the most

controversial account begins *Black Sunlight*, through the characterisation of the

'great chief' whose 'large erection' and general characterisation parodies

Europeanised depictions of the 'African Savage', as well as cultural associations

between masculinity and virility.[37] He is a caricature of a violent form of hegemonic

masculinity, which notably had a stranglehold on the articulations of post-

independent nationalism emerging in the early 1980s and proliferating thereafter. Yet

the episode has homophobic potentialities which may uphold, rather than undermine,

heteronormativity. Shaw has gone so far as to claim that the episode mocks

homosexuality, even if he also acknowledges an important facet of the

representation: that homosexuality is shown to precede the colonial encounter.[38] Yet

condemning Marechera for this passage risks simplifying it and decontextualising it

from the nightmarish surrealism of *Black Sunlight*. The section represents a form of

carnivalesque satire, as the combination of racist stereotypes of a pre-colonial and

sexually atavistic tyrant, the feminisation of the European imperialist, and the

lamentations and torture of 'Christian', critique various discursive configurations and

intersections. To read Marechera's depiction of homosexuality as mocking is to risk

undermining the complex negotiations of a clearly satirical account. Rather, the

episode may be read as confronting heteronormativity by articulating and confusing

the relationships between dominant discourses. The heteronormative chief is also a

hypocritical 'sodomiser', and conceived in terms of the white European Christian

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[36] Drew Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations: Dambudzo Marechera and Zimbabwean Literature', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, vol. 1, ed. by Dirk Naguschewski and Flora Veit-Wild (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), p.102
[37] Dambudzo Marechera, *Black Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp.1-3.
[38] Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations', p.104.

rhetoric which reimagined local gender and sexual norms. The articulation of homosexuality as un-African is associated with this religious notion, and undermined by the notably pre-colonial presence of homosexual desire. This confusion and conflation undermines a binary division, even if the binary vision of female and male is present in the inversion of gendered activity and passivity represented by the male chief and the female coloniser. It is ultimately a chaotic but satirical beginning which interrogates contradictions in normative and oppressive discourses. This counter-discursive reading correlates with Marechera's other depictions of homosexuality, such as his critique of the regulatory nature of heteronormativity in *The Black Insider*.[39]

Marechera's ground-breaking depictions of homosexuality are also marked by what Shaw has described as another 'landmark' – the first depiction of a homosexual encounter between women in Zimbabwean literature.[40] This is essential, because practically every reference to same-sex desire/sexuality in Zimbabwean writing, whether explicit or implicit, relates to men.[41] It would be reductive to define any singular reason for this, but there are various potentialities which likely contribute to the absence. It may be because of local associations between 'real' sex and penetration, and the centralisation of male experience reflected by gender norms. Femininity was and is also differently articulated from masculinity, and was incessantly maternalised in the period discussed; to be a woman was to be a mother

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[39] The narrator bemoans that 'the secret of homosexuality in E.M. Forster's life seems also to have stunted and finally silenced his talent, to our great loss', and lambasts the marginalisation of Oscar Wilde because of his sexuality. Dambudzo Marechera, *The Black Insider* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992 [1990]), p.74.

[40] Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations', p.106.

[41] A reference is made in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* to Tracey as Bougainvillea 'special friend', implying a form of homosexual engagement similarly hinted at in *Nervous Conditions*, as I will discuss later. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006), p.36.

or future mother and so subsumed within a heteronormative familial unit.

Additionally, the articulation of normative masculinity relies upon the heterosexual

compliancy of women, and so homosexuality threatens the nature of hegemonic

masculinity. Notably, Marechera's depiction of sex between women resists the

discursive conditions described, as sexual transgression is related to gender

normativity:

> When [Grace] opened the door and it was Rita, their bodies *knew*. A totally
> physical terrible ecstasy…And there was nothing to explain, nothing to feel
> ashamed about. Everything was so right. Rita had cooked a meal and Grace
> spread the table and they ate facing one another like two people who had
> been living together for a long time.[42]

The emphasises on bodies is notable, and has led Shaw to claim that Grace reclaims

ownership of her body as an act of defiance against patriarchy.[43] Shaw's argument is

persuasive, and responds to the clear gendered concerns Grace espouses throughout

the narrative. Particularly telling, however, is Marechera's counter-discursive

affront. The reference to the oxymoronic 'terrible ecstasy' references the social

irreconcilability of the act, whilst the use of 'shame' is particularly evocative

because shame functions as a means of policing dissident forms of sexuality. The

readiness to personify the bodies of the protagonists resists denaturalising rhetoric by

rendering the moment organic, much like the use of mud in the episode in 'House of

Hunger'. Similarly, the depiction of Grace and Rita eating a meal afterwards

reiterates the naturalness of both the act of sex and their companionship. This re-

engages with the familial ideas which underwrite heterosexuality, and offers another

example of Marechera's self-conscious engagement with discourse and its normative

and regulatory effects.

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[42] Dambudzo Marechera, *Mindblast; or The Definitive Buddy* (Harare: The College Press, 1986
[1984]), p.70.
[43] Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations', p.105.

Gendering Homoeroticism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Whilst there is a dearth of representations of acts of homosexuality between women in Zimbabwean literature, there are notable hints of homoerotic desire in one of the most prominent Zimbabwean texts, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Dangarembga's novel is distinctive in the context of my chapter, because it is the only text with an overtly feminist message. This is clear from its infamous opening line, 'I was not sorry when my brother died', which is used to criticise the gender constructions which empower men and disempower women.[44] The protagonist, Tambu, is particularly irritated by her brother Nhamo's manipulation of his socially embedded authority, which is manifested by his cruel treatment of their younger sister. His egotistical behaviour becomes increasingly prominent as he enjoys the relative luxuries of his uncle Babamukuru's residence, whilst attending the missionary school in which Babamukuru acts as headmaster. Tambu finds Nhamo's educational opportunities especially frustrating, because she was forced to leave school due to financial problems, and because her father did not believe she needed an education. However, Nhamo's death enables Tambu to take her brother's place at the mission school. This move brings the protagonist back into contact with her transgressive cousin Nyasha, whose reticence to speak Shona, and general levels of apparent disrespect, are initially criticised by Tambu, who longs for the more familial and joyous cousin she remembers from her early childhood. Nyasha's change is linked to her time in England, although this aspect of foreign influence, at least as it concerns gender, is not negatively constituted in the text. Whilst

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[44] Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, p.1.

Dangarembga's text does criticise colonialism, racial disparity, and the superficial benevolence of the missionaries who are necessarily a part of the imperialistic machinery, there is a clear admiration for ostensibly progressive English gender conditions.

Gradually, the narrator protagonist is changed by Nyasha's characterisation. She begins to engage self-consciously with the previous frustrations she encountered because of her sex. This reaches a crescendo following a fierce fight between Nyasha and Babamukuru, after Nyasha is repeatedly labelled a whore by her father because she has stayed out late talking to a boy. The fight is a culmination of many arguments between Nyasha and her father, and leads to Babamukuru slapping his daughter across the face. Nyasha hits him back, causing a violent brawl to break out until the interventions of Nyasha's mother, Maiguru, and her older brother, Chido. This act of physical violence is unexpected because it contradicts the narrator's amicable representation of Babamukuru, and because hitting one's daughter, who will secure Lobola for the family one day, may be conceived as an unusual act. Nyasha's retaliation is especially transgressive, as it signifies a material disregard for her father's authority, and a refusal to adhere to the expected behaviour of a woman and a daughter. Yet the episode also draws attention to the physical threat which underlines discursive conditions and gender differentiation. This gendered significance is exaggerated by Babamukuru's use of the word 'whore'.[45] The signification of the word is clear, and assumes that Nyasha's willingness to a talk to a boy of the opposite sex, and to dress indiscreetly, is tantamount to a sexual act. It also functions, in the heteronormative context, to assume a heterosexuality to which

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[45] Ibid, pp.116-117.

Nyasha does not explicitly adhere. It is the use of this word which especially piques

the protagonist, who is caught between her sense of duty and decorum, and her

realisation that Nyasha's anger has a legitimate route. As Tambu claims, 'all the

conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and

inferior to maleness'.[46] The word whore in this regard signifies to the protagonist the

victimisation that women cannot escape because of men and the oppressive effects of

heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is, however, disturbed by several incongruous episodes of same-

sex sexuality within the novel. These moments invite comparisons with those

discussed in Chinodya's texts, especially because they occur in the early teenage

years of the girls during puberty. This notion is represented by Lucia, the

protagonist's aunt, who compliments Nyasha's breasts, and proceeds to claim that

Nyasha will find a good husband, illustrating her assumption about her niece's

inevitable integration into heterosexual familial life and its patriarchal ramifications.

However, the incongruity of the same-sex relations I reference is altogether different

than that discussed in Chinodya's text. The homoerotic desire is less overt and

sexualised, but is framed in a way that emphasises its transgressive potential. A

homoerotic potential is first considered through the nature of the narrator's

description about her blossoming friendship with Nyasha. This relationship is

described as 'more than a friendship', as conversations between the pair are

compared to those of 'lovers under the influence of the novelty and uniqueness of

their love', and the 'kind of conversation that cousins have when they realise that

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[46] Ibid, p.118.

they like each other in spite of not wanting to'.[47] Their friendship is then represented

by the narrator as her 'first love affair', and the first time that she grows fond of

someone of whom she did not wholeheartedly approve.[48] The inability to name this

friendship perhaps responds to the cultural unintelligibility of a form of same-sex

romantic love. Indeed, Stephanie Selvick has argued that the relationship of Nyasha

and Tambu cannot be labelled as either romantic or as a friendship, and as a

consequence defies a binary opposition constructed in language and through rigid

conceptions of sexuality.[49] The narrator's reluctance to define the relationship also

invokes feelings of shame surrounding same-sex desire, which contradict the

morality of heterosexuality and religious institution represented by the missionary

school location. These feelings must also be read in the context of a minor

developing story line, in which Nyasha offends her parents because she is reading a

copy of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Accordingly, these potential

same-sex feelings emerge at a time of sexual transgression, which is foreclosed when

Babamukuru confiscates Nyasha's book, representing his desire to regulate her

sexuality. Yet it is this authority, or heteropatriarchy, which the girls developing

same-sex feelings resist, and which occur outside of Babamukuru's understanding.

Their desire then exposes the limits of Babamukuru's authority.

As the story progresses, subtle depictions hint at a physical manifestation of same-

sex desire described through the representation of the narrator's friendship with her

cousin. Soon after in the narrative, Nyasha compliments Tambu on her developing

body, praising her breasts but mocking her large backside, which she slaps playfully.

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[47] Ibid, p.79
[48] Ibid.
[49] Stephanie M. Selvick, 'Beyond the Binary: Same-Sex Desire and Gender Defiance in Tsitsi
Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49.3 (2003), p.281.

Tambu is flattered by the attention, and by the 'teasing', which is enough to make her 'tingle with pleasure'.[50] The clear homoerotic possibilities of these playful interactions occur just as Tambu begins to menstruate, and therefore at a time of her physical transition from girlhood into womanhood. Other moments seem strategically designed to upset the heterosexual assumption of the context. Whilst Nyasha and Tambu dance with some relatives and friends, the narrator references 'heterosexual couples' who had recklessly moved too close together.[51] This phrasing is significant, because heterosexuality is not used as a term in any texts I discuss, as it is accepted as normative. To use it then illustrates that there may be homosexual couples at the dance. Soon after, when Babamukuru labels Nyasha a whore and strikes her because of her apparent misconduct and her refusal to accept his authority, Tambu climbs into Nyasha's bed to comfort and cuddle her. There is nothing specifically peculiar about this in terms of reading sexuality, yet the moment is rendered noteworthy by the description of Maiguru's reaction: 'Maiguru was not very pleased the next morning when she found us in bed together'.[52] Maiguru's disapproval is surprising, and invites the reader to relate this moment to sexual possibilities that the text never defines, but gestures towards through various moments of homoeroticism.

The hidden possibilities of moments of homoeroticism are especially prominent because the text deals with notions of the unsaid and unrepresented. This notion can be related to the ambiguous nature of Nhamo's death, which frames the text. The reader is not told why Nhamo died, and various outbursts by the narrator's mother

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[50] Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, p.92.
[51] Ibid, p.113.
[52] Ibid, p.121.

suggests that she has unresolved concerns about the circumstances of the death.
Importantly, Babamukuru was the person responsible for breaking the news of
Nhamo's death, and he generally controls interpretation and regulates behaviour
within the novel. This relationship between authority and regulatory control is
explicitly considered by the criticisms of several female characters about a *dare* that
takes place to discuss the conduct of Lucia. Lucia has fallen pregnant by a relative of
Babamukuru's, named Takesure, who was sent to the homestead by Babamukuru to
aid the protagonist's father, Jeremiah, after the death of Nhamo. After finding out
about the extra-marital relationship between Takesure and Lucia, Babamukuru
orders them both away, but discovers upon his return to the homestead that neither
has left, and that Lucia has also slept with Jeremiah. The *dare* then is called to decide
upon an appropriate action, and the men of the family, Takesure and one woman,
Tete, make up the *dare*, whilst the rest of the women, and notably the accused Lucia,
are excluded. The episode is used to criticise the paternal authority manifested in
practices like the *dare*, and also considers the relationship between concealment and
control:

> I don't know what frightens them about coming out in the open, but
> everything they do is hushed up and covered. Hidden. Even from us, as
> though we were children.[53]

This act of concealment then is also an act of power, which both visualises paternal
authority and disempowers the women subject to that authority. Notably, Lucia
interrupts the meeting after she overhears Takesure labelling her a witch. This
readiness to interrupt the *dare* is characteristic of her refusal to adhere to gender
expectations, which is also represented by the depiction of her sexual desires and the

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[53] Ibid, p.139.

way in which she uses sexuality as a means of empowerment. The representation of her as a witch in this regard is important, because it invokes an association between female sexuality and witchery, demonstrating both a fear and the threat of unregulated womanly behaviour disciplined through language.

Most of the major episodes in the novel revolve around attitudes towards sex and sexuality in some way. This is clear in the storylines relating to Lucia, in Babamukuru's representation of Nyasha as a whore, and in his confiscation of her copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. These moments specifically address female sexuality, whereas Jeremiah's role in an extra-marital affair with Lucia goes unpunished and almost unmentioned, illustrating differing expectations about male and female behaviour. Babamukuru's regulatory battles are then fought specifically over the symbolic female body. Importantly, Babamukuru holds authority both because of his sex, and because of a British education and his position at a missionary school. He then partly enjoys a form of receptacle authority related to a colonial system to which he is subjected, but which he also promotes through his actions. Babamukuru in many ways corresponds with Bhabha's articulation of a mimic man, as 'almost the same but not white', as he imitates regulatory norms which reiterate the conservatism inherent in colonial discourses.[54] His characterisation predicates and foreshadows Tambu's own mimicry, which is portrayed in an exaggerated form in *The Book of Not*. The colonial system necessarily underlines the text, even if it is often left unmentioned and unrepresented save for the criticisms of Nyasha. The title *Nervous Conditions* enhances this reading, invoking Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in a feminist text which

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[54] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p.128.

connects imbricated ideas of gender, sexuality, and colonialism. The parallels

culminate at the end of the text, when protagonist Tambu finally retaliates against

Babamukuru's authority on the day of her parents' wedding. This wedding is taking

place because Babamukuru believes that the misfortune of the family may relate to

the fact that his brother's marriage did not take place in a church, and therefore may

be illegitimate in the eyes of God. Yet Tambu is embarrassed by the charade of the

marriage, but is unable to approach the subject with Babamukuru because of her

sense of duty and decorum. However, on the wedding day, her internal conflicts

render her unable to move. She experiences an episode of disembodiment, as she

becomes detached from her bodily self, existing both in and at the edge of the bed, as

both watcher and watched. This notion of disembodiment invokes a form of colonial

disembodiment produced by biopolitical materiality, as well as the bodily

manifestations of heteronormative discourses which control and regulate the female

body. Notably, Babamukuru disciplines Tambu by sentencing her to fifteen lashes,

just as he previously did with Nyasha, illustrating a desire to reregulate her body

through violence.

Before this punishment is carried out, the long-suffering Maiguru leaves

Babamukuru, following through with a similar threat also made by Lucia and the

protagonist's mother to leave Takesure and Jeremiah earlier in the novel. This

moment is significant, even if Maiguru soon returns, because it reiterates to the

reader and Babamukuru that Maiguru may leave, and may escape her husband's

heteropatriarchal authority. This idea is similarly represented by the development of

Nyasha's anorexia at the end of the novel, which Babamukuru is powerless to

prevent. The anorexia has many possible interpretations. It resembles a masochistic

desire perhaps produced by Babamukuru's criticisms and his claims about Nyasha's

evilness and disrespect. It also has a clear gendered reading, in view of the

competing bodily expectations to which Nyasha is subject, and her self-conscious

realisation about her objectification. Yet it also illustrates a form of self-hatred

explicitly related to the hybridity Nyasha struggles with as a Zimbabwean defined by

her time in England, who speaks English more authentically than Shona, and by the

colonial rule which defines the context.[55] The nature of the mental disorder perhaps

then considers a disjuncture between the physical and mental, between the external

and internal, which is also considered in the episode of Tambu's disembodiment.

Whilst the colonial signification is clear, Nyasha's anorexia also explicitly renders

Babamukuru powerless, because he cannot prevent his daughter's self-annihilation.

This notion of powerlessness again strongly relates to the ideas of same-sex

sexuality in the text, as exemplified by an earlier episode involving a tampon, as

Selvick has claimed.[56] In this episode, Nyasha teaches Tambu how to use a tampon.

She explicitly compares the tampon to the penis, but notably distinguishes the

tampon as different, because the tampon is something over which the female subject

has control. As Nyasha claims, it is better to lose one's 'virginity to a tampon'.[57] As

Selvick has posited, this functions to represent the possibilities of same-sex desire,

which rejects the notion of the phallus, and accordingly the heteronormative and

heteropatriarchal connotations of society.[58] In this regard, same-sex desire resists the

heteronormative environment which underlines the text, and which is connected to

ideas of nationalism and colonialism both in the colonial context, and in a

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[55] Nyasha tells Tambu at the end of the novel that the girls at the mission school do not like her language, her 'English, because it is authentic', whereas her Shona is not. Ibid, p.200.
[56] Selvick, p.285. Selvick argues that the tampon exchange is 'saturated with homoeroticism'.
[57] Dangarembga, p.97.
[58] Selvick, p.285.

postcolonial context that is subject to the imbrication of these ideas in Mugabe's political rhetoric. Dangarembga's Bildungsroman then may be represented as Tambu's coming into knowing, but it is as much a story of her transformation as a changing realisation about what Babamukuru represents, and his relationship to the colonial context. Whilst initially a heroic and benevolent figure, he becomes the very symbol of heteropatriarchy which same-sex sexuality disturbs, and which Nyasha, and eventually Tambu, defy. This heteropatriarchy is inseparable from the colonial conditions to which all the characters are subject, and which contribute to the heteronormative constructs which regulate sexuality and gender.

The Changing Context of the 1990s

In 1991, Stanley Nyamfukudza became only the second Zimbabwean author to depict same-sex sex in his short story 'Posters on the Wall'. Taken from *If Only God was a Woman*, the short story is part of a collection which aims to centralise women and women's voices. Whilst the study suffers from some of the issues discussed in my last chapter, and often renders women's narratives secondary or auxiliary, it is telling that a collection explicitly concerned with gender also engages with sexuality. This suggests a changing awareness of the relationship between sexuality and gender, which is apparent in forms of gender theory of the period and in Marechera's earlier writing.

In 'Posters on the Wall', male protagonist Taku plots to steal his manager's expensive car. His actions are motivated by financial concerns representative of a period in which the gulf between rich and poor was pronounced by increasing

economic problems and various stories of corruption. Taku is caught and imprisoned for six years for his actions, although his accomplice, his girlfriend Noma, escapes unpunished. The story offers a rare portrayal of prison, and explores the virtually unrepresented homosexual practices which take place. Inside, the male inmates talk incessantly of women, fetishising their pictures and their memories. Yet these men commonly engage in sexual relations with other younger inmates – the new recruits, 'boys' who are subordinated as 'quasi' girls in prison relationships.[59] Like the same-sex relationships documented in mining contexts, these are marked by a disparity, which is often inter-generational and invariably hegemonic. This hegemonic dimension ostensibly relates to contemporaneous gender norms, as the men, disempowered and trapped in prison, perform masculinity by subordinating other men. These actions reveal the differential nature of gender performances, and the anxieties of men in the absence of the women upon whom their identities are anchored. These relationships also suggest that contextual change allowed some men to live out the homosexuality they had repressed. Yet the sexual dynamics of these relationships are lived but not discussed. Men 'fuck...each other's bums' in corners, but do not speak about it because these relationships are taboo and surrounded by a veil of silence.[60] The protagonist, angered by this secrecy, names and describes the unspoken. Like Nyamfukudza, he refuses the discourse of repression.

The repressive discourse illustrates the all-encompassing nature of heteronormativity, and a particular form of normative violence which evokes shame in non-conformists. This shame is suggested by the refusal to discuss these practices

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[59] Nyamfukudza, p.85.
[60] Ibid.

even within the context in which they take place, implying a recognition of the dissident nature of these acts. Whilst the narrator refuses this repressive response, he does not engage in homosexual practices. His frustrations turn into violent fantasies about his partner, which graduate from tongue lashings to beatings and eventually to murder. He begins to hate Noma for her freedom, for the disloyalty he assumes, and for her femaleness. His increasingly misogynistic persona explodes when he leaves jail, as he immediately and brutally assaults Noma when returning to their shared home, leaving her for dead. His actions stem from his own frustrations, and illustrate how normative ideas of masculinity in the context are inherently hegemonic and oppressive. At the same time, the same-sex relations depicted queer the heterosexual foundation of heteronormativity, rendering the stability of both sexuality and connected gender roles in doubt.

Five years later, editor and journalist Nevanji Madanhire published *If the Wind Blew*, which describes a concealed homosexual affair which ends the protagonist's Isis' marriage. Isis is a female reporter, and issues of journalism and corruption are central to the story. Madanhire worked for the independent press, and was a colleague of Geoffrey Nyarota, the former editor of the *Daily News* who fled Zimbabwe after multiple attempts were made on his life following his investigations into governmental corruption. In the story, Isis witnesses and investigates the assassination of the leader of the political opposition. Her actions endanger her, as Madanhire visualises the corruption and repression which has supported the ZANU-PF administration. Isis is doubly vulnerable because of her sex – throughout the narrative she struggles with institutionalised sexism. Men call her 'girl', she is limited at work, she is touched, harassed, and continually reduced to a sexual object,

and finally almost raped.[61] She is constantly aware of her physical precarity in the aggressive masculinised context. Her name, deriving from mythology, is used to expand this idea, as Shaw has remarked – Isis was the Goddess of Justice in Egyptian mythology, who resurrected God Osiris after his murder.[62] However, Isis' autonomy and power was limited by her subsequent marriage to Osiris, via the constraints of a familial unit that underlines patriarchy. The clear gendered concerns of the narrative demand to be read alongside government corruption, as various forms of repression and oppression overlap and intersect in the post 'independent' space.

Isis makes various references to her failed marriage and to the miscarriage that followed throughout the narrative. Her husband was Hebrew – an excessively good-looking man and rumoured womaniser. Yet Hebrew's womanising is only a cover – he represses his homosexuality, and performs hyper-masculinity as a veil. In the process, Hebrew's actions draw attention to the ways in which masculinity may be self-consciously performed, even if heteronormativity is constitutive. At the end of the novel, Isis finally relays the discovery of Hebrew's secret. A friend visits the family home – the Swedish Christian, who stays up to play chess with Hebrew when Isis goes to the bed. When she wakes, and goes looking for her husband, she observes him and Hebrew involved in 'an intense love act' through the open bedroom door.[63] The shock of the discovery prompts a miscarriage and Hebrew's subsequent admission about his sexuality.

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[61] For examples, see Madanhire, pp.48-50 and pp.83-93.
[62] Drew Shaw, '''Deviant'' Innovations in Zimbabwean Writing: From the Racial Divide to Same Sex Desire', *The Round Table* 95.384 (April 2006), p.280.
[63] Ibid, p.97.

Criticism has rightly engaged with the transgressive potential of the representation. The readiness so explicitly to define homosexuality was, after all, transgressive, and contradicted a context which had rendered homosexuality absent. Critics have also noted the religious signification of the names Christian and Hebrew, and Madanhire's ostensible attempt to disrupt the assumed religious basis of heteronormativity.[64] Yet the act is not wholly unproblematic, and it is important to acknowledge its complexity within the narrative. Notably, Isis suffers a miscarriage after seeing the act. Symbolically then, the end of her relationship accompanies the death of the child, and the heteronormative futurity represented by the child. This may be read as a violent vilification of homosexuality, even if the narrative resists such a straightforward reading. Notably, Christian is Swedish, and met Hebrew when he worked in Sweden. Whilst this is arguably an irrelevant detail, it perhaps feeds into the homophobic assertions that define homosexuality as a foreign importation. Yet there is a unique intimacy to the relationship between Christian and Hebrew which contradicts homophobic definitions of homosexuality as unnatural. In a narrative of real and potential conflict, the depiction of Hebrew as 'lay[ing] peacefully on Christian's breasts' is notable.[65] Madanhire seems inclined to criticise not the act, but the necessity of repression. Repression and oppression are the central concerns of the text. Hebrew must repress his sexuality, Isis is oppressed by gender conventions, and an atmosphere of governmental repression and violence surrounds the context. Madanhire's dissident representations strike at the heart of contemporaneous homophobia and the nationalistic heteronormative definitions of

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[64] Anna Chitando and Molly Manyonganise, 'Saying the Unsaid: Probing Homosexuality in *The Hairdresser of Harare*', *Journal of Homosexuality* 63.4 (2016), p.564; and Shaw, p.280.
[65] Madanhire, p.98.

nationhood which have marginalised and punished women, those with non-normative sexual and gender identities, and those who opposed the government.

Mungoshi's short story 'Of Lovers and Wives' followed Madanhire's text in 1997, and is similar in its representation of a male homosexual affair disrupting a heterosexual marriage. The protagonists are the married Shami (Shamiso) and Chasi, and Chasi's close friend Peter. As with Mungoshi's depictions of gender, there are paradoxes that risk reproducing certain heteronormative ideas. This is clear from the opening sentence: 'In the middle of the night, in the midst of a very pleasant dream involving some children and some men, Shami shook him violently and asked him if he was dreaming about Peter'.[66] By conflating homosexuality and paedophilia, Munogshi repeats a disconcerting association between the two in homophobic discourse.[67] Symbolically, this association represents the threat homosexuality poses to the normativity of the heterosexual familial unit, which has been a product of various homophobic tirades in Zimbabwe during the last two decades. The invocation of paedophilia projects the abjection of homosexuality onto vulnerable children, and therefore symbolically onto family and futurity. Yet, beyond this problematic beginning, Mungoshi's text engages transgressively with homosexuality. It soon transpires that Shami's husband Chasi has been engaged in a lengthy homosexual affair with Peter. Peter has been a friend of the family for eighteen years, but has always been greeted with some uncertainty by Shami, who believes that Peter never seems completely at ease with women. Yet, whilst Shami's and Chasi's marriage lacks intimacy, Peter's and Chasi's relationship is loving and

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[66] Mungoshi, 'Of Lovers and Wives', p.105.
[67] Shaw has also noticed this 'troubling' association. Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations', p.99.

fulfilling, as Chitando and Manyonganise have remarked.[68] Like Madanhire,

Mungoshi shows that familial connection need not be contingent on heterosexuality,

and so indirectly attacks the denaturalising logic of homophobia.

Shami's realisation about the nature of their relationship alters her conception of her

and Chasi's life. She begins to realise that others may have always known about the

affair, and feels a peripheral part of Peter's and Chasi's relationship, ironically

mimicking the liminality of homosexuals in heteronormative spaces.[69] Soon after

Shami confronts Peter and Chasi with her feelings, and her belief that she cannot go

on living in this manner, Peter commits suicide by driving his car into a river. The

ambiguity of the ending invites readings such as that of Lahoucine Ouzgane, who

contends that the suicide functions to 'ostensibly…police homosexual desire'.[70]

Shaw is similarly critical, attacking the ending and the unsettling condemnatory tone

of the narrator.[71] This is most explicit in the concluding extract, which immediately

follows the news of Peter's suicide, and defines Shami's conception of the

'rightness' of the act:

> There could be no question about the rightness of certain situations, under
> certain circumstances. And when Chasi decided to leave town after Peter's
> funeral, preferring only to visit his wife occasionally during a weekend,
> Shamiso felt that that too had its own rightness.[72]

Peter's suicide is represented in strikingly unsympathetic terms, even if these are

intended to represent the views of Shami. Yet it is possible to read this ending

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[68] Chitando and Manyonganise, p.564.
[69] Shami describes her exclusion in the following terms: 'I'm not part of your lives. I've been pushed
to the periphery, to the place where the light ends, to the edge.' p.109.
[70] Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Men in African Film & Fiction* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2011), p.92; and
Chitando and Manyonganise have similarly argued that Peter's death represents a restoration of order.
[71] Shaw, 'Queer Inclinations and Representations', pp.99-100.
[72] Mungoshi, p.111.

differently, as a means of expressing the impossibility of Peter's and Chasi's relationship. Their relationship exists only because it remains unacknowledged, and unspoken. Shami's realisation about their homosexuality shatters this illusion, and the unwritten rules of the culture of discretion represented both in Zimbabwean society and through the need of Peter and Chasi to maintain an appearance of heterosexuality whilst clandestinely engaging in a homosexual affair. Peter's suicide depicts the impossibility of being openly homosexual. The concluding extract illustrates that Chasi and Shami will continue a charade which is ultimately unsatisfying, purely because of social expectations. It is social normativity which has prevented the relationship of Peter and Chasi, despite its loving and intimate nature. As Peter recalls earlier in the story, there is nothing unnatural or natural about their relationship, because that which is considered natural is both socially constructed and changes over time.[73] This denaturalising trend prevents pure condemnation of a Mungoshi story which is admittedly constrained by heteronormativity, but which offers a positive portrayal of homosexuality at a time of explicit state sanctioned and governed homophobia.

Contextualising Mining Compounds

The heteronormative culture described in this thesis also obscured the visibility of same-sex sexuality in mining compounds, which has been documented in Southern Rhodesia and various other African countries. These relations offer a unique representation of sexuality, because they emerged in heteronormative contexts which rendered homosexuality unintelligible in different ways. That is not to argue same-

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[73] Mungoshi, p.108.

sex sexuality on mines was conceived as homosexual, at least in a general sense, but neither can same-sex behaviour be reconciled with pre-existing norms. It is remarkable that these same-sex practices, despite their popularity, are almost wholly undocumented in literature and public discourse. I have found no mention of same-sex sexuality in Zimbabwean literature, and only one in South Africa, in an autobiographical memoir by Mark Mathabane detailing life under Apartheid. Intriguingly, women interviewed by Judith Gay in Lesotho about Mummy-baby relationships also refer to the practice, suggesting that it may be known but at once repressed because of heteronormative demands.[74] Yet, same-sex sexuality in mining compounds demands discussion, and engenders questions about the relationship between discourse and context. Firstly, though, it is important to define the nature of mining compounds and life, as a means of understanding the context in which these relationships emerged.

Mining compounds were established from the early 1890s onwards in Rhodesia, after a royal charter was granted to the British South Africa Company in 1889, following the controversial Rudd concession in 1888.[75] This movement into Rhodesia emerged from a desire to chase profits accrued from operations in South Africa, even if geographical differences and global economic factors prevented this from being realised. Consequently, compounds in Southern Rhodesia were similar to those in South Africa, but were generally smaller and were not closed spaces, so

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[74] Judith Gay, '''Mummies and Babies'' and Friends and Lovers in Lesotho', *Journal of Homosexuality* 11.3/4 (Summer 1985), p.105. Mummy-baby relationships refer to the intergenerational relationships which took place between women in Lesotho. These relationships often included mutual sexual play, gift giving, and companionship, and commonly involved married women.

[75] Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1980), p.13; and Assa Okoth, *A History of Africa: Volume One: African Societies and the Establishment of Colonial Rule, 1800-1915* (Nairobi, Kampala and Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 2006), pp.147-149.

miners could visit local villages.[76] Over time, prostitutes became a feature of mining

life, whilst some men were even joined by their wives and children after the

development of shared living facilities later in the twentieth century.[77] However, the

compounds were predominantly male spaces, because only men were permitted to

mine and work underground.[78] Because of the nature of mining work, potential

workers had to meet certain strength and size requirements. Isak Niehaus, whose

research concentrates on a South African context, has even reported that miners in

South Africa were forced to endure often humiliating physical tests, including the

inspection of their penis and pubic hair growth, as a literal manifestation of colonial

biopower which underlined mining and colonial systems.[79] Because different ethnic

and national groups were represented in the mines, and because of these

prescriptions about physical capacity, it is necessarily to acknowledge that the space

of the mine would have been competitive and liable to the performances of

masculinity integral to prevailing conceptions of hegemonic masculinity. This

notion, which has been omitted from much of the literature surrounding mining

environments, is consolidated by the performances of differing tribal forms of dance

which occurred on rest day Sunday in Southern Rhodesia, which, as Van Onselen

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[76] Onselen, p. 18 and Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani*: *The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*, second edition (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), pp.113-114.

[77] Onselen, pp.49 and 174. Epprecht has also described the 'village' like nature of mining compounds, although the financial factors discussed by Onselen suggests that his may have been an unrealistic interpretation of social possibilities, because workers would not have routinely been able to support themselves and their families. Epprecht, *Hungochani*, pp.113-114 and 129.

[78] This was legally reinforced in South Africa in 1896, in a ruling which prohibited women and boys under the age of 12 from working underground. Because of this industry practice, and prevailing local and European gender constructions, women did not participate in mining operations in Southern Rhodesia. Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860–1910* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994), p.201.

[79] Pubic hair growth was inspected to assess whether an individual was old enough to work underground. Men and boys were also asked to dance and climb steps in a heated room, and only those who endured were permitted to work underground. Isak Niehaus, 'Renegotiating Masculinity in the South African Lowveld: Narratives of Male-Male Sex in Labour Compounds and in Prisons', *African Studies* 61.1 (2002), p.79.

documents, celebrated specific national histories and masculinities.[80] Forms of cross-cultural hostility were also suggested by the refusal of some workers to share accommodation with miners from different cultural backgrounds, leading to the production of demarcated living spaces.[81]

Living conditions within the Southern Rhodesian compounds were poor, and arguably inhumane in the early years of mining operations, as documented by Onselen, who is largely responsible for defining the understanding of the mining conditions in the area. These conditions were a product of the prevailing racial discourses and the stuttering profits of the mining industry, which failed to meet expectations fuelled by larger operations in South Africa, and were damaged by war and global economic factors in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth century.[82] The unwillingness to invest in the workforce led to diet related diseases such as scurvy becoming commonplace because of insufficient food rations, whilst the overworked and underpaid labourers were also packed into small and improperly heated accommodation blocks.[83] These conditions were enabled in part by the improper regulation of the mining industry, especially prior to 1906, when the issue of 'Chinese slavery' in South Africa drew public attention to some of the material consequences of colonial mining operations.[84] Mortality rates were accordingly very high, fuelled by insufficient safety measures and conditions conducive to the spread

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[80] Onselen, p.187.
[81] Onselen, pp.35 and 37.
[82] Onselen, pp.14-18.
[83] A visiting expert estimated that around a third of the black labour force was suffering from scurvy in one district in 1903. Onselen pp.41-44 and 54. Onselen also reports that it was not uncommon for five or six men to share a hut, or two to three to share a bed and blanket, p.38.
[84] 'Chinese slavery' refers to the treatment of indentured Chinese and Indian workers in gold mines in South Africa. The treatment of these workers, and the political fallout, directly lead to the Tory government losing the 1906 election. Onselen, pp. 26 and 65 and Karen L. Harris, 'Sugar and Gold: Indentured Indian and Chinese Labour in South Africa', *Journal of Social Sciences* 25.1-2-3 (2010), pp.147-158.

of disease.[85] According to Niehaus, these conditions and associated dangers even caused Bantu speaking workers in South Africa to compare mining with going to war.[86] I will not attempt to interrogate the effects of these conditions, but it is needless to say that they merely reinforced a dehumanising colonial process and the biopolitical disembodiment of colonial subjects. It is therefore likely that hegemonic forms within mining communities responded to this disempowerment, as a retaliation against a disempowering colonial process. The profit-motivated approach of the mining owners and the disdain for the well-being of black workers also resulted in disproportionately low compensation payments being paid in the event of injury or death, especially prior to legislative changes in 1930.[87] These payments were also subject to numerous exclusions, and payments relating to the death of a worker were only paid if the death occurred by 'accident', or rather whilst that worker was engaged in mining operations, despite the fact that the vast majority of deaths occurred because of disease.[88] The paltry amounts paid were barely sufficient to meet funeral costs in the event of a death in the early years of operations, whilst Onselen recounts that compensation paid to one miner, who lost an arm in an accident in 1918, was not even sufficient enough to meet the costs of his train fare home.[89] Documenting and understanding these conditions, which have been overlooked in some of the more recent research addressing sexuality in mining compounds, is essential to understanding the development of sexuality on the mines.

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[85] It has been estimated that over 30,000 black African workers lost their lives in mining compounds during the first third of the twentieth century, with 90% of these deaths related to disease. Onselen, p.62.
[86] Niehaus, p.80.
[87] Onselen, pp.61-62.
[88] Ibid, p.62.
[89] Ibid.

Same-Sex Sexuality and Gender Performances in Mining Compounds

The nature of conditions in mining compounds may not be surprising, in view of the bloody legacy of European colonialism. However, the emergence of same-sex relations in these compounds could not be so easily anticipated, considering African and imported European attitudes towards sexuality, and the importance of procreation in the context. Yet it is not appropriate merely to define the existence of same-sex practice as transgressive without understanding the nature and constitution of these relations. Firstly, it is important to note that same-sex relations in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa took on two forms: anal penetration and thigh sex. Anal sex was seemingly rare. Whilst anal intercourse was reported, there is no evidence that it was commonplace, although it is important to acknowledge that contemporaneous and historical forms of homophobia have rendered anal penetration taboo and affected the nature of witness testimonies.[90] This is a regulatory condition of heteronormativity, which limits not only the visibility of same-sex relations in mining compounds within public discourse, but the nature of disclosure about these relations. Thigh sex on the other hand, which describes the practice of inserting the penis between the thighs of another man or woman until ejaculation, seems to have been a relatively common practice in both Southern Rhodesian and South African compounds during the colonial period. Thigh sex has been documented in other contexts too, especially in Mozambique, and offered a means of avoiding sexual infection and circumventing pregnancy fears in heterosexual relations.[91] An historical antecedent has also been argued to exist in the

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[90] Ibid, pp.63, 77, and 111.

[91] Harries, p.200; and Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo, 'ABANGIBHAMAYO BATHI NGIMNANDI (Those who Fuck me Say I'm Tasty): Gay Sexuality in Reef Townships', *Defiant*

area of Zimbabwe by Epprecht, who has identified a cave painting dated to at least 2000 years BC which appears to show San bushmen engaged in thigh sex and/or anal intercourse.[92] Whilst this reading of the painting by Epprecht is notable, especially because it suggests the historical presence of same-sex relations in Zimbabwe, critics must be reticent about attributing significance to the act without context. This is especially true because thigh sex, by avoiding the penetrative act used to characterise a phallocentric conception of 'real sex', may not have been irreconcilable with heterosexual norms.[93] Nonetheless, thigh sex was not routinely practiced between men outside mining or prison contexts in Southern Rhodesia or elsewhere, and was not part of a regulated normative performance of sexuality and gender. There is also a strong suggestion in some witness reports that thigh sex was considered non-normative, such as the contention that thigh sex often occurred whilst the compliant slept.[94] Whilst the confined living spaces and the occasional necessity of sharing blankets placed men in close proximity, replicating the homoerotic potentialities discussed in relation to Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning,* it seems highly doubtful that thigh sex resulting in ejaculation could have routinely occurred whilst one party remained asleep. These assertions then indicate that interviewees were conscious of the non-normativity of the practice, and suggest that an act of sex which resulted in ejaculation between men, whether penetrative or not, had clear homoerotic/sexual potentialities.

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*Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, ed. by Edwin Cameron and Mark Gevisser (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.167.

[92] Epprecht, *Hungochani,* Introduction, p.xv.

[93] Epprecht has discussed the conception of 'real sex' as that which involved the penetration of the female vagina, and that which potentially resulted in pregnancy. Ibid, p.224; and this is consolidated by the discussion of similar conceptions in the work of Edward P. Antonio, 'Homosexuality and African Culture', *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*, ed. by Paul Germond and Steve De Gruchy (South Africa: David Philip, 1997), p.299; and Cameron and Gevisser, p.167.

[94] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p.111.

Whilst thigh sex may have functioned as an occasional outlet for sexual frustrations, it was also habitually practiced by men involved in the cross-generational relationships which have dominated the scholarship of same-sex sexuality in Southern Rhodesian and South Africa compounds.[95] These relationships generally mimicked traditional heterosexual relationships, in so far as the older party would act as the man, and the younger, typically a boy, as the woman, therefore replicating the structures of domination and subordination characteristic of hegemonic heteronormative cultures. Within these relationships, the older party would provide protection to the younger and give gifts and money, replicating a financially consolidated disparity entrenched in heterosexual relationships and institutions, such as Lobola, which reiterated conceptions of masculinity related to provision.[96] There is even evidence that cross-generational 'marriages' were celebrated and ratified in public ceremonies in South Africa involving Mozambican, Xhosa, and Zulu men, although this does not appear to have occurred publicly in Southern Rhodesia, where which same-sex relationships appear to have been engaged in less explicitly.[97] Within the 'marriages' or relationships, the younger party would characteristically act as a passive sexual partner, and would often carry out a series of 'femininised' domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning.[98] The gender inversion was sometimes consolidated in more overt ways, with reports that boys occasionally constructed artificial breasts out of clothing in South African contexts, shaved or

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[95] Cross-generational relationships, known as Ingotshana, were 'being described as early as 1907 as a common practice on the mines', ibid, p.116.
[96] Ibid, p.117; and T. Dunbar Moodie, 'Black Migrants Mine Labourers and the Vicissitudes of Male Desire', *Changing Men in Southern Africa*, ed. by Robert Morrell (South Africa: University of Natal, 2001), p.305.
[97] Niehaus, p.84.
[98] These activities have been both reported in Southern Rhodesia and in South Africa. See Epprecht, *Hungochani*, pp.61 and 117.

covered beards with cloth, and even wore skirts and perfumes, and greased up their inner thighs according to Harries.[99]

The feminisation of the 'boy' in mining relationships perhaps reveals the accepted mutability of the adolescent stage, even if the mimicking of female appearance also suggests a self-conscious realisation about the abnormality of same-sex desire, and attempts to reconcile that desire within the heteronormative framework. It is difficult to ascertain any fixed age at which boys matured into men and were no longer subject to the perceived indignity of acting as the feminised party, but the references to beard growth suggest that this may not have been achieved until the late teenage years, or even until the middle twenties, according to Moodie.[100] However, the mutability of sexuality in adolescence was not something generally represented outside mining scenarios in Shona and Ndebele cultures, as differentiated boy/male and girl/female roles were established from early childhood. However, differing standards of same-sex sexuality have been reported between boys in a modern urban context. For example, Antonio has discussed the same-sex relationships of 'street children' in Harare, which also often occurred between transgenerational boys. Those involved ranged from the ages of 6 to 30 according to Antonio, whilst some also engaged in homosexual practices when working as prostitutes.[101] That this took place in a modern urban area suggests that the rural practices which centralise heterosexuality and encourage gender differentiation from childhood are less prominent, facilitating the destabilisation of a nonetheless rigid heteronormative centre. It seems likely, then, that veiled adolescent homosexual practices take place

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[99] T. Dunbar Moodie, 'Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines', *Journal of South African Studies* 14.2 (Jan 1998), p.235; and Harries, p.205.
[100] Moodie, 'Migrancy and Male Sexuality', p.236.
[101] Antonio, pp.307-308.

in modern day Zimbabwe, and perhaps that transgenerational relationships serve a similar hegemonic purpose to those on the mines. However, within a traditional rural context it is difficult to frame this feminisation as anything but non-normative and emasculating, or even doubly emasculating, in view of the reconstitution of hegemonic masculinity because of colonisation and an altered racial hierarchy. This emasculation has been reconciled by some critics who posit that the inversion of gender roles merely represented a rite of passage in the processing of becoming 'a man', and achieving the financial independence which would subsequently allow for the payment of Lobola.[102] Yet representing the subordination of the younger party in this fashion perhaps assumes an inevitable integration back into forms of heteronormative familiarity marked by the payment of Lobola, but does not mean that mining relationships were entered into in order to save money for Lobola. A financial reading is warranted nonetheless, especially because greater spending capacity would have enabled mine workers to invest in their diet and clothing and to negotiate better accommodation, and therefore to improve material factors related to the preservation of good health. However, irrespective of potential motivations, which are based on retrospectively established suppositions, the existence of differing gender constructions and sexual practices was not reconcilable with contemporaneous heteronormative forms.

Cross-generational relationships, which occasionally involved young boys, may invoke connotations of child abuse in a modern or different geographical context. This is certainly a connotation of some relationships, especially in view of

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[102] For example, Moodie argues that 'men became ''wives'' on the mines in order to become husbands and therefore full ''men'' more rapidly at home'. Moodie, 'Migrancy and Male Sexuality', p.240.

accusations of assault represented by some in compounds, or documented outside of compound life in Southern Rhodesia.[103] Connotations of abuse are pronounced because of an embedded culture of respect for elders which may have prevented or discouraged the disclosure of such incidents. The constitution of such moments as rites of passage, as Moodie has argued, or the feelings of shame associated with incidents of abuse may also have constrained the admittance of victimisation. Intriguingly, *Kaffir Boy,* the one literary representation of compound sexuality, delineates a violent, coerced, and paederastic conception. The memoir was banned in South Africa, whilst the representation of child prostitution and sodomy led to calls to ban the book in America, where author Mark Mathabane lived and taught after escaping apartheid in South Africa on a tennis scholarship.[104] This act of censorship at once represents a desire to repress that which offends standards of morality, but also illustrates how these standards repress and render certain behaviour unintelligible. Whilst few would doubt the necessity of disincentivising victimisation, censorship may not have this effect, whilst it is also notable that similar acts of censorship affected Marechera's writing, and may be used to enforce heteronormative and politically defined discourses.

The offending episode in *Kaffir Boy* occurs early in the autobiography, at a time when the author protagonist is a young child living in a South African township which housed a compound for migrant workers. The family described struggle with poverty and hunger. Whilst the father works, he cannot earn enough to provide fully for the needs of the family, and the mother struggles to find employment because of

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[103] Epprecht, pp.108-109.
[104] Kathlyn Gay, *Bigotry and Intolerance: The Ultimate Teen Guide* (Maryland and Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), p.120.

the restrictions of the pass laws and the apartheid state. It is in this context that the author protagonist, who describes in detail his struggles with the pangs of hunger, is given an opportunity to earn money and food inside the migrant compound. One day, when his mother is away looking for work, he approaches a teenage boy who takes him into the living quarters. The cramped and dirty conditions of the living quarters are described, and the author, whilst initially disturbed, is excited by the performance of some *impis,* or Zulu warriors, engaged 'in mock fights using spears and knobkerries'.[105] The narrator is then led to a section holding ten young boys, some of whom are estimated to be as young as five years old, and eight muscular and topless men. The protagonist declines to eat the food offered by the men, despite his hunger, seemingly fearing the strangeness of the situation. A sexual dimension is foreboded by this reticence, by the description of the topless men, and by an incongruous use of the word ejaculated as a synonym for exclaimed. The boys are then paid, and begin to undress. They soon line up alongside the bunks, and bend over. The author flees when he observes the men removing their clothes, and covering the boys' 'anuses' and their own penises with Vaseline.[106]

The scene leaves little room for doubt. Unlike some of the more familial mining relationships described (which involved older boys/young men), this episode reflects the most violent and exploitative possibilities of cross-generational sexual practice. Notably, these events take place in an environment in which women lived, and accordingly where men could have theoretically met sexual needs through heterosexual sex. Whilst this example may have been an anomaly, Mathabane

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[105] Mathabane, p.70; and a knobkerry is a type of club used principally in Southern Africa.
[106] Ibid, p.73.

recounts how this was merely one of many townships in which such compound

activities took place, even though the research discussed illustrates that compounds

in South Africa were generally closed spaces. Importantly, Mathabane's

representation shows that the act of penetration occurs in the company of other men,

suggesting that it was considered normative. The performance related framing of the

event is also significant. Mathabane's depiction shows this to be a homosocial space,

liable to performances of masculinity represented by the mock fight described. It

may then be possible to relate this idea of performance to the need to reiterate

masculinity in the dehumanising context of white minority rule. It is difficult,

however, to reconcile such practices with sexual norms in South Africa or in

Southern Rhodesia where there are fewer accounts of explicit same-sex or

paedophilic sexual acts. Perhaps these ideas are reconcilable with a conception of

hegemonic masculinity because the boys are not seen as men, as discussed in relation

to cross-generational mining relationships. Yet such practices clearly contradicted

both pre-existing sexual norms, and the establishment of sexual morality reiterated

through Christianity, which was enforced through the distribution of

heteronormative materials at mines in South Africa.[107]

My discursive orientated approach follows a poststructural conception of identity as

produced by discourse. Yet normative discourses are always vulnerable to

reconstitution, even if the possibilities for reconstitution are governed by discourse.

Processes of deconstruction, denaturalisation, and recontextualisation offer a means

of reconstituting conditions, as the differential and exclusionary processes which

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[107] Epprecht mentions that homophobic literature was distributed at mines in South Africa and that talks were arranged which were specifically designed to reiterate the non-normativity of homosexual relationships. Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p. 153.

underline normativity are always subject to the threat of disruption. This is exposed at times by contextual changes in often unpredictable ways, which illustrate the mutability of any normative system. For example, traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe normalised the domination and sexualisation of women, and the performance of this behaviour. However, in the highly masculinised spaces of mining compounds there were far fewer women, whilst men were not subject to the same form of extended familial hierarchy and expectations which informed rural life. The normativity of masculine hegemony was also disturbed by the nature of colonialism, and its oppressive brutality which was manifested in mining compounds. Workers laboured in dehumanising living conditions, and were pathetically remunerated for producing materials for the benefit of the European settlers. The emergence of same-sex relations in this space of emasculation suggests that this need for a performative domination was rearticulated through the subordination of teenage boys or younger men, or whatever was defined as less than man, so that the privileged status of masculinity was not threatened. That these relationships defy, at least to an extent, normative sexual modes perhaps illustrates that a hegemonic need transcends pre-existing sexual expectations. It also demonstrates how context influences the constitution of gender and sexual behaviour, and hints at the possibility that different contextual processes would lead to the increased visibility of non-normative practices constructed as taboo and as unintelligible.

Whilst I have discussed the hegemonic gendered connotations of same-sex mining relationships, it is also important to reiterate that mining compounds allowed men to pursue a same-sex relationship by choice and not only by social or sexual necessity.

As I have referenced, compounds in Southern Rhodesia were not closed spaces.

Whilst they were male dominated, men could seek out prostitutes on the compounds

or women in local villages, or could choose to satisfy sexual desires through

individual acts of masturbation rather than more intimate acts of thigh sex.[108]

Instead, a sizable proportion of men choose to engage in same-sex relationships, and

some have admitted preferences despite the regulatory and repressive conditions of

heteronormativity. For example one interviewee, who married after his return from a

mining compound, noted that he preferred the intimacy and nature of his same-sex

relationship to the heterosexual relationship he engaged with in a local village.[109]

This observation demonstrates that men have engaged in heterosexual and same-sex

relationships at the same time, suggesting that different needs and wants were met by

the relationships. Others have similarly expressed a preference for the nature of their

same-sex relationship, hinting that the mining context enabled men to live out

repressed homosexual desires.[110] Love was invariably a part of some of these

relationships, as indicated by numerous accounts of suicides after mining

relationships ended.[111] Reports of anal intercourse between men also demonstrate

that some willingly engaged in practices which directly contradicted traditional

values and newly instituted Christian sexual prescriptions.[112] That such relationships

were seldom reported outside of compound scenarios suggests not only that context

amended the normativity of sexual practice, but that prevailing heteronormative

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[108] Whilst prostitutes may have been costly for underpaid miners, transgenerational relationships also generally involved various gifts and financial exchanges. Cost motivation is at best an incomplete response to male same-sex sexual encounters, and at worst representative of a desire to reconcile the sexual encounters with heteronormative conceptions.

[109] Moodie, 'Migrancy and Male Sexuality', p.243.

[110] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, p.77.

[111] Ibid, p.77; and Moodie, 'Black Migrants Mine Labourers', p.307.

[112] Epprecht, *Hungochani*, pp.73-75 and 111-112; and Niehaus, p.85.

forms foreclosed same-sex alternatives, or necessitated that same-sex relationships were concealed.

The mining space is a fascinating area of exploration, because it represents a partially recontextualised arena in which different forms of sexuality and gender emerged. Whilst some may contest the usefulness of the mine space because relationships typically involved cross-generational relationships marked by disparity, or because relationships may have been motivated by profit interest, these factors merely reflect the benefits afforded to heterosexual relationships outside mining contexts. Financial institutions like Lobola, as well as employment rules, capitalised heterosexuality, whilst gender constructions normalised the subjugation of women to men, especially in more traditional societies. Therefore, mining relationships mimic the structures and imbalances of the heterosexual space, but demonstrate that sexual normativity may be reformed, even if the logic of hegemony remains untouched. It is, however, important not to categorise these relationships as homosexual, or indicative of bi-sexuality, but merely as disrupting and contesting dominant forms of heteronormativity. The categories of homosexuality, heterosexuality, and bisexuality seem insufficient as Harries has argued, because they assume a rigidity of sexual practice invalidated by the existence of mining relationships, and theoretical approaches like mine which define desire and sexuality as contextually influenced.[113] It is also difficult to determine conceptions of sexuality across time and space, in view of the conflation of pre-colonial sexual attitudes and the imposition of Christian European values. This is not only a problem of cultural translation, but affects the documentation of sexuality, because differing modes of repression and taboo will

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[113] Harries, p.xviii.

have influenced both the production of heteronormativity, and the readiness to discuss dissident forms of sexual behaviour. Yet mining relationships and forms of homosexual desire discussed in textual and documentary accounts suggest the existence of non-normative expressions of desire not reconcilable, or not completely reconcilable, within the heteronormative framework. The existence of these suggests that any culture, whether it conceptualises homosexuality as taboo or fails to conceptualise it altogether, cannot completely restrain the existence of non-normative sexuality. This was illustrated by mining relationships and in the literary record, especially through the unique and progressive responses of Marechera, who refused and sought to undermine the logic of heteronormativity.

# Chapter Four: Writing the Body in Zimbabwean Women's Writing

> I learnt to write when I was almost six and at same time discovered the magic of my own body as a writing surface…Using the edges of my fingernails or pieces of dry grass broken from my grandmother's broom I would start to write on my legs...We wrote near the bone...deep into the skin and under skin where words could not escape.[1]

> If you prick a socially constructed body, it still bleeds.[2]

The body is a much-contested entity in gender theory and literature. Whilst self-evidently tangible, the body is often rendered or read as symbolic in the act of representing and confronting discourses.[3] This question of discourse is a prevailing concern in gender theory which seeks to negotiate the relationship between society, the mind, and the body. For some, the body is discursively constituted even if it may be a corporeal entity. Poststructural discursive concentrated theorists like Judith Butler typically view destabilising discourses as a means of liberating, to a degree at least, socially limited bodies. For others, the body beneath discourse is more prominent, and some conceive of the body as influencing discourses in a way that is antithetical to Butler's approach. These debates may descend into ostensible semantic quibbling at points, but are essential to understanding and conceptualising the body. This is especially applicable to the cross-cultural application of gender theory which risks projecting preconceived theoretical conceptions onto vastly different contextual environments. For example, much of the recent European and

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[1] Yvonne Vera, 'Writing Near the Bone', *Word. On Being a [Woman] Writer*, ed. by Jocelyn Burrell (New York: The Feminist Press, 2004), p.59.

[2] Aileen Douglas, *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.xxii.

[3] Grace Musila has discussed this in relation to African literature, noting that the body features 'predominantly as a metaphor in the African canon and criticism'. 'Embodying Experience and Agency' in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*', *Research in African Literatures* 38.2 (Summer 2007), p.51.

American centred gender theory has been conceived in contexts relatively free of the armed conflicts that have marked certain postcolonial countries. Yet living through the precarious circumstances of an event like the Zimbabwean liberation war undoubtedly influences one's conception of, and relationship to, the body. Accordingly, theoretical approaches must engage with the various contextual and intersectional factors that influence localised responses to the mind and body. Whilst an overly material response to the body may ignore the processes that coerce and oppress individuals, an overly discursive approach risks underwriting normative discourses that negate certain bodies. It is important to acknowledge that a socially constructed body bleeds, whilst interrogating how bodily corporeality is brought into focus, and how these bodily realities influence discourses and vice versa.

Postcolonial Zimbabwean literature has centralised the body. This is not surprising, for the colonial period was marked by psychological and physical subjugation, and by the material realities of racial disparity. The liberation period was also marked by the violence of the liberation war struggle, and the relatively undocumented genocidal activities of Gukurahundi in the 1980s. This sustained period of conflict necessarily prolonged and exaggerated the bodily precarity symptomatic of a colonial period. Gender has informed both the colonial and postcolonial country, and the intersectional nature of domination has led many critics and writers to discuss the double colonisation of women. Intersectional oppression is not merely a question of constraint, but of violence. Rape was a characteristic of the liberation struggle and Matabeleland massacres, and revealed the extremities of patriarchal domination. These narratives have been concealed, however, because of the demands of heteronormative forms of nationalism. This act of historical repression illustrates

how politicised narratives may conceal personal traumas, as personal histories are appropriated or repressed in the articulation of a singular national narrative.

The oppressions of gender disparity have been discussed throughout my thesis, albeit frequently from the position of male writers. This testifies to the nature of a literary terrain dominated by male writers because of a historically entrenched heteronormative order which has limited the autonomy and voices of women. It was not until 1987 that the first novel by a black Zimbabwean woman was published. It is no surprise that this novel, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, is so explicitly concerned with representing and rejecting the authority of patriarchy, colonialism, and the constraints of the family.[4] Soon after, Yvonne Vera's short but prolific writing career began. Vera's violent prose also rejects the constraints of gender and familial roles through the politicisation of the repressed histories of subjugated women. Her readiness to engage with the taboo subjects of rape, suicide, infanticide, murder, and incest illustrates her desire to politicise the unrepresented and to contest normativity. In both Vera's and Dangarembga's writing, the body, and particularly the bodies of women, are centralised and politicised. For Vera, writing is a bodily act. It is a means of discovering the body, and representing the body. This bodily focus is represented in both Vera's and Dangarembga's writing through shared themes of literal and figurative dismemberment, disembodiment, and bodily disassociation that represent and contest discursive realities through the body. The dual bodily and symbolic focus in their writing is not only peculiarly similar, but illustrates the possibilities of a theoretical strategy that is concerned with both the body and discourse.

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[4] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2004).

This chapter will centralise the writing of Vera and Dangarembga because of their shared bodily concerns, and because they critique patriarchy and colonialism, and contest the celebratory liberation narrative. However, this selection transcends the thematic, and also relates to Vera's and Dangarembga's identity as women. Whilst I do not want to promote gender binaries, and believe that my approach has brought both male and female writers into dialogue, it is necessary to acknowledge that sex and gender dictate individual experiences. In this regard, whilst many of the male Zimbabwean authors I have discussed represent the violent realities of heteronormative roles, they nonetheless write from a relatively empowered status as men, even if they have been victims of racism or were marginalised because of a failure to adhere to normative practices. As Monica Bungaro has stated, men may be feminist but men cannot be women.[5] Similarly, Luce Irigaray's contention that 'I will never be in a man's place, a man will never be in mine' illustrates the importance of acknowledging both male and female voices (and others who do not subscribe to a binary gender system) due to the varied nature of gendered experience, and because lived experience informs understanding.[6] Importantly, the voices of women also hold the capacity performatively to reject the discourses which restrict the agency of women, and to denaturalise the naturalised power of gender roles. Any heteronormative focus which failed to engage with both male and female writers would underwrite gender disparity, even if it is essential to acknowledge that intersectional factors related to individual experience foreclose the possibility of defining any essentialised male or female subject position.

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[5] Monica Bungaro, 'Male Feminist Fiction: Literary Subversions of a Gender-Biased Script', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender: Versions and Subversions in African Literatures*, vol. 1, ed. by Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), p.48.

[6] Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p.13.

I will begin my chapter by discussing the writing of Yvonne Vera. She, of all Zimbabwean authors, is most concerned with representing female victimisation in all its forms. I will introduce her literary style and her representation of the body through a detailed discussion of *Butterfly Burning*.[7] This section will also introduce ideas of disembodiment, bodily disassociation, and maternal rejection that are so central to Vera's oeuvre. I will analyse how Vera portrays the relationship between the experiences of women and the social constitution of maternity and the family, whilst I develop my argument through a discussion of rape, infanticide, and incest in Vera's *Without a Name* and *Under the Tongue*.[8] This section will also explore the represented relationship between the mind and the body under colonial and patriarchal structures. I will interrogate the psychological dimensions of this relationship through a discussion of internalisation and abjection in Vera's writing, before shifting my discussion to Tsitsi Dangarembga's novels. My discussion of *Nervous Conditions* will principally focus on the depicted relationship between patriarchy and the body, and engage with protagonist Tambu's and Nyasha's changing characterisations in the novel. I will expand my discussion of racial disparity through *The Book of Not*, and consider ideas of mental colonisation and internalisation discussed in relation to Vera, whilst comparing Dangarembga's and Vera's conception of bodily disassociation and the mind and body relationship.[9] I will then shift focus to a discussion of the liberation war and the Matabeleland massacres. This section will engage with the gender disconformity of the liberation war period, and the associated feminist perspectives represented in literature and society in the 1970s. Following the discussion of gender disconformity, I will return

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[7] Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000 [1998]).
[8] Yvonne Vera, *Without a Name* [1994] and *Under the Tongue* [1996] (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).
[9] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 2006).

to an analysis of the oppressions of patriarchy. I will discuss the representations of

violence and rape during the liberation war and the atrocities in Matabeleland, and I

will consider how knowledge and discussion of these events has been repressed. This

repressive thesis will be analysed through a brief representation of the public

reaction to Ingrid Sinclair's film *Flame* and through a discussion of rape and

repression in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences*.[10] The latter novelette will be

my only detailed representation of a piece of male authorship in the chapter,

although I will engage with other male writers at points, and in particular Marechera,

because he persistently centralises the body as both a literal and symbolic entity. I

will then discuss *The Stone Virgins* and the link between patriarchy and the violence

represented in Vera's text.[11] I will also ponder the gendered politicisation of

historical memory, and expand my discussion of the relationship of memory, myth,

and history through an analysis of Vera's first novel *Nehanda*.[12] The body will be

centralised throughout my chapter as a means of examining the relationship between

discourse and materiality.


Writing the Body: Resisting Colonialism and Patriarchy


Dambudzo Marechera's writing is the most bodily of the authors I have discussed in

depth so far. Whilst Marechera is attuned to discursive processes and acts of

symbolic resistance, the corporeality of the body is at the core of every text. Its

tangibility is felt in each jarring reference to sex and violence, and through his

depictions of a series of coerced and violated bodies which promote the corporeal

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[10] Ingrid Sinclair, *Flame* (Paris: JBA Production and Zimmedia, 1996); and Alexander Kanengoni,
*Echoing Silences* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1997).
[11] Yvonne Vera, *The Stone Virgins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).
[12] Yvonne Vera, *Nehanda* (Ontario, Canada: TSAR Publications, 2007 [1993]).

effects of colonial and patriarchal social processes. A sense of resounding violence is reinforced by a lack of plot or structure which leaves Marechera's narratives vulnerable to the intrusions and digressions that perpetually produce the anticipation, or realisation, of violence. The narrator's recollection of a public marital rape in 'House of Hunger' epitomises this technique, as sudden digressionary violence conflates the private and public, and visualises the collection's connection between violence and sex.[13] No Zimbabwean writer is as relentlessly carnal and violent as Marechera. No writer forces the body so profanely onto the pages. Yet Vera's intensely descriptive writing is just as physical, albeit differently so. The brutality in Vera's writing is less consistent, for she usually centralises a violent sexual moment which is then either anticipated in the text or returned to throughout. Accordingly, there is less digressionary violence and sex, and her textual environments lack the chaos of Marechera's, although the prose of both writers often appears structure-less and is punctuated by ambiguous jumps forwards and backwards in time.

Vera's abstract style perhaps obscures some of the most violent moments in her writing. The distortion of time, the subversion of the body and the environment, and a descriptive poetic writing style all contribute to an occasionally ambiguous reading process.[14] Vera's work demands multiple readings at points, much like Marechera's, whilst she resists the chronological and didactic forms which have marked the writing of some other Zimbabwean authors. However, her bodily descriptive focus

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[13] Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993 [1978]), p.50.
[14] Critics have critiqued the density of Vera's writing style and its ambiguities. For example, Alix Wilber in a review of *The Stone Virgins* described Vera's prose as 'densely poetic', and her opening chapters 'so preoccupied with ambience, that at times it is almost impossible to discern what she is taking about'. 'BOOKS IN BRIEF: FICTION & POETRY; The Enemy Was Everyone', *New York Times* (online), 23.02.2003, www.nytimes.com/2003/02/23/books/books-in-brief-fiction-poetry-the-enemy-was-everyone.html. Last accessed 16.05.2016.

nonetheless renders Vera the most sensory English language writer in Zimbabwe.

This quasi-contradictory conception is illustrated at the beginning of *Butterfly*

*Burning* through her description of the seventeen men hung by colonial authorities

for resisting the settlement of Zimbabwe. Their execution is represented through

symbolism and abstraction, as illustrated:

> Mist ascends like luxurious tears and claims the men. They are swimmers, in
> the mist pulling up and then down the tree, like floating wood. Swimmers
> with no arms. Floating and forever dipping down. Sinking in a tree has
> become a lake of light.[15]

Descriptions of swimming, floating, drinking, and sinking invoke metaphors of

drowning and water, which are used throughout *Butterfly Burning*. Drowning is

rendered inevitable, as confluent with colonial existence, as Vera represents the

realities of racial discourses through physical metaphor. To drown is also to

suffocate and to disappear, and this impression is enforced by later references to the

men as 'shadows' and as 'buried in their mouths' which express ideas of liminality

and silence as a means of exploring the repression of colonial subjectivity.[16] Notably

the symbolic and metaphorical nature of descriptions, which are highly

interpretative, obscure the bodily realities of the hanging. However, this bodily

conception is rendered in retrospect through Vera's mundane descriptions of

everyday life and the general tangibility of her writing. This is illustrated by her

description of a group of children which follows soon after in the narrative:

> Hidden in their closeness the children hold their pulsing hands together.
> Shoulders touch. Toes scratch the folded rim of metal. Naked feet are sealed
> against every humiliation, held carefully under the body. Knees are folded.
> Elbows bend and burn with the powdery rust of the metal which peels into
> thin crumbling flakes, like dead skin. The children touch again and again,
> back to back, hand to elbow. Their lips are dry. Their voices splinter like
> dead branches.[17]

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[15] Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p.11.
[16] Ibid, p.12.
[17] Ibid, p.18.

The references to pulsing, touching, folding, bending, and dryness illustrate the sensory dimension of Vera's descriptive style, and enhance the bodily realities of the children and a variety of other characters. Dehumanising racist ideologies are resisted through this rampant tangibility, as Vera emphasises that these are bodies which touch, feel, hope, and suffer. Such concentrated bodily portrayal has a specific relationship to the hanging of the men due to textual positioning and because the description explicitly fuses these two ideas through the reference to 'voices splinter[ing] like dead branches'. This simile gestures towards the vulnerability of the children because their bodies are subject to the same racially endorsed violence which led to the executions of the men. The depiction of voices 'splintering' refers to the repressive constraints of discursive conditions, which are similarly represented through the reference to men 'being buried in their mouths'. Silence, and processes of repression, are a thematic concern in Vera's writing and link discursive productions of silence to lived and negated corporeal realities. The discursive production of history is represented later in a sentence which epitomises the relationship between silence and dominance in Vera's oeuvre: 'identity had already become a curious detail to living…It is the nature of victory to measure triumph in the silence or death of the other'.[18]

*Butterfly Burning* documents protagonist's Phephelaphi's doomed search for freedom. From her arrival in the narrative, Phephelaphi's fate is foreboded, as she is introduced to the reader through the patriarchal lens of Fumbatha, who later becomes her lover. Fumbatha meets the protagonist whilst swimming, recalling the portentous

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[18] Ibid, p.25.

signification of swimming and drowning which began the story. These foreboding

dimensions are exaggerated by the terms of ownership used to describe

Phephelaphi's inception in the text:

> She was a being entirely from the water…The river was not as greedy as he
> had said. It had given him this woman, spitting her onto the rock like a
> dream.[19]

The mystical ambiguity of the description renders Phephelaphi nymph-like, implying

an association between female sexuality and nature. The nature of her represented

birth also denies Phephelaphi an independent presence or genealogy, as her existence

is depicted as beginning only when she was 'given' to Fumbatha. Giving has

contextual significance because it repeats the 'giving' of traditional marriage which

is entrenched in the Lobola system. Fumbatha's desire to 'protect' Phephelaphi,

which is described soon after, and his wariness about 'the loss he already anticipated,

by the memory of her which he already treasured' enhance a constructed reading

which negates Phephelaphi's own identity, feelings, and hopes.[20] Fumbatha's vision

is purely his own, and is implicated in the gendered dimensions which constrain

female subjectivity.

Phephelaphi strives, unsuccessfully, to determine her own identity throughout the

text. She epitomises Carolyn Shaw's claim that an 'unfulfilled dream of self-

generation lies at the core of [Vera's] work'.[21] Shaw references the failures of so

many of Vera's women to define themselves, as hopes of autonomy are crushed by

the patriarchal and/or colonial authorities empowered by gender and/or racial

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[19] Ibid, p.27.
[20] Ibid, p.31.
[21] Carolyn Martin Shaw, 'A Woman Speaks of Rivers: Generation and Sexuality in Yvonne Vera's Novels', *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera*, ed. by Robert Muponde and Mandi Taruvinga (Harare: Weaver Press, 2002), p.92.

disparity. Whilst Phephelaphi's struggle is a product of an oppressive social environment that condemns all of Vera's protagonists, it also has a direct relation to the protagonist's ruptured personal history. Phephelaphi witnessed her mother Gertrude's ambiguous death as a child, watching as her corpse fell through the open doorway of their house. Her mother was victim of the extra-judicial actions of a jealous white policeman, although the protagonist's understanding of this fact, and the nature of her mother's death, is obscured by the repression of the memory of the murder because of a context which devalues the lives of colonial subjects. Phephelaphi's early relationship with negation and death constitutes her as a 'death-bound subject'.[22] This theoretical conception, coined by Abdul JanMohamed, represents the precarious existence of a subject 'formed, from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death'.[23] The precarity of existence is also represented by the executed men at the start of the story, suggesting a parallel between the personal and communal which is insistently invoked in Vera's politicised narratives. This parallel is also encouraged by Phephelaphi's relationship with her older lover Fumbatha, because his father was one of the executed men. Accordingly, memory is depicted as a form of knowledge owned and controlled in the text, because these narratives of oppression have been concealed through discursive disparities. This discursive conception has both a material effect, as illustrated through the murders depicted, and psychological and social consequences for subjects marked by 'death-bound' conceptions. However, whilst Phephelaphi and Fumbatha share traumas, Vera does not encourage a direct comparison between the

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[22] Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p.2.
[23] Ibid.

two because they experience very different realities defined by the empowerment and disempowerment of male and female gender roles.

Phephelaphi is resistant to the domestic femininity promoted by Fumbatha. Like her mother, and various secondary female characters represented in the text, she searches for a sense of identity free from the constitution of men. She idealises her mother Gertrude's sexual freedom and that of the older prostitute Deliwe, whose 'scorpion' eyes signify a form of combative empowerment which Phephelaphi longs for.[24] She hopes to find this empowerment by becoming the first black African nurse in her township. Her desire is not specifically about becoming a nurse but about becoming itself, and the 'movement forward' into the 'new and untried'.[25] Yet this movement forward is both restricted by colonial authorities, and by internal patriarchal structures which constrict women through the family. Fumbatha attempts to dissuade Phephelaphi from her ambitions, arguing that he will provide for her whilst also showing a distrust for a city represented in part through the transgressive independence of characters like Deliwe. However, Fumbatha fails to realise that Phephelaphi wants to work because of her own ambitions and hopes, as the narrator states: 'Finding herself, that was it. Phephelaphi wanted to be somebody'.[26] The use of some 'body' is particularly poignant, for Phephelaphi is restricted because of her bodily identity as a woman, and by the discursive signification of the domestic femininity policed by men like Fumbatha.

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[24] Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p.61.
[25] Ibid, p.71.
[26] Ibid, p.75.

This conception of being trapped by, and in, a body takes on further signification when Phephelaphi falls pregnant. Her pregnancy means that she cannot pursue a career as a nurse, because of a stipulation on the application form. Accordingly, a direct conflict between familial restrictions and the possibilities of a career is encouraged. This conflict is also an expression of the imported Christian morality of the settlers, as illustrated by a condition relayed to the reader: 'married girls were not admitted as they could get pregnant while being trained'.[27] This legitimisation of pregnancy as, and only as, a product of marriage accordingly constrains normative sexuality, and condemns the actions of prostitutes like Deliwe and the protagonist's mother, as well the protagonist's own extra-marital relations. Perhaps this stipulation, and the assumption of the immorality of extra-marital sex, also contribute to Phephelaphi's failure to locate and understand herself. Whilst the conflict between maternity and the search for the freedom of a career is discursively signified, it is important to state the obvious: falling pregnant is necessarily something only experienced by women. This condition then rejects, as Musila has claimed, women's reproductive bodies.[28] Phephelaphi thus experiences a dual alienation as a black African woman. She is rejected by the colonial administration on account of her gender and race, and suffers because of the actions and mindsets of men like Fumbatha due to patriarchal constructions. This illustrates how heteronormativity resignifies Phephelaphi's body, promoting the internalisation of hatred that predicates her suicide.

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[27] Ibid, p.99.

[28] Grace Musila, 'Embodying Experience and Agency', p.53.

The hopelessness of Phephelaphi's situation leads to her choosing to abort the foetus, which she decides upon after visiting Deliwe for guidance. The nature of the abortion which follows is highly naturalistic, taking place in solitude in the bush. The lengthy description of the scene is occasionally abstract but nonetheless concentrates on the bodily act. Vera also subverts voyeuristic and sexualised heteronorms reproduced in some of the male authored texts I have discussed, as represented:

> Push. She has pushed it in. Sharp and piercing. No fear. No excitement. This must be. In and out a watery sac. Slowly she receives it as though this motion will provide an ecstatic release…Her own hand inserting an irreversible harm.[29]

Vera's description mimics the act of sex. The pushing in, and the reference to 'ecstatic release', de-eroticises sex through the abjection of abortion, and disturbs the sex-life relationship in the process. This binary is also upset by mention of the thorn bush from which Phephelaphi had procured 'the longest and strongest needle she could find'.[30] The bush, she realises, is 'now bright with dots of red' and 'covered with red blooms', as birth has emerged from death and an alliance is forged with the natural world.[31] The conflation of life and death also de-eroticises Phephelaphi's nakedness, which is necessarily associated with the bloody and damaging act of abortion. Vera's delineation of the act then seems consciously directed towards the discursive conditions which produced Phephelaphi's conflict, suggesting a correlation between the body and the discursive. Vera's readiness to engage with the taboo subject of abortion contests the processes of repression which define historical memory, and negate female victimhood in the context. Her manipulation of taboo is

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[29] Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p.115.
[30] Ibid, p.117.
[31] Ibid.

also powerfully demonstrated through Phephelaphi's rejection of maternity, which transgresses her expected role as a woman. Yet Phephelaphi's act does not bring her the freedom she seeks, as Vera defines the psychological damage it has caused. Rather, Vera exposes the difference between expectation and reality endured by the protagonist:

> This whole action had been about tidying up. Ordering the disorder. Instead, her fingers are torn and bleeding. Her blouse is open at the top where the button has fallen.[32]

> Phephelaphi walks in a stupor, unable to bury her pain; not clear if she has parted from death or life.[33]

The dual sensations, and conflation of life and death, reiterate the constricted nature of Phephelaphi's identity. Her attempts to free herself from the burden and constraints of pregnancy have merely brought more misery, suggesting an inevitability of suffering introduced through the drowning metaphor used to describe the executed men at the text's inception.

The relationship between embodiment and disembodiment develops as the narrative progresses, as Vera explores the split/divided identity of women within a patriarchal and colonial system. Splitting is first depicted as a manifestation of trauma following the abortion, in which Phephelaphi experiences and is dislocated from the events: 'Each moment is hers and she recalls each detail with clarity even while she is living it, living in it, part of it, and parting from it'.[34] This sense of being part of and parting from it depicts the ambiguous status of the protagonist, as both part of a colonial system and subjugated by it, as part of a patriarchal system but oppressed by it. This

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[32] Ibid, p.125.
[33] Ibid, p.127.
[34] Ibid, p.124.

is especially true of the maternity encouraged by both systems but which Phephelaphi physically rejects, and in the process also rejects what it means to be a woman in her context. As the narrative nears its end this thematic concern intensifies. The protagonist is described as 'Folded into two halves, one part of her is death, the other living…consumed by a strong temptation to tell a stranger that her life has ended'.[35] The reiterated manipulation of the life and death binary again emphasises her precarity as less-than-man and less-than-white. Folding is a particularly evocative image, because it reinforces a theme of powerlessness whilst attributing blame to someone, or something, which is responsible for the act of folding and for the conflicts that destroy Phephelaphi. She begins to feel increasingly isolated as her relationship with Fumbatha breaks down, invoking a theme of isolation which Elleke Boehmer has identified as representative of female protagonists in Vera's work.[36] This notion of isolation rebukes conceptions of community which underwrite heteronormativity and oppressive colonial and postcolonial discourses, lending a bodily singularity to life experience. Phephelaphi's splitting and doubling, whilst initially internalised, is later projected onto Fumbatha, who Phephelaphi represents as developing 'two heads' after he tells her about an ongoing affair with Deliwe and discovers the truth about the abortion. In this regard, the doubling manifests the gap between her perception and the ostensible reality of Fumbatha, as Phephelaphi loses control of both the felt and perceived. This manifests itself in a more literal split between mind and body, foreboding her later suicide:

> She could never…lift her arms to clear cobwebs from her path [again], anything which required the swing of her arm or her feet rising was now impossible for her. Her legs felt light, more hollow than bamboo, weightless,

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[35] Ibid, p.127.

[36] Elleke Boehmer, 'Versions of Yearning and Dissent: The Troping of Desire in Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender*, p.117.

> and she was floating like a lone feather, suspended between each of his cutting words.[37]

Sensations of suspension and weightlessness represent the impossibility of Phephelaphi's reality, and the link between words, or discourses, and her suffering and later death. This suspension is something which began at her inception in the text, and which never truly changed, although her understanding of the inevitability of it has. Betrayed by Deliwe, Phephelaphi also discovers that a fellow prostitute Zandile was her true mother but had abandoned her to the care of Gertrude because it interfered with her prostitution and plans. In this regard, Phephelaphi symbolically becomes the child she too rejected, and her sense of suspension is reinforced by the misunderstanding of her own genealogy, and a changing self-conception marked by betrayal, misconception, and disembodiment.

Phephelaphi's mental disintegration and powerlessness is confirmed when she falls pregnant again, leading to her decision to take her own life. The description of her self-immolation again exposes the contradictory relationship between coercion and autonomy: she waits, ready to be harmed, to be freed. She seeks surrender, a death as intimate as birth. A birth as certain as love.[38] The reference to 'surrender' indicates the role of social forces and history in her demise. Yet the conflation of death and birth lends a hopefulness to the death. This is reiterated through descriptions of wings and flying which hint at an intangible expression of freedom denied by the corporeality of Phephelaphi's body. The act of suicide also perversely expresses an eventual moment of self-love: 'Finally she has done it, embracing each part of

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[37] Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p.142.
[38] Ibid, p.149.

herself with flame, deeply and specially'.[39] As Fumbatha watches on powerlessly, and receives Phephelaphi's last unreported whisper, a measure of autonomy has been achieved. Phephelaphi has finally, as Eleni Coundouriotis has claimed, repossessed her body, and this is perhaps the only genuine moment of bodily possession in a text about dispossession.[40] Yet autonomy and repossession are only possible by destroying the body which has entrapped the protagonist. Her death then communicates the impossibilities of life for her, but is also a means of exposing the limits of Fumbatha's and the colonial government's control over her body. The politicisation of her death rejects the conditions of a precarious and coerced existence, and represents the body as a site of resistance.

Vera's protagonists endure conflicted relationships with their bodies. Phephelaphi's story provides credence for such a reading, because her personal ambitions are literally constrained by her sex and her biological ability to fall pregnant. Critics have discussed the betrayal of Phephelaphi's body, reiterating a disjuncture between mind and body whilst illustrating how bodies constrain and determine experience. Yet one must be wary of providing such a reading when that reading ignores the relationship between the mind and body and the consequences of discourses. For example, Ranka Primorac has discussed her conception of this mind and body disjuncture:

> Vera's characters have inner lives that do not undergo change: their minds are lively, mature and free from the very outset of their stories. It is their *bodies* that they do not fully possess, and therein lie their tragedies.[41]

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[39] Ibid, p.150.

[40] Eleni Coundouriotis, 'Self-Inflicted Wounds in Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*', *World Literature Today* (September-December 2005), p.64.

[41] Ranka Primorac, 'Iron Butterflies: Notes on Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*', *Sign and Taboo*, p.107.

Primorac's interpretation represents the bodily disconnection so evident in Vera's narratives, yet downplays the effects of patriarchy, colonialism, and, by extension, discourses on the mind. The body and mind are inextricably linked, because processes of socialisation impact on an individual's psyche, and one's ability to interpret a world through structures of language and behaviour which necessarily predicate and influence subjects. In Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, one cannot say that Phephelaphi's mind is free, because she struggles with an incessant desire for self-realisation restricted by internal conflicts, her mother's death, and by the discursive constraints of her contextual moment. Her internal conflict, and her desire to 'love herself' is directly related to Fumbatha's controlling patriarchal conception which is emblematic of a hegemonic position within society which constrains the subjectivity and bodies of women. Because of patriarchal conceptions linked to the colonial settler institutions and to conservative Christianity, Phephelaphi may not be both a mother and a nurse. Whilst her ability to fall pregnant, her biological difference as a woman, underpins this discursive measure, it is the way in which biological difference is understood that domesticates the protagonist. Phephelaphi's suicide then must be read as a rejection of her literal but socialised female body, and it is a mental condition, one present throughout the text, which predicates her suicide. This condition is in part a colonial condition, but principally a product of gender constructions, and embodies a form of double or even triple consciousness marked by the intersecting oppressions of race and sex.

Rejecting and Abjecting the Mother and the Family

In Zimbabwe and Southern Rhodesia femininity has historically been an expression of motherhood: to be a woman is to be a mother, or a future mother. To reject motherhood then was to reject what it meant to be a woman. This normative conception of motherhood was, and is, endorsed through naturalised readings of biological difference which conflate the capacity to bear children with the necessity of doing so, and with the interpreted naturalisation of domesticated maternal constraints. This normative constitution of motherhood was historically enhanced in the African context through various social and institutional beliefs and practices. For example, both traditional Shona and Ndebele religious systems centralise fertility and procreation, because of an ancestral belief system.[42] The mother occupies a treasured but restricted role based upon the continuation of a lineage which will protect and continue the spiritual legacy of ancestors. The importation of Christian belief systems arguably enhanced, or at the very least differently signified, traditional gendered roles. Institutions like Lobola (bridewealth), which have continuing influence, capitalise and incentivise the preservation of a traditional hierarchy which symbolically and financially empowers men.[43] These normative belief systems are concerned with the preservation of maternity, and thus the family. Accordingly, the maternal is at once the familial, and is rendered the reproducer of personal and national life. It is not merely bearing children which becomes the sole

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[42] The centralisation of fertility is reiterated through certain rituals and beliefs which explicitly relate fertility to God, such as Aschwanden's contention that semen is conceived of as a source of immortality in Shona society. Herbert Aschwanden, *Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1989), pp.28 and 206.

[43] Lobola, best translated as 'bride price' or 'bride wealth', represents a promise of payment from a husband or his family to the father of a bride at the point of, or following, marriage. Excellent and Regis Chireshe, 'Lobola: The Perceptions of Great Zimbabwe University Students', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 3.9 (June-July 2010), p.212.

responsibility of women but rearing children too, because of the discursive signification of woman as the producer and nurturer of children. In this tradition, the man's role as protector and provider is reified, and masculinity is constructed as the antithesis of the nurturing domesticity associated with women. This is validated by returning to the function of Lobola, which capitalises gender roles that empower men as the purchasers, or the compensators or at the very least the payers that endorses traditional familial roles.[44] It is not coincidental, then, that so much of Vera's work, which is concerned with rejecting patriarchy, rejects maternity and the family, because patriarchy is inextricably linked to the social expression of the family. Intriguingly, none of Vera's primary protagonists are married, although some secondary characters are, and no primary protagonist remains a mother. Several of her female characters also explicitly and violently reject motherhood, and this maternal disconnect, as Shaw has argued, is staged again and again by Vera.[45] This has been discussed in relation to Phephelaphi, who rejects maternity through her abortion because a child would lead to her domestication and constraint, whilst Phephelaphi's biological mother Zandile similarly rejected her daughter. However, the rejection of maternity and the family is more violent and explicit in two earlier novels of Vera's, *Without a Name* and *Under the Tongue*. These texts also engage with images of disembodiment, bodily distortion, dismemberment, and abjection which mark Vera's oeuvre and indicate the unique bodily concerns that define the experiences of women because of the ways in which biological difference has been socialised in Zimbabwe and Southern Rhodesia.

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[44] These varying interpretations of what Lobola represents have been discussed in Excellent and Regis Chireshe's study. Ibid, pp.212 and 215.

[45] Shaw, p.84.

*Without a Name* stages Zimbabwean literature's most violent rejection of maternity. The story is about infanticide and rape, and illustrates Vera's desire, like Marechera before her, to engage with the taboo subjects repressed by contemporaneous discourses. As in many of Vera's texts, the details of the traumas are gradually disclosed. The first portrayal of the rape is dislocated and superficial, with the attack represented through images of disembodiment and dismemberment which define most of the traumatic moments in Vera's writing:

> She cried and ran with her two legs missing, buried, and she thought she ran with her arms because she saw them swing forward.[46]

This use of bodily disassociation responds to a lack of control and agency forced on Mazvita during the rape. The 'buried' legs have both a figurative and literal meaning: literally, her legs appear buried because the mist which concealed her attacker also concealed her legs, but figuratively the severing of legs from body depicts the disembodied force of trauma. This is pronounced because the conception of burial is suggestive of death and corpses, anticipating the loss and abjection which defines the narrative.[47] The mist that conceals the attacker also conflates the act of rape with the land, introducing a conflicted relationship between land and identity endured by a disenfranchised female protagonist. Vera has discussed this conception of the land in interviews, suggesting a correlation between the literal rape and the rape of memory as a dual reflection of patriarchal nationalism.[48] The embodied consequences of this act are enhanced by later descriptions of the attack:

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[46] Vera, *Without a Name*, p.31.

[47] Corpses, in Kristeva's conception of abjection, represent the 'utmost of abjection'. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4.

[48] 'These things did occur and for Mazvita, and maybe for women generally, there is the feeling of being left out in shaping the truth of the struggle…Nobody has asked ''what is happening to the women while we are creating these heroes?''' Yvonne Vera, '''Shaping the Truth of the Struggle'' an Interview with Yvonne Vera', Eva Hunter, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 10.1 (1998), p.80.

> He removed her legs from her body, and she lay still, not recognising her legs as her own.[49]

In this description, Mazvita's powerlessness and detachment is more concrete and pronounced. Her misrecognition responds to the loss or negation of rape, which is conceived through a relationship of the physical to the psychological. Notions of negation and loss are substantiated through other references to forms of bodily dislocation, because of the distance Mazvita feels from the 'parts of her body [her attacker] had claimed for himself' and the misrecognition she directs towards her 'unknown and strange' skin.[50] This bodily disassociation is a characteristic of Vera's writing, as Shaw has argued, as all of Vera's protagonist suffer some form of 'bodily distortion or disassociation'.[51] Boehmer has read these distortions as occasional manifestations of synecdoche, with the bodily parts disconnected from whole bodies as in 'some manner...disavowing fixed genders or sexual identities'.[52] However, I think that bodily distortion is a representative action rather than indicative of gender or sexual disavowal, because Vera's protagonists suffer bodily disconnection precisely because of their gendered and sexual identities. Bodily distortion and disembodiment then demonstrate how Vera's female protagonists lack control of their own bodies, because of the patriarchal colonial constraints and physical violations which divorce mind and body. Bodily disassociation and disembodiment are also a characteristic of trauma, as research has identified, as both a response and a coping mechanism.[53] The relationship between trauma and the gendered

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[49] Vera, *Without a Name*, p.97.
[50] Vera, *Without a Name*, p.98.
[51] Carolyn Martin Shaw, 'The Habit of Assigning Meaning: Signs of Yvonne Vera's World', *Sign and Taboo*, p.32.
[52] Boehmer, p.121.
[53] Sharon Stanley, *Relational and Body-Centered Practices for Healing Trauma: Lifting the Burdens of the Past* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp.7-8.

signification of the attack is represented through Mazvita's reaction to a change in her menstrual pattern. Believing that she had been stripped of 'the seasons of motherhood', the protagonist engages positively with the 'power' this change allows.[54] This reaction to loss illustrates the potential constraints of maternity for a woman, and suggests a connection between the social construction of maternal femininity and her physical vulnerability as a woman subjugated by a hegemonic gender order. However, Mazvita's biological changes are a product of her falling pregnant, and her realisation of this fact predicates a more severe rupture between herself and her body because the body limits Mazvita's desire for freedom.

Mazvita's bodily misrecognition transforms into anger as she suffers from the physical and psychological consequences of the pregnancy. Several references to 'betrayal' render her body, rather than her attacker, the receptacle of this anger, and suggest that her body constrains her desire to be free.[55] These feelings intensify because her lover Joel does not want her child, signifying that Joel is free, and will always be free, from a biological constraint that hinders Mazvita. After the birth, this bodily betrayal is represented with greater vehemence as a form of 'disgrace', which is suggestive of an internalised abjection that is also directed toward the new born chid.[56] This is shown through a refusal to name the infant, which suggests a reluctance to personify the child because she does want to signify her mother-child bond through the act of naming and possession.[57] Because Joel rejects the child, Mazvita leaves him for the city in a journey that is recalled in various parts of an anachronous narrative. This manipulation of time ruptures the distance between

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[54] Vera, *Without a Name*, p.36.
[55] Ibid, p.73.
[56] Ibid, p.84.
[57] This is also suggested by the narrator's claim that 'A name binds a mother to her child', Ibid, p.85.

memory and events, creating a circularity which refuses to render the original act a random ahistorical aberration. Rather, the protagonist is at once fleeing from and running towards the rape, illustrating the inescapable bodily and psychological consequences of the trauma.

In an apparent response to Mazvita's psychological disintegration, the accounts involving her and the child are defined by increased textual and bodily abstractions. These serve to illustrate the association between Vera's writing style and her subject matter, whilst creating ambiguities for the reader that are not remedied until the novel's conclusion.  This is shown early in the narrative through an account of Mazvita's broken body following her arrival in the city:

> She walked sideways, because her left shoulder leaned forward. It was her broken side. Her bones spread in splintered fragments, across her back. She leaned farther sideways and felt, once more, her bones fall against each other. Her bones built a mountain on her back. Mazvita. Her back was broken.[58]

The distorted and broken conception of the body is suggestive of a violent event taking place. This forebodes a violence symptomatic of the precarity of a liberation war period marked by random attacks, especially for those travelling between rural and city spaces like Mazvita. It transpires, however, that Mazvita's back is not broken but that the descriptions relate to the dead infant strapped to her. This abject fusion of the child's body and Mazvita's visualises a bodily link initially denied by Mazvita. It suggests a realisation that her condition is inescapable: she is bound to her daughter in life and death, and to the act of rape.[59]

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[58] Ibid, p.42.
[59] This is indicated by the narrator's description: 'The baby was her own, truly her own burden'. Ibid, p.51.

Images of bodily disintegration parallel a psychological disorientation marked by other instances of conflation and doubling, both before and after the act of infanticide. Before strangling her child, Mazvita's uncertainty is represented by her description of the infant as 'not hers, was hers, was not hers'.[60] After the murder, Mazvita leaves the city and witnesses various distorted, dismembered, and doubled images. She looks through the dusty window of a bus and perceives heads 'missing from shoulders' and 'arms chopped off'.[61] She then begins talking to a woman with 'her own voice', to whom she promises to release the child, and is answered 'with two voices, both of which were hers'.[62] Mazvita's schizophrenic disorientation depicts her mental fragmentation in response to the trauma and the subsequent infanticide. The dismemberments, such as a vision of various headless people, project internalised conflicts onto Mazvita's environment. These distorted bodies reflect a body and mind dichotomy produced by Mazvita's circumstances, and the impossibility of transcending a corporeal existence represented in one especially pertinent section:

> She only pulled her neck high in an effort to detach her head from her body, somehow, to walk around with her body completely severed. Her thoughts would be free.[63]

This fantasy of decapitation provides the clearest expression of a body restraining the mind in Vera's writing. It is a fantasy which responds to an abject existence, and an internalised hatred projected onto a detached body in an ostensible attempt to gain control of a trauma. This head and body divide is also represented through Mazvita's decision to strangle her child, which can also be read as an attempt to rid herself of

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[60] Ibid, p.107.
[61] Ibid, p.88.
[62] Ibid, p.103.
[63] Ibid, p.25.

the trauma of which the child is a constant reminder. The final scene in the text

consolidates the bond between Mazvita's maternity, trauma, and the land, as she

returns to her destroyed village to bury her child. This return to the beginning

completes a cycle of a narrative defined by the destruction caused by the rape.

Mazvita's violent rejection of maternity, albeit maternity linked to rape, is paralleled

with a violent distortion of the family in Vera's next novel, *Under the Tongue.* The

narrative revolves around an act of incest, as childhood protagonist Zhizha is raped

by her father Muroyiwa, who is then subsequently murdered by Zhizha's mother,

Runyararo. Vera's decision to follow *Without a Name*, a story about rape during the

liberation struggle, with a narrative about incest during the liberation war, also

invites symbolic readings related to the historical memory of liberation. As in Vera's

previous novel, the writing is abstract. There is a sense that this abstraction responds

to the unintelligible nature of incest (and rape), or in other words, a conception of

incest as an aberration which defies meaning.[64] This unintelligible conception is also

suggested by Zhizha's physical reaction to the trauma, as she loses her voice and her

ability to communicate the event. Loss of speech is representative, of trauma as

Martina Kopf has argued in relation to Vera's text, and is especially applicable to

children whose 'symbolic order is still under construction'.[65] Zhizha's muteness is

notably depicted in terms of the thematic splitting and severing which similarly

marked the descriptions of Phephelaphi's conflicts in *Butterfly Burning*:

> My voice is caught in the midst of its awakening, unable to escape. My voice
> stands upright, a solid thing somewhere beneath my breasts splitting me in
> half.[66]

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[64] Kristeva refers to the abject as a site where 'meaning collapses', p.2.

[65] Martina Kopf, 'Writing Sexual Violence: Words and Silences in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*', *Body, Sexuality, and Gender*, pp.244-245.

[66] Vera, *Under the Tongue*, p.225.

This conflation of the physical and intangible represents Vera's intention to focus on the dual psychological and physical effects of trauma represented by a mind and body split in her work. The struggle of definition is enhanced by Vera's failure to reveal the details until the very end of the narrative. Yet, when revealed, the details are marked by a bodily concentration which contradicts the generally abstract nature of the text. Zhizha's bones are 'broken and crushed' in the attack, her 'knee breaks, slides sideways, contracts', her elbows are 'bruised and broken', and a pain 'climbs upward through [her chest], a blinding pain 'grows across [her] foreheard, grows in [her] stomach'.[67] The narration of this moment in the present tense illustrates, as Kopf has claimed, 'no temporal progression' because Zhizha has not recovered from her trauma.[68] The sheer materiality of the extended description visualises the corporeal violence and horror of the attack which renders its repression impossible.

Zhizha recovers her voice when her mother returns from prison, yet this should not lead the reader to interpret this change as promoting the psychological and physical benefits of the mother and daughter bond. After all, it is clear that Runyararo has only returned temporarily before travelling to the city in search of freedom from her own personal trauma. She, like all of Vera's mother figures, rejects the domestic binds of a constructed mother and child bond. Aside from this, it is very difficult to conceive of a mother-child relationship outside of a patriarchal environment which naturalises and essentialities maternity for women. Yet, this normative position, and the patriarchal system which underlines it, are something the narrative, and Vera's

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[67] Ibid, p.230.
[68] Kopf, p.250.

oeuvre, explicitly critiques. In *Under the Tongue*, this critique is represented by the stories of Zhizha's grandmother, who acts as a mother to Zhizha after Runyararo is imprisoned. The combination of mother and grandmother categories is also paralleled by a conflation of Zhizha's identity with that of her biological mother, provoking a generational link of victimhood between the women, as Boehmer has posited.[69] Zhizha's grandmother has suffered in the past from infertility problems. She was rejected by her community as a result, and subject to insults from her husband who accused her of having a 'rotten…womb filled with termites'.[70] The use of abject imagery represents the social marginalisation of women who contradict maternal expectations, and reflects a reality in a Zimbabwean society which, as Hove has stated, is 'haunted' by the fear of infertility.[71] The otherworldly conceptions of anti-maternity are also reflected in the narrative by the accusations that the grandmother is a witch, which demonstrates how non-normativity is policed through language. The grandmother's situation is worsened when she gives birth to a child 'drowning' in water, whose disorder leads to his death in infancy.[72] This story of infant death parallels the story of Muroyiwa, who was left to die in a calabash soon after birth. Intriguingly then, all three children represented in the text are victims of something: one dies of a biological disorder, one is rejected, and one is subject to the violent rape by her father. This distortion of the freedom and innocence of childhood negates the promise of futurity represented by children, and by the birth of the new Zimbabwean nation.

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[69] Boehmer, p.121.
[70] Vera, *Under the Tongue*, p.183.
[71] Chenjerai Hove, 'How an ancestor is born in Zimbabwe', *Mail and Guardian* (online), mg.co.za/article/2013-03-28-00-how-an-ancestor-is-born-in-zimbabwe. Last accessed 16.03.2015.
[72] Vera, *Under the Tongue*, pp.191-193.

A chapter describing the celebratory atmosphere of the liberation war concludes

Vera's narrative. Following directly after the act of incest, this chapter demands to

be read alongside it. In view of the distorted images of childhood, it is very hard to

read this as anything but a condemnation of the liberation mentality. In this regard,

the pessimism for liberation appears to relate to the various traumas discussed in

Vera's work, and particularly the gendered dimensions of these traumas. Both the

rape and the incest in Vera's first two novels could be read as mere aberrations

which contradict the core tenets of familial life inextricably linked to

heteronormativity. Robert Muponde has endorsed this de-socialised conception,

criticising gendered readings of the rape in Vera's *Without a Name*.[73] Yet the

widespread use of rape as a tool of violence during both the liberation war and

Matabeleland massacres is not coincidental. Whilst brutal violence may be a product

of the contextual rupture, it also represents an exaggerated version of a patriarchal

and colonial system which has subjugated women to men in various ways. This

notion is represented by the extremes of physical and sexual violence in the work of

writers like Vera and Marechera. Contrastingly, the act of incest cannot be subsumed

into normative gender conceptions. It rather 'collapses' meaning, because it directly

contradicts the social constitution of the family, and in the case of reproduction, has

biological ramifications.[74] Yet *Without a Name* is also a text about gender and the

relationship between this and the act of incest should not be read as unintentional.

Intriguingly, the act of incest haunts patriarchy, because it represents the most

extreme distortion of patriarchal power. The daughter in a traditional

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[73] 'it [is] difficult to see viable connections between patriarchy and the brutal rape that Mazvita suffers at the hands of a colonial agent. Mazvita was not raped because the rapist had a patriarchal attitude' Robert Muponde, 'The Sight of the Dead Body: Dystopia as Resistance in Vera's *Without a Name*', *Sign and Taboo*, p.122.

[74] Once again this invokes Kristeva's abjection, and her understanding of the abject as defying meaning. Her work notably engages with this dimension of incest. See pp.2, 48, and 57-68.

heteronormative order is to become a man's wife. A passing takes place between father and son-in-law, which is differently symbolised in various traditions. In some societies, like in Zimbabwe, a Lobola payment will take place to valorise, and even to compensate, the father on the loss of his daughter. The daughter then is at once a wife and mother, because of a gendered view which renders the normative woman always a current or future wife and mother. In the act of incest explored, the process is aborted and at once accelerated: the daughter becomes and displaces wife, and is subject to the most violent extremes of patriarchy, even if these extremes are not only non-normative but represent the collapse of meaning. The incest of the story then both defies meaning and haunts the patriarchal order represented at other moments in the story.

I have made consistent references in this section to abjection, because Vera's texts are saturated by abject images. This is perhaps a product of the brutality of Vera's subject matter. Yet Vera's abjection of maternity testifies to an underlying conception in Kristeva's theorising. For Kristeva, abjection is first associated with the mother figure, because the formation of the subject necessitates a breaking away from the mother figure.[75] This rejection of the mother then produces a self and an abject Other, the mother, who becomes the paradoxical figure of disgust and attraction.[76] This struggle for definition, of separating self from other, is fundamental to the theorising of abjection, and to debates about the constitution of self and other. This fragility of definition has been represented in postcolonial theory in the work of critics like Bhabha and Said, and in the gender theorising of critics like Butler and

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[75] Ibid, p.13.
[76] Ibid, pp.1-6.

McClintock. My research, then, is concerned with the culturally contextualised signification of abjection which has pervaded both the postcolonial and gender theory relevant to my work, in part because of a shared concern over the constructed relationship between normative and non-normative subjects and ideas.[77] The specific relationship to Zimbabwean literature is represented through the clear abject imagery which influences so many of the writers discussed in my research, and because of a peculiar relationship between the abject and the maternal. Whilst there is not a singular way of reading this relationship, the rejection of the mother figure compares with Kristeva's theorising and forms of feminism which reject the mother figure in the act of rejecting patriarchy. This is depicted in Marechera's abject textual environments in which various mother figures and maternal symbols are repudiated. Whilst this is more prominent in his later work, and especially in *Mindblast*, 'House of Hunger' also includes a portrayal of an oppressive and violent mother figure. In Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and its sequel *The Book of Not*, Tambu's mother is a despicable character, motivated by an exaggerated villainy which almost leads to the death of patriarch Babamukuru. Her actions and characterisation, and the schadenfreude she feels over Babamukuru's suffering and Tambu's later misfortune, leads to the protagonist rejecting her mother and her family. In Vera's writing, however, this rejection of the mother is signified differently, because her primary concern is not with the child rejecting the mother, but the mother rejecting the child and her own maternally signified body. In the process, the abjection used to define

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[77] Anne McClintock has discussed her intention to develop a form of 'culturally contextualised psychoanalysis'. It is this cultural and social dimension which is centralised in my writing, and my use of abjection relates to its social dimensions rather than any essentialised psychoanalytic approach. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.72.

an excluded Other is internalised, leading to the psychological and bodily
disintegration of both Phephelaphi and Mazvita.

The internalisation of abjection, which is also projected onto the figure of the child
in various texts, rejects the normative position of motherhood, whilst paradoxically
internalising forms of social disgust promoted by normative forms. This paradoxical
relationship reflects the impossibilities of escaping a discursively understood, but
physically experienced, maternal process. This bind inhibits Mazvita and especially
Phephelaphi, who associate maternity with the absence of freedom. Accordingly, the
aborted child, or the infant child, is rejected, but neither rejection brings freedom
because of the effects of the traumas experienced, and because the social
environments which differently afflict both characters remain unchanged. So the
disjuncture between mind and body staged in Vera's texts expresses how the body
delimits the possibilities and experiences of women. Specifically, dismemberment
and disembodiment reflect the internalisation of abjection, and reject the body as a
response to the attempted ownership of bodies by men. This process should not and
cannot be divorced from colonialism, because Christian conservatism reconstituted
the relationship between the mind and body via conceptions of bodily sin, and
because racial discourses necessarily produce bodily disassociation for black African
colonial subjects. The attempt to free oneself from reconstitutive process is
symbolised by Vera's description of the destruction of mirrors by women in
celebration of independence in *Under the Tongue*.[78] This moment compares with the
act of the protagonist in Marechera's 'Burning in the Rain' who is haunted by an

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[78] Vera, *Under the Tongue*, pp.232-234.

image of an 'ape' in the mirror because of his internalisation of racial hatred.[79] He

responds by breaking the mirror in the act of destroying the lens through which the

colonised subject is seen and constituted. Yet the liberation pessimism in both Vera's

work and Marechera's forebodes the continuation of a bodily disunity because of the

deeply embedded consequences of racial and sexual difference. This is especially

pertinent to repressed narratives elucidated by various female protagonists in Vera's

work, whose stories of gender oppression clash with the celebratory discourses of

postcolonial nationalism. Intriguingly, this breaking of the mirror also invokes

abjection once more, and specifically the Lacanian mirror stage in which a subject

identifies with itself in the act of breaking away from the mother and formulating a

separate self.[80] Unfortunately for Vera's protagonists, bodily identification is never

achieved because the socialised body inhibits internal desires. The breaking of the

mirror, then, is a fiction, for the lens through which a colonised female subject may

view herself is not destroyed with liberation, but merely resignified. This is because

the patriarchal norms which intersected with colonialism remain, as represented

through each Vera text that differently exposes a story of female suffering repressed

by contemporaneous discourses.


Colonising Disembodiment in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*


The nature of the description of bodily dismemberment, disassociation, and

disembodiment in Vera's novellas is not comparably represented in the writing of

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[79] Marechera, 'Burning in the Rain', *The House of Hunger*, pp.83-87.
[80] Kristeva, pp.9-10.

male writers. Whilst some of these themes are considered in the work of male authors, and especially in the novellas and short stories of Marechera, these ideas are usually written from the perspective of an observing male character and often respond to the schizophrenia of a colonial, rather than intersectional female, condition. Intriguingly, Zimbabwe's other leading female writer, Tsitsi Dangarembga, also engages with similar images of bodily distortion, which arguably testifies to a bodily relationship related to lived female experience. Dangarembga, like Vera, interacts with both gender and race, but her writing centralises race and the colonial context to a greater degree than Vera. This is especially relevant to her second novel, *The Book of Not*, which brings white and black characters together in a way rarely staged in Zimbabwean literature. If *Nervous Conditions* was primarily concerned with gender, then *The Book of Not* is primarily concerned with race, and reading both works together enhances the intersectional products of the individual works. Understanding Dangarembga's detours from Vera's representational strategies also allows for a more thorough understanding of the discourses and material realities that limit female subjectivity.

*Nervous Conditions* is a text about women's bodies. My discussion of homoeroticism sought to address this, by reading homoeroticism as a response to heteronormative forms of control. The articulation of these heteronormative forms were deeply related to a Christian conservatism generally absent in Vera's writing, but represented through the conservatism of patriarch Babamukuru in Dangarembga's novel. Babamukuru both verbally and physically disciplines his daughter Nyasha, violently striking her and lashing her after she dresses transgressively and refuses to adhere to his authority. The lashings enforce a

relationship between the mind and body relevant to disciplinary forms materialised in corporeal punishment in the Zimbabwean school systems. Yet these lashings also stage a dislocation between mind and body because of an association between the body and assumed sin. This contradiction is enhanced by the paradoxical expectations forced upon the female body. Women are subject to sexualisation and voyeuristic appropriation in discursive forms and in person in heteronormative environments across the world. Yet women are also subject to the domesticised constraints of familiarised discourses of femininity, which are policed by the use of disciplinary phrases like 'whore' and slut.[81] These antithetical expressions of sexualisation and constraint symbolise the liminality of female subjects entangled in discursive contradictions. It is unsurprising that such ambivalence is paralleled with images of splitting and rupture in Vera's and Dangarembga's writing.

Babamukuru promotes his patriarchal 'right' to police and protect the female body by physically disciplining his daughter. In the process, the lens remains on a female body which comes to bear the responsibility for an assumed future sexual act. Not only does this render the imaginary and essentialised female subject passive, but it assumes an inherent atavistic sexuality in 'the man'. This is left unchecked because the focus remains on the sexuality of women, and because heteronormative performances often paradoxically celebrate male sexuality. Such logic also underlines forms of victim blaming which inflects contemporary discussions about rape and sexual abuse. These ideas render girls/women always and inevitably vulnerable because of a male sexual threat, reiterating traditional binary ideas of masculinity and femininity, strength and weakness, and activity and passivity.

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[81] Babamukuru describes his daughter as a whore on p.116 of *Nervous Conditions*.

Attempts to delegitimise the hegemonic bias have resulted in recent demonstrations across the world in which women have dressed 'provocatively' as a manifestation of their autonomy. In 2014, over 200 women marched through the streets of Harare in a demonstration known as the 'mini-skirt march'.[82] Bystanders insulted the women during the march, notably calling them prostitutes, whilst social media was also used to criticise the women involved.[83] The use of 'prostitute' in this regard was particularly symbolic, because it assumes a link between sartorial and sexual choice, and because it invokes ideas of purchase and exchange arguably constituted as part of female identity in Zimbabwe via the continuation of the Lobola tradition. Notably, this Lobola tradition has a strong relationship to a patriarchal tradition represented by characters like Babamukuru. These ideas reiterate a fundamental truth: patriarchy expresses a desire to control and regulate the female body.

Nyasha resists Babamukuru's attempts to control her mind and body. She reads *Lady Chatterley's Lover* openly, and wilfully challenges the conservative sexual politics of her father. She strikes Babamukuru after he hits her, and reaffirms her resistance to the physical manifestations of his authority, and to the ownership his assault implies. Nyasha also wilfully resists the colonial education system Babamukuru in part represents, and specifically the racial subjugation promoted by that system. Her resistant characterisation has led Kathryn Holland to argue that she is the 'most powerful masculine' character in Dangarembga's novel.[84] Whilst Holland's

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[82] 'Multimedia: Mixed Reactions to Mini-skirt March', *Newsday*, 6th October 2014, https://www.newsday.co.zw/2014/10/06/mixed-reactions-mini-skirt-march/. Last accessed 01.06.2016.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Kathryn Holland, 'The Troubled Masculinities in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*', ed. by Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p.133.

comments hint at the non-normativity of Nyasha's actions, I would be reticent to

label her as a masculine character. Holland's reading perhaps problematically

conceives of resistance as a masculine characteristic, which both promotes

naturalised gender roles and ignores how Nyasha's conceptualisation exposes the

contradictions inherent in the constitution of normative femininity. Understanding

Nyasha's conceptualisation and her relationship to normative femininity also

necessitates a reading of her anorexia/bulimia. Nyasha's eating disorder in part

represents her internalisation of Western ideals of beauty which leads her to reject

Tambu's plumpness and celebrate angular beauty.[85] This offers an insight into the

competing standards of beauty endured by the non-European and non-American

subject in a global commercialised world, which are represented through various

references to skin bleaching creams in Zimbabwean literature.[86] However, whilst

Nyasha's eating disorder rehearses a form of racialised bodily alienation, it also

contests Babamukuru's gendered authority. This dual conception has been

represented by Shenna Patchay who has argued that Nyasha uses her body as a site

of resistance against both colonialism and patriarchy.[87] Patchay's conception

represents Nyasha's attempts to wrestle agency back from the social structures and

individuals which produce her alienation. This question of agency is also central to

Kristeva's theorising of abjection which represents 'food loathing' as an elementary

part of the struggle to define oneself from an abject object:

> When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of the
> milk…nausea makes me balk…separates me from the mother and father who

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[85] 'Nyasha…believed that angles were more attractive than curves'. Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, p.137.

[86] For an example, see Vera's description of Ambi in *Without a Name*, pp.32-33. References to skin-bleaching creams in Vera's novellas have been analysed by Jessica Hemmings in her article 'Altered Surfaces: The Ambi Generation of Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning.*' *Body, Sexuality, and Gender.*

[87] Sheena Patchay, 'Transgressing Boundaries: Marginality, Complicity and Subversion in *Nervous Conditions*', *English in Africa* 30.1 (May 2003), pp.150-152.

> proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out.[88]

Kristeva expresses a paranoia of subject constitution, of the desire to define a self in the process of defining an Other. In this respect, food loathing responds to specific kinds of food which disturb the gap between Self and Object, namely the skin (of the milk) which is like my skin but not my skin. Yet perhaps this is not a merely a case of what is constituting this relationship, but who. After all, as in much of Kristeva's theorising and in psychoanalysis, there is a preoccupation with the parent/s. It is they who offer, and who by offering signify their desire. So rejecting the food object is a rejection of becoming – of being constituted by another. This resistance to becoming is represented by Nyasha's refusal to eat, or to digest, the food offered by the parent figures (and specifically the father), and this complex social cycle of abjection and control brings Nyasha to the point of death. Her condition may then be read as a politicised form of self-destruction which reasserts Nyasha's control over her own body, and which exposes the limits of the systems which contend control over her. Importantly, her self-negation has one other function: it responds to the sexualisation of the female subject by de-eroticising the body eroticised by heteronormative forms. Her use of the abject image of vomit, and her emancipated state, ironically denies the sexualisation Babamukuru sought to police. This, too, mimics and mocks her father's promotion of a Christian conservative distaste for the body, as she gradually eradicates a socially abject body.

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[88] Kristeva, p.3.

Nyasha's bulimia is not easily defined as an act of voluntary or involuntary resistance. Charles Sugnet has similarly struggled with this categorisation, describing her condition as 'quasi-voluntary', as a response to an ambivalence which arguably blurs the line between Vera and her protagonist.[89] Yet Nyasha is certainly a resistant character, as demonstrated by her various conflicts with Babamukuru. Contrastingly, Tambu is generally naïve and passive. She begins as a non-conformist, resisting the gendered constraints which limit her educational possibilities because of her sex. Yet any dissent evaporates when she gets to the mission. This is in part because of her awesome respect for the seemingly benevolent Babamukuru. Her admiration blinds her to the realities of the heteronormative system Babamukuru represents and promotes, although Babamukuru's characterisation is gradually demystified as the narrative progresses. Yet Tambu remains conflicted even at the end of *Nervous Conditions*, both because of a deeply embedded patriarchal respect for Babamukuru, and because he is solely responsible for the educational opportunities from which she benefits. Her internal conflict leads to a moment of disembodiment which notably invokes the thematic concern with the symbolic body, and the relationship between the psychological and the bodily, which pervades Vera's work. The instance of disembodiment occurs when Tambu is unable to move on the morning of her parents' sham wedding, which has been arranged by Babamukuru in a peculiar attempt to Christianise the parents' union in the hope of alleviating the misfortune which has afflicted the family. Her realisation that this is wrong clashes with her mystification of the 'divine' pseudo-father figure, resulting in an act of resistance which is not conscious but bodily:

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[89] Charles Sugnet has also noted that Fanon's writing includes numerous references to eating disorders. '*Nervous Conditions*: Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon', *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*, ed. by Obioma Nnaemeka (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp.35-36.

> I appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the bed, watching [Nyasha's] efforts to persuade me to get up…I observed with interest…Maiguru came in and mentioned Babamukuru. This was a bit of a shock and I nearly did get up, but in the end decided to stay at the foot of the bed and watch more of this extraordinary drama…The body on the bed didn't even twitch. Meanwhile the mobile, alert me, the one at the foot of the bed, smiled smugly, thinking that I had gone somewhere where he could not reach me.[90]

Tambu splits into two selves: the bodily, and a separate, non-corporeal conception. She watches her body and is therefore dislocated from her body, rejecting the corporeal bind which disempowers her. Her disembodiment represents a source of freedom, for she is located where Babamukuru cannot reach her. The smug smile visualises a repressed dissent which emerges in this quasi-voluntary moment, and stages a form of bodily dissent that Tambu could not consciously vocalise or perform. It is not coincidental that this resistance is bodily, because the debates in the novel relate to a desire to police the body. It is this consciousness of the body, and of the bodily, to which Dangarembga returns in her next novel *The Book of Not.*

*The Book of Not* begins in the later stages of the liberation war, and centralises *Nervous Conditions'* undercurrent of war-time precarity and racial disparity. The changing context is depicted through the violent beating of Babamukuru that begins the story, after he is labelled a sell-out after a meeting with guerrilla soldiers. Tambu's mother watches the assault gleefully, eroticised by the spectacle as she '[breathes] in catches of satisfaction like a woman who has not been gratified for too long, caressed upon untouched places'.[91] This description epitomises the peculiar villainy of the mother, whose eroticisation by the narrator arguably replicates a male

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[90] Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, p.168.
[91] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.14

voyeuristic gaze. The assault is interrupted after Tambu's combatant sister steps on a

hidden mine, causing her leg to fly into the sky and land on a nearby branch. The

sister survives her dismemberment with Babamukuru's help, but the trauma scars

Tambu, who later breaks down in tears in a classroom when her repressive instincts

fail her. The extremities of violence invoke the corporeal in the act of symbolising

familial rupture, whilst illustrating the physical realities of a liberation war repressed

in the white majority spaces of the novel. The infighting which characterises the

opening events, and the reference to the spurious use of the world 'sell-out', forces

Tambu into herself. The events engender an ugly individualism in Tambu, who

becomes almost completely focused on herself in an ostensible rejection of the

constraints of family and community.

As I discussed in the first chapter, Tambu is a mentally colonised character. She

yearns for a form of recognition defined by the European colonisers, and her

characterisation is a clear response to the oppressive circumstance of her existence.

This racism is incessantly rendered in the white majority context of the school, in

which most of the novel takes place. This is transmitted in part through the politics

of space, endorsing Lily Mabura's contention that Sacred Heart School functions as

a microcosm of Southern Rhodesia.[92] As Musila has claimed, the institutionalisation

of colonialism revolved around the control of bodies, as enacted through pass law

rules or apartheid conditions.[93] At the school, this is represented through the

dormitory segregation, as Tambu lives, and must live, with other Africans. This

spatially stages and promotes the mythology of a differentiated whiteness and

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[92] Lily G.N. Mabura, 'Black Women Walking Zimbabwe: Refuge and Prospect in the Landscapes of Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and its Sequel, *The Book of Not*', *Research in African Literatures* 41.3 (Fall 2010), p.101.
[93] Musila, p.53.

blackness, because blackness cannot associate with whiteness. At meal times the politics of queueing introduce a new threat for the black African: position oneself behind the wrong person, and risk the social embarrassment of rejection. Perhaps that classmate 'could pitch peremptorily further forward' and be joined by the other white girls leaving a 'lonely figure afloat on a sea of scorn'.[94] Yet this is better than the other possibility: the accidental touching of the white skin. This is an imperative: 'your skin and theirs should not come in contact'.[95] So Tambu's skin becomes a virus and its touch is capable of infecting the whiteness of the school. This cannot be said outwardly – it is unsaid. A white character does not wish to be labelled a racist, but merely is racist. Racial difference is policed through separate living quarters, toilets, queueing systems, and honour rolls. It is promoted through a racist education system, underlined by one great illusion: the right of white minority rule. Tambu cannot escape the infection of racism, so Tambu rejects herself, and experiences herself as an 'inhuman and treacherous person' when she feels that she has overstepped the demarcated spaces of racial difference.[96]

Tambu's rejection of self is represented through certain abject images which respond to the failure to constitute an abject self, or rather, the impossibility of accepting a self which is negated by being. This is represented by the novel's title, as Kennedy has claimed, which suggests a negation or unbecoming linked to the racial politics and gender differences depicted in the novel and in its prequel.[97] The link between abjection, race, and gender is illustrated when Tambu's dormitory is blamed for a

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[94] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, pp.49-50.
[95] Ibid, p.50.
[96] Ibid, p.45.
[97] Rosanne Kennedy, 'Mortgaged Futures: Trauma, Subjectivity, and the Legacies of Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*', *Studies in the Novel* 40.1 (2008), p.89.

sewage blockage because of an accumulation of flushed sanitary products. This invokes the signifiers of difference which render Tambu a 'biologically blasphemous person…indicted on two counts':

> First were the secretions that dripped crimson into the toilet bowl, or, stopped with cotton wool, clogged the school's waste system. Then there was the other type of gene that made me look different from the majority of pupils. Even if these others ran the risk, as I did, of rendering waste removal systems dysfunctional, at least they were different in appearance.[98]

This is a rare moment of intersectionality in a text primarily about race; it is the inflection of race and gender which makes Tambu doubly disgusted. The abjection of waste depicted by the toilet is repeated later in the text, when Tambu and some of the other girls sneak into the junior dormitories because they are unable to get to their own appointed toilets in time. They are caught in the act by the authoritarian matron Miss Plato, who arrives just as Tambu defecates. Tambu is caught in this abject moment, in this separation of self from waste, in this moment of becoming/unbecoming. In shock at being caught, and because of the anger in the commanding voice of the matron, Tambu forgets to flush and forgets to wipe. This failure to flush invites multiple readings. Perhaps the failure is the result of Tambu's guilt for having 'aspirations above [her] station', and for the 'triumph' she feels in exposing her buttocks on the toilet seats in which white girls have done the same.[99] Or does she leave the toilet dirty as a reflection of the waste she is made to represent? Are her actions even a purposeful affront to the supposed purity of whiteness reflected through the necessity of having white only toilets? Irrespective of any potential readings, the event does not cause Tambu to reject the racism which forces her to use separate toilets, but to repudiate the racial otherness of her fellow

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[98] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.64.
[99] Ibid, p.67.

black Zimbabweans: 'Had these people I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all'.[100] Her rejection of the others parallels the rejection of self suggested by the abject moment of defecation. Yet this is not as explicit as the rejections of the bodily self staged in Vera's work, as Tambu contrastingly rejects the other bodies which draw attention to her own abject existence. Her attempts to escape the social negation of blackness lead to her wearing, or attempting to wear, the 'white mask' referenced by Fanon.[101]

Tambu's failure to flush perhaps implies a form of wilful resistance which is paralleled by other moments of stunted retaliation in the text. Despite her general passivity, Tambu laments the racial politics of the period at points, and denigrates the mythical superiority of the white settlers. Unfortunately, these moments are transient, never vocalised, and generally overwritten by an almost immediate moment of obeisance. Rather, Tambu's external resistance is only manifested in an 'unconscious' form which resembles the disembodiment depicted in *Nervous Conditions*. This is most explicitly represented during an incident with Miss Plato, which begins when she reprimands the girls for being late and Tambu responds by inadvertently smiling at her. The smile is comparable to the 'smug grin' referenced during Tambu disembodiment in *Nervous Conditions,* and functions as an articulation of dissent which is suggestive of the ironic mimicry Homi Bhaba has endowed with destabilising possibilities.[102] This is not a question of intent, for Tambu leads the reader to believe, perhaps falsely, that she was attempting to grin in

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[100] Ibid, p.71.

[101] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

[102] 'Mimicry represents an ironic compromise...in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference'. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p.123.

such a way as to signify agreement. Yet the destabilising effects of the doubling of mimicry need not be intended, but merely a 'slippage' which confirms the anxieties of colonial power.

The signification of the smile takes on a physical dimension when Tambu, sobered by roommate Anastasia's groan and interrogative, looks down to see her hands engaged in a 'tug-of-war' with Miss Plato.[103] Tambu lets go of the sheet as she realises what she is doing, and watches as Miss Plato staggers back and puts down a hand to spare her 'the ignominy of sitting upon' one of the beds.[104] Miss Plato's humiliation is a spectacle of resistance and mockery; the signification of Tambu's smile is confirmed by Irene's subsequent giggle – Miss Plato's authority has not merely been rendered precarious but the subject of implied ridicule. This is reiterated through the way in which first former Irene informs Miss Plato about the progress of the girls:

> Benhilda and Anastasia to mass are gone…One from us, Ntombi, is cleaning herself. Another, Patience is already clean. There are only we two are remaining.[105]

The grammatical construction of the sentences mimics the style of address of Miss Plato, who is of German extraction. This doubling visualises Miss Plato's grammatical flaws, but also entraps Miss Plato; she cannot critique Irene, for to criticise her would be to criticise herself. Rather, Irene's mimicry represents the in-between space Bhabha has identified between mimicry and mockery – as an area of ambivalence which threatens colonial power. The exaggerated act of mimicry

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[103] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.55.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid, p.56.

reiterates Miss Plato's own failures and incompleteness. Her authority is brought

into question and subverted by the events of the episode.

Critical readings which portray Tambu as a rebellious or defiant character in *The

Book of Not* seem untenable, in view of the unconscious representation of acts of

defiance in the novel.[106] Every act of defiance by Tambu is described in dislocated

and unconscious terms, as depicted by the representation of her actions following the

incident with Miss Plato: 'What if I did something else I didn't know I could do, like

pull the sheets! What would it be, and wouldn't it be awful?'[107] Instances of defiance

and resistance appear to signify a conflicted relationship with self related to the

internalisation of racism. This reading is substantiated later in the text after Ntombi

accuses Tambu of loving Europeans and only caring for herself. Tambu fights

Ntombi because of this assertion, but once again the fight is represented in dislocated

terms by a narrator who fails to recall, and even disowns, her bodily actions.[108]

However, Ntombi's words express a truth, because Tambu does perceivably venerate

the Europeans. Seemingly, then, Tambu's anger responds to the perception of herself

wearing a white mask. It is an attack on a conception of herself through another,

which she is insistently subject to because of the constitutive effects of racism. This

implies shame on the part of Tambu, for she dislikes what she is, but cannot escape

what she is. Shame is also implied later in the text when Tambu volunteers to sew

garments for the Rhodesian army, and performs the role of the obedient subordinate

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[106] Anna Chitando and Angeline M. Madongonda have, for instance, discussed how the adolescent Tambu's pubescent changes start a period of rebellion marked by the breaking of rules at the school, and through forms of defiance against Patriarchal and 'Western' systems. 'Intricate Space: The Father-Daughter Relationship in Zimbabwean Literature and Culture', *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, ed. by Kizito Z. Muchemwa and Robert Muponde (Zimbabwe: Weaver Press, 2007), p.177.

[107] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.57.

[108] This is endorsed by descriptions of the actions as 'numb' and 'blind' and by the narrator's failure to remember that she has hit Ntombi first. Ibid, p.107.

colonial subject. However, the act of volunteering is depicted in disengaged terms and also suggests a generally un-narrated sense of shame: 'Mine was among the arms that were raised.'[109] This narratorial technique represents disembodiment as a response to a subjugated social existence, and exposes an internalised hatred constituted by an oppressing entity. Tambu is trapped, for her oppression is predicated on racial and gendered distinctions that she can never escape. She is 'sealed' in her blackness, to use Fanon's phrase, in response to the psychological torment of colonial subjectivity.[110] If *Nervous Conditions* was about Tambu's changing understanding of what benevolent patriarch Babamukuru represented, then *The Book of Not* represents Tambu's gradual realisation about what she herself represents. As Gugu Hlongwane has argued this is because her experiences in a predominantly white space shatter her sense of self, due to the various effects of face to face racism.[111] In the process, Tambu faces forms of both cultural and bodily alienation which are emblematic of the psychological trauma of colonialism.

Babamukuru is a far less prominent character in *The Book of Not*, but he retains influence over Tambu as a quasi-paternal figure who promotes the necessity of academic achievement and obedience to the colonial hierarchy. This influence is displayed when Babamukuru forces Tambu to write an apology to Sister Emmanuel, after learning about her misconduct. The letter visualises Tambu's intersecting subordination, as she is subject to both the authority of white minority rule and Babamukuru's patriarchal rule. The writing of the letter renders Tambu's loss of control a spectacle, as illustrated later when Nyasha sits with her and places her

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[109] Ibid, p.132.
[110] Fanon, p.3.
[111] Gugu Hlongwane, '''A Piece of Person'': Fractured Selves and Colonial Education in Tsitsi Dangarembga's The Book of Not', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.5 (December 2009), p.450.

'abject and corpselike' hand in her lap.[112] In this moment, Nyasha's hand becomes Tambu's hand, as both girls are joined through a shared abject victimhood which subjects them, and Maiguru, to the authority of others. The lifelessness of the daughters is linked to ideas of gender and duty depicted in the novel, and reiterated through Babamukuru's actions after he learns of Tambu's disappointing A Level results. Angered, Babamukuru thrusts his arm in the face of Tambu, and shows her the scars her mother caused, exclaiming 'This scar came because of you!'[113] In this moment, Tambu's fears that her mother sold out Babamukuru are confirmed, and she is bound both to her mother and her quasi-paternal figure through his scars. She responds by disengaging her mind from her body:

> I resorted to the usual way out of not feeling anything, of concentrating on every inch of skin, on the opening of every pore until I could feel nothing else and the sensation of me filled the entire universe.[114]

In this instance, disembodiment becomes uniquely conscious: Nyasha wilfully looks to disconnect herself from a body that feels shame and condemns her as a woman, as a daughter, and as a black colonial subject. After this moment she feels 'numb permanently', finally and fatally dislocated from a corporeal existence she has persistently been taught to hate.[115] When liberation follows, Tambu feels no joy. The psychological legacy of her traumatic childhood does not die, and is reiterated in the novel's final pages through the reintegration of a gendered and racial framework which continues to deny Tambu the opportunity to define herself.

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[112] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.91.
[113] Ibid, p.189.
[114] Ibid, p.187.
[115] Ibid, p.192.

The 'Liberation' War

All but one of the texts I have discussed in this section situate familial and maternal violence, and gendered forms of disembodiment and bodily distortion during, or at the end of, the liberation war. This is not just a response to colonialism and its effects, but represents a desire to unseat patriarchy linked to the memory of the liberation struggle. Such a conception is promoted by a clear pessimism for liberation in Vera's and Dangarembga's writing, which is linked, at least tangentially, to the gendered concerns of both writers. Whilst this is more apparent in *The Book of Not*, it is also relevant to *Nervous Conditions* which, although set in the past, is, as Dangarembga has herself stated, 'about the future Zimbabwe'.[116] This is because the text portrays forms of psychological disintegration which will continue to define colonised subjects after independence, and because the novel engages with a prevailing relationship between nationalism and patriarchy. This relationship, as Hena Ahmad has astutely argued, is invoked via the Sartre/Fanon phrase from which the novel takes its name, as an indicator of the imbricated relation of domination which limits the bodies of Tambu and Nyasha.[117] Accordingly, as Sugnet has theorised, Dangarembga's novel represents a feminist reinvention of Fanon, and specifically his conceptions of the psychological trauma endured by colonial subjects.[118] In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga explicitly renders postcolonial pessimism through the personal narrative of Tambu. Concluding Tambu's story just after liberation invites a connection between the personal and national, as the

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[116] Dangarembga quoted in Hena Ahmad, *Postnational Feminisms: Postcolonial Identities and Cosmopolitanism in the Works of Kamala Markandaya, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo, and Anita Desai* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p.55.
[117] Ibid, pp.53-54.
[118] Sugnet, pp.35-38.

protagonist struggles with the familial (communal) expectations she presently strives to escape, and with the continued effects of racial and gender inequality. This is epitomised by the repeated misrecognitions of the white manager of the hotel in which she lives, who mistakes her for a different black Zimbabwean. This reproduces the sensation of being part of one 'undifferentiated flesh' that Tambu encountered first hand at Sacred Heart.[119] The gendered dimensions to these racial constructions are reiterated when Tambu has the praise taken for her copywriting work by Dick, a senior white male writer at her agency. This mimics the loss of her trophy because of racial mythologies at Sacred Heart, linking the postcolonial present with the colonial past. As Kennedy has argued, the text refuses to stage redemption because of the ongoing 'psychological' and 'material' effects of racism, and also because the structures of domination of the colonial period have not disappeared but have been reimagined.[120]

In Vera's *Under the Tongue* liberation hope is subverted through the use of rape. A description of the liberation moment immediately follows the belated description of the sexual assault on Zhizha, and subverts the promised futurity of liberation through the distortion of the futurity of childhood. The aberration of incest draws attention to the repressed horrors of liberation also represented by the rape of Mazvita or through the spurious but deadly use of the word 'sell-out' referenced in Dangarembga's *Book of Not*. Like Marechera, Vera uses the extremities of violence and taboo to write the moments written out of history. Marechera also distorted this celebration of independence with a unique foresight. His nightmarish vision of Zimbabwe clashed

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[119] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.207.
[120] Kennedy, p.104.

with celebratory discourses by resisting nationalism, and by deconstructing the violence of hegemonic masculinity depicted in his writing. All three writers respond to this liberation memory at different times: Marechera writes at the end of the old nation and at the birth of the new, and Vera and Dangarembga write after the Matabeleland massacres and at a point of waning optimism for the Mugabe regime. There is a clear common theme, however: all three writers, and many of those discussed in my thesis, challenge the discursive construction of liberation and reveal the violated and oppressed bodies concealed by officially sanctioned colonial and post-independent histories.

The centrality of the liberation war in post-independent politics was an inevitable product of Zimbabwe's history. To subject a country to the dehumanisation of colonial rule is to bind various victims together based around homogenised constructions of nationhood and race. The victims are not and will never be the same, because of the intersecting influences of gender, class, and ethnic differences, and the specifics of individual experience. Yet the brutal and lengthy nature of both the struggle and colonial period necessarily produced forms of retaliatory nationalism which unified the colonised. This national politicised reality also has personal dimensions because so many members of the Shona ZANU-PF leadership were directly involved, and imprisoned, during the liberation war. Mugabe's own role as the teacher turned revolutionary has continued to find support, despite a collapsing economy and the documented corruption of his administration. This is because Mugabe is emblematic of a struggle against the white coloniser, and this struggle is invoked time and time again through the rhetorical politicisation of the liberation war by Mugabe and members of his administration. This political

manipulation of the liberation memory by an increasingly hostile and antagonistic ZANU-PF has consequently risked homogenising a varied and complex period, and has resulted in the repression of the counter-narratives which threaten the coherence of the postcolonial hegemony and the selected national memory. But what of the women who fought alongside men, but were subject to the domesticised restraints of heteronormative nationalism in the years that followed independence? What of the women raped during the struggle? What of the Ndebele who suffered, and were victims of the events in Matabeleland in the 1980s? Are these narratives not also part of Zimbabwe's history?

## Liberating Gender

The transformative space of war enabled gender change in Southern Rhodesia, as it has in contexts throughout the world. Female combatants, once tied to the domestic sphere, took on supportive roles in the liberation struggle, and even fought and died alongside men. These activities contradicted contemporaneous gender roles relating to the domestication and passivity of women, illustrating how contextual change may contradict norms. The empowerment of women was also performed through the occasional supervisory roles they took during the later stages of the war, as some women trained combatants and gave orders to both men and women.[121] These roles may also have had a direct familial relation, as Naomi Nhiwatiwa has discussed, because a husband may have had to take orders from his wife if she was of a higher rank.[122] The performance of these roles would therefore necessarily have altered the

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[121] Carol B. Thompson, 'Women in the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe: An Interview of Naomi Nhiwatiwa', *Women's Studies International Forum* 5.3/4 (1982), pp.247-252.

[122] Ibid, p.248. Nhiwatiwa was notably one of only three female cabinet members at the institution of the ZANU-PF government.

expectation of men and women, and even the social signification of women's bodies, transforming female subjects from potential victims to agents of violence. Changing gender conventions were not only expressed through authoritative or combative roles, but through the development of differing sexual attitudes. This was witnessed in various military camps in Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique, as men and women increasingly engaged in sexual practices free from institutional expectations.[123] The increased public sexual autonomy of women in these military contexts may be read as performances of transgression, and as a means of doing gender differently. These changes have been referenced in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature, even if the female combatant has been mystified by postcolonial heteronormative forms. Dangarembga's narrator responds to this mystification in *The Book of Not*, when she asks '[what does] a woman who fought look like?'[124] Vera had answered this call in *The Stone Virgins* through her depiction of a series of former female combatants who once held guns like men, now sit on crates 'like men', and listen to the football scores with male former combatants.[125] These women 'define the world differently' and have 'no desire to be owned, hedged in, claimed', as their war-time experiences have transformed a relationship to self and to a patriarchal society which attempts to control, define, and confine women.[126] Unfortunately, this egalitarian vision of former combatants who forget that they are 'male or female but know that they are wounded beings' is temporary.[127] The next time the men 'see these women they will no longer be these women'.[128] They will be

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[123] Patricia Chogugudza 'Gender and War: Zimbabwean Women and the Liberation Struggle', *EnterText* 6.2, pp.44-45.
[124] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.13.
[125] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, pp.58 and 62.
[126] Ibid, pp.54 and 56.
[127] Ibid, p.58.
[128] Ibid, p.62.

constrained once more with the returning patriarchal order of the new government

for which women fought and died. Yet highlighting these combative

characterisations is a crucial strategy in contesting the hegemonic discourses which

relegate the role of women and naturalise traditional roles. As Meredeth Turshen has

argued, 'The enduring wartime picture of ''man does, women is'' has depended on

the invisibility of women's participation in the war effort.'[129] Vera's act of political

remembering contests this historical amnesia by showing that women may constitute

themselves, and transgress a domestic gendered sphere of constraint.

In *The Book of Not*, the downtrodden Maiguru expresses the post-liberation promise

of change whilst looking proudly at her garden patch:

> 'Soon every woman will have a patch like that! For her to work with the
> strength of her hands! After the war everyone will have something. That's
> what the elder siblings are promising!'[130]

It is telling that Maiguru is the mouthpiece for this sentiment, because she labours

with the consequences of the hegemonic conditions which render her subordinate to

Babamukuru, and repress her academic achievements. She, like so many female

protagonists in Zimbabwean literature, struggles for self-definition, and imagines

change in the post-liberation space. Her words represent a genuine sentiment in the

period, as encouraged by the aforementioned gender changes and by the growth of

forms of feminism which sought to debunk the constraints of tradition and reform

the post-independent landscape. Lobola, or bridewealth, became a target of this

reformation campaign, as a signifier of gender difference which had perceivably

empowered men and disempowered women. Naomi Nhiwatiwa spoke internationally

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[129] Meredeth Turshen, 'Introduction', *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*, ed. by Meredeth Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya (London and New York: Zed, 1998), p.1.
[130] Dangarembga, *The Book of Not*, p.182.

about plans to abolish Lobola during the war, whilst there were domestic demands

from the department of women's affairs to abolish bridewealth and for greater power

and equality.[131] These actions respond to connotations of ownership represented in

Vera's description of the former combatants who had no wish to be 'owned' and

'claimed'. This proliferating feminist moment reached a crescendo on the eve of

independence in 1979, when the ZANU-PF women's league organised a conference

to discuss the issues of law and tradition.[132] Importantly, these calls for change

illustrate that women fighting in the war of independence may not only have sought

to free their country from colonial/white minority rule, but to also shed the

constraints of contemporaneous gender conditions.

The hope for change, or at least genuine change, was ultimately unrealised. The new

administration, whilst progressive in some ways, promoted the importance of

tradition in the act of looking back to imagined histories for an expression of a

national identity untouched by colonial rule. This represents how, as Elleke Boehmer

has argued, the motherland of male nationalism may not 'signify home to

women'.[133] The reconstitution of a traditional order is unsurprising perhaps, because

of an entrenched patriarchal legacy linked paradoxically to both the institution of

traditional Europeanised Christianity and to the rejection of modern sexual modes

because of their perceivably European nature. The trappings of patriarchy were also

expressed by attempts to censure and restrain the relative sexual freedom and gender

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[131] Chogugudza, p.45; and Tanya Lyons, *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), p.198; and Nhiwatiwa, p.249.

[132] Thoko Ruzvidzo, 'Is there a Women's Movement in Zimbabwe?', *Women Plus* final issue (2001), p.8. Accessed online at www.iiav.nl/ezines/email/WomenPlus/1-101.pdf. Last accessed 01.08.2015.

[133] Elleke Boehmer, 'Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa', *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991), p.5.

disconformity of the 1970s. It is important to note that during the earliest stages of

war, women's combative roles were generally restricted. Women were often

confined to supportive tasks, like carrying munitions or caring for men, and were

improperly trained until the mid-1970s when ZANU and ZAPU relented and allowed

women and men to train together.[134] Yet some women were still denied access to the

front line, illustrating how gender expectations restricted combative opportunities for

women.[135] There were also clear attempts to restrain the sexual freedom of the

period. Contraception was withdrawn from some women, or at least not made readily

available.[136] This demands to be read as a biopolitical attempt to control the sexual

autonomy of women or even, as Chogugudza contends, a punishment, even if such

readings risk ignoring the effects of these measures on male sexuality.[137] Marriage

between couples was increasingly enforced, as ZANU-PF officials kept records to

ensure that bridewealth was paid at the conclusion of the war, illustrating a desire to

maintain institutional control of sexuality.[138] These attempts to restrain the

burgeoning changes culminated in the ZANU Defence Secretariat holding a rally in

July 1978 which was specifically designed to discuss the 'problems of women'.[139]

The politicisation of these discussions also revolves around Zimbabwe's relationship

to Britain, and to a perception of 'Western' identity related to colonialist and neo-

imperial values. The emphasis on tradition arguably constitutes a parochial response

to cultural intrusions similarly evoked through the responses to the burgeoning

feminism of the 1970s, which took place on both a domestic and world stage. As

Dangarembga has discussed, feminism signified conceptions of 'Western' identity,

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[134] Chogugudza, pp.40-41.
[135] Ibid, p.41.
[136] Ibid; and Lyons, p.201.
[137] Chogugudza, p.45.
[138] Lyons, p.199.
[139] Chogugudza, p.45.

and was and is feared by some as manifestation of cultural imperialism.[140] Unfortunately, this has restricted, in Dangarembga's words, the development of an 'indigenous feminist theory' and demonstrates the effects of the psychological legacy of colonialism on a discursive environment defined principally by an empowered male hierarchy.[141]

## Confronting Repressed Histories

The liberation war period, whilst implicitly acting as a battleground for debates over sexuality and gender constitution, also witnessed an ominous jump in rape statistics.[142] The social reality of rape, whilst generally repressed in various postcolonial discursive channels, is explored in many of the texts I have discussed which are set during or around the liberation war period. Writing by Marechera, Hove, Chinodya, and Vera either depicts acts of rape, and/or represents rape as a threatening potential consequence of gender norms. The relationship between rape and forms of patriarchy which seek to control the female body seems clear, and is especially relevant to a war-time context of uncertainty. No singular explanation can account for the prominence of rape during the liberation war, but to disregard the realities of masculinity would be to ignore the role of gender construction in the expression of sexuality. In this regard, it is not surprising that all the Zimbabwean texts which represent rape also consciously engage with gender. This is an inherent feature of Vera's writing, and is represented in Hove's and Marechera's writing too.

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[140] Tsisti Dangarembga, Helen Scott and Rosemary Marangoly George, 'An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 26.3 (Spring, 1993), p.316.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Marc Epprecht, 'The ''Unsaying'' of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24.4 (December 1998), p.644.

An author I have not discussed so far, ex-combatant Alexander Kanengoni, also coalesces many of these themes by specifically staging rape in a combatant setting, whilst questioning the silences and negations which have written the violence of rape out of discourse. His text, *Echoing Silences*, considers the effects of war through its mentally disintegrating protagonist Munashe. Kanengoni's text engages with the relationship between the psychological and bodily in a manner which invites comparisons with the writing of Marechera and Vera, especially because of his unrelenting representation of bodily violence and suffering. This violence is staged most powerfully through Kanengoni's representation of female solider Kudza, whose suffering and brutal murder trigger the protagonist's psychosis. Kudzai was repeatedly raped by her senior commander, as she describes to the protagonist:

> I was raped by the bastard for over a year. I couldn't run away. I had no option but to abort. I *hate* men. I *hate* the war.
>
> … Now something strange is happening to me. I no longer menstruate and I am not pregnant. Menopause at twenty![143]

The expression of being trapped has a clear bodily dimension, because Kudzai's sex renders her vulnerable to the violent possibilities of hegemony. Her early menopause symbolises a rejection of the biological processes which render her a woman, and the social relationship between maternity and femininity. This representation also undercuts celebratory liberation narratives, and the reiteration of traditional gender constructions which marked the rhetoric of the newly instituted administration. Munashe eventually loses contact with Kudzai, but finds her mutilated and rotting corpse later in the story. Her dead body again bears the scars and traumas of rape:

> Munashe stood back and saw the mutilated breasts and the twisted legs and the blood smudges between the thighs and the single bullet hole through the forehead. But above all, he saw anger that only he could understand in her

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[143] Kanengoni, p.56.

> half-closed eyes and the impudent scowl on her blood-scattered lips. And he knew she had not died silently.[144]

The location of the blood and the mutilations notably associate Kudzai's breasts and genitalia with violence, and invert the habitual eroticisation of women's bodies which underline many cultural productions. However, the mutilations, like Munashe's psychological scars, also represent the unacknowledged traumas of a national body unwilling or unable to address the crimes and wounds of its colonial past and the war of 'liberation'. This idea is represented through the novel's title: *Echoing Silences*. Kanengoni's echoes signify not only the legacy of trauma, but the reverberations of hegemonic conditions which continue to restrict the realisation of different social possibilities.

Kanenongi's text directly responds to a postcolonial climate of repression which endangers the processes of healing and understanding of moments written out of history. His narrative, like those of Vera, Marechera, Dangarembga, and Hove illustrate the capacity of literature to intervene in discourse, and to speak with those whose ability to be heard has been limited by social and political realities. Such texts necessarily draw attention both to a reality, and to the structural repression of that reality. In 1996 in Zimbabwe, the reality of this repressive discourse was forced into the public domain with the release of Ingrid Sinclair's controversial film *Flame*. The account of rape and female companionship during the liberation war broke box office records in Zimbabwe, illustrating the desire for many to experience its controversial subject matter first hand. The nature of the film lead to early attempts to censure it, and to restrict its production, although these unwittingly created

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[144] Ibid, p.69.

publicity and debate and surely contributed to the film's commercial success.

Unedited negatives of the film were initially seized by police in Harare in 1995 on

the fallacious allegation that the material was pornographic, although this failed to

halt its release.[145] Preview screenings of the film engendered criticism, especially

from the Zimbabwean War Veterans' Association who attacked Sinclair for

misappropriating history.[146] The Chairman of the Veterans' Association, Chenjerai

Hunzvi, went further still by demanding the destruction of all versions of the film,

whilst the association's executive director criticised the film for failing to show that

severe punishments were in place for acts of rape.[147] These actions and comments

reiterate the repression of the discussion of rape. The film and controversy in this

regard respond, in the words of Tanya Lyons, to the ways in which 'women's war

experiences were silenced – obscured by the glorifications, reinscribed in the

domestic, and muted by the shame or rape'.[148] This act of silencing is perhaps a

product of the culture of concealment and repression discussed in my last chapter.

However, it is also a clear symptom of the mobilisation of retaliatory forms of

heteronormative nationalism. This rhetorical movement politicised a traditional

gender order as a response to perceived cultural imperialism, in part to manipulate

the colonial memory because of waning political support. In the process, the

celebration of the independence war and post-independent period continued to

negate the narratives of rape and violence which marked both the war and the

Matabeleland massacres. *Flame* was consequently so violently opposed not because

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[145] Lyons, p.259
[146] Deanne Schultz, *Filmography of World History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p.64.
[147] Stephen Chan, *Robert Mugabe: A Life of Power and Violence* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003), p.109; and Lyons, p.261.
[148] Lyons, p.260.

it threatened the reality of liberation, but because it contested the normative and officially sanctioned memory of liberation.

A discussion of rape during the liberation war, whilst defying dominant nationalistic narratives, also disturbs the specific symbolic role of women in nationalistic productions. This symbolic role is, as McClintock has identified, the construction of the representative female subject as a 'symbolic bearer of the nation'.[149] Whilst this transcultural and transhistorical notion risks homogenising diverse political articulations of female subjects, McClintock's conception nonetheless represents the characteristic passive constitution of women because of male orientated nationalistic demands. This idea is represented in part through the act of gendering the nation as female during war. This ostensibly functions to compel men to fight to protect the feminised nation, as traditional gender conceptions are invoked in the act of defining protective male roles as well as the vulnerable passive constitution of women. However, female combatants, and the female companionship represented in cultural responses to the war like *Flame*, necessitate a redefinition of this gendered rendition. Yet such a passive conception has a specific contextual relevance to traditional Shona and Ndebele societies in view of the religious beliefs which rendered women the reproducers of spiritual and material life. I opened my thesis with this image of the feminised nation, through a depiction of the semen covered prostitute Marechera's narrator identifies as symbolic of Rhodesia. This depiction references the hegemonic gendered conditions which led to conceptions about the emasculation of the nation, but also underlines associated nationalistic strategies which render

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[149] Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993), p.62.

woman as symbolic of the country. However, such a politically symbolic role is disturbed by notions of rape during a liberation war period, which, as Lyons has posited, 'strike at the very heart of (male) nationalism', because women were constructed as symbols of the Zimbabwe nation.[150] Admitting this visualises the intersectional relationship between gender and nationalism, and the connection between the two in constructing a vision of the nation in which the representative female subject is appropriated and marginalised by men. Describing the tangible physical manifestations of traumas like rape also disturbs symbolic conceptualisations by humanising the victims of rape, murder, and historical negation. The female writers in my thesis in particular engage with this approach, which is emblematised by the sensory dimensions to Vera's narratives of victimhood.

Yvonne Vera's final novel, *The Stone Virgins*, also engages with the repressions and negations of political discourse, by situating a story of rape and murder in Matabeleland during the genocidal activities of the 1980s. At least 20,000 people were murdered during the atrocities, which are commonly known as Gukurahundi (the early rain that washes away the chaff), whilst physical and sexual assaults also took place.[151] The victims were primarily of Ndebele origin, but the details of the genocide are still obscured because of political acts of censorship. The massacres were perpetuated primarily by members of ZIPLA's (ZANU-PF's) fifth brigade,

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[150] Lyons, p.260.
[151] Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'For the Nation to Live, the Tribe Must Die: The Politics of Ndebele Identity and Belonging in Zimbabwe', *Society, State, and Identity in African History*, ed. by Bahru Zewde (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2008), p.169; Duduzile S. Ndlovu, 'Violence and Memory in Breaking the Silence of Gukurahundi: A Case Study of the ZAM in Johannesburg, South Africa', *Healing and Change in the City of Gold: Case Studies of Coping and Support in Johannesburg*, ed. by Brandon Hamber et al (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), p.59.

although members of ZIPRA (ZAPU) were also involved.[152] Whilst an official

investigation was instigated in the 1980s, no report was ever published by the

government.[153] There have also been concerted attempts to repress any further

investigations and representation. For example, Glynis Clacherty (et al) has argued

that the Organ of National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration, a government

ministry set up to spearhead national healing programmes, has strategically ignored

Gukurahundi.[154] This reality was represented by the nature of comments made by the

speaker of parliament in 2007, who rejected proposals for further investigations by

the ONHRI: 'Gukurahundi has always been steeped in tribal overtones pitting the

Ndebele against the Shona, and no one wants to revisit such a divisive era'.[155]  One

official who did later speak out about the massacres at a community meeting in 2011

was arrested, illustrating a uniform political desire to repress knowledge of the

genocide.[156] This was also illustrated a year earlier when artist Owen Maseko was

arrested, along with a gallery owner, for his exhibit which commemorated the

genocide.[157] The display exhibited photos of missing people and mine shafts where

corpses were believed to have been dumped, and therefore specifically sought to

visualise the concealed.[158] Mugabe's refusals to discuss or publicly admit any blame

has also nurtured this repressive political strategy. However, documentation released

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[152] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, p.169; and Enocent Msindo, *Ethnicity in Zimbabwe: Transformations in Kalanga and Ndebele societies, 1860-1990* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012) pp.211-219.

[153] Glynis Clacherty et al, 'Remembering, Healing, and Telling: Community-Initiated Approaches to Trauma Care in South Africa', *Psychosocial Perspectives on Peacebuilding*, ed. by Brandon Hamber and Elizabeth Gallagher (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), pp.205-206.

[154] Ibid. p.60.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Verity Norman, 'From Liberation to Oppression: Exploring Activism through the Arts in an Authoritarian Zimbabwe', *Sustainability, Participation & Culture in Communication: Theory and Praxis*, ed. by Jan Servaes (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), p.186.

[158] Shepherd Mpofu, 'Memory, National Identity, and Freedom of Expression in the Information Age: Discussing the Taboo in the Zimbabwean Public Sphere', *Handbook of Research on Political Activism in the Information Age*, ed. by Ashu M.G. Solo (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2014), p.121.

in 2015 contradicted official rhetoric, and suggested that Mugabe was aware of the extent of the violence and ordered the killings.[159] Of all the historical negations in Zimbabwe's history, the repression of the memory of Gukurahundi is undoubtedly the most concerted. The state sponsored violence and censorship similarly represents a theme of repression documentable during recent election campaigns and through aggressive responses to dissident journalists. These tactics have consistently sought to protect the political and personal interests of a Shona male elite. It is also important to note that the international press were silent about the Matabeleland massacres in the 1980s, despite, as Duduzile Ndlovu has noted, their widespread coverage of the land repossessions in the following decades.[160] These competing approaches suggest forms of self-interest with clear national and racial connotations. Mugabe was notably awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in 1984, just one year after the activities of Zimbabwe's fifth brigade were believed to have begun.[161] That his doctorate was not removed until 2007 illustrates a problematic and complex relationship of guilt with an icon of independence who has sat atop an increasingly brutal and corrupt regime.[162]

Vera's decision to write about the repressed memory of the Gukurahundi is an act of political opposition. It signifies her readiness to politicise the unwritten and unheard, because as Vera represents in the novel, truths are 'born between thumb and forefinger'.[163] This desire to provide and provoke counter-narratives has been

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[159] Stuart Doran, 'New Documents Claim to Prove Mugabe Ordered Gukurahundi Killings', *The Guardian* (online), 19th May 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/19/mugabe-zimbabwe-gukurahundi-massacre-matabeleland. Last accessed 06.06.2016.
[160] Ndlovu, p.66.
[161] Paul Kelbie, 'Edinburgh University Revokes Mugabe Degree', *The Guardian* (online), 15th July 2007, www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jul/15/highereducation.internationaleducationnews. Last accessed 06.06.2016.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.11.

described by Vera in interviews; she has attacked the continent's response to history

through her claim that 'Africa has erred in its memory' and critiqued the patriarchal

constitution of history in Zimbabwe.[164] As discussed, this patriarchal dimension is an

explicit characteristic of Vera's writing and is specifically linked to the Matabeleland

massacres in *The Stone Virgins* through her account of the victimhood of the text's

two female protagonists, sisters Nonceba and Thenjiwe. Vera's text also connects the

violence of Gukurahundi with the endemic violence and apartheid tactics of the

colonial regime. This link is suggested through her delineation of racial

marginalisation in the first section of the novel (1950-1981), which begins by tracing

the transient movements of the gold mine workers who travel between Bulawayo and

Johannesburg in search of work dictated by the policies of the settler regime. The

oppressive colonial context is also portrayed through the apartheid city space of

Bulawayo, in which black Africans are denied access to buildings and are forced to

meet at street corners, at 'Ekoneni', the place of rendezvous.[165] Ekoneni represents

the margins, the interstices of existence for the disenfranchised colonial subjects. It

is, as Touria Khannous has argued, a 'space of tension between the European centre

and its black margins' in Bulawayo, and a 'liminal space' which offers the potential

of resistance.[166] Whilst Khannous does not clearly elaborate on his conception, his

feminist reading positions Vera's writing at the margins and invokes Bhabha's

reconstitutive conception of liminality.[167]

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[164] Yvonne Vera, *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women's Writing*, ed. by Yvonne Vera (Oxford: Heinemann, 1999), p.2; and Vera, Hunter Interview, p.79.
[165] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.11.
[166] Touria Khannous, *African Pasts, Presents, and Futures: Generational Shifts in African Women's Literature, Film, and Internet Discourse* (Maryland and Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), p.84.
[167] Ibid, pp.82-89; and Bhabha, pp.123-126.

Liminality is also portrayed through the village space of Kezi, which lies on the bus route to Bulawayo. The names of those in Kezi are not listed in the village phone book, and the inhabitants of the village are representative of a temporary and unwritten existence which is central to the novel and forebodes the genocidal activities which follow. Whilst liminality may offer the reconstitutive possibilities discussed in Bhabha's work, in the space of the novel it represents the vulnerable and the forgettable. This conception is symbolised by the brutal murder of Mathlini, the manager of Thandabantu store, which is the centrepoint of all village life in the novel and a last or first call for travellers moving between the city and village space. The storekeeper is targeted because of his alleged political activities, and his innocence is irrelevant to his murderers who act outside of law and history. The soldiers who kill the storekeeper make a 'perverse show' of his death, shooting him in the legs, tearing off his clothes and then skinning and burning him alive.[168] The split between body and skin depicts the sheer brutality of violence, and symbolises the gap between narrative and reality obscured by the tortured corpse covered by the burnt remains of Thandabantu store. Mathlini's unseen corpse lies under the rubble which 'nobody dares to approach', for fear of also becoming victims.[169] So Mathlini's death is not registered, because there is 'no memory desired of it'.[170] Vera's use of desire is pointed, because memory is something that can be controlled, as her narratives of colonialism sought to show.

Vera forges a relationship between the ownership of memory, patriarchy, and rape in the novel through the narratives of sisters Thenjiwe and Nonceba. The sexually

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[168] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.132.
[169] Ibid, p.134.
[170] Ibid, p.133.

liberated and independent Thenjiwe is comparable to Gertrude in *Butterfly Burning*.

Like Gertrude, Thenjiwe's sexuality is conceived as a form of empowerment, as she

strides into Thandabantu store and seduces a stranger, before leading him back to her

home like a 'helpless child'.[171] The celebration of female sexuality contradicts

traditional conservative conceptions, illustrating how Vera, as critics have noted,

promotes female sexuality as a form of resistance against the constraints of

normative femininity.[172] The love affair that follows between Thenjiwe and the

stranger is dictated by Thenjiwe in a section of the novel which celebrates her

relationship to the land. This relationship is symbolised by repeated references to the

taste and smell of the marula seeds, which both localise the narrative and suggest

that the genocidal activities which follow are also a crime against the land.[173]

However, the relationship between Thenjiwe and the stranger is distinguished by the

symptoms of patriarchal ownership which also defined Fumbatha's characterisation

in *Butterfly Burning*. Thenjiwe's lover fetishises her bones, and reduces her to her

bare materiality, to a living 'fossil' immortalised by the peculiarities of his

patriarchal gaze.[174] By constituting Thenjiwe as the sum of her bones, as a purely

physical manifestation, the stranger rehearses a mind and body disconnect usually

represented through the female protagonists in Vera's writing. The fetishisation of

the bones also invokes the abject undercurrent in Vera's writing, and threatens the

violence of ownership which marks her death later in the novel.

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[171] Ibid, p.37.
[172] Corwin L.Mhlahlo, 'Advocating a Nameable Desire: Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*', *Journal for African Culture and Society* 41.1 (2013), p.104.
[173] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.38.
[174] Ibid.

The murder of Thenjiwe by Sibaso follows soon after in the narrative, and is comparable to Gertrude's death in *Butterfly Burning*. This prevailing comparison between Thenjiwe and Gertrude suggests a generational relationship that stretches through historical moments and literary narratives, revealing a prevailing oppressive patriarchal order. Thenjiwe's death is also sudden and initially ambiguous, as described by the narrator via the observing Nonceba:

> His head is behind Thenjiwe, where Thenjiwe was before, floating in her body; he is in her body. His is floating like a flash of lightning. Thenjiwe's body remains upright while this man's head emerges behind hers, inside it, replacing each of her moments, taking her position in the azure of the sky.
>
> Then he holds the dead body up, this stranger, clutching that decapitated death like a rainbow.[175]

In this abstract moment Sibaso both murders Thenjiwe, and consumes Nonceba's memory of her sister. There is a completeness to this action, which has been represented by Caroline Rooney as an appropriation of the feminine 'to the point of absolute usurpation'.[176] This is represented symbolically through the perverse conflation of Thenjiwe's and Sibaso's bodies, as Sibaso is reformed through the act of murder, and in the negation of Thenjiwe. By delving into Thenjiwe's being, Sibaso also repeats her lover's desire to uncover 'the deepest part of her'.[177] The murderer and the lover are compared, because they differently articulate patriarchal forms of ownership. This conception has been endorsed by Sofia Kostelac, who has suggested a comparison between the men because of dual 'coercive forms of masculine desire' which differently negate the female subject.[178] A comparison is

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[175] Ibid, p.37.
[176] Caroline Rooney, *Decolonising Gender: Literature and a Poetics of the Real* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p.154
[177] Ibid.
[178] Sofia Kostelac, '''The body is his, pulse and motion'': *Violence and Desire in Yvonne Vera's The Stone Virgins*', *Research in African Literatures* 41.3 (Fall 2010), p.76; Rooney has similarly

also encouraged by Vera's portrayal of the rape of Nonceba, which communicates the physical violence of the act but blurs the distinction between abuser and lover. Sibaso is described as entering the protagonist 'like a vacuum', in a consuming conception which reaches into the 'pit of her body' and forever defines a psyche irremovable from the body.[179] A pointed reference to Sibaso holding Noncebaa's 'dark bone' explicitly links this and the early sex scene between the lovers, and reiterates the ownership of the rape through one integral line: 'He owns her like a memory'.[180] This reference consolidates the relationship between the ownership of patriarchy and memory which underlines both the text and the context of Gukurahundi. When Sibaso mutilates Nonceba after the rape, the psychological torment is forged onto her skin and she is temporarily robbed of her speech. The loss of voice once more invokes a context of repression, and the difficulties in articulating a trauma that is removed from history. The visible scars of the act also communicate Sibaso's complete physical and mental ownership over Nonceba, whilst rendering Nonceba a walking embodiment of a personal and national violation.

The articulation of memory and interpretation in the text are also linked to the 'stone virgins' of Vera's title. The stone virgins are represented in ancient stone paintings relayed to the reader through Sibaso, who observed them whilst hiding in the Gulati hills after independence. These virgins are 'disembodied beings…who walk into their own graves before the burial of a king'.[181] There is a permanence to their

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compared the representations of lover Cephas and murderer Sibaso, arguing that Vera shows the 'proximity of love and destructiveness' through their depictions, p.154.

[179] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.68.

[180] Ibid, p.71.

[181] Ibid, p.103.

representation, and to the rocks on 'which history is steady'.[182] These rocks and pictures are read by Sibaso, who longs for the permanence they offer, and rehearses the disembodiment shown through the murder of Thenjiwe. But Sibaso's conception represents a false history, defined by a mentally scarred individual whose own unheard war-time traumas mark him out as another victim of the liberation struggle. His personal interpretation represents the reading he seeks, and demonstrates a subjectivity of perspective conceived by Vera through her description of history as a 'retelling…influenced by the time in which it is told and the purpose for which the history is being retold'.[183] Vera's play with history is also depicted through her characterisation of Thenjiwe's former lover Cephas, who is finally named in the text after Thenjewi is killed. Cephas returns to care for Nonceba, moving her from the 'naked cemetery' of Kezi to the city space of Bulawayo.[184] As Nonceba improves physically and psychologically, an unspoken love grows between the pair, in an ending which is by the far the most optimistic in Vera's stories. Intriguingly, Cephas is an archivist. He is a collator and agent of history. This noteworthy profession has been represented as a means of healing by Terence Ranger, suggesting that a truer history could promote personal and national healing.[185] However, whilst the hopeful ending to *The Stone Virgins* endorses Ranger's conception, it is important to note that the partial healing symbolised by Cephas is a possibility but not a reality. Rather, the memory remains repressed and counter-narratives like Vera's are necessitated in the hope of redefining a public memory dictated by the empowered.

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[182] Ibid, p.104.
[183] Vera, Hunter Interview, p.79.
[184] Vera, *The Stone Virgins*, p.159.
[185] Terence Ranger, 'History has its Ceiling. The Pressures of the Past in *The Stone Virgins*', *Sign and Taboo*, pp.215-216.

Reconstituting Histories

Vera has described herself as in 'some way' a biographer of 'unknown women'.[186]

Her self-description illustrates the ways in which her narratives centralise

representational victims of both oppressive social contexts and repressive histories.

This is especially relevant to Vera's *The Stone Virgins* which, as Ranger has

commented, confronts 'the reality of history' and depicts the unwritten stories of the

murdered and violated victims of Gukurahundi.[187] However, in Vera's first novelette

*Nehanda*, the writer engaged with a notably different approach by centralising a

Nehanda figure who was both real and the product of myth. Nehanda is perhaps the

most prominent ancestress in Zimbabwean history and symbolic of anti-colonial

struggle invoked throughout Vera's text. Nehanda had inspired 'anti-colonial

resistance and the uprisings against the British occupation' through her spirit

medium Charwe, or as Charwe depending on one's perspective about the

relationship of medium and spirit.[188] Nehanda took a central role in the first

Chimurenga, alongside a male medium known as Kaguvi, who is also represented in

Vera's text.[189] Both were eventually hung by the British for their role in the

resistance movement, and Charwe/Nehanda is said to have proclaimed at her

execution that 'her bones would rise again'.[190] This proclamation, and Nehenda's

role in the first liberation war, facilitated her reappropriation during the second

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[186] Vera, 'Interview with Yvonne Vera, 1st August 2000, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: ''Survival is in the Mouth.''' Interviewed by Jane Bryce, *Sign and Taboo*, p.223.
[187] Ranger, p.206.
[188] Annalisa Oboe '''Survival is in the Mouth'': Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*', *Journal des africanistes* 80.1-2 (2010), paragraph 2.
[189] Chimurenga translates loosely as 'revolutionary struggle', and was first used in relation to the War of Independence in the 1890s (The first Chimurenga).
[190] David Lan, *Guns & Rain: Guerrillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (Oxford: James Currey, 1985), p.6 and pp.118-119; and Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power, and Spirit Possession* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp.139.

Chimurenga in which she was celebrated as a national hero in songs and literary productions.[191] This took on a more literal manifestation in 1972, when a woman was apparently possessed by the spirit of Nehanda, and was taken from her home to a station on the Zambezi River where she advised and guided ZANLA guerrillas.[192] Her emergence invigorated recruitment in the Northern region, which became known as the Nehanda section, until her death in 1973.[193] Nehanda was also reappropriated during the 'third Chimurenga' by various mediums, as a justification and catalyst for land dispossession in the 1990s. Over time, Nehanda has increasingly been represented using the affix Mbuya, which means grandmother.[194] Whilst this may be a product of Nehanda's mythological role as a forebearer of the original Zimbabwean nation and of an ancestral tradition, the act of rendering Nehanda maternal is nonetheless suggestive of a desire to reconcile the Nehanda tradition with existing gender roles. Such an attempt reveals the inherently contradictory nature of opposing conceptions of femininity which Lauretta Ngcobo has associated with Africa, in which the female subject is 'idealised' or 'idolised' as a mother but simultaneously subject to the disempowered status of being a wife.[195] The reformation of the mythology illustrates an underlining conception about history and myth, which reflects both the circumstances of inception and the context of their reinterpretation.

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[191] Lan, pp.6-7; and Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.200.
[192] Turino, p.200.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Keller, p.139.
[195] Lauretta Ngcobo, 'The African Woman Writer', *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing,* ed. by Kristen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (Oxford: Dangeroo, 1986), p.81.

Vera has discussed her desire to collapse history and myth in her articulation of the Nehanda story.[196] In doing so, she refuses to prioritise one mode of historical construction over another, but seeks to illustrate how both are subject to politicisation and the omissions and retellings which mark historical narratives. This is emphasised through the distinctly oral style noticed by critics, which denies the privileged position of written histories in the act of rearticulating pre-colonial memory through the conflation of pre-colonial orality with the written form.[197] This manipulation of form illustrates Vera's versatility as a writer, and her willingness to use both form and content to contest dominant positions and normativity. Vera's retelling of the Nehanda story rejects the patriarchal and heteronormative politicisation of the Nehanda mythology through the representation of a non-maternal protagonist. Vera's Nehanda does not marry or start a family, unlike the real-life Charwe, who was apparently a mother and a wife.[198] Vera uses Nehanda's non-maternity to explore the maternal constructions and constraints of normative femininity. Whilst this is located in a Nineteenth century context, Vera's rejection of normative femininity has a clear relation to her own contemporary moment. Through Nehanda's non-maternity, the text considers whether a woman is a woman if she chooses not to marry. The ambiguity of womanhood for the non-maternal subject is illustrated by the nature of the protagonist's mother's public defence of her daughter's decision not to marry:

> We do not know what the future brings. Let us respect her silence. Let my daughter be. Perhaps that which wishes to be part of her will not allow her to marry. She is a woman, is she not?[199]

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[196] Vera, Hunter, p.77.
[197] Annalisa Oboe has for example claimed that *Nehanda* is peculiarly oral, because of its jumps in time, its multiple voices, and its fragmentary nature. Paragraph 3.
[198] See Lyons, 'Guerrilla Girls and Women', p.232.
[199] Vera, p.39.

The mother's question is both affirmative and doubtful, illustrating her uncertainty about her daughter's non-maternity. Later in the text, a fellow villager is more direct about the plight of the unmarried woman:

> Do you think she can still bear children? As long as a woman is not married, she will be talked about as if she were a young girl, even if she has already lost half her teeth.[200]

In this conception, the female subject is rendered infantile because of the refusal to become a 'woman', or rather, to become a mother and therefore a woman. Vera, however, contests this domestication through her subsequent role in the liberation struggle. In Vera's version, Nehanda is simultaneously anti-maternal and a mother of the nation, as her identity confronts intersecting ideologies of nationhood and gender identity in the act of disturbing a politically engineered imbrication that functions to reiterate traditional gender roles. Rather, Vera manipulates the paradoxical relationship between the combative Nehanda and her domesticised familial representation to reform the relationship between nationalistic discourses and heteronormativity. However, the destabilising possibilities of this gender reconstitution are arguably dampened by the nature of the spirit and spirit medium relationship. As Keller has argued, Nehanda, or the figure of the possessed woman:

> can only exercise a paradoxical authority ('instrumental agency'), born of radical receptivity: her power derives from the community's assessment that she no longer exists as an autonomous agent, having become an instrument of the overpowering will of an ancestor or spirit.[201]

By implication, Keller's statement represents the anti-maternity of Nehanda's character as a possible product of spirit possession, and not as a wilful resistance to gender conventions. This possibility, which is a product of traditional conceptions

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[200] Vera, p.40.
[201] Keller, p.296.

which associate non-normative sexuality and gender with spirit possession, is anticipated by Nehanda's mother's reference to the idea that the possessing spirit does not allow Nehanda to marry. However, Vera's framing of the mother's quote perhaps suggests that the spirit of Nehanda resists maternity through her medium, or in other words, that Nehanda's spirit medium is a vehicle for her own wants and desires. This reading allows for the performative capacity of the sexually resistant act to transcend Keller's conception of paradoxical authority.

Vera's critique of colonialism in *Nehanda* is most explicitly represented through the characterisation of the racist white settler Mr Browning, and through the portrayal of his relationship with his servant Mashoko. Browning subjugates and emasculates Mashoko, renaming him Moses in an act of power representative of the colonial machinery. Yet Mashoko, whilst initially obedient, 'undercuts' Browning's control through what Khombe Mangwanda has described as an 'internal mode of resistance' because of his disparaging opinion of the white settler.[202] This internal resistance eventually manifests itself when Mashoko returns to Browning one day dressed in traditional garb and holding weaponry. This physical transformation represents Mashoko's readiness to reject Browning's act of constitution, and to reclaim both his name and identity. Browning's renaming of Mashoko as Moses also draws attention to the religious aspects of the story, which are rendered synonymous with white civilisation, as Mangwanda has argued.[203] Vera's decision to centralise a story of spirit possession contests the importation of a civilising Christian belief system, which is also represented directly through Nehanda's refusal to submit to a priest's

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[202] Khombe Mangwanda, 'Re-mapping the Colonial Space: Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda*', *Sign and Taboo*, pp.148-149.
[203] Ibid, p.148.

attempt to convert her before her execution. Vera's resistant approach is epitomised

by her representation of Nehanda's death which represents a divergence from the

factual account of Nehanda's execution. In Vera's story, Nehanda chooses to die, as

she passes to the spirit world in an abstract and ambiguous passage. Her 'suicide'

therefore resists the biopolitical power of the colonial machinery. Vera has discussed

this decision in an interview with Peter Nazareth:

> It was history that goes beyond the particular day of April 27, 1897 that the
> British record, the day of her hanging. I choose to reject the event of that
> history of her being hanged. I was trying to free her from that photographic
> space in which I first encountered her.[204]

The photographic space, whilst perhaps representing a literal photographic

encounter, also illustrates Vera's intention to defy the apparent fixity of meaning,

which is similarly depicted through the text's play with orality.[205] This rebuttal of

meaning is explicitly defined through a description of words taken from early in the

text:

> Nehanda carries her bag of words in a pouch that lies tied around her waist.
> She wears some along her arms. Words and bones. Words fall into dreaming,
> into night. She hears the bones fall in the silence. She is surrounded by a
> turmoil of echoes which ascends the night and sky.[206]

As Root has argued, this passage resists any conception of static meaning. Words are

alive, are part of Nehanda's body, and are part of her bones.[207] Root posits that these

bones are Nehanda's bones, in reference to the aforementioned legacy of 'rising

bones' and rebellion associated with Nehanda.[208] But there is also something more

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[204] Vera quoted in Melissa Rae Root, *The Political is Personal: The Female Body as Site for Zimbabwe's Historical Memory in the Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (Denver: University of Denver, 2008), p.43.
[205] According to Root, there is a picture of Nehanda on display at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, pp.43-44.
[206] Vera, p.1.
[207] Root, p.44.
[208] Ibid.

universal about bones and silence in the passage. There are bones that fall in silence because there is no one to write these bones into the record. These bones represent the unwritten histories, or perhaps the repressed and concealed narratives of history. Writing then becomes an act of definition and reclamation, and even of avoiding and transforming symbolic death. In this regard, Vera transforms Nehanda's death by writing it differently. She gives Nehanda control over her body, and therefore politicises her death because she is in control of the colonised female body. This authority over self is similarly represented through Vera's very act of writing and rewriting, and of reclaiming an oral space and heroine moulded in the image of contemporaneous gendered discourses. Vera rescues Nehanda from a different patriarchal history, and her act of rescue similarly opposes the continuing, if changing, heteronormative environment of the text's inception. In a sense, Vera joins her own story and Nehanda's through the act of writing. Vera's *Nehanda* is for this reason very much a political novel, which seeks to criticise and displace the processes and strategies which underpin oppression. Her act of looking back is thus a means of looking forward, and of ensuring that Nehanda's bones rise again in the fight for female liberation.

Both Vera and Dangarembga contest gender disparity by politicising the stories of oppressed female protagonists. Their depictions of precarious and vulnerable bodies reflect oppressive social conditions and the mythology of communal liberation narratives which underwrite gender disparity. Throughout their novels and novellas, the focus remains heavily on female protagonists, inverting the masculinised perspective that had largely defined earlier Zimbabwean literature. Whilst their texts negatively constitute male protagonists who are also victim to colonial subjugation,

both Vera and Dangarembga engage with the relationship between colonialism and patriarchy through underlining stories of racial disparity and oppression. Accordingly, the mental colonisation, alienation, and bodily trauma endured by their protagonists are rendered a product of both colonialism and patriarchy. The conflation of these intersecting modes of domination reiterates a prevailing form of oppression that rejects the nationalist mythology of liberation. Dangarembga's and Vera's bodily focus also communicates the material effects of discursive forms, whilst both writers reject the naturalisation of maternal and familial gender roles. In Dangarembga's writing, this is epitomised by the infamous first line of *Nervous Conditions*: 'I was not sorry when my brother died', and through her rejection of mother and father figures. In Vera's prose, maternal and familial rejection is portrayed through the violence of abortion, suicide, rape, incest, and infanticide. The use of taboo not only transgresses normative representational modes, but relentlessly depicts the extremes of bodily suffering enabled by oppressive colonial and patriarchal systems. The relationship between the body and the mind is represented in Vera's and Dangarembga's writing through similar forms of bodily disassociation, dismemberment, and disembodiment. Whilst these states are occasionally represented literally, they generally function symbolically as an articulation of the colonisation of both mind and body. This is often depicted through a mind and body disjuncture which rejects the body signified by discursive forms. By representing victimised and coerced bodies, Vera and Dangarembga seek to wrestle control of the body back, and to destabilise and contest heteronormative forms of control. Their readiness to unveil the repressed and negated bodies that underwrite patriarchy also resists gendered nationalisms, and suggests that freedom will not be achieved until women and men are liberated from the binds of gender disparity and patriarchy.

**<u>Conclusion</u>**

This project has explored the representation and nature of heteronormativity in Zimbabwean postcolonial literature and society. Heteronormativity has been understood as a regulatory and oppressive construction, which limits and constitutes individuals and ideas. Its constitutive nature is invariably intersectional, shaping, and being shaped by, other ideas, practices, and institutions. I have sought to document the expressions and inhibitions of heteronormativity, but also to engage with the writers who have confronted it, in complex, progressive, and at times unique, ways. Prior criticism of Zimbabwean literature has generally failed in its representation of heteronormativity, in terms of extent and complexity. There are many superb articles on gender and occasionally sexuality referenced in this thesis, but there is a consistent failure to engage sufficiently with heteronormativity, especially in intersectional terms. Only Drew Shaw has comprehensively contextualised and analysed the engagement with homosexuality in both Zimbabwean literature and society. Whilst Shaw's work represents an essential critical intervention, it too briefly and insufficiently reads depictions of same-sex sexuality alongside the gendered contestations that inform intersectional counter-heteronormative affronts, most notably in Marechera's writing. My project has aimed to fulfil the need for a composite study engaging with heteronormativity in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. It is fundamentally a discursive orientated study, although I have engaged with context throughout, describing representations beginning with the colonial encounter and ending with the Matabeleland massacres. This has necessitated an

exploration of the relationship between context and discourse, which is at times discordant, engendering contradictions that expose the impermanence of discourses.

The structure of the thesis was designed to engage with elements of heteronormativity in stages, whilst necessarily relating ideas and intersections throughout to provide a complete representation. The first chapter analysed literary depictions of colonialism and its effects, continuing the contextualisation of colonialism provided in the introduction. This was necessary to understanding heteronormativity's contextual relation, as well as the legacy of colonialism in the post-independent space. Representations of language, religion, racism, name changes, and other elements of colonial hegemony were described, and used to portray the extent of subjugation and cultural imperialism in Southern Rhodesia. Many descriptions stressed a traumatic response, with various writers describing the psychological consequences of colonialism. Readings of Marechera's texts focused on the results of internalising racisms, and on complex masochistic actions which reveal the conflicts produced by settler colonial racisms. Tambu of Tsitsi Dangarembga's novels also offered a haunting expression of mental colonialisation. Believing in, and even aspiring to, the mythical status of whiteness, she hates her blackness, rejecting herself and other black Africans in the apartheid space of Sacred Heart School. Multiple episodes of disembodiment rehearse a split between mind and body caused by the oppressive circumstances of her existence, and by the intersection between patriarchy and colonialism which marks her out as a doubly oppressed subject. This intersection was central to the concluding concerns of the chapter, which explored how gender affected the expression, understanding, and experience of colonialism. This involved a problematisation of the phallocentric

conceptualisation of colonialism as emasculatory, which pronounced and consolidated gender difference.

The emasculatory conception predicated and informed the discussions of the second chapter, which explored the hegemonic nature of normative masculinity. Marechera was central to these discussions once again, because of his brutal representations of gender violence. Readings of Peter's beatings of Immaculate, a public marital rape, and various other episodes were used to document the oppressions of normative masculinity. As with the discussion of emasculation in Hove's *Bones*, these were related to the colonial context, and to a violent reaffirmation of masculine norms because of the emasculatory perception of colonialism. I was engaged not merely with depicting normative oppressions, but in contesting and destabilising them. I considered how Marechera attacked the logic and constructs that enabled actions like Peter's, and which concealed, through normalisation, the violence represented. I was particularly concerned with Marechera's readiness to emphasise aspects of performance in highly heteronormative episodes, such as the homoerotic masturbation scene and the public marital rape. This framing functioned to denaturalise gender norms and to draw attention to gender's necessarily artificial nature. Marechera's counter-discursive affront was also represented through the discussion of several transgressive female characters, who reject gender roles as well as associated familial constraints and standards of decorum and morality.

Despite Marechera's clear anti-hegemonic inclinations, and the ostensibly feminist intentions of several male writers, the constitutive nature of gender has inhibited its resistance in Zimbabwean literature. In this regard, my study did not seek to classify

writers as resistant or complicit, but to describe the contradictions which invariably informed their work. This was an essential element of this project, which addressed occasional failures in criticism to properly account for the paradoxes and nuances that pervade Zimbabwean literary representations of gender and sexuality. I focused principally on certain repeated tropes of representation in the second chapter, most notably acts of sexualisation and objectification, anti-maternal sentiments, and a discourse of animality which repeated the dehumanising logic of colonial discourses. These expressions reiterated a hegemonic logic which normalised gender disparity, rendering women vulnerable whilst restricting men.

The third chapter engaged with heterosexual normativity, representing and challenging the limits and illusory coherence of heteronorms. This limit was expressed in part through the invisibility of homosexuality in Zimbabwean literature and public discourse, despite its practice in certain contexts, most notably in the mining compounds described in the chapter. I analysed homoerotic descriptions in several texts, and read these moments alongside gender expressions, analysing the relationship between heterosexuality and normative gender roles whilst considering the potential for and of acts of recontextualisation. Much of the literary discussion focused on Marechera's writing, because of his unique readiness to portray the same-sex sexuality that other writers refused to define. I engaged with several representations in Marechera's texts, but most notably the homosexual embrace in 'House of Hunger' between the narrator and Harry, which has been peculiarly neglected in criticism. I read this through a deconstructive lens and argued that it necessitated a rereading of earlier moments, because it queered the rituals and performances of gender described. I sought to show that Marechera's readiness to

depict same-sex sexuality and to contradict a societal silence, illustrates that discourses are never utterly coherent or definitive but are marked by acts and the potential of resistance, as well as contradictions and anxieties. The disciplinary violence which consolidates normative forms reveals these anxieties and the possibility of resistance inherent in the production of power. My discussions of same-sex sexuality in mining compounds further explored discursive contradictions and the fluid relationship between sexual and gender normativity. Same-sex mining relationships were shown to be highly gendered in Zimbabwe and neighbouring South Africa, revealing a hegemonic need which ostensibly transcended the deeply entrenched normativity of heterosexuality. These relationships inevitably allowed some men to express their homosexuality, which was not valorised in urban and rural environments. The analysis sought once more to explore and render anxious heterosexual normativity and its relationship to gender and to provoke the artificiality described in some literary productions.

The concluding chapter focused on the major Zimbabwean female writers who emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga. Whilst I had discussed their writing in earlier chapters, I thought it was necessary to centralise them because of their unique concerns, especially with the body, and because of their expressions of lived experience not similarly conceived in men's writing. I was predominantly interested in linking the bodily expressions in their writing to the intersecting forces of colonialism and gender. I analysed the effects of this intersection through Nyasha's and Tambu's bodily struggles and through the symbolic use of disembodiment in Dangarembga's work. This is also a characteristic of Vera's writing, which, whilst often abstract, is nonetheless highly material and

tangible. The analysis of Vera's work explored the complex intersections staged in her writing and the signification of her brutal anti-maternal and anti-familial expressions. Her engagement with rape, incest, abortion, infanticide, and murder was read as pivotal to an expansive counter-hegemonic affront, which sought to undermine the mythological celebration of the family and to visualise repressed narratives. This was especially relevant to the issue of rape during the liberation war and the Matabeleland massacres, which have been systematically repressed by the state. I read Vera's readiness to describe these moments as a necessarily political act, which targeted the hegemonic constraints of the post-independent hierarchy and the amnesiatic and gendered functions of nationalism. Vera's writing received such extensive engagement because of the complexities of her approach and due to her readiness to link systems and logics of domination.

My poststructural approach was integral to documenting the representation and confrontation of heteronormativity in Zimbabwean postcolonial literature. Its constitutive based theories, which have defined modern gender theory, provided the basis for discerning the limits of discourse, whilst practices of denaturalisation, recontextualisation, and deconstruction offered a resistant blueprint. Heteronormative oppression, as I conclude, was varied, complex, and intersectional. Certain writers portrayed these intersections more deliberately and explicitly than others. For example, Hove is clearly concerned with linking gender and the hegemony of colonialism. *Bones* provides the best example of this, as Chisaga's struggle with racist emasculation leads to the rape of Janifa, who bears the consequences of gender and racism. Dangarembga also links gender and racial hegemonies across her two novels, as Tambu suffers, in physical and psychological

ways, with the consequences of patriarchy and colonialism. However, the main discussion in terms of a conclusion returns to the writers I consider most essential to the demands and intentions of this study: Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera.

Marechera and Vera are alike in many ways, and I am not sure that Vera would have been the same writer if Marechera had not emerged before her. Both write with a similar brutality, as they relentlessly describe the violence that permeates their contexts. A certain tangibility infuses their descriptions, despite their abstractions and readiness to engage with the nature and constraints of discourse. The use of violence, which is often sudden and spontaneous, presents a sense of precarity produced by the nature of the dominations described. This spontaneity is also an element of form, as plotless and anachronistic prose passages are marked by violent digressions and by the emergence of trauma and brutality. Ideas and contexts are connected in complex ways by these stylistic choices, engendering multiple readings and rereadings. However, these stylistic choices attracted much criticism. This is especially true for Marechera, who was specifically attacked in nationalistic terms. His writing was conceived as foreign and thus 'un-African' and was also criticised because of its transgressive sexual content. These attacks were regulatory and revealed a logic of singularity that had characterised colonial discourses, but which is inherently resisted by the nature of Marechera's writing. The limits of postcolonial nationalism are frequently resisted in writing which, like Vera's, denies the promise and optimism of ZANU-PF's Zimbabwe. This is represented through both writers' engagement with the sexual abuse of children, which subverts the heteronormative familial conceptualisations of postcolonial nationalisms and the promise of futurity.

I would argue that Vera and Marechera's writing best resists totalised discourses, whether they be racist, gendered, and/or related to normative sexuality and the constraints of nationalism. Their work eschews singularity, contradicting the notably didactic efforts of some writers of the period. In the process, they contest the logic of homogenisation that informed the racisms, sexisms, and various other isms of their contemporaneity and the colonial era and which continue to inform Zimbabwe to this day. Theirs is a fundamentally structural form of resistance, which encourages the resuscitation of new meaning by reconceiving the terms of its prior expression. In Vera's writing, this is often explicitly historical, as she targets and regenders narratives repressed at a governmental level. Her abstractions toy with the unintelligibility of certain moments, suggesting that personal traumas, and their expression, are related to social mechanisms. Her anti-maternal and anti-familial affronts target the gendered basis of these mechanisms, repeating Marechera's attack on the family as a necessity for facilitating individual freedoms.

In Marechera's writing, the complexity of resistance is greater still. His representations target heteronormativity and not merely gender, as he links and destabilises normative gender and sexual roles, undermining and toying with assumptions produced by heteronormativity. Strategic acts of denaturalisation and deconstruction provoke the anxieties inherent in the production of norms, rendering the power of heteronormativity illusory and visualising the inequalities that uphold normative constructions. Marechera's strategic relations of gender and racial hegemonies also anticipate the post-independent oppressions described in later writing. He experienced nationalistically contrived oppression first hand, as he was

criticised because of perceived Europeanised writing techniques which reflected his hybrid identity, as a citizen of colonialism and of the diaspora when in England.

Marechera's and Vera's texts, whilst not wholly without problems, are the most complete in their resistance. This is necessary for heteronormativity emerges, like other oppressive constructs, from a singular logic – from a way of seeing and doing things, that is deeply embedded in the mechanisms of societies and minds. It is transmitted in the readings of religious scripture, in the education systems Marechera describes, in which thought is taught to go in straight lines and not around corners. It envelops and is contained by language, trapping and constituting the means of understanding and expression. It is in the capitalistic blueprint of colonialism and the legacy of globalisation, which consolidates geographical disparity and influences the promotion and constitution of ideas. One such idea is the portrayal of capitalised ideals of bodily beauty which are invariably racialised and gendered and which lead to the high sales of skin-bleaching lotions in Zimbabwe. It is not enough to only say that heteronormativity is oppressive and must be resisted and that racism has no place, although that is a necessary step, especially in scenarios where such expression is repressed. It is essential to attack and eschew singularity and the intersectional productions of oppression which hide in plain sight, which we as individuals reiterate because of the constraints of normativity and performativity. Accordingly, heteronormativity, and other oppressive formations, must be attacked in all forms, even if they appear incidental, because there is nothing incidental about anything. These incidental things are merely expressions of the deeply embedded nature of normative ideas. These ideas police the gender non-conformist, rendering the animalised woman, or the tomboy who is so named and policed, and brought

back into line. They marginalise homosexuals, or those who identify as transsexual or transgender, and lead to the violence of words and at times actions, as minds and bodies bear the consequences of heteronormativity. These words and actions cannot be resisted purely in the form they take, but the act of formation must be targeted and the logic that predicates it.

Zimbabwe has undergone numerous transformations in recent years. The nationalistic affronts of Mugabe have accelerated and taken on an increasingly violent shape – the land dispossessions of white farmers were particularly notable, as the racial binary which infused Mugabe's nationalistic doctrine took on material form. Yet most Zimbabweans have continued to labour under increasingly dire economic and social conditions, defined by unprecedented hyperinflation, fuel, electricity, and water shortages, and mass unemployment. Election scandals, state sanctioned violence, and the repressive nature of the government-controlled press have belied the democracy promised with the birth of the new nation. With Mugabe's health faltering, Zimbabwe once more finds itself at the precipice of change. It is difficult to look with optimism into the future, in view of the continuing civil strife and the potential violence which threatens to envelop the leadership battle to come. Its major player, vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa, also fought and suffered in the liberation war, and promises a continuation of the violent heteronormative nationalism which defined the Mugabe era.

Zimbabwean writers, despite the dangers of doing so, have continued to depict and critique social conditions. Writers have emerged to international acclaim, achieving the status Marechera and Vera should have been afforded because of their

uniqueness. Two recent novels, Tendai Huchu's *Hairdresser of Harare* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* are particularly noteworthy additions in the context of this study.[1] These texts warrant some discussion, as a prelude for further work and investigation. Both Bulawayo and Huchu depict the harsh economic realities of modern day Harare. In *Hairdresser of Harare*, the narrator protagonist Vimbai struggles to pay the bills on the expensive property she has inherited whilst caring for her child, as Huchu documents the food, electricity, and fuel shortages that plague modern day Zimbabwe. Bulawayo's text begins by representing township poverty. A group of six children including protagonist and narrator Darling, and the pregnant eleven-year-old Chipo, roam the streets of the wealthier suburb of Budapest stealing food. Driven by unrelenting hunger they over indulge in guava fruit; as they defecate in the bush after eating the fibrous fruit, and the pregnant Chipo vomits, the abject representation of the township is reiterated. The name of their locality, Paradise, like Immaculate's name in 'House of Hunger', illustrates the disjuncture between ideals, in this case religiously sanctified, and the harsh realities of life.

Bulawayo's feminism is similar in tactic and representation to Vera's, although her writing is different – it is not as abstract or nightmarish as her predecessor's, and is more structured, accessible, and humorous. Eleven-year-old Chipo's pregnancy is used in *We Need New Names* to explore exploitative social conditions, and is reminiscent of Zhizha's narrative in *Under the Tongue*. Chipo has barely spoken since falling pregnant, but finds her voice after observing an act at church. She and

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[1] Tendai Huchu, *The Hairdresser of Harare* (Zimbabwe: Freight Books, 2013 [2010]); and NoViolet Bulawayo, *We Need New Names* (London: Vintage, 2014 [2013]).

the protagonist are listening to the head of the church, the greedy and nefarious Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, preach when he is interrupted by the screams of a woman, who is being carried by several men.[2] The unnamed woman's body is eroticised by the narrator, with references to her white angelic thighs, her nickers, and her breasts foreshadowing the events to come. Portrayed as possessed by a demon, the woman is exorcised by Mborro, who commands the devil to leave her. As she continues to scream whilst being pinned down, Mborro jumps on top of her, rubbing her 'thing', her vagina, to 'free' her of the demon.[3] The flagrant sexual assault robs the woman of her strength, and her beauty, in the eyes of protagonist Darling. It is an act that reads as regulatory – as hemming in the transgressive woman, whose assault is enabled by recourse to a hypocritical sense of gendered morality defined by men like Mborro.

The attack encourages Chipo's admission, as she recalls her own assault by her Grandfather, who fought in the liberation war. Her victimisation is necessarily gendered, as the violation of Chipo and the sexual assault are used to explore oppressive gender realities and the concealment of these. In the case of the woman, the supposed benevolence of Mborro, and his mission from God, enable his villainous actions. In relation to Chipo, her age, the structure of the family, gender, and the memory of the liberation war all facilitate, and repress, her victimisation.

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[2] Mboro means penis in Shona and its usage appears strategic in the novel. Seemingly, the name is representative of an oppressive phallocentric state enacted and policed by men like the prophet. Anna Chitando has discussed the definition in her article 'The Girl Child's Resilience and Agency in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*', *Journal of Literary Studies* 32.1 (2016), pp.116-117.
[3] Bulawayo, p.40.

Bulawayo's readiness to subvert the memory of liberation encourages parallels between colonial and post-independent hegemonies. Bulawayo frequently conflates ideas and emotions in interesting ways. Her notably humorous tone, which is very childlike in the novel's early stages, incongruously contradicts the routine brutality described. This is particularly evident during an attempted abortion on the pregnant Chipo, involving Darling, friend Sbho, and newcomer Forgiveness. The episode begins as a ridiculous spectacle – Sbho leads the group, based on knowledge of medicine derived from an episode of American television show *ER*. She commands Darling to urinate and Chipo to drink the wee, whilst Darling piles stones without reason as Sbho massages the pregnant girl's stomach. However, Forgiveness's actions reiterate the seriousness of the situation and Chipo's precarious condition – she begins to carefully unfold a rusty clothes hanger and sharpen its point. She informs the girls of the operation to come, with her knowledge derived from an overheard conversation of her sister's. Before the girls can proceed they are interrupted by Shebeen owner Motherlove, who breaks down in tears when she realises what is happening. Her sadness is a response to the gendered disparity endured by Chipo and the girls, and its arbitrary quotidian nature, which is emphasised by Bulawayo's use of humour, even in such a harrowing episode. This is a representation of township life which is much closer to the nightmarish portrait of Marechera, than to the mythology of liberation, although it feels more real than both.

Bulawayo also portrays the systematic dispossessions and election violence which have plagued Zimbabwe in recent years. Darling experiences this dispossession as a

child – her family and many others are forced from their homes by bulldozers.[4] One mother loses her child in the rubble – his limp body manifests a ruined futurity caused by the destructive authoritarianism of the ZANU-PF hierarchy. This theme of dispossession is repeated later in the novel, when a couple of white Africans are forced from their home by a rampaging nationalistic mob. The children enter the house's ransacked interior and feast on the cheese, meat, and unknown foods they find inside. Its luxuries are alien to them, and illustrate the legacies of racially engineered disparity. Yet the violence of mob is not valorised, but represents a frightening inversion of the racial binaries which marked colonialism.

Bulawayo does not depict Zimbabweans as hopeless, despite the significant poverty and constraints the country faces. The election represented in the novel (seemingly the 2008 campaign) represents genuine hope for many, who are excited by the slogans of change and the promise of a different future. However, hopes for change are denied by the ZANU-PF hierarchy, with the election marred by violence which is depicted in personal terms through the murder of campaigner 'Bornfree', whose name symbolically lays bare the pretentions of independence. Bornfree's death is represented retrospectively, in a chapter that begins with the children secretly watching his funeral from some trees, as it is filmed by BBC reporters. When the mourners leave, the children act out Bornfree's death, with Bastard playing the victim, Chipo playing the distraught mother, and the others taking on the role of

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[4] Chitando has noted that this dispossession likely alludes to the controversial Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, in which approximately 700,000 people were forced from homes in urban areas. Some have argued that this campaign was strategically designed to hurt those who had supported the opposition in the elections of the same year. Chitando, p.116; and Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, 'Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina', *United Nations News* (July 2015), accessed online: http://www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf. Last accessed 26.07.2017.

murderers. Their actions illustrate an arbitrary relationship with death, presumably

because of its normality. The description of the frivolity is interspersed with details

from the real event – the mock weapons become actual weapons – blood sprays, and

the children re-enact the horror and their act of witnessing. This peculiar show, and

the absurd contortion of the real and unreal, of the innocence of childhood and the

brutality of murder, is witnessed by the reporters who record the actions. This is one

of several moments in the text in which black African children are photographed and

filmed by white Europeans. Their difference, their suffering, is fetishised for

cameras, informing a quasi-imperialistic empowered politics of compassion, not

dissimilar at points to the white-saviour industrial complex described by Teju Cole.[5]

This notion is further explored in the second half of the novel, which documents

Darling's experience of life in America, after she leaves Zimbabwe to live with her

aunt. She is accosted by a white American woman in the toilets of a wedding venue,

who laments the brutality of events in the Congo and tells stories of her daughter's

charitable work in Africa. Darling is made representative of the continent, and is

auxiliary to the outpouring of the woman's emotions, which appear artificial,

insincere, and self-serving. This recalls Dangarembga's complaints about

intervention in the production of *Everyone's Child*, which followed an AIDS based

story line because of pressure from its financial backers, reiterating the imperilled

difference of a homogenised Africa in the process.

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[5] Cole's conception describes a form of empowered sentimentality which satisfies the needs of the sentimentalists (defined provocatively as 'white people and Oprah' in Cole's original representation). It is imperialistic to a degree, for it is predicated upon homogenised notions of difference, and reinscribes the inequalities it ostensibly seeks to resist. It is also hypocritical – for the white American worries more about the 'African Warlord' (a reference to the Kony2012 video that prompted Cole's critique), than the Iraqis killed because of an American invasion. For a more detailed description, see Teju Cole, 'The White-Saviour Industrial Complex', *The Atlantic*, 21st March 2012, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/, Last accessed 24.07.2017.

AIDS has not been discussed in any depth in this thesis, but is mentioned throughout

*We Need New Names*. Darling's absent father returns to the family in the narrative,

reduced to a skeletal state by the 'sickness', of AIDS, which also effects other

characters. Despite causing the deaths of Marechera and Vera, AIDS is seldom

referenced in early postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. This was undoubtedly

because of a lack of awareness in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and because of

misconceptions related to its physical implications, its transmission, and because of

nationalistic contestations. Current studies must account for its effects on the minds

and bodies of Zimbabweans, and on heteronormative formations. *We Need New*

*Names* also engages with another issue that has been only thinly described in this

thesis – the realities of the diaspora. Darling struggles with a sense of homelessness,

conceived as an irredeemable loss, and with her hybridity in a foreign context.

Whilst Marechera's literary representations have been described, it is important to

state that the reality of diaspora is not singular, and that some writers may not agree

with Marechera's self-dramatization. Whilst this is not the question of this thesis or

conclusion, interesting work is to be done on the relation between diaspora and

identity which is central to texts like Bulawayo's, and which informs the

heteronormative nationalisms and issues of belonging central to this thesis. Such

work might consider the relation between different contextual manifestations of

heteronormativity, as well as the consequences of local racisms, and the politics of

compassion/sentimentality, on citizens of the diaspora.

Huchu's *Hairdresser of Harare* is similar in many ways to Nevanji Madanhire's *If*

*The Wind Blew*. It also represents the repressed homosexuality of an African man

through the eyes of his female partner, although Huchu's engagement with homosexuality is more complex and central to the plot. The novel's primary protagonist and narrator is Vimbai, a single mother who was raped by the child's father Phillip, representing a gendered vulnerability all too familiar in the context of this study. Vimbai works as a hairdresser and enjoys her status as the salon's most talented employee. Yet this is disturbed by the arrival of handsome and enigmatic stranger Dumi, who soon takes over her mantel and causes an upturn in the fortunes of the saloon.

Over time, Vimbai and Dumi become friends, roommates, and eventually engaged in an unconsummated romantic relationship. Dumi introduces Vimbai to his wealthy family, who are peculiarly overjoyed by Vimbai, despite her status as a single mother from a poorer background. The extent of their acclaim, a peculiar remark from Dumi's mother about Vimbai curing her son, and Huchu's general readiness incessantly to reference a coming revelation anticipates the news to come. Eventually Vimbai, who is perturbed by Dumi's absences and expects an affair, searches his room and finds a diary and in turn the admissions of his sexuality. He had been in love with Colin, a visiting European. Accordingly, homosexuality, as in Madanhire's text, is represented in terms of a relationship between an African and foreigner. Colin was forcibly ejected from the country on the wishes of Dumi's father, prompting Dumi to attempt to conceal his sexuality and to live as a heterosexual man. His attempts are undone when he falls in love with another man – this time Mr M__, an ex-combatant and husband to a senior politician. This representation is notably transgressive, for it locates homosexuality in a political hierarchy that is conspicuously heteronormative in nature, and central to policing

sexual normativity. Vimbai is shocked and disgusted by Dumi's admission, describing 'Phillip the rapist as better than Dumi the homo'.[6] She informs the minister, Mr M___'s wife, and learns that Mr M___ has had previous affairs. When Dumi is later beaten and left for dead, Vimbai realises the consequences of her actions.

Homosexuality is at the core of Huchu's story and is not limited to one episode, as in previous descriptions in Zimbabwean texts. This represents an essential transition, because the whole story revolves around Dumi's sexuality. In the process, Huchu challenges the assumption of heterosexuality that structures Zimbabwean society, and which renders Vimbai unable to recognise or understand Dumi's sexuality. Dumi is also notably masculinised, passing for a heterosexual man like Madanhire's Hebrew, despite engaging in a typically feminised profession. His constitution rejects any conflation of sexuality and gender, but it does not prevent him from suffering from the effects of heteronormativity. He is rejected by his parents because of his sexuality, as is Vimbai due to an inheritance dispute which represents the ways in which a phallocentric assumption, and in this case a patrilineal one, underlines normative gender roles. Dumi's repression is vocalised in his diary, which becomes a personal outlet. He admits that part of him wants it to be found, because of the consequences of concealing who he is. When he is beaten, he suffers from a more violent form of the regulatory violence he had always been subject to, and risked being subject to, as a homosexual man. When Dumi flees the country at the novel's conclusion, he is a notably different person – his broken and scarred body visualises his inner turmoil and the consequences of state sanctioned homophobia. Whilst

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[6] Huchu, p.209.

Vimbai facilitates his departure and comes to accept his sexuality and love for both her and Mr M__, she suffers from the guilt of her actions, and realises that both she and Dumi have been limited and oppressed for different reasons. In the process, Huchu represents and compares the oppressions of heterosexual and gender normativity.

Huchu's and Bulawayo's texts illustrate that some of the concerns of writers of the 70s, 80s, and 90s are still prevalent today. My discussion of their interventions has been very brief, but it illustrates the possibilities for a comparative approach that accounts for the clear contextual and discursive changes in Zimbabwe, and the ways in which literature has reflected these movements. Whatever happens to Zimbabwe next, literature will invariably represent and resist its connotations. It will be the responsibility of critics to engage compositely with these expressions – to represent, to problematise, and to analyse the constrictions of the material and discursive. Criticism must not relegate or underwrite heteronormativity, as it at times has risked doing. Those who come next follow in the footsteps of those represented in this study, and most prominently Yvonne Vera and Dambudzo Marechera, who uniquely and progressively confronted heteronormativity and its various intersections.

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