

**HEAD OF DARKNESS: REPRESENTATIONS OF “MADNESS”  
IN POSTCOLONIAL ZIMBABWEAN LITERATURE**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

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I, **Yuleth Chigwedere**, declare that “**Head of Darkness: Representations of ‘madness’ in postcolonial Zimbabwean Literature**” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

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DATE

## SUMMARY

This study critically explores the numerous strains of “madness” that Zimbabwean authors represent in their postcolonial literature. My focus is on their reflection of “madness” as either an individual state of being, or as symptomatic of the socio-political and economic condition in the country. I have adopted insights from an existential psychoanalytic framework in my literary analysis in order to bring in an innovative dimension to this investigation of the phenomenon. I consider this an appropriate stance for this study as it has enriched my reading of the literary texts under study, as well as played a crucial role in providing me with effective conceptual tools for understanding the manifestations of “madness” in the texts. The literary works that I critique are Shimmer Chinodya’s *Chairman of Fools* (2009), Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness* (2010), Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North*, Petina Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* (2006) and Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998). These selected texts offer me an opportunity to analyse the gender dynamics and discourses of “madness”, which I do from a peculiarly indigenous and feminist perspective. My study reveals that these authors’ representations are located in and shaped by very specific temporal and spatial contexts, which, in turn, shed light on the characters’ existential reality, revealing aspects of their relationship with the world around them. It demonstrates that their notions of “madness” denote different markers of identity, such as race, class, gender, and religion, amongst others. Significantly, my literary analysis illustrates the varied permutations of “madness” by exposing how these authors characterise the phenomenon as trauma, as alienation, as depression, as insanity, as subversion, as freedom, and even as a sign of the state of affairs in Zimbabwe. This investigation also reveals that because “madness” in these authors’ fiction is intricately linked to the question of identity, it manifests in situations where the characters’ sense of ontological security is compromised in some way. What emerges is that “madness” can either signify a grapple with identity, a loss of it, or a struggle for its re-definition.

## **KEY TERMS**

- Madness
- Insanity
- Trauma
- Depression
- Identity
- Postcolonial literature
- Existential psychoanalysis
- Imperialism
- Colonialism
- Ontological insecurity
- Subversion
- Gender
- Zimbabwean literature

## **DEDICATION**

This academic growth is dedicated to my late mother, Margaret Chideke-Sala. Although no longer of this realm, she beats forever in me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	(ii)
Summary.....	(iii)
Key Terms.....	(iv)
Dedication.....	(v)
Acknowledgements.....	(vi)
Table of Contents.....	(vii)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Defining “Madness”.....	6
1.3 Philosophical Insights Harnessed.....	11
1.4 Literary Criticism Strategies.....	14
1.5 Chapter Delineation.....	15
1.6 Conclusion.....	18

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction.....	19
2.2 History of “Madness”.....	20
2.3 “Madness” and Colonialism.....	21
2.4 Literature and “Madness”.....	24
2.5 Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism.....	29
2.6 Creativity and “Madness”.....	33
2.7 Critical Scholarship on Madness in African Literature.....	36
2.8 Zimbabwean Literature and Literary Criticism.....	37
2.9 Feminism and “Madness”.....	40
2.10 Women and “Madness”.....	41
2.11 Zimbabwean Traditional and Cultural Beliefs on “Madness”.....	45
2.12 Postmodernism and “Madness”.....	47
2.13 Conclusion.....	51

CHAPTER THREE: THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD: PARANOIAC DISPLACEMENT  
IN SHIMMER CHINODYA’S *CHAIRMAN OF FOOLS*

3.1 Introduction.....	53
3.2 <i>Chairman of Fools</i> as a Psychotic Text.....	54
3.3 National Insanities - Intertextual “Madness” in <i>Chairman of Fools</i> .....	56
3.4 The Nexus between Creativity and “Madness”.....	61
3.5 Far from the Madding Marriage.....	64
3.6 Farai’s Mental Washing Away into Paranoia.....	68
3.7 Returning to the Source: Shona Cultural Beliefs on “Madness” and Its Treatment.....	81
3.8 The Twilight World of the Fools and Their Chairman.....	85
3.9 Conclusion.....	88

CHAPTER FOUR: LIBERATING “MADNESS” IN THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST  
DISCOURSE OF MASHINGAIDZE GOMO’S *A FINE MADNESS*

4.1 Introduction.....	90
4.2 Linguistic Miscegenation as a Cultural Vehicle.....	96
4.3 Re-membering Africa: Breaking the Colonial Mirror.....	99
4.4 Conclusion.....	115

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WRETCHED OF THE DIASPORA: TRAUMATIC  
DISLOCATION IN BRIAN CHIKWAVA’S *HARARE NORTH*

5.1 Introduction.....	117
5.2 Turncoating “Madness”: Making Language and Form Sweet.....	120
5.3 Diasporan Identity: Cultural “Madness” and the Trauma of Belonging.....	124
5.4 The Shattering of Self: Diasporic Displacement, Trauma and the Nameless Narrator.....	133
5.5 Conclusion.....	144

CHAPTER SIX: POSTCOLONIAL “NERVOUS CONDITIONS” IN PETINA GAPPAN’S  
*AN ELEGY FOR EASTERLY* AND TSITSI DANGAREMBGA’S *THE BOOK OF NOT*

6.1 Introduction.....	146
6.2 The Political, Social and Economic Shades of “Madness” in Petina Gappan’s	

<i>An Elegy for Easterly</i> .....	149
6.3 Being and Nothingness: Trauma, loss and alienation in Tsitsi Dangarembga's <i>The Book of Not</i> .....	159
6.4 Conclusion.....	172
CHAPTER SEVEN: BODIES ON THE FRONTLINE: SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSES OF "MADNESS" IN YVONNE VERA'S <i>WITHOUT A NAME</i> AND <i>BUTTERFLY BURNING</i>	
7.1 Introduction.....	175
7.2 The Experimental Nature of Vera's Writing Style.....	178
7.3 "Madness" and the City in <i>Without a Name</i> .....	180
7.4 Transgressive Female Sexuality and the Colonial Township of <i>Butterfly Burning</i> ....	183
7.5 "Madness", Motherhood and Abjection: An Unholy Trinity?.....	189
7.6 Feminine Rage and Vera's Women Who Kill.....	194
7.6.1 Infanticide in <i>Without a Name</i> .....	194
7.6.2 Abortion and Suicide in <i>Butterfly Burning</i> .....	202
7.7 Conclusion.....	209
CONCLUSION.....	211
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	220

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

*Recurrent literary representations of madness constitute a history of exploration of the mind in relation to itself, to other human beings and to social and political institutions. – Lillian Feder, Madness in Literature*

In the epigraph above, Feder highlights how literature depicts “madness” as a part of human society. As it is a very real phenomenon, these representations in literature are inevitable, since art is often a reflection of reality. Marystella Chika Okolo (2007: 100) points out that literature’s “purpose is to analyse society on its own terms, to present a fictional world that is a lifelike representation of the real world”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, “madness” in fiction is portrayed as both a state at the individual level and as a motif at the social one. These literary representations, therefore, are indicative of constitutional, dispositional and behavioural disorders that human beings suffer, as well as serve to function as symptomatic of the social, political and economic malaise within societies. Wrapped in the metaphoric title of this thesis -“Head of Darkness”- are allusions to the mental instability, disintegration of self and trauma that the protagonists suffer in the selected literary texts that I explore here. The “darkness” that is implicit in all the facets of the postcolonial “madness” evident in the literature under scrutiny all point to a psychological wounding or to an uncertain existential reality. Therefore, whereas in *Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad 1994) equates “darkness” with mystery and savagery, in this thesis I equate it to the trauma and ontological insecurity that the authors’ protagonists experience which, in turn, threaten their identity resulting in an obscure sense of being<sup>2</sup>. Although the theme of “madness” at both the individual and collective level is prevalent in African literature within the colonial and postcolonial contexts, not much literary criticism exists on its characterisations evident in the literary works of the continent’s writers. This constitutes a scholarly vacuum because such investigations would

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<sup>1</sup> As Ervin Laszlo (1964) suggests, however, many theorists have critiqued this assertion. See, for example Andrei Burov (1956); Hayden White (1980); Alan Segal (1982); Ian Hunter (1985); Elena Morato (2011).

<sup>2</sup> In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad portrays Africa as barbaric, nightmarish and irrational, the antithesis of Europe’s civilised world. The text has aroused much criticism (see, for example, Chinua Achebe (1965); Karl (1992); and Leavis (1995). There have also been literary creative responses to this depiction, such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, as well as Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* which both sought to show that Africa was not “one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans, acting on God’s behalf, delivered them” (Achebe (1965).

surely provide a deeper understanding of the ideological background of the African authors who explore the phenomenon, their aesthetic ideas and their perspectives of the societies in which they are located.

In *Writing Madness: Borderlines of the Body in African Literature*, Flora Veit-Wild (2006:2) highlights the sparse literary research on the phenomenon's representation in African fiction when she states that "within the field of scholarship on African literature, the theme of 'madness' and its relationship to writing has been little explored, and if at all, only in articles on individual works by certain writers". Examples of this include Rogers' "The Politics of madness in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*" and Veit-Wild and Anthony Chennells' *Emerging Perspectives on Dambudzo Marechera* (1999). *Writing Madness* attempts to close this gap as Veit-Wild's book extensively explores the notion of "madness" in colonial and postcolonial Africa<sup>3</sup>. She explains that:

Introducing the perspective of 'writing madness' into African literature ... does not suggest the championing of an outlandishly individualist, wayward or apolitical stance. On the contrary - the political situation in Africa is so full of absurdities, monstrosities and gross aberrations that it *demand*s a literary response reflecting the innermost madness of this very situation and the structures ruling it.

Gerald Gaylard (2009) acknowledges Veit-Wild's scholarly effort by suggesting *Writing Madness* is timely and original and would make a significant contribution to a budding postcolonial critical psychology. He stresses that *Writing Madness* has "helped to open up a new and fascinating angle of investigation" (2009:179).

It is this approach that I pursue in this thesis, but whereas Veit-Wild's recent compilation provides a broad and general African view of "madness", I narrow the boundaries to provide an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon as characterised in Zimbabwe's postcolonial literature in English. My focus in this research is to augment the scanty critical scholarship on "madness" in the African literary arena by probing the representations of the trope in the fiction of selected authors. The texts to be studied are Shimmer Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* (2005), Mashingaidze Gomo's *A Fine Madness* (2010), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The*

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<sup>3</sup>Veit-Wild's study mainly focuses on southern African writers (Dambudzo Marechera, Lesogo Rampolokeng, Bessie Head), but also includes authors from francophone Africa (Sony Labou Tansi) and East Africa (Rebeka Njau).

*Book of Not* (2006), Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009) and Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998). This thesis, therefore, provides a valuable contribution to an area of Zimbabwe's fictional landscape in which Marechera's creative work has, so far, taken the centre stage. It offers an elucidation of the varied meanings of "madness" depicted in these authors' literary works.

Lars Bernaerts, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck (2009: 285) state that "[s]tudying madness in fiction can yield insights into the work of a particular author, into the psychology of literary characters, into standards of normality in a certain time and culture, and into creative processes". My literary analysis, then, affords an exposé of these selected authors' understanding and negotiation of the phenomenon as evident in their fiction. It is a scholarly journey in which I utilise their insights and approach the literary texts through some of the lenses they have used in order to draw my own conclusions about the creative elements in their literature in relation to "madness". Significantly, my study proffers an indigenous perspective on the manner in which these authors depict "madness", as not much local critical attention has been devoted to this trope. I have been inspired by the challenge Gaylard (2009: 177) raises in his assertion that Veit-Wild's work shows that "it often takes an outsider to recognise the value of what the locals cannot see under their own noses". In this research I stand, therefore, as a black, female Zimbabwean critic - an insider - to give an extensive literary analysis of the depictions of "madness" in the Zimbabwean postcolonial context. Being an insider gives me the situated knowledge needed for deeper insights into the social, traditional and cultural nuances that these representations may reveal, possibly reducing the danger of misconceptions<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the "indigenous perspective", I will be offering different analytical emphases from Veit-Wild's research, as will emerge later in the chapter breakdown. Pertinently, as literary representations of "madness" that abound in the fictional world are unavoidably gender-specific, in this literary study I listen to the gendered "speech of madness" (Veit-Wild 2006:2) of the selected postcolonial Zimbabwean writers - both male and female - who follow in Marechera's footsteps.

My selection of the authors studied here is deliberate, as I explore the more widely analysed literary texts of writers like Chinodya, Dangarembga and Vera alongside those of the lesser

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<sup>4</sup>Many scholars, such as James Banks (1998), Leila DeAnrade (2000), Bahira Sherif (2001) and Abdi Kusow (2002) have elaborated on the advantages of being an insider when doing research. In particular, Banks (1998:8) suggests that because of the closeness to the community being studied, an insider "endorses the values, perspectives ... and knowledge of his or her community".

known ones, such as Gomo, Chikwava and Gappah. This comparative dimension is significantly designed to capture the notions on “madness” of these writers with different class, gender, philosophical and ideological leanings. Deliberate, too, is the inclusion of diverse literary genres (the novel, the short story, poetic prose narrative and semi-autobiography), that deal with life in Zimbabwe, as well as with the lived experience of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, as I probe why “madness” is such a recurring theme in contemporary Zimbabwean literature, I simultaneously explore the traumatic historical experiences of colonialism that remain a legacy in this independent postcolonial nation.

In Africa<sup>6</sup>, colonialism’s onslaught on the continent’s supposed primitiveness and lack of culture - its “heart of darkness”- has left behind a bequest of historical, religious, emotional and cultural scars on its people. None of these have been more profound than the lacerations to the psyche of black Africans, leaving them traumatised, with some carrying this legacy even in the postcolonial era. According to Achille Mbembe (2001: 102), “[t]he notion ‘post colony’ identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship involves”. It is pertinent to understand, however, that the term “post” here does not suggest a shift beyond colonialism. Postcolonialism is a complex trajectory in history and attempting to regard “post” as “after” does not take into account neocolonialism, which is a new form of domination African nations encountered at the hand of western powers after attaining independence. As Stuart Hall (1996: 246) asserts, the postcolonial era did not bring about a “break where the ‘old relations’ disappear forever and entirely new ones come to replace them ... ‘the colonial’ is not dead, since it lives on in its ‘after effects’”. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1967a:52) poignantly describes the traumatic dimension of colonialism in Africa when he refers to the black man surviving in “a state of

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<sup>5</sup>Mass exodus to the Diaspora - the United Kingdom and South Africa in particular - is a thorny issue in the nation’s postcolonial history as many of the educated elite leave the country in search of greener pastures resulting in a massive “brain drain”.

<sup>6</sup> It is pertinent to note that in this study, I do not treat Africa as a monolithic whole. This misconception of Africa as a homogenous entity, especially in the West, is vividly captured in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2014). In this narrative, the young protagonist, Darling, moves from Zimbabwe to America and she articulates how irritated she becomes when people do not seem to realise that there are many countries in Africa. She describes how the manager at the store where she works “speaks as if Africa is just one country, even though I’ve told him that it is a continent with fifty-some countries, that other than my own country” (Bulawayo 2014:253). I recognise, therefore, that Africa contains diverse traditions and cultures peculiar to the respective countries that make up the continent. I do acknowledge, however, the underlying affinities that exist among the varied cultures of Africa. For a more detailed exploration of these affinities see Polycarp Ikuenobe’s *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions* (2006).

permanent tension”; a state of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996: 61) explains trauma as “a break in the mind’s experience of time”, whereas Lenore Terr (1990: 8) posits that “psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected blow or series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they are quickly incorporated into the mind”. The colonial bequest has culminated in the self debasement and loss of identity on the part of the African people. The resultant acute sense of alienation has led to the “nervous condition(s)” (Fanon 1967a:20) of black people as Dangarembga (1988) so aptly highlights in her novel of the same name. For Fanon, severe psychological trauma ultimately becomes the end product of the violence of colonial oppression. This trauma is experienced at both an individual and collective level and this harrowing colonial historical encounter continues to shape postcolonial identities and contemporary African discourses. Jessica Murray (2009) elaborates on this experience when she states that as an individual’s frame of reference is consumed by individual trauma, the trauma of colonialism dislocates the colonised’s cultural framework, resulting in cultural displacement. There is a sense of disassociation from one’s self or from one’s body that results in what Susan Brison (1999:39) calls an “undoing of self” that involves “a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future”. David Lloyd (2000) reiterates this when he describes how the violent intrusion of trauma causes a feeling of annihilation and objectification such that the psychological effects of trauma can be mapped onto the cultures that suffer colonisation<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Marianne Hirsch (2012:5) describes this personal, collective and cultural trauma that postcolonial subjects experience as “postmemory”, which she explains as a “structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience”. Stephen Clingman (1991: 231) emphasises this when he notes that “the darkness at the heart of the colonial experience may be a certain history of madness”. These arguments all signify that the trauma caused by colonialism ultimately impacts on an individual’s sense of identity. Consequently, the manifestation of “madness” as trauma is a distinguishing feature in my literary analysis.

My study, therefore, shows that the writers under scrutiny here have not confined themselves to the conceptualisation of “madness” simply as mental illness or insanity. They have also taken into account this trauma of blackness as a result of the colonial encounter in their

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter Two, I will further discuss theorists who describe how trauma narratives convey this psychologically damaging effect on an individual, such as Deborah Horvitz (2000); Laurie Vickroy (2002); and Amy Novak (2008).

representations, as my exploration of Gomo's *A Fine Madness* in Chapter Four, Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* in Chapter Six and Vera's fiction in Chapter Seven highlights. Cathy Caruth (1996: 61) explains trauma as "a break in the mind's experience of time", whereas Lenore Terr (1990: 8) posits that "psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected blow or series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they are quickly incorporated into the mind". In addition, this literary research demonstrates that these authors have weaved "madness" into various forms as reflected not only in their characters, but also in the language, form and style of their fiction. This study, therefore, focuses on the numerous strains of "madness" evident in the authors' narratives. The varieties I highlight in this study also include "madness" as it manifests in their literature as psychosis, as schizophrenia, as depression and as contrived "madness", amongst others, all of which are considered as a break from what is real or rational - a transgression. "Madness", therefore, is a complex phenomenon and requires careful definition of its manifestations, which I do below in Section 1.2.

Analyses of these varying manifestations of "madness" take into account the Zimbabwean cultural context and beliefs because, as Susan Sontag (1976: iv-v) stresses, "different societies use different definitions of what constitutes madness (that is, of what does not make sense)". Sylvia Huot (2003:3) suggests that:

... madness and sanity alike are, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder, that the behaviour patterns classified as pathological will be different in different societies, and that concepts of both madness and identity are specific to the culture that produces and polices them.

This is because, as Leslie Swartz (1998) argues, not all human activity is determined by cultural influence. The social and cultural stimuli of a particular society will determine the kind of deviant or irrational behaviour that can be characterised as mad.

The following key questions will, therefore, guide my literary analysis: How do the selected Zimbabwean postcolonial writers depict "madness" in their fiction? To what extent do historical and socio-cultural factors influence their conceptualisation of "madness"? To what extent is feminist writing on "madness" a subversive discourse aimed at overturning a

dominant patriarchal discourse? How does “madness” manifest itself in the writer’s choice of literary style and narrative form?

### 1.2 Defining “Madness”

“Madness” is “seductive, a compelling subject, yet also a dangerous one in its power to consume, as to inspire, to destroy as well as to create, to silence as well as to speak” (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005: 15). Within the historical and psychological realms, critics who have studied the trope (Geekie and Read 2009; Reid 2002; Crawford *et al* 2010) agree that there can be no singular definition or meaning for “madness”, as the phenomenon may be determined differently depending on the socio-cultural and historical context in which it is deemed to occur. It is a relative concept.

Feder (1980:5) defines “madness” as “a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that they control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience that, judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate”. She further argues that the variations of “madness” created in literature often reflect what human society has discovered about it. In *Madness and Modernism*, Louis Sass (1992) describes “madness” as a condition that involves decline or even disappearance of the role of rationality in the organisation of human conduct and experience. Reid (2002:15) emphasises these multiple meanings of the phenomenon:

Across the millennia, the term ‘madness’ has been used with a multiplicity of meanings and implications. The scale of the term ranges from mere anger and rashness to irrationality, intoxication and ecstasy to fantasy and illusion to transcendence, delusion and psychosis. Whether we consider ‘madness’ a physical disease, a brain dysfunction, a deluge of passion, divine intervention, possession, repression or the consequence of environmental stress, consistent in these understandings and aetiologies is the underlying concept that ‘madness’ entails estrangement from reality.

What is evidently common in the definitions above is the implication that “madness” is a deviation from rational reality or from the societal norm; basically, it is something undesirable. I contend, therefore, that “madness”, can be perceived as a vague, non-medical term that has subjective meaning, very distinct from scientifically defined “insanity” or

“mental illness”. As I mentioned earlier, the phenomenon may manifest itself in various forms and, as Reid suggests above, has an array of meanings. Simone Oettli-van Delden (2003:13) clearly explains this dynamic nature of “madness” when she states that:

... the concept, being socially constituted, is continually in the process of reconstruction, and both its manifestations and our understanding of it are subject to constant change. Not only does madness take as many forms as there are people who suffer from it, but the way in which it is perceived will differ according to its cultural, geographical and historical location.

It is not feasible, therefore, to exhaust all the possible meanings of “madness”, but those I discuss below are significant to this thesis.

Pertinently, in this study I envision “madness” as transgression, or the breaking of boundaries<sup>8</sup>. Such an interpretation allows me the scope to pattern its meaning to suit the authors’ diverse conceptualisations, rather than constrict the phenomenon within a psychiatric framework. Mental illness constitutes just one of meanings of “madness”. Crawford *et al* (2010: 19) support such a stance as they believe that “the word madness represents the social, personal and cultural context of the term as signifying a number of different meanings for different people. It is a term that “actively defies ... formal diagnostic classification” (Crawford 2010:19). Geekie and Read (2009: 16) reiterate this approach when they state that:

... by using the term ‘madness’ the experience is wrested from the grip of a select few experts on ‘schizophrenia’ or ‘psychosis’ and portrayed not as a medical condition with an obscure Greek or Latin derived title, but rather as an aspect of the human condition about which we can all have our say.

Moreover, such an open conceptualisation of “madness” becomes significant in my literary analysis as apart from probing the authors’ portrayal of the malfunctions of their characters’ minds, I elucidate how they depict the trope as stressing an individual’s response to environmental influences, allowing for the examination and critique of social, political and cultural values (Oettli-Van Delden 2003) within the characters’ societies. Therefore, the conception of what constitutes “madness” in the various chapters of this study will depend on

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<sup>8</sup> I do acknowledge here, however, that not every act of transgression can be characterised as “madness”.

how particular authors depict the phenomenon in their fiction. In each instance, I will be explicit about how the term is used in addition to the definitions I offer in this introductory chapter.

Within the sociohistorical context of postcolonial Zimbabwe, for example, having emerged from a period under colonialism where “all have an uneasy time in their land ... Everywhere they stand as on hot ashes” (Mutswairo 1974: 66), “madness” can be viewed as a certain kind of *ufuru*, that is, as freedom. In the Preface to *The Search for Identity and Ufuru*, George Kahari (2009: xi) explains *ufuru* as a “pastoral imagery which emanates from the Shona or Zimbabwean idea of both veld and domestic freedom and liberty to graze (*kupfura*) anywhere (*kumafuro*) or to overflow like froth (*furu/furo*) from the limited confinement of the container with relative freedom and liberty, *ufuru*”. Such *ufuru* can lead to “a fine madness” of the kind that Gomo depicts in his literary text of the same name, which I analyse in Chapter Four.

Such latitude in fashioning “madness” as transgression also permits an interpretation of the phenomenon that is dependent on how the selected writers choose to use it as a literary device. The concept can, for example, be used to give rhetorical or dramatic effect to the story, to make a plot more exciting, or to reveal certain qualities in various characters and the reaction of other characters to those afflicted. Downie (2005: 62) elaborates on this: “... as a device, the use of madness can be more or less successful in a plot, and it can also serve to symbolise extreme aspects of human nature, or more crudely, to trigger emotions such as fear”.

In addition, “madness” may play a symbolic role and can be used thematically with certain social, political or cultural connotations, as this study makes evident in Chapter Six in the interrogation of Gappah’s short stories. These overtones may even be subversive, as the analysis of Vera’s literary texts in Chapter Seven reveals. Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (2005:6) state that:

Writers as diverse as Shakespeare, Blake, Elliot and Mann employ the image of fragmentation of the mind to reflect the disease or degeneration of society, while the figure of the hysteric ‘madwoman in the attic’ common in nineteenth-century writing offers a different kind of emblem of repressive cultural assumptions and gender stereotypes.

The analysis of the protagonist's schizophrenic behaviour in *Chairman of Fools* in Chapter Three makes "madness" as a mental illness a significant element of this study, especially as concerns the relationship between "madness" and creativity. This nexus is largely influenced by the cognitive characteristics of a person's personality and psychopathology.

Psychoanalytic assumptions, therefore, have some influence on the way that schizophrenia is defined. Sass and Louis (2000-2001:1) regard schizophrenia as "a 'primitive' disorder involving fixation at or regression to early instinct- and affect-dominated modes of experience that are relatively devoid of the capacity for self-consciousness or of a sense of differentiation between self and world".

Nineteenth Century French psychiatrists Ferrus Esquirol and Calmeil Bayle were the first to describe mental illness scientifically as a physical disease of the brain (Roberts 2001a). They believed that it is a natural sickness of the mind caused by faulty brain chemistry or structure. Psychosis, for example, is considered an illness which disrupts the normal functioning of the brain, such as that experienced in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. David Laing (1965: 2) describes psychosis as "a social or biological failure of adjustment, or mal-adaptation of a particularly radical kind, of loss of contact with reality, of lack of insight". This mental disease has symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, and disorganised thought, speech or behaviour of the kind that Farai suffers in *Chairman of Fools* (Chapter Three) and that Emily experiences in Gappah's short story "The Annexe Shuffle", as Chapter Six shows.

In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga handles depression as a psychological malady that the protagonist, Tambu goes through in her attempt to deal with life and the events that occur around her at a period in time that the country is moving away from the shackles of colonialism towards independence, as I reveal in Chapter Six<sup>9</sup>. German Berrios (1995:386) defines depression as "the lowness of spirits of persons suffering under disease ... a reduction in general activity ranging from minor failure in concentration to total paralysis". Clinical depression is an emotional, physical or cognitive state that is intense and long-lasting; it is a mood affective disorder that manifests in many ways (Barlow and Durland 1999). In the title of the second chapter of her book *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience* Jane Ussher (2011:15) describes depression as "[t]he daughter of hysteria". It is a mental pain that is

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<sup>9</sup> Depression literally means "a lowering".

“inexpressibly dreadful” (Ingram 2005:88). Ussher (2011: 50) goes on to suggest that depression is “very much a Western cultural concept ... and many so called symptoms of western depression are not expressed, or positioned as signs of distress, in many non-Western contexts”. Bearing this assertion in mind, I investigate how Dangarembga explores this so-called “Western” malady in *The Book of Not*.

Since the Seventeenth Century in England, hysteria has been commonly described as a “female malady” and was long believed to be a physical disorder that affects the mind (Showalter 1985b). However, Ussher (2011) explains how Thomas Sydenham was the first to recognise hysteria as symptomatic of a disorder of the mind that is articulated through the body. In the Introduction to *Readings of Trauma, Madness and the Body*, Anderson (2012: 168) views trauma as “a reaction to events so terrible, so painful, that victims cannot properly understand or incorporate the events into their normal existence”. She believes that the body speaks through its hysterical manifestations, “[t]rauma, is expressed through the reactions of the hysterical body (in the form of outbursts, screaming, laughing, crying) telling its tale of psychic wounding” (Anderson 2012: 168). In other words, hysteria is seen as a form of protest that can result from trauma. Kathryn Robson (2004:54) elaborates on this importance of the female body as an instrument that gives voice to psychological wounds when she suggests the need to “rethink the positioning of the female body and the female subject within psychoanalytic narratives of trauma and hysteria”. In such instances, “madness” in women culminates to a point where “the troubled mind speaks through the body and thus transforms the body into a text” (Robson 2004:131). In Chapter Seven of this study, therefore, I reveal the mental pain and fragmentation, the certain kind of “madness” that Vera’s protagonists experience a result of differing traumas.

Taking into account the varying definitions of “madness” that I have given here, I will conclude with Jane Ussher’s (1992:246) words that the phenomenon “may take many forms, have many roots, be manifested through a myriad of assumptions, be given different names”. Her words almost provide an umbrella delineation of the different conceptualisations of “madness” that I have highlighted above.

### **1.3 Philosophical Insights Harnessed**

An interdisciplinary approach will be used with the adoption, where necessary, of theories that may help in the better understanding of the representations of “madness” in the selected

texts, such as Fanon's postcolonial theory in the analysis of Gomo's *A Fine Madness*. Simon Gikandi suggests that postcolonial theory is "one way of recognising how decolonised situations are marked by the trace of the imperial pasts they try to disavow" (1996:15). In this study, I will concentrate on postcolonialism as it relates "both to a condition (here postcoloniality) and to the discourse which theorises that condition" (Rice and Waugh 2001:360). Feminist theories on the female body's subversive potential will be explored in the study of Vera's texts, as it highlights how women use their bodies as a site of resistance against patriarchal oppression (Simone de Beauvoir 1974; Kate Millet 1977; Judith Butler 1990; Ketu Katrak 1992; Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewksi 2005).

However, the main theoretical framework that will guide this study will be a fusion of existentialism and psychoanalytic theory, that is, existential psychoanalysis. My literary study will draw on insights from this philosophy as I adopt an existential psychoanalytic stance in order to bring in an innovative dimension to the conceptualisation of "madness" in selected postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. Additionally, such a stance will allow for the theorising on the condition of the colonial and postcolonial subject under study.

Existentialism is a theory in which humanity is the central ethical value. Existential thought contradicts the common philosophical argument that the world is one great, rational and comprehensible system of matter and ideas. It believes that there is no rational pattern that prescribes human values and commitments. Jonathan Webber (2009:4) describes the central themes of existentialism as including "the reliability of our everyday views of ourselves and other people, the relation between objective facts and subjective experience, the significance of the temporality and mortality of life, the basic nature of relationships between people, and the role of society in the structure of the individual".

Existentialism is, therefore, a perspective concerned with finding a meaning to human existence that is not preordained, stressing the fact that it is the individual who must find or create meaning for his or her self. Central to existential thought are the 1940s and 1950s theoretical works and other writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. Within this philosophy, of particular interest to this study will be Laing's theory of the divided self, that is, of the relationship between a person's real self and his/her false self - the split psyche - as well as his/her experience of the world. Such an existential framework is important in my analysis of "madness", particularly in Chinodya's *Chairman of*

*Fools*, Chikwava's *Harare North* as the "mad things said and done by a schizophrenic will remain essentially a closed book if one does not understand their existential context" (Laing 1990: 17). Important, too, is his theory of ontological security which posits that a person encounters life in its entirety (socially, ethnically, spiritually and biologically) from "a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality" (Laing 1965:3). An ontologically insecure person possesses a security threshold that is low (Laing 1965) as is evident in *Chairman of Fools*, *The Book of Not* and *Harare North* as this study shows. Laing (1965) pointedly stresses, however, that ontological insecurity is not synonymous with insanity. My study reveals, however, that combined with trauma, ontological insecurity can deescalate into mental instability, as Chapter Five reveals.

Psychoanalysis is rooted in psychoanalytic theory, the medical technique Sigmund Freud developed in 1900, which focuses on unconscious mechanisms and their relationship with consciousness. In later years, Freud connected psychoanalysis to the study of literature, thus giving birth to a school of psychoanalytic literary criticism. Robert Mollinger (1981: 31) defines psychoanalysis as "a theory of the mind that can serve as an explanatory model for literature". In the abstract to her doctoral thesis entitled "Screams Somehow Echoing: Trauma and Testimony in Anglophone African Literature" which juxtaposes postcolonial and trauma studies in the analysis of the literary representations of colonial violence, Michelle Brown (2008: iv) suggests that psychoanalysis fruitfully represents post-independence literature as "testimony representing the trauma of colonial occupation". Therefore, as a postcolonial critique, psychoanalysis can be used to focus on the content of the literary texts and the psychology of the authors' characters, as well as to "engage with the form and structure of texts, seeking how literature itself is exemplary of psychic structures" (Hook 2008: 272). Other renowned proponents of this theory include Jacques Lacan, Shoshana Felman and Jane Gallop. In the colonial and postcolonial African contexts, Clare Counihan (2007: 1) states that:

... psychoanalysis permeates the practice of theorising the condition of the colonial and postcolonial subject: the subject's formation or that failure, his response to the daily pressures and constraints of the colonial milieu, his twisting and turning efforts to run either towards or away from the temptations of colonial acquiescence emerge in and through a psychoanalytic discourse of identity and identification.

Within this psychoanalytic school of thought, the trauma theory is significant to this study as in literature the manifestations of trauma is often portrayed as “madness”. Caruth (1995:5) states that “[t]o be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event”. Her conceptualisation of trauma is modelled on Freud’s notion of “deferred action” and the image or event’s non-linear relationship to the past. Caruth (1995) elaborates that the traumatised signify the history that they cannot entirely possess. This articulation of the crisis of the historical experience is reflected in some of the literary texts I examine, as for example, in Vera’s *Without a Name*, Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*, Gomo’s *A Fine Madness* and Chikwava’s *Harare North*. However, in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds*, Stef Craps (2013:9) cautions that non-Western populations should be acknowledged outside of the hegemonic framework of a dominant Eurocentric trauma aesthetic as it developed out of “an engagement with Holocaust testimony, literature, and history”. He goes on to state that “if trauma theory is to adhere to its ethical aspirations, the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition” (Craps 2013:13). What this suggests is a “breaking with Eurocentrism” in order to broaden the focus of the trauma theory so that non-western and minority groups are recognised “on their own terms” (Craps 2013:19). I take into consideration this criticism of the trauma theory as I analyse the texts in this study.

Furthermore, a psychological approach to studying postcolonial Zimbabwean literature is crucial because of two particular mental disorders that human beings can experience in such a context, that is, neurosis and psychosis. Neurosis - either obsessive, phobic or hysterical - is usually the result of internal conflict within the individual characters as the ego defensively shuts out the intrusion of desire. With psychosis, the ego is controlled by the unconscious resulting in paranoia or schizophrenia, in which the self is virtually subsumed.

The basis of blending existentialism and psychoanalytic theory lies in the fact that whereas existentialism looks for meaning within the world, psychoanalysis is more concerned with what goes on within the mind of the individual and is pertinent when exploring the traumatic unconscious conflicts of the psyche. Although the individual is part of the world, psychoanalysis is more concerned with the individual’s internal search for meaning within the larger context through, for example, the choices he or she makes, his or her pursuits and what he or she desires. In other words, all knowledge is determined by an individual’s personal experience. Existential psychoanalysis is, therefore, an appropriate framework here

as it is pertinent to the understanding of the “madness” that manifests in the literary texts under study, especially as it illuminates the psychological impact of the characters’ relationship with the world around them. The application of a combination of the existential and psychoanalytic principles in this study, therefore, ensures effective analyses of the writers’ representations of “madness”, of the operations of characters’ psyches, and of the creative processes within the literary texts. It also helps the reader have a better understanding of these.

#### **1.4 Literary Criticism Strategies**

The research is analytic in nature and a qualitative approach to this study is, therefore, adopted because of its emphasis on meaning, meaning as perceived by the characters involved and their perspectives of the situations, other characters or events around them. Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (1984) state that qualitative research explores the richness, depth and complexity of phenomena, allowing the researcher to step into the shoes of the individuals or literary characters being analysed. It is a subjective approach in which the researcher’s perceptions and philosophies can play an influential role.

This study represents a critical analysis of the literary narratives of selected postcolonial writers in Zimbabwe. A narrative is any text or discourse used in qualitative research whose specific focus is on the stories told by individuals (Donald Polkinghorne 1995). Barbara Czarniawska (2004:17) defines a narrative as “a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected”. Pauline Chinn (2002:305) further states that “[n]arratives reflect cultural scripts and thus are a way for individuals to understand themselves both as individuals (self-identity) and as members of social groups (social identity)”. In this study, therefore, I attend to both the personal and social conditions of the characters as represented in the selected literary works. Personal conditions refer to the “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Chinn 2002:305), whereas the social conditions encompass the circumstances under which people’s experiences and events unfold, that is, the cultural, social and linguistic narratives.

Gramaglia (2008: 8) asserts that, “[i]n some cases, the literary representation of ‘madness’ mirrors the author’s inner displacement and anxieties, or even contributes to a process of self-therapy; in others, the symbolism of ‘madness’ is adopted to convey a wider sense of historical or existential fragmentation that extends beyond individual experience”. I,

therefore, analyse the racial, political, social, sexual and emotional pressures that result in “madness” as depicted in the literary works being studied. By “listening to the speech of madness in the literary text” (Felman 1985:17), I explore the concerns and techniques that represent a transgression and introduce the element of risk and instability (Veit-Wild 2006). This means that the style and form of the narratives is as of much concern to me as the content. Significantly, the study concentrates on the issues of “madness” while taking into consideration the historical and social relativity of the phenomenon within the Zimbabwean cultural context.

### **1.5 Chapter Delineation**

The introduction has provided an overview of the study by giving the background, identifying the research questions, as well as justifying the need for the study. It has outlined the literary criticism strategy used and given an indication of the theoretical framework that underpins this work.

Chapter Two, which comprises the theoretical background and framework of this study, gives an extensive review of literature that is significant to a better understanding of the conceptualisation of “madness” by the selected authors in this study. It provides an overview of the history of “madness”, as well as of the relationship of “madness” to literature, colonialism and creativity. The chapter also explores the connection between women and “madness”, as well as black Zimbabwean’s traditional beliefs on mental illness. Significant, too, in this chapter is the representations of “madness” in literature outside of Zimbabwe, that is, within Africa, in order to place Zimbabwean literary representations of “madness” in its larger continental context.

Chapter Three, entitled “The Centre Cannot Hold: Paranoiac displacement in Shimmer Chinodya’s *Chairman of Fools*”, gives a critical analysis of Chinodya’s literary work which shows us a male intellectual who is driven to the edge of “madness” in a manner and style that seems to follow in the Marechera “tradition”. The main character, Farai, is an unconventional hero who leads a “phoney, artsy life” (Chinodya 2005:1) and whose search for rediscovery and restoration lands him in a psychiatric ward. A pertinent question to be explored in this chapter is “[w]hether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence - whether much that is glorious - whether all that is profound - does not spring from disease of thought -

from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect” (Poe, cited in Galloway 1986: 243) in an attempt to reveal the association between creativity, intellect and “madness”.

In Chapter Four, “Liberating ‘Madness’ in the Anti-Imperialist Discourse of Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*”, I analyse the “mad” narrative voice of Gomo’s afro-radical stance, which exposes the reader to the lived experiences of a war in the DRC in which Africa and depicts Africa as a perpetual victim of imperialism. It explores how this poetic narrative depicts the colonial “head of darkness” legacy that continues to grip postcolonial Africa, of which Zimbabwe is a metaphor, ensuring that Africans remain the “wretched of the earth”. Gomo’s literary text represents a masculine discourse of “madness” as he shows us the scarred African identities that live on in the postcolonial period.

“The Wretched of the Diaspora: Traumatic dislocation in Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North*” is the heading of the fifth chapter, whose main purpose is to trace the unnamed protagonist’s trek to the edge of insanity as he battles to deal with immigrant life in metropolitan London in this dark comedy. The chapter reveals that he is a refugee who is confused, alienated and frightening in his attempt to cope with life in the Diaspora, an experience that is affected both by the harsh demands of such a life, as well as by the baggage of his past as a “Green Bomber” in Zimbabwe. With the aid of Laing’s theory of the divided self, the chapter, therefore, critically analyse this nameless narrator’s capricious behaviour and insane thought patterns that result from the psychological pressures that he undergoes in *Harare North* and which leave his mind “out of gear”. Particular attention is paid to the linguistic form and style that pervade Chikwava’s contentious literary text, in an attempt to determine whether or not it is - in the words of the renowned journalist and critic Ikhude Ikheloa (2012) - “an unfortunate book”.

Chapter Six, “Postcolonial ‘Nervous Conditions’ in Petina Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* marks the shift away from masculine discourses on “madness” to feminine ones. This feminist viewpoint is meant to give an insight into the historical and social experience of women in a postcolonial Zimbabwean society.

Concentration here is how these female authors depict the conjunction between women and “madness” in an African context. The chapter begins by probing the representations of the social and psychotic “madness” evident in Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly*. It shows how social, political and psychological and cultural factors all contribute to the different textures

of “madness” that she highlights in her short stories. The chapter proceeds to analyse the sequel to Dangarembga’s famous *Nervous Conditions*, a narrative that has a more political thrust than its predecessor as it traces the country’s transformation from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. It reveals how “madness” manifests itself not only in the mild depression the psychologically wrecked main character, Tambu, goes through, but also in the discrimination, mental losses and insane killings that the nation suffers as it moves from one state into another.

Chapter Seven, entitled “Body on the Frontline: Subversive discourses of “madness” in Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*” delineates the relationship between Zimbabwe women’s writings and the struggle for a postcolonial female identity. In such a framework, the chapter explores Vera’s feminist subversive discourse of “madness” in her literary texts, which depict her female characters’ lived experiences within a colonial and patriarchal African society. The chapter illuminates how both her female protagonists in *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name* use their bodies as battlefields against patriarchal domination, as they fight for control over them.

The conclusion highlights the different conceptualisations of “madness” by the authors studied, outlining any similarities and comparing the differences of their approaches. Based on the outcomes of this study, a recommendation is made on possible future research that can be done in relation to “madness”.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the background to the study, outlined the key research questions, as well as given a clear indication of the justification for it. It has given various definitions of “madness”, showing the varied meanings that can be applied to the phenomenon. In addition, the chapter has stated the problem and supplied the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Furthermore, the chapter has highlighted the literary criticism strategy used in this literary research. The organisation of the study has been outlined through a delineation of the various chapters. This demarcation has shown what is emphasised in each of the chapters, especially as regards the different authors’ conceptualisation of “madness” as represented in their respective literary texts. This delineation has also incorporated the concluding chapter, which will highlight the conclusions drawn from this study. In the next chapter, I proceed to provide an overview of scholarly literature and debates that relate to the theme of “madness”.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an extensive review of literature that gives a fundamental background to the study of the theme of “madness” in the postcolonial Zimbabwean literary context. My aim here is to situate this research in the larger bodies of relevant scholarship and to demonstrate how this study takes forward existing academic debates. I begin with the history of “madness”, an important starting point into understanding how western society has dealt with mental illness and those afflicted by it in the past. I also briefly outline Michel Foucault’s explanation of the relationship between “madness” and reason. Foucault’s argument is pertinent to this study as he reveals how historically, “madness” has always been regarded as the “other” of reason and is, therefore, a complex human phenomenon.

I then go on to discuss “madness” within the colonial context, as the colonial legacy has had a profound effect on the psyche of African people as reflected in the literature of this era<sup>10</sup>. Postcolonial thinkers, such as Fanon and Bhabha, have provided psychoanalytic theories on the psychological repercussions of this colonial encounter on the black African and I explore these in this chapter. Since “madness” is a global phenomenon, this chapter considers how this theme has been dealt with within the African, as well as the global context. An insight into how “madness” manifests in the societies and literatures across the globe significantly allows for an examination of the differences and similarities in how it is perceived in both. Furthermore, such cognisance enables me to highlight the peculiarities in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon within a postcolonial Zimbabwean context. This chapter also gives an overview on the critical scholarship that exists on “madness” in African literature and on the development of literary criticism on the trope within Zimbabwe. Such a synopsis will help me situate how selected postcolonial Zimbabwean authors handle the theme. Doing so means taking into account traditional and cultural beliefs in relation to

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<sup>10</sup> I recognise that there is no homogenous colonial context. All manifestations and experiences of colonialism are always embedded in specific temporal and spatial contexts. Colonial oppression and domination differed depending on the policies of the imperial powers. The different types of colonialism practised included direct, rule, indirect rule and settler rule. In this study, I deal with the settler type of colonialism that was primarily evident in southern African countries in which the Europeans settled permanently in these countries and imposed direct rule over the colonised subjects.

“madness” of the two major ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, the Shona and Ndebele<sup>11</sup>. I proceed to review some of the literature that highlights the interconnectedness between “madness” and creativity. No study of the “madness” phenomenon would be complete without a consideration of gender and consequently this chapter examines literature that deals with the question of gender in relation to it. Finally, Veit-Wild (2006: 4) states that:

Mad writing cannot be anything but violent writing. The traumas, the derangement and suffering that political and mental colonisation have engendered in the colonised subject have brought about literary texts that are cries of anguish, of rage, and more often than not, of violent obscenity.

As currently mad writing seems almost always to reflect modernist and postmodernist techniques, I end this chapter with a brief exploration of how Zimbabwean postcolonial writers use these narrative styles in both the form and language of their writings to represent “madness”.

## **2.2 History of “Madness”**

In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Michel Foucault’s discourse suggests that the history of “madness” has been the history of the “other”. His scrutiny of “madness” relationship to reason asserts that “madness” is reason’s absolute limit. He suggests that human beings institutionalise or confine “madness” because it represents a disruption of social order, something to be ashamed of, or feared, and hence the need to incarcerate the “other”. In this sense, “madness” is seen as a social, rather than a biological evil. This fact is amply illustrated in Ama Ata Aidoo’s play *Anowa* when, after the main female protagonist by the same name goes mad, the Old Man categorically states that:

And yet no one goes mad in emptiness, unless he has a disease already in his head from the womb. No, it is men who make men mad. Who knows if Anowa would have been a better woman, a better person if we had not been what we are. (1965: 124)

Like Foucault, Aidoo seems to suggest here that “madness” is indeed a social construct determined by the society in which it exists. The gendered language she uses implies that within a patriarchal society, men, as the dominant sex, are accountable for the social and

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<sup>11</sup> The Shona, one of the largest communal-cultural groups in Zimbabwe, constitutes approximately 75% of the population of Zimbabwe (Viriri and Mungwini 2009: 180). The Ndebele account for an estimated 15%.

cultural space in which “madness” manifests itself. Foucault identifies a paradoxical relationship between “madness” and reason, stating that the madman “although devoid of sense, he has more common sense and reasons less awry than those who have all their wits” (1961: 210). Foucault here seems to suggest that although “madness” is the negation of reason, there is a visible logic to the disorder, but it becomes dazzled reason as the discourse of “madness” is constricted by the ordered structure of language. This is evident in my analyses of Gomo’s *A Fine Madness* in Chapter Four and Chikwava’s *Harare North* in Chapter Five reveal how these authors transgress conventional language structures in their fiction in order to push forward their “madness” discourse.

Foucault (1961) further illustrates that the experience of “madness” is one determined by society. In *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel (2001:41) asserts that “[a]ll living things contain a measure of madness that moves them in strange, sometimes inexplicable ways. This madness can be saving; it is part and parcel of the ability to adapt. Without it, no species would survive”. Martel’s assertion suggests that it is the strangeness of this “madness” that can, for example, make one question the state of being, or upset the norm of the society in which one survives. It is what makes the unimaginable come to life. A case in point is Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech<sup>12</sup> in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, whose freedom rhetoric culminated in a free and equal society on the American continent. The significance of Foucault’s “madness” discourse in this study is evident in Chapter Seven, for example, which illustrates how the female protagonists question their roles within their societies. In the next section, then, I proceed to consider how the social, cultural and economic structures of colonialism on the African landscape have triggered a “measure of madness”.

### **2.3 “Madness” and Colonialism**

In order to be able to adequately explore the relationship between “madness” and colonialism as represented in African literature, I would like to briefly discuss the debate continuously stirring the African literary arena over the use of the language of the former colonial masters in creative writing. From one side of the debate, Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2009:65) decries the fact that African languages “remain invisible, literary wise, buried alive

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<sup>12</sup> The “reach and resonance” of this speech made the Federal Bureau of Investigations mark Martin Luther King as “the most dangerous negro of the future of this nation” (Young 2013).

under the weight of European languages". The whole debate is reflected in the questions Ngugi (1981: 6) asks:

What is African Literature? ... Was it literature about Africa or about the African Experience? Was it literature written by Africans? What about a non-African who wrote about Africa: did his work qualify as African literature? What if an African set his work in Greenland: did that qualify as African literature? Or were African languages the criteria? But, what about Arabic, was it not foreign to Africa? What about French and English, which had become African languages? What if a European wrote about Europe in an African language?

Ngugi's questions resurrect Obiajunwa Wali's (1963) earlier argument that the only true African literature is that written in indigenous languages. Wali (1963:11) postulates "the whole uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing, is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture". Ibekwe Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jamie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (1983) support such a stance, and assert that use of European languages in African Literature perpetuates neo-colonialism. Other African critics and writers, however, view the whole language debate differently. Achebe (1975: 62), for example, believes that "for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it". Peter Vakunta (2010: 77) asserts that "Achebe's commitment to the promotion of a Nigerian identity in his Europhone novels lends credence to the fundamental truth that African literature need not be written in African languages in order to convey an African message". Here in Zimbabwe, Chinodya remarks that he is not apologetic for using the English medium because:

[f]or me, the English Language imposed itself upon me, and it is now for me to impose upon English Language my thought process, my vision of existence, my values, my beliefs when using this language ... for me the language problem is not a problem, it is an act of hybridisation. (Gagiano 2010)

For the purposes of this study, I align myself to Vakunta's (2010) argument that in essence, what matters is that African writers take on the responsibility to promote their perceived image of Africa using whatever tools are at their disposal. What this means is that even creative writing in European languages can be perceived as African Literature, so long as it promotes an African agenda. Some African writers have, however, proceeded to bastardise

the former languages of the colonial masters, in the manner Gomo and Chikwava do as I highlight within my analyses of their literary texts in Chapter Four and Five, respectively.

In African history, colonisation has had a devastating effect on the African people, leaving them in a condition best described by Fanon (1967a: 210) when he states that “[c]olonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it”. The cultural alienation that results is so traumatising such that otherness, exile and marginalisation have been states of being that many African people have suffered. Therefore, themes that dominate African literature in general, and Zimbabwean postcolonial fiction in particular, have to do with cultural alienation - “a phenomenon which mainly concerns a small class of well educated people, the ones who have maintained recurrent contacts with the European Other” (Baaz 2001:12). These themes also include anti-colonialism and decolonisation, processes which Fanon (1967a) describes as a part of the African’s struggle to be identified as a sovereign human being; they also signify the fight for national liberation, and which Gomo calls for in *A Fine Madness*, as Chapter Four highlights. African authors have tended to stick to what Flora Veit-Wild (2006:2) describes as “predictable and unambiguous” writing styles and themes, with many having adopted a realist stance in the portrayal of this colonial bequest<sup>13</sup>.

In “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” (Fanon 1967a), Fanon reveals through the cases that he examines how colonisation is responsible for the various psychological complaints by some of his patients who were colonial subjects. In *Black Skin White Masks* (1967b) he goes on to assert that the effects of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised have created a “massive psycho existential complex”. Fanon begins Chapter Five with the words “‘Dirty nigger!’ Or simply, ‘Look, a Negro!’” (1967b:109) signifying the objectification, through this racial slur, of the black people as the “other”<sup>14</sup>. This marginalisation strips them of subjectivity, making them conscious of merely being objects ‘in the midst of other objects’ (Fanon 1967b:109). This results in a double consciousness, a psychological splitting of the psyche and internalisation of oppression and racism.

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<sup>13</sup> Some notable exceptions, amongst others, include for example, Dambudzo Marechera (*The House of Hunger*, 1978), Vera (*Without a Name*, 1994) and Ayi Kwei Armah (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, 1968) whose texts exhibit much more experimental writing styles.

<sup>14</sup> Besides Fanon, preoccupation with the “other” has always been a great concern of many other African critics, such as, Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) and Homi Bhabha in “Of Mimicry and Man” (*The Location of Culture*, 1994) among others.

This collective neurosis, split personality and mental disintegration still prevail in the postcolonial era in Africa where there is “a continuation of the political and mental repression that had begun with colonialism” (Veit-Wild 2006:93). In this study, I explore how this repression can manifest itself as a certain kind of “madness” and validate Clingman’s (1991) assertion that fiction reveals how the trope is inevitably linked to the history of colonialism. It is, as I argue in Chapter Six in my analysis of *The Book of Not*, an inevitable result of the social relations that exist under such an oppressive, patriarchal society and extends even into the postcolonial period. This is profoundly illustrated in Peter Abrahams’ *The Path of Thunder* (1948), which Clingman (1991:237) describes as a text that shows “what it means for those who have to struggle back from the netherland of an unacknowledged identity”. It reverberates in Robert Muponde’s short story “Touched” in *No More Plastic Balls* (2000), which highlights the consequences of such a repressed history. Elijah, the main character, is a failed revolutionary who lacks originality and whose numerous “visions” leave him “impotent and depersonalised” as he adopts many differing personalities. And as Muponde’s text suggests, is not “madness” the ultimate outcome if one cannot reclaim one’s identity, one’s subjectivity?

Veit-Wild (2006: 54) emphasises that “the borderline experience of living in two worlds - of being ‘on the edge’ - opened sensitive minds to a new dimension of perception and lucidity and is at the base of many of the finest examples of African literature”. A significant example of such is the “mad genius” Marechera, a prolific and provocative writer in whose footsteps many postcolonial Zimbabwean writers attempt to follow, as I discuss in greater detail in section 2.12 below. At this point, I will go on to give insight into the relationship that exists between literature and “madness”, since studying the former can provide a better understanding of the latter as this research highlights.

#### **2.4 Literature and “Madness”**

In *Writing and Madness* Felman (2003: 15) believes that “the madness silenced by society is given voice by literature” because, she continues, “literature and madness are informed by each other ... precisely linked by what attempts to shut them out” (Felman 2003:16). This means that in any society, there is a close relationship between literature and “madness”, since literature influences the way in which people view and describe “madness” and “madness”, in turn, can affect literature. Literature pervades culture and offers representations

of different aspects of the human experience, providing us with a better understanding of ourselves, our existence and, therefore, of “madness”, which also can shape this reality. Therefore, when studying representations of “madness” in fiction, the most pertinent question becomes: What constitutes “madness”? As previously mentioned, there cannot be a single definition of “madness” because conceptions of its meaning differ according to the historical, cultural, literary and even individual context in which it is being defined. . Allan Thiher (1999) believes that literary representations of “madness” often reflect different cultural assumptions. In *Madness in Literature*, however, Feder (1980: xi-xii) suggests that:

The connection among all these [forms of madness] is a concern - however primitive or sophisticated - with mind, with deviation of some norm or thought and feeling, whether as a threat, a challenge or a field of exploration which must yield revelation.

Branimir Rieger in the Introduction to *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness* (1994:9) emphasises the relationship between literature and psychology when he states that the two are “complementary differences, for each contributes to an understanding of personality. Therefore, studying the specialised topic of ‘madness in literature’ might actually contribute to our knowledge of human behaviour”. In relation to trauma, one of the manifestations of “madness” I highlight in this study, Caruth (1995:18) stresses the connection between psychoanalysis and literature when she states:

[i]f Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

What Caruth implies here is that at the moment at which the traumatic event occurs the individual does not assimilate it, that is, it is not known. It is in the telling or retelling of the traumatic experience through literature that it can, in fact, become acknowledged, become felt. Jessica Murray (2008:1) clarifies this point in her assertion that “[t]he nature of trauma complicates the articulation of traumatic experience, and fiction opens up possibilities for overcoming the representational difficulties posed by trauma”. Rieger (1994:9) goes on to

elaborate that “we often repress our mad or wilder sides in reaction to the pressures of society or pretend to be saner than we are. Literature clarifies many of these situations and provides insight into understanding ourselves and others”. Felman (2003:15) asserts that literature is the space where reason and “madness” meet, suggesting the interplay of literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis: “throughout our cultural history, the madness that has been socially, politically and philosophically repressed has nonetheless made itself heard, has survived as a speaking subject only in and through literary texts”. I strengthen this argument in this study by showing how “madness” is given voice in and through literature in the selected Zimbabwean postcolonial texts that have hitherto not been explored together in this way.

Murray (2009b:17) suggests that “[m]adness seems to have its own spectrum of colour, with shades and gradations discernable in one eye that seem different to another”. This supports the claim I made earlier that a definition of “madness” depends on who is defining it and the socio-historical and cultural context in which it is being determined. In support of the latter, Duncan Salkeld (2004:2) argues for the need to “focus on the materiality of its form and the contexts in which it occurs”. This suggests that when studying “madness”, one must take into consideration the historical specificity in which the “madness” occurs. This consideration is a crucial aspect of this study, especially as it pertains to the colonial and postcolonial experiences of trauma. This does not, in any way, mean that the representations of the internal life of the characters I study are not important. I look into all the dynamics - socio-historical, cultural, ideological and psychological - that come into play as I analyse “madness” in the selected literary texts. Salkeld (2004:3) continues by suggesting that “the body” was “the space or text wherein the madness was prescribed and represented”. This is a critical assumption in relation to my analysis of the body politics of the female protagonists in Chapter Seven of this study.

“Madness”, therefore, can be said to serve two main functions in literature:

Firstly, there is the kind of story where madness is used as a kind of device, a rhetorical or dramatic motif – madness as acting as a kind of vehicle for entertainment. Secondly, there are texts where the theme of madness may have been adopted with provocative, informative and/or politically minded motives. In this kind of work the author actively seeks to engage with, and at times subvert, the dominant

cultural, social, and media-perpetuated public construction of madness. (Baker et al 2010:5)

In the African context, despite the limited critical attention afforded to this trope, “madness” as a theme is dominant in the continent’s literature, as I mentioned in the Introduction, with both male and female authors addressing it. It has been explored from as early as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which Clingman (1991:234) asserts that “the theme of madness is linked to an ambiguity at the core of colonial history”, suggesting that literary representations of “madness” in the African novel are fundamentally rooted in the traumatic experiences of colonialism and racism. I argue, then, that literature is a crucial vehicle for the exploration of “madness” as it manifests as postcolonial trauma. Petar Ramadanovic (2001:2) highlights this when he asserts:

What makes literature into the privileged...site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or...in order to be witnessed.

Even renowned African writers have explored “madness” as a theme, such as Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In the latter novel, the protagonist, Okonkwo - a man consumed by an excessive fear of failure - commits suicide, leaving the villagers shocked at this abnormal act. In the same novel, the chief priest’s mind snaps when he hears about Obika’s death, a development that results from the combination of an internal psychological warfare and his fight against all those around him, including the colonial administration. Similarly, in Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother* (1972), the genius Amuma’s disillusionment in the future triggers insanity. In Southern Africa, novels by Bessie Head (*A Question of Power* 1974), Nadine Gordimer (*July’s People* 1981), Doris Lessing (*The Grass is Singing* 1950) Hove (*Bones* 1997) and Marechera (*House of Hunger* 1978; *Black Sunlight* 1980; and *Black Insider* 1990) are just a few of the literary texts which deal with “madness” to some degree.

Augustine Asaah (2006: 5002) explains that the “thematization of insanity”<sup>15</sup> in African writing of English and French expression can be appreciated from four angles: real madness, megalomania, cultural alienation, and desemanticised madness”. For Asaah, real “madness” is the clinically diagnosed degeneration of the mind. This is reflected, for example, in the mental disorder Aboti suffers in Armah’s *This Earth, My Brother* as the prospects of a bleak future trigger his descent into insanity. Megalomania, the belief that you are powerful and more important than you really are, is depicted in Wole Soyinka’s (1971) *Madmen and Specialists*. Towards the end of the play, one of the leaders, Dr. Bero, actually begins to think he is God. His father, the Old Man, parodies Bero’s illusions to deity when he says, “you cyst, you cyst, you splint in the arrow of arrogance ... oh how dare you raise your hindquarters you dog of dogma and cast the scent of your existence on the lamppost of Destiny” (Soyinka 1974:275). Cultural alienation’s contribution to “madness” is effectively illustrated in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* where Nyasha feels smothered by the people and cultural practices around her. Ma’Shingayi, one of the characters in the novel, believes Nyasha’s “madness” is a result of “the Englishness ... It’ll kill them all if they aren’t careful ... That boy Chido can hardly speak a word of his own mother’s tongue ... About that one [Nyasha] we don’t even speak. It’s speaking for itself (Dangarembga 1988: 207). All three novels reveal the psychological consequences of colonialism and Seri Luangphinit (2004:2) postulates that such texts “portray how ‘psychological’ disorders serve as mirrors of the chaotic and brutal consequence of occupation”.

In a desemanticised “madness”, where its meaning is decontextualised from its normative construction as mental abnormality, the negative connotations are removed from the meaning. Asaah (2006: 502) states that:

Here, the mad person, indeed, has the trappings of a hero, a prophet, a sage, the custodian of communal morality, the irrepressible conscience of the community or a martyr. Madness in this case becomes less of a taboo than a valorised metaphor and a positive symbol.

A good example of this valorisation of “madness” is found in Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones*, where the mad Janifa symbolises the morality and vision of the community. Likewise, I demonstrate

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<sup>15</sup>In this particular quotation by Asaah, insanity is being used as a synonym for “madness”. In the previous chapter, however, I highlighted that in this study, “madness” is not synonymous with mental illness, as I consider the latter as just one of the various manifestations of “madness”.

in this study how some of the selected authors strip “madness” of its original meaning and recode it, as is evident in Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* and Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*.

I conclude this section by stating that, as illustrated above, literature does, indeed, serve an important function in the understanding of madness. Baker *et al* (2010:2) highlight this when they point out that:

Literature from Homer to contemporary fiction presents an archive of madness – of bizarre and inexplicable experiences, mental distress, behavioural disturbances, and interpersonal difficulties ... the archive of individual stories and representations of madness in literature has a vital role to play in our comprehending, mapping and negotiation of madness.

This assertion articulates so well the importance of literature in making the phenomenon of “madness” comprehensible. In the next section, I proceed to illustrate the interconnectedness of psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory within African fiction.

## **2.5 Psychoanalysis and Postcolonialism**

In African Literature, a strong connection exists between psychoanalysis and postcolonialism. As I mentioned earlier, the period of postcolonialism did not necessarily signal the end of colonialism. Simon Gikandi (1996:14) actually views the term as a “code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation”. The postcolonial perspective emerged from the discourse of developing countries and minority groups that have suffered racism, exploitation, subjugation, social marginalisation and domination under colonialism and after it. As a theory, postcolonialism therefore examines the effects of imperialism on these societies and assesses the position of the colonial or postcolonial subject. It focuses on the political, economic, social, cultural and psychological oppression of those societies subjected to colonisation. Consequently, postcolonial discourse is significant in any critique of race, place, the body and identity, specifically in relation to the black people of Africa. Zimbabwe, for example, endured almost a century of colonialism (1890-1980), an experience that negatively impacted on the psyche and culture of its black people. This scarred psychological and cultural identity still affects many of them in the postcolonial era as is evident in the

postcolonial literature of this period, as this thesis highlights through the selected literary texts studied.

Ranjana Khanna (2003: 2) explains that “the concepts of self and being that came into existence in psychoanalysis were dependent on strife or violence, that is, on the politics of colonial relations”. This psychoanalytic theorising of the colonial encounter actually began with Fanon in 1952 (*Black Skin, White Masks*) in his notion of the “Other”, discussed earlier, and is also deeply embedded in Bhabha’s work (1994). I consider this use of psychoanalysis as it relates to the condition of the colonial and postcolonial subject as necessary to this study because as Fanon (1967a:10) asserts “only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex”. This assertion is supported by Mrinalini Greedharry (2008:6) who suggests that psychoanalytic language:

... has allowed postcolonial criticism to insist and demonstrate that there are devastating cultural and personal manifestations and effects of colonialism that strictly economic and political accounts of colonialism have not, in the past, been able or willing to reveal.

In such an engagement, necessitated by the violent and oppressive historical milieu, I believe that psychoanalysis provides valuable insight into both colonial and postcolonial formulations of subjectivity. In addition, it offers an understanding of the affective and discursive dynamics at play in colonialism and its aftermath. Fanon’s “nervous conditions” which I earlier elaborated on, is one of the most poignant illustrations of the affective forces that impact on the colonial subject. In addition, Bhabha (1994:6) points out the desire/hate reaction of this subject towards the former colonial master that is reflective of the “white mask psychology” typical of the postcolonial era<sup>16</sup>. The discursive refers to the colonial discourse in which the black person is identified as the “other” and inferior, a discourse of difference (Bhabha 1994). Thus, when used as an analytic tool in the study of postcolonial literature, psychoanalytic thinking allows for a clearer understanding of the cultural and psychological dimensions of the postcolonial texts that I study as “it remains one of the mainstream modalities for making sense of both the self and the mind” (Greedharry 2008:5).

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<sup>16</sup>See also Mannoni’s *Prospero and Caliban* (1990).

Psychoanalysis is not without its faults as a theoretical framework for the differing postcolonial conditions in Africa. This theory has been strongly criticised by some postcolonial literary scholars. Benita Parry (2008:12), for example, suggests that “[the] post-structural version of psychoanalytic theory in postcolonial studies has over-simplified the colonial encounter, transforming a violent socio-political struggle between material bodies into an agnostic dialogue between the psyches”. The implication here is that psychoanalysis fails to adequately allow for the material realities of postcolonial domination. Despite this criticism, I still believe that the psychoanalytic theory is essential to this critique on representations of “madness” in Zimbabwe’s postcolonial writing as its weakness does not in any way detract from its relevance because, as Khanna (2003) suggests in *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, it illuminates the psychic strife of colonial and postcolonial modernity. The trauma that the black people of Africa suffered under the colonial era lives on in them in the postcolonial period because “remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (Bhabha 1994:63). This is lucidly illustrated in, for example, Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not*, in which Tambu has been described as providing the female perspective to Fanon’s psychopathology of “ordinary” racism (Kennedy 2008), as I show in Chapter Six of this study.

This brings me to a discussion of the relevance of the trauma theory itself to the conditions of the postcolonial subjectivities in Africa. As I have already mentioned in the Introduction, Craps (2013) advises caution when applying the mainly Eurocentric trauma theory to non-Western groups. Similarly, in “Decolonising Trauma Studies: A Response” Michael Rothberg (2008:226) calls attention to the need to “question whether trauma provides the best framework for thinking about the legacies of violence in the colonised/postcolonial world”. Feminist theorist Laura Brown (1995), however, identifies instead an “insidious trauma”<sup>17</sup> which is often suffered by minority groups like, for example, black people and women. She describes this kind of trauma as very different from that experienced by Western societies’ dominant groups as it is suffered mainly as a result of oppression and discrimination. Brown (1995:107) explains this particular type of trauma as “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit”. This definition of trauma is similar to that

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<sup>17</sup>This concept was first developed by Maria Root (1996), a feminist therapist.

outlined by Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he stresses the harm objectification and nullification have caused to the psyche of marginalised groups through the continued exposure to "a galaxy of erosive stereotypes" (Brown 1995:129). In "The Fact of Blackness", Fanon (1967b:111) states some of these as "The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly". An even more dominant stereotype is that of impotency of the black man in his role of "other" to his white colonial master. Under such power relations, Fanon (1967b:112) reveals the sense of castration felt:

I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [*sic*], racial defects, slaveships. . . . I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?

This is the kind of trauma Tambu endures in *The Book of Not* as she constantly battles against the gendered and racial labels people have of her. As a black female she is "other" not only to the black male, but also to her white female counterparts. Chapter Six examines how successful she is in her struggle.

Stef Craps and Gert Buelens (2008:3) further suggest this need for a broadening of the definition of trauma to take into account "the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class and other inequities". Doing so would allow for "deeper insight into the distress and alienation represented and enacted in postcolonial literature" (Craps and Buelens 2008:4). This alludes to a collective "colonial trauma" that transcends the individual level to account for the trauma experienced by larger social groups, such as communities or whole nations<sup>18</sup>. Is this why Dangarembga makes Tambu fail to get past her negativity in the *Book of Not*? Is this kind of trauma not something that can be fought at an individual level? Again, these are issues I investigate in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven. I feel it pertinent, though, to highlight at this point that social structures do indeed contribute to trauma as:

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<sup>18</sup> Kai Erikson (1995), Dominic LaCapra (2001) and Linda Hutcheon (2003) support such a translation of trauma, while others - David Lloyd (2000); Rebecca Saunders and Kamran Aghaie (2005) - believe doing so is "reductive and politically irresponsible" (Craps and Buelens 2008:4).

[a] narrow focus on individual psychology ignores and leaves unquestioned the conditions that enabled the traumatic abuse. Indeed, the psychologisation of social suffering encourages the idea that recovery from the traumas of colonialism is basically a matter of the individual witness gaining linguistic control over his or her pain. Immaterial recovery – psychological healing – risks becoming privileged over material recovery: reparation or restitution and, more broadly, the transformation of a wounding political, social, and economic system. (Craps and Buelens 2008:4)

I support Fanon's (1967b) argument that only when the socioeconomic structures in African nation states are changed to materially empower the black people can their neurosis be healed. Put simply, individual trauma must be considered in relation to the larger sociohistorical forces at play. There is a need to attend to "the political and cultural contexts in which literary testimonies are produced and received" (Craps and Buelens 2008:5) so that trauma narratives aid readers to understand the traumatic experiences (Vickroy 2002). Chapter Six demonstrates that this is the kind of philosophy that seems to inform *The Book of Not*, a literary narrative that "brilliantly inscribes a young woman's struggle to achieve subjectivity in the context of the ongoing denial, forgetting, and the unspeakability of racism, colonialism, and war" (Kennedy 2008:102).

In relation to the interconnectedness between "madness" and creativity, which I expound on in the section below, psychoanalysis is also an appropriate framework for analysis as, in Kristeva's (2001:8) words, "[p]sychoanalysis approaches madness as if it were a set of models of structure that quietly lurk inside us, and that encourage excesses and limitations, but also innovation". The theory thus allows me to explore these "excesses" and non-rational spheres of the human mind that often culminate in creativity.

## **2.6 Creativity and "Madness"**

Research has shown that a very fine line exists between genius and insanity, that there is a definitive link between the two extremes of the human mind and that somehow "madness" is intricately woven into the artistic element (Jamison 1993; Rothenberg 1990; Andreasen 1987). Albert Rothenberg (1990: 149) believes that "[d]eviant behaviour, whether in the form of eccentricity or worse, is not only associated with persons of genius or high-level creativity, but it is frequently expected of them". Similarly, in this study I argue that both "madness"

and genius are considered transgressions in which societal normative boundaries are contravened as the discussion on *Chairman of Fools* in Chapter Three reveals. The creative processes are accomplished through the crossing of the fine line between rational and irrational thinking.

Stenberg (2001) defines creativity as the potential to create novel products that are task appropriate and of high quality. Christine Battersby (1989:10) describes a genius as one who has “instinct, emotion, sensibility, intuition and imagination” and Kristeva (2001: 8) suggests that “madness” is “a formidable transitory state, a tireless source of creativity”. Saunders and Macnaughton (2005:4) point out that “[m]adness can itself be like a drug that allows the sufferer to experience a kind of creative ‘high.’” There are many examples of celebrated creative geniuses in history who have fallen prey to mental illness at one point in time or another. Cases in point are the renowned artist Vincent van Gogh (Goodwin and Jamison 2007), the gifted cellist Nathaniel Anthony Ayers (Lopez 2008), whose life both as a genius and lost traveller is poignantly portrayed in the movie “The Soloist”, the literary giants Virginia Woolf (Figueroa 2005), Edgar Allen Poe, Maxim Gorky, Joseph Conrad and Charles Dickens (Jamison 1993) and nearer to home, Dambudzo Marechera (Veit-Wild 2006). A clinical psychologist and professor at John Hopkins University School of Medicine, Kay Jamison (1993: 2) quotes Lord Byron as saying, “We of the craft are all crazy. Some are affected by gaiety, others by melancholy, but all are more or less touched”. Acclaimed psychiatrist, Nancy Andreasen (2005:37) elucidates it this way:

Once in that “other reality,” the creative person may remain for hours on end, living in a world that is a mixture of nebulous floating concepts and forms that are gradually turned into an object or idea that ultimately becomes the creative product, be it a play or a mathematical formula. This capacity to focus intensely, to dissociate, and to realise an apparently remote and transcendent “place” is one of the hallmarks of the creative process.

For most of the twentieth century, the relationship between creativity and “madness” was explained as one that existed within the cognitive domain. David Schulberg and Louis Sass (2000-2001) state that the cognitive characteristics of personality and psychopathology, rather than the affective ones, were considered as accounting for the relationship between

creativity and “madness”. More recently, however, there has been a radical shift from this stance with popular interest now focusing on the link between affective disorder and creativity. Jamison (1993) highlights that the findings of some 20 or 30 scientific studies that prove the claim of the “tortured genius” and show that creativity has a strong correlation to mood disorders, especially bipolar disorder, which is a condition in which the mood swings between extreme happiness and severe depression. Raya Jones (2005:162) describes bipolar disorder as “a cluster of severe disorders characterized by cycles of extreme mood swings ... Its symptoms bear upon aspects of psychological functioning that, at least in western cultures, are regarded as core constructs of personality or ‘character’, and therefore self-identity”.

In the chapter that follows, I highlight how bipolar disorder impacts on the self-identity of Farai Chari, the protagonist of *Chairman of Fools*, whose already threatened sense of identity is further compromised when he succumbs to bipolar disorder and is confined to a mental institution. In “The Personalities of Creative Writers” Jane Piirto (2009:12) states:

Creative writers were ‘markedly deviant’ from the regular population, and the distinguished writers seemed to have tendencies to be schizoid, depressive, hysterical, or psychopathic and not to have rigid sex role expectations.

Some of the characteristics described here definitely seem to affect Farai. The question remains, however, whether creative writers have not fallen prone to what Schuldberg and Sass (2001-2002: 2) call “a perspective that implies that madness or mental anguish is a necessary condition for serious creative activity,” resulting in a scenario where many modern writers “have actually courted madness in a wilful fashion or have sought to appear mad as a way of ensuring their own creative worth” (Schuldberg and Sass 2001-2002: 2). This assertion implies that any analysis of “madness” in literature, such as this one, should bear this possibility in mind.

In Africa, the gifts of prophecy and of healing are the preserve of those who are “spiritually endowed” (Gelfand et al 1985:3) and, as *Gelfand et al* clarify, these individuals are given special powers “either by a *mudzimu* (spirit of a departed relative) or by a *shave* spirit (the spirit of someone unrelated who had a talent for healing)”. African society, therefore, considers these healers as extraordinary since they have a relationship with the spirit world that no ordinary person has, as is powerfully depicted in *Anthills of the Savannah* where

Achebe (1987:125) describes the prophetic Agwu as a “brother to Madness”. Similarly, in Vera’s *Nehanda* (1993) the female cultural nationalist and spirit medium is considered strange for not living up to societal expectations of what a woman should be, that is, a wife and mother<sup>19</sup>. Asaah (2006:504) believes in this strangeness of those who possess spiritual powers of healing when he argues that “[p]rophecies and predictions have been made in Africa, since time immemorial, through the medium of trances and madness-like states”. Chapter Three shows how Farai’s family members consider seeking the help of diviners when he falls ill. In the following section, I move onto critical scholarship on “madness” in African Literature.

## **2.7 Critical Scholarship on “Madness” in African Literature**

After exploring the debate on what constitutes African scholarship, Emmanuel Ngara (2009) asserts that “African scholarship is scholarship conducted in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share the African experience and have an African centred consciousness”. Yet, as stated earlier, in African literary scholarship, not much criticism exists on the theme of “madness”. The Nigerian author and critic, Ifeoma Onyemelukwe (2009), deals extensively with the trope of “madness” as reflected in Anglophone African literature in *The Theme of Madness in African Literature*. In contrast, in “Madness in Black Women’s Writings”, a study of the theme of “madness” in Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power*, Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa*, Lilian Osaki (2002:4) limits the boundaries to an attempt to analyse “how and why women lose touch with reality”. Similarly, Nancy Bazin (1995) in “Southern Africa and the Theme of Madness” concentrates on the novels of female authors (Head, Gordimer and Lessing) and the question of why women transgress the boundaries of sanity.

In *Writing Madness*, Veit-Wild deals with the thin line that exists between sanity and insanity as reflected in African Literature and her work is all the more significant to this study as she includes Zimbabwean literature in her analysis. In a book review of *Writing Madness*, Drew Shaw (2007: 623) states that given the scarcity of criticism on the subject of “madness”, Flora Veit-Wild's critical discourse is a most welcome intervention. Shaw (2007: 624) goes on to suggest, however, that Veit-Wild’s pioneering work suffers somewhat when he posits that

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<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed exploration of Nehanda’s role as a cultural nationalist and spirit medium see “The African Womanist Vision of Vera’s Works” (Chigwedere 2010).

“[b]ecause her canvas is so vast, Veit-Wild struggles to pull the many strands and vignettes she has to offer into a single over-arching distinctive argument”. To avoid such a weakness, in this study I concentrate on the concept of “madness” within a peculiarly Zimbabwean literary landscape.

Despite this weakness, Hogan (2008) posits that Veit-Wild’s critical work is a valuable addition to a postcolonial critical psychology whose roots are in the psychology and practices of traditional non-western cultures. Hogan (2008:3) further suggests that the main notion surrounding *Writing Madness* is the fact that “madness” is not only “a figuration of the mind. It intimates a mental realm where the borderlines between body and mind blur”. Chapter Seven of this study provides a poignant illustration of this as Vera’s female protagonists in *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name* battle oppression through the borderlines of their body. The subversive potential of the female body highlights the socio-political significance of women’s use of their bodies as sites of resistance against colonial and patriarchal domination. Sylvia Tamale (2004:23) rightfully states that “body politics for African women is also possessed of an empowering subtext, reflected through resistance, negotiation, identity”, as I elaborate below in the section on “Women and Madness”. This delineation of Veit-Wild’s contribution to African critical psychology begins my discussion on Zimbabwean literature and literary criticism, which I explore next.

## **2.8 Zimbabwean Literature and Literary Criticism**

With the attainment of Independence, Zimbabwe’s literary output in English, Shona and Ndebele flourished, with many writers flowing out of the new tide of optimism that flooded the nation, adding significantly to an established literary canon dominated by Mungoshi, Hove and Marechera, amongst others. Post-independent writers such as Vera, Dangarembga, Chinodya, Geoffrey Ndhala, Chirikure Chirikure and many others ensured a well developed Zimbabwean literary landscape within the broader African Literature arena. A literary critic, George Kahari (1990:2), acknowledges this development when he states that:

Black Zimbabwean writing is remarkably diverse. It is a literature that has adopted and adapted as well as assimilated creative energy from disparate sources and models: oral tradition, Western classics, romances, detective stories and thrillers.

As a result of the colonial experience in Zimbabwe, much of the earlier Zimbabwean literature had to do with the struggle for liberation and the search for identity (Kahari 1990). According to Anna Chitando (2011:2) “most authors in pre-independent Zimbabwe were driven by the desire to unhinge colonialism and recover authentic African identity. They sought to undo the damage of colonialism and express their Africanness”<sup>20</sup>. Yet another dominant theme was that of alienation, which Musaemura Zimunya (1982) lucidly explores in *Those Years of Drought and Hunger*, metaphorically referring to the spiritual drought and material hunger experienced by the landless black masses of the then Rhodesia. These conditions still persist in the independent nation, despite the land reform that has seen a significant number of black people now owning land<sup>21</sup>. This postcolonial cultural alienation is clearly evident in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*.

Literary criticism, however, has not developed as remarkably, with non-indigenous literary scholars tending to dominate this arena. Notable critics on Zimbabwean literature include Zimunya, Rino Zhuwarara, Ranka Primorac, Veit-Wild, Emmanuel Chiwome, and more recently Robert Muponde and Maurice Vambe, amongst others. In Introduction to *Zimbabwean Literature in English*, Zhuwarara (2001) provides an in-depth background to Zimbabwean literature in his analysis of the works of Dangarembga, Vera, Hove, Mungoshi and Marechera, in addition to others. He states that these texts “have captured the breadth and depth of the Zimbabwean experience and expressed the historical, cultural, social and psychological dimensions of life in the context of a society that is rapidly changing” (Zhuwarara 2001:25). It is the psychological realm that is of significance in this study.

Chitando (2011: 32) asserts that “[u]p to the turn of the century, critical works on Zimbabwean literature tended to be published by single authors. From 2002, a trend has emerged where edited volumes dedicated to specific themes are published”. One such work is Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac’s *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to*

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<sup>20</sup> It is pertinent to note here that I believe that the notion of an authentic African identity is an essentialist one and therefore problematic. In Chapter Four of this study, I elaborate on the scholarly arguments surrounding such essentialism, given the multiple and diverse black identities that exist on the continent. Like the authors I study, however, I do acknowledge the positive influence such idealism has in the struggle to reclaim African identity.

<sup>21</sup> The “fast track” land reform programme, popular known as the Third *Chimurenga* (war of liberation), has been a fraught and politically charged process in Zimbabwe. The government viewed the repossession of fertile agricultural land from the white minority farmers as “part of the crusade to regain lost ancestral lands” (Chitando 2005:223) in the fight for economic independence. For a comprehensive exploration of the land reform programme, see also Sam Moyo (2011), Prosper Matondi (2010), Russel Kaschula (2006), and Paul Gundani (2002).

*Literature and Culture* (2005) which is sensitive to the social, economic and political climate existing in the country the time and whose critical contributions examine diverse themes in Zimbabwean literature, which include violence, theory, children's literature, ethnicity and the social construction of Zimbabwe (Chitando 2011). From this text, what is pertinent to my study is the section on "Text and Violence" as it is concerned not only with the violence that took place during the liberation war, but also that which occurs in the post-independent era. In *Echoing Silences*, Kanengoni (1997:62) questions if "another war that threatened to tear the country apart had broken out. ZAPU versus ZANU, the Shonas versus the Ndebeles: a civil war". His protagonist watches "the sweating faces of the young troopers at the back of the armoured vehicles holding their rifles loosely, arrogantly, at the ready, he noticed the familiar madness in the pupils of their eyes" (Kanengoni 1997:62), in a situation "when people thought of nothing else except killing and being killed" (Kanengoni 1997:30). Kanengoni here alludes to the violence in 1983 of an operation dubbed "*gukurahundi*"<sup>22</sup> where a group of soldiers (the Fifth Brigade) were supposed to weed out their dissident counterparts in Matabeleland who were alleged to be destroying peace. The Fifth Brigade "were almost all ex-ZANLA fighters, interpreted themselves as liberators of Zimbabwe and the 'dissidents' as merely the old enemy in another disguise" (Madamombe 2011:16). The dissidents were part of the Zipra ex-combatants aligned to Joshua Nkomo, the Ndebele political leader. What resulted instead was the unleashing of terror in the region where "young men in camouflage uniform with distinctive red berets, calling themselves the Fifth Brigade ... were out to terrorise the people. They burned villages, slaughtered cattle, assaulted women and killed simply to instil [sic] fear" (Nkomo 2001: 243-244)<sup>23</sup>. The aggression of this period is vividly explored in Vera's *Stone Virgins*, which brings to light these atrocities. It is further reflected in her portrayal of her male protagonist, Sibaso. The kind of trauma he suffers as a result of the violence is the same kind Munashe experiences in *Echoing Silences* and the nameless narrator endures in *Harare North* as I show in Chapter Five of this study.

Muponde and Primorac's work also aids me in my analysis of Vera's *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name*, to which much criticism is given, but none of which concentrate on the representations of "madness" in these texts. In addition, I draw some insights to Vera's literary work from Robert Muponde and Mandivavarira Maodze-Taruvunga's *Sign and*

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<sup>22</sup> "*Gukurahundi* refers to the rain which washes away the chaff before spring rains.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of Joshua Nkomo's autobiography *The Story of My Life*, see Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2009:93), who describes it as "brittle, vulnerable and incomplete, particularly when placed alongside recent historical records ... Nkomo's book is a 'tale', and as with tales, it contains history, facts, and fiction".

*Taboo: Perspectives on the poetic fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2003), which explores several different aspects of the author's fiction. My special interest in this text is those critical analyses that relate to woman's sexuality and her body as a subversive tool. As the next section highlights, some feminists believe that this subversion is an inevitable response to the oppression women endure under a patriarchal society.

## 2.9 Feminism and “Madness”

Feminism is a philosophy that promotes equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The feminist movement has been identified by some feminist theorists<sup>24</sup> as geared towards changing and uplifting the status of women within their respective societies. Ify Achifusi (1987:40) provides a definition of feminism which is pertinent to this study:

Feminism is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. The power relations structure of all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what, for whom, what we are and what we might become.<sup>25</sup>

It is the dynamics of these relations within a patriarchal society that I am concerned with in this study. I adopt Psychoanalytic Feminism in my interrogation of the female authored texts of this study, as it seeks to address the relationship between feminist literary criticism and the texts of “madness”. It is a philosophy that has been used to study literature as early as the Victorian age<sup>26</sup>. My analysis of the texts dealing with female protagonists investigate to what extent the existing societal structures contribute to women's mad acts, like, for example, Mazvita's murder of her baby in *Without a Name*. Significantly, when applying feminism within the African context in this literary research, I realise, as Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) stresses, that contrary to common belief, feminism does not stand in opposition to African culture and heritage, as culture is ever-evolving and not fixed in time. It is a dynamic process and African women's conditions within their culture and their world of work need not remain static. Feminist philosophy, therefore, calls for an upsetting of patriarchal culture,

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<sup>24</sup> Such as Filomina Steady (1987), Florence Stratton (1994), Carol Hudson Weems (2004) and Obioma Nnaemeka (2005).

<sup>25</sup> There are many strands of feminism within the feminist philosophy, which have different ideological leanings, such as for example, Black Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Radical Feminism, amongst others.

<sup>26</sup> This is evident in Valerie Beattie's (1996:1) study of the representations of “madness” in *Jane Eyre*, in which she asserts that “Charlotte Brontë's paradigmatic madwoman continues to compel feminist criticism to address the highly problematic yet omnipresent conjunction of madness and femininity”.

an assertion of sexual equality and an eradication of sexist domination in order for the positive transformation of women's conditions to take effect. Some African schools of thought, however, reject the term "feminism" because of its western connotations and align themselves instead to Alice Walker's "womanism"<sup>27</sup>. For Walker, womanism is to feminism "as purple is to lavender" and is:

... more suited to the black woman's position in society. Her definition of womanist is one who is 'committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male or female' ... womanists are concerned not only with overcoming sexual domination but also discrimination based on people's racial and socioeconomic reality. (Chigwedere 2010: 22)

What this suggests is that it is pertinent in this study to consider not only the sexually related factors that lead African women to "madness", but also the racial and socioeconomic forces at play that affect the psychological being of the black race as a whole. With this in mind, I proceed to explore the relationship between women and "madness".

## **2.10 Women and "Madness"**

Jane Ussher (2011) begins her book *The Madness of Women* by quoting Phillip Martins (1987:42) who suggests that "women and madness share the same territory ... they may be said to enter a concentric relationship around a central point occupied by a fundamental male normality". Ussher (2011) continues by explaining that over the centuries, women have occupied a peculiar position in the history of "madness". The construction of women from the earliest times in western societies has been connected to the issue of witches and witchcraft (Sharpe 1994; Horseley 1979). The same can be said of African societies, despite the fact that colonial psychiatry did not believe that African women "go mad". In *Colonial Power and African Illness*, which attempts to describe a distinctly "African" insanity, Megan Vaughan (1991:22) asserts that:

It was men who, having behaved strangely or violently in the urban area or mining compound, found themselves defined as schizophrenic and confined to a colonial lunatic asylum. African women, by contrast, were said not to have reached the level of self-awareness required to go mad, and in the colonial literature on psychology and

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<sup>27</sup> Walker first coined this term in the Introduction to *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* (1983).

psychopathology, the African woman represented the happy, 'primitive' state of pre-colonial Africa.

Susan Hubert (2002), however, contradicts this assumption in *Questions of Power: The Politics of Women's Madness*. Despite the fact that Fanon's crucial theories on the colonised of Africa are disappointingly gender-blind, she states that "Fanon's articulation of the link between madness and subjugation can also be applied to the psychological oppression of women in patriarchal societies" (Hubert 2002:20). Yet another study by Colleen Ward (1982) reveals that in both western and non-western societies, the majority of people who go mad are, indeed, women.

Therefore, this means that women across the globe have been labelled as "deviant" and "uncontrollable". These terms in themselves generate the conceptualisation of women's "madness," of subversion and any study of women and "madness" has to consider this aspect of subversion and the question of power, as I do in this literary analysis. Such a theoretical underpinning would give rise to the examination of subjectivity and agency, where "madness" becomes a form of resistance, as I highlighted earlier and show in Chapter Seven. Significant to this interconnectedness of women and "madness" would be Freud's notion of hysteria<sup>28</sup>. Ussher (2011:23) explains how "feminists have celebrated hysteria as a woman's response to a system in which her subjectivity is denied, kept invisible".

Veit-Wild (2006:127) states that in Africa, the psychiatric discourse on African women has been of "rampant sexuality, hysteria and unruliness" as seen in the labelling of them as "wandering wombs, walking vaginas, menopausal witches". Likewise, feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1986) posit that living in a patriarchal environment frequently represses women, a situation which leads to outbursts of hysteria and "madness", such as that the female protagonist suffers in Gappah's short story "The Annex Shuffle" as I reveal in Chapter Six. This correlation between women's identity and "madness" is also explored in Vera's texts as Phephelaphi aborts her unborn baby and commits suicide (*Butterfly Burning*) and Mazvita kills her baby (*Without a Name*). Marie Denise Shelton (2004:351) suggests that when a women's sense of self is compromised, she can resort to

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<sup>28</sup> As I have stated earlier in the Introduction, loosely defined, hysteria is a disturbance of the nervous system, with often uncontrollable outbursts of emotion.

such aberrant acts in a bid to escape the “existential disease of belonging nowhere, of being deprived of identity”.

In the twenty-first century in Europe, schizophrenia, depression, anorexia and bulimia have become the widespread mental diseases associated with women, which are linked to their femininity and the expression or repression of their sexuality. Phyllis Chesler (2005:116) stresses this point when she states that:

Women who act out the conditioned female role are clinically viewed as ‘neurotic’ or ‘psychotic’. When and if they are hospitalised, it is for predominantly female behaviours such as ‘depression’, ‘suicide attempts’, ‘anxiety neuroses’, ‘paranoia’, eating disorders, self-mutilation or ‘promiscuity’. Women who reject or are ambivalent about their role frighten both themselves and society so much that their ostracism and self-destructiveness probably begins very early. Such women are assured of a psychiatric label and, if they are hospitalised, it is for the less ‘female’ behaviours such as ‘schizophrenia’, ‘lesbianism’, or ‘promiscuity’.

This pathologising of femininity is reflected in Zimbabwe’s postcolonial literature, as Chapters Six shows. In Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), for example, in the short story “The Annexe Shuffle,” a law student, Emily, lands up in the mental wing of Parirenyatwa Hospital after being diagnosed with schizophrenia and in the *Book of Not*, Tambu plunges into a “Fanonian “mode of ‘negativity’” that leads to her post “O” Level depression and a condition where she is unable to control her bowels.

Anorexia and bulimia are eating disorders that are usually associated with types of psychiatric disorders tied to anxiety about the female body and female sexuality and are both intense forms of hysteria. They have come to be intimately connected to the anxieties and newly created repressive discourses related to women’s entrance into the public and intellectual realms, as witnessed in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), where in Nyasha’s anorexic attacks she chooses to use her body as a text where this “unAfrican” disease becomes a discourse of subversion against her father’s patriarchal authority. In support of the notion of the female body’s use as a subversive instrument, Sheena Patchay (2003:147-148) asserts that:

... rather than seeing hysteria as anterior to symbolic order, women's desires and the pain of its 'disarticulation' should be seen as threatening the (masculine) symbolic order ... since women's subjectivities begin with the body, a body which is inscribed by patriarchal discursive practice, it is significant that this body rebel against the practices that define and constrain it.

This view is vividly illustrated in Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* and Vera's *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*. In *Echoing Silences*, Munashe's girlfriend, Kudzai, is so traumatised by being repeatedly raped by her male commanders that she becomes one of the living who are dead. This is the same traumatic experience that Mazvita endures in *Without a Name* - the psychological damaging of her psyche. The rapes result in Kudzai having to go through three abortions and premature menopause. Similarly, my analysis reveals how Phephelaphi in *Butterfly Burning* aborts her unborn child. Ketu Katrak (2006:2) suggests that the female protagonists go through a kind of "internalised exile" where the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency". This exile usually results from a breaking away from traditional cultural beliefs, or a resistance to patriarchal domination by male members of a family, that is, a husband, father or brother. Katrak (2006:2) goes on to explain that such a state of exile leads to the female protagonists seeking, or achieving:

a 'liminal' state of consciousness ... a space for the female protagonist to cope with, and at times to transcend exile. They resist domination and attempt to reconnect with their bodies via speech, silence, starvation or illness. At times, resistances fail and fatal outcomes result in murder or suicide.

Murder is what Mazvita resorts to in *Without a Name* and suicide becomes Phephelaphi's means of escape in *Butterfly Burning*, both of which are self-destructive forms of resistance as Chapter Seven of this study shows.

When one mulls over Mazvita's infanticide and Phephelaphi's abortions from a feminist perspective, a pertinent question that comes to mind is whether, as Patchay suggests, these "mad" acts are not, in fact, intentional attempts by the female protagonists to use their bodies as battlefields in the fight against patriarchal dominance? It is a question I respond to in my analysis of Vera's texts by bearing in mind that there is method to their "madness". This study demonstrates that in these texts "madness", indeed, seems to be a question of power

linked to the female body as a site of resistance where “the woman has to distort, to torment, or even to prostitute her own body in order to liberate it from constraints outside her, to make it her own” (Veit-Wild 2006: 102). The deliberate nature of their “madness”, therefore, forms a key angle in my exploration of the female protagonists’ mad acts of abortion, suicide and murder of a child in Vera’s texts in Chapter Seven.

In relation to this, Katrin Berndt (2005: 155) asserts that Vera’s novels “stress the constitutive function of the subject position of the female body. Therewith, they introduce an individually defined, feminist discourse into Zimbabwean literature that had been mainly ignored until the publication of these texts”. Thus, using psychoanalytic feminism alongside Kristeva’s (1982) notion of the abject (which describes the operation of the human psyche that is fundamentally related to the constitution of subjectivity) I illustrate how female “madness” operates within a colonial and patriarchal society. In doing so, I consider the traditional and cultural beliefs of Zimbabwean society, which I discuss in the next section.

### **2.11 Zimbabwean Traditional and Cultural Beliefs on “Madness”**

As stated earlier, “madness” is culturally specific and historically located and, therefore, “the biomedical psychiatric model’s conception of madness as universal, ahistorical and clearly demarcated in terms of neat diagnostic categories” (Long and Zietkiewicz 1998:1) is problematic. Carol Long and Estelle Zietkiewicz (1998) assert that poststructuralists argue instead that “madness” is a culturally and socially constituted active concept whose varying meaning is determined by time and can be debatable. Ian Parker (1995:4) emphasises this when he states that “notions of madness and abnormal psychology as we understand them are particular and peculiar to our culture and our time”. In other words, “madness” manifests itself differently in different cultures with a particular culture specifying its own symptoms of what constitutes “madness”, what causes it and how it can be treated.

After researching on the social representations of “madness” in urbanised Congo, Geneviève Coudin (2013:28) suggests that in Central Africa, any illness or misfortune is usually attributed to “imbalances” or “social strains” within the social fibre. She states that “the individual was not the exclusive venue of the truth of his illness” (Coudin 2013:28) but was part of a collective society. For the traditional Congolese, the source of a calamity was usually believed to lie either in witchcraft or in the anger of ancestors and “[s]ince, like any misfortune, madness was a sign of individual or collective transgression, the problem for the

families was to discover the cause of the disruption of social order” (Coudin 2013:29). Similarly, traditionally in Zimbabwe, “madness” is seen as indicative of a communal, rather than an individual problem (Gelfand *et al* 1985). Social factors, however, are not the only cause of mental illnesses. Veit-Wild (2006:24) highlights how the late Professor Gordon Chavunduka (1994:81-82), a well-known sociologist and President of Zimbabwean National Traditional Healers’ Association, explains the possible manifestations of “madness”:

Firstly, there are natural factors such as brain damage, poor brain development, and incorrect use of medicines. In the second group of factors responsible for mental illness are psychological factors such as worry, strain, and tension. Related to the second group of factors are the various social agencies that cause illness, such as ancestor spirits, angry spirits, witches, alien spirits and sorcerers.<sup>29</sup>

In Zimbabwe, it is the third group of factors that are considered as dominant causes, and “madness” is usually attributed to three main causes, an upset ancestral spirit (*mudzimu*), a witch, or “*ngozi*”, a term more commonly defined as an angry spirit but which Augustine Tirivangana (2011) describes as a crime violating the principle of the sanctity of human life. “*Mamhepo*” (bad spirits), which is characterised by bad luck and most often results in “madness”, is a common complaint in the society. This principle of psychiatry extends to the rest of Africa as Alfã Ibrãhîm Sow (1980: 213) illustrates:

With the concept of victim that characterises the African perspective, it is the whole community that is attacked ... jeopardising the order and structure of the institutional complex of relations (i.e. culture). That is why any therapeutic procedure must first be solidly based on a community (or at least a family) consensus before going on to symbolic practices aimed at triumphing over the aggression being afflicted.

Chiwome’s (1998) short story “First Street - Harare” aptly illustrates how “*ngozi*” works. The main character, Muchapera<sup>30</sup>, is a war veteran who has been left mentally ill by the trauma of the liberation war. His name signifies the fact that the lack of cleansing and reparation traditionally expected for the treatment of “*ngozi*” inevitably results not only in the death of the perpetrator, but also of other members of his clan. Similarly, in Alexander Kanengoni’s

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<sup>29</sup> Gordon Chavunduka, a renowned authority on traditional medicine conducted numerous studies in this area. He was the elected the first president of ZINATHA (Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers’ Association) in 1980.

<sup>30</sup> “*Muchapera*” literally means “you will all die”.

*Echoing Silences* (1997), Munashe, who during the war ruthlessly kills a woman with a baby on her back, is haunted by the traumatic memory after the war right up to his death. A significant part of this study is on the trauma caused by the atrocities of the liberation war, as evident in Vera's *Without a Name* and Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*. As Joycelyn Alexander and JoAnn McGregor (2004:79) state, trauma is indicative of "the ways in which former civilians and soldiers cope - or fail to cope - with disturbing memories of violence". This brutality does not end with the war of liberation but lingers on in the postcolonial era. In "Polarising cultures, politics and communities and fracturing economies in Zimbabwean literature", Kizito Muchemwa (2011:404) suggests that when the nameless narrator states that everything is falling apart, he is hinting at "the political and psychic dimensions of the nation-state in crisis in that bad winds (*mamhepo*) are associated with madness", a situation which leaves this main character "psychologically traumatised, socially miseducated and politically deformed" (Muchemwa 2011:403). Although Muchemwa hints at the psychic fragmentation the narrator suffers, he does not concentrate on it as his main concern as his article is a critique of the nexus between literature and the cultural dimension of nationalism. Chapter Five elaborates on the psychological effects of past traumatic experiences in the homeland that this young "green bomber"<sup>31</sup> suffers while in the Diaspora.

The treatment of mental illness differs in western and traditional African cultures, where in the former the mental patient tends to be institutionalised or isolated, whereas in the latter, African traditional psychotherapy encourages healing practices with the patient remaining within the system. In Zimbabwean communities of all classes, both rural and urban, traditional healing practices continue to exist for mental health care alongside the modern medical provisions for the illness (Gelfand *et al* 1985). In the next chapter, I demonstrate how in *Chairman of Fools*, the protagonist's maternal uncle (Sekuru Tumai) and other characters in the novel advocate for this kind of treatment as a remedy for Farai's mental illness after he is admitted to the sanatorium. This shows that despite the dominance of Christianity in Zimbabwe<sup>32</sup>, a significant number of people still maintain a firm belief in the healing powers

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<sup>31</sup>The government set up youth camps across the country meant to train them with life skills and instil in them patriotism and a sense of national identity. These youths were popularly known as "Green Bombers" a pseudonym given to them because of the green military uniforms they wore during training.

<sup>32</sup> According to the Religion in Zimbabwe 2012 estimate of religious identity in the country, 85% of the nation is Christians. This percentage includes those who practice syncretic forms of Christianity, that is, mixing Christianity with traditional religious beliefs, the latter being secretly practiced when deemed necessary for fear of condemnation. Only an estimated 3% are believed to openly engage in traditional religion, although I think that this figure is debatable, considering the syncretic nature of the Christianity practised as mentioned above.

of traditional healers and their medicine for many ailments, including mental or psychiatric disturbances. At this point, I proceed to consider the extent to which the narrative forms of Zimbabwean postcolonial writing reflect “madness” through the authors’ use of modernist or postmodernist techniques.

## **2.12 Postmodernism and “Madness”**

Vassilii Novikov (1981:8) states that “every method, style, trend and genre produces its own set of devices and its own ‘truthfulness’”. When writing, authors make a deliberate selection in the choice of narrative form and language in the expression of the experiences, both individual and collective, that they wish to capture in their texts. In depicting the various forms of “madness”, many authors have difficulty in doing so using traditional narrative forms, coherent structures and ordinary language because, as (Stone 2004:23) argues, “traditional forms of narratives, in their dependence on retrospective closure, linearity, unity and coherence repress the possibility of multiplicity and ‘otherness’”. Stone (2004:18) goes on to suggest that because what constitutes “madness” is different from reason, it follows, therefore, that narrations of “madness” should invariably be “characterised variously by fragmentation, amorphousness, entropy, chaos, silence, senselessness”. Such characteristics are undoubtedly those of postmodernist writing. Also, the trouble that authors writing on “madness” have with using the ordinary sentence is because the normality within the sentence which causes the essence of “madness” to evaporate as it is swallowed up by reason (Stone 2004:19), thus further justifying why authors who write on “madness” opt for the postmodernist technique.

Postmodernism is pertinent to this study because, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I am also investigating the extent to which the authors under scrutiny have moved away from conventional writing to adopt a language, form and style that reflect the “madness” they depict in their narratives. In literature, postmodernism is a term that is problematic to define or classify, especially as most of its characteristics are similar to those found in modernism. Roger Webster (1996: 122) asserts that “the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is itself rather blurred: it is difficult to define a clear boundary in chronological, aesthetic or political terms”. Nithyanantha Bhat (2010:1) emphasises that the distinction between the two terms is controversial as some theorists see the two movements

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For a detailed exploration of religion as one of the legacies of colonialism in Zimbabwe, see Maureen Grundy’s “Religion and the Legacy of Colonialism in Contemporary Zimbabwe” (2000).

as closely intertwined, while others see it as “quite antithetical”. Both, however, “give prominence to fragmentation as a feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century art and culture” but the distinction arises from the fact that “the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it” (Bhat 2010:2).

In his abstract to “A Parable of the African Condition: The Interface of Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Biyi Bandele-Thomas’s Fiction,” Ayo Kehinde (2003:6) suggests that “the contemporary African novel is mostly couched in postmodernist mode in an attempt to signify the anomic nature of the African postcolonial milieu”. This is because postmodernism is a philosophy that requires serious consideration of both the individual and the nation, and “theorises the experiences of a world whose material realities as much as its ideologies call into question the teleologies of class and nation, and in the Southern African experience, of race”(Vambe and Chennells 2009:10). Some examples of African who have experimented in what may be considered postmodernist writings include Chinua Achebe, Tansi Labou Sony, Amos Tutuola, Ben Okri, Marechera and Vera, amongst others

Although African writers have employed differing narrative strategies to highlight the trauma of the colonial experience and its aftermath, for many, the postmodernist stance has been the better option as the “anti-narrative modernist forms” include the “disruption of linear chronology, fragmentation, narrative self-consciousness ... [and] non-closure” (Felman and Laub 1992: 45). The African writers’ literary imaginations are, therefore, not confined by the traditional styles and form:

Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and in direction. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique. (Whitehead 2004:3)

Critics like Deborah Horvitz (2000) and Laurie Vickroy (2002) support Whitehead’s assertion as they believe that when colonial narratives set out to give voice to the damage and distortion that result from the traumatised event, trauma fiction becomes the inevitable choice for such transmission. In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* Vickroy (2002:1)

defines trauma narratives as those that “help readers access the traumatic event”. She suggests that “trauma fiction emerges out of postmodernist fiction and shares its tendency to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit” (Vickroy 2002:82)<sup>33</sup>. Through their narratives, Vickroy (2002:18) believes that these African writers are, in fact, “bearing witness to oppression”<sup>34</sup>.

In Zimbabwe, the postcolonial condition requires careful reflection on the question of identity of the black people who have evolved from a period of colonial oppression under the Ian Smith regime<sup>35</sup>. I argue that the traumatic violence of the time and the subsequent psychological scarring of the black people is something that cannot easily put into neat, chronological ordering, or contained in conventional narratives. Therefore, it is no surprise that postmodernism has become a popular philosophy among many postcolonial Zimbabwean authors. Some of the nation’s prolific writers - Chenjerai Hove, Stanley Nyamufukudza and Chinodya - have employed postmodernist writing. Muponde and Primorac (2005) analyse how the post-liberation war violence in the country is addressed by Hove’s *Shadows* (1991). They point out how Hove (2005:12) employs “experimental, modernist techniques, breaks of chronology, and a dense poetical style to represent an array of mental states emerging from an extended period of violence which stretches from colonialism far into independence”. Similarly, Mbulelo Mzamane (1999:94) describes Chinodya’s *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) as disruptive because of his departure from the norm and characterises his dialogue as “stiff, formal and in some parts unnatural”. Mzamane’s criticism stems from the fact that Chinodya’s work steps outside of realism’s framework, which has for so long been a conventional strategy in the African writer’s portrayal of the African experience.

Stepping out of the realist frame is something that Marechera - one of the forefathers of postmodernist writing in Zimbabwe - was most famous for, especially in *Black Sunlight*. Marechera believed that realism was too prescriptive. In an interview with Flora Veit-Wild (Veit-Wild and Chennells 1999) Marechera stressed that his writings had a wilful violation of

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<sup>33</sup> It is pertinent to note, however, that literary scholar Stef Craps (2013) views postmodernism as one of the obstacles that trauma theory needs to surmount.

<sup>34</sup> A great deal of scholarship on the dynamics and politics of bearing witness exists. See, for example, the argument by Brison (1999) that the act of testimony requires a listener in order for the victim to be able to externalise the traumatic event. Other scholars on bearing witness include Craps (2013), Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2010), Jenny Edkins (2003), Giorgio Agamben (2002), Yael Danieli (1998), Lea Fridman Hamaoui (1991), Felman and Laub (1990), amongst others.

<sup>35</sup> In 1965, Ian Smith cut off ties with Britain, the then Rhodesia’s through his Unilateral Declaration of Independence in a bid to maintain white supremacy. This began a period of civil war in the country.

syntactical and grammatical rules. For him, although considered “European bourgeois literature”, postmodernism was a conducive narrative vehicle for “exploring the subconscious of our new society” (Shaw 1999:13), the independent Zimbabwean nation. Regarding the essential elements of realism - logic, linearity and closure - Marechera declares:

[s]traightforward things leave no room for the imagination; they allow no other perspectives. The tyranny of straightforward things is more oppressive and more degrading than idle monstrosities as life and death, apartheid and beer drinking, as stamp album and Jew-baiting (Shaw 1999:12).

Seeming to support Marechera’s stance, Drew Shaw (1999:11) asserts that the “[t]he desire for closure and order highlights another incongruity in claiming realism as the aesthetic of Zimbabwean nationalist narration”, as these concepts were not, in fact, indigenous to Africa and were mainly “cultural imports” that were part of the colonial package. Time and space were neither rigid nor linear concepts in traditional African societies. Shaw (1999:11) argues:

Fixed lines, borders and boundaries arrived with the coloniser whose project, ostensibly, was to bring ‘Enlightenment’ to the ‘dark continent.’ With reason and logic (tools of nineteenth century imperialism) Europeans condemned and subordinated Africans, seeing them as ‘savages.’ The ‘Enlightenment,’ through its project of colonisation, precipitated in a violent re-ordering of the continent, and violence was performed on the minds, as well as the bodies of African.

In light of this “re-ordering”, Marechera’s rejection of realism is understandable and may also be the rationale for the current wave of postmodernist writings that has hit the Zimbabwean literary arena. After all, “thoughts that think straight cannot see the round corners” (Shaw 1999:11). Most of the relatively new writers are, therefore, dabbling in both modernist and postmodernist techniques - like, for example, Kanengoni, Gomo and Chikwava - as they expose the violence of the colonial era (*Echoing Silences*) and of the post-independent nation (*A Fine Madness, Harare North*), as I illustrate in this study. All three seem heavily influenced by Marechera. Dzingai Mutumbuka, a former Minister of Education in Zimbabwe, describes Marechera’s work as giving “illuminating insights into the struggle for sanity in a situation full of contradictions, where there was severe dislocation of moral and social norms, which, for the young academic resulted in the fragmentation of family and community life” (Veit-Wild and Chennells 1999:6).

Given this backdrop I contend, therefore, that postmodernist writing is, as implied earlier, a liberating and appropriate technique for handling the theme of “madness” as it allows for the transgressing of boundaries.

### **2.13 Conclusion**

This chapter has given an elaborate review of literature that is relevant to my study on the representations of “madness” in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. It has provided the necessary background knowledge and different perceptions on the phenomenon that I need to help me in my critical analysis of the different authors’ conceptualisation of “madness” in the postcolonial context as revealed in their literary texts. Highlighting this literature strengthens my focus on the beliefs surrounding “madness” and raises my awareness of the various socio-historical and cultural factors that have to be considered in such a study. This examination of related literature has provided an essential overview of the history of “madness” and has shown the relationship “madness” has with literature, colonialism and creativity. It has also pointed out the importance of bearing in mind the interplay of both gender and culture in relation to “madness”. In the next chapter, I begin my detailed exploration of this theme by critiquing Chinodya’s conceptualisation of “madness” in *Chairman of Fools*, where his highly creative protagonist, Farai Chari, ends up institutionalised. One of the chapter’s foci is on revealing the relationship between creativity, intellect and “madness”.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD: PARANOIAC DISPLACEMENT IN SHIMMER CHINODYA'S *CHAIRMAN OF FOOLS*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of literature and relevant to this study on the representations of “madness” in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. In it, I explored issues pertinent to such a study on “madness”, such as the history of “madness”, its depiction in literature and its gendered nature. I also critically analysed the relationship “madness” has with colonialism, creativity and postmodernist writing. The chapter illuminated that any understanding or interpretation of the literary depictions of “madness” has to take into consideration the historical, political and socio-cultural context in which it occurs. The critical exploration of existing scholarship and the development of my theoretical framework in that chapter will now inform the analysis of the selected primary texts.

In this chapter, my critical literary analysis focuses on how Chinodya handles the theme of “madness” in *Chairman of Fools*. In an interview with Manfred Lomeier (Harare, March 2010), Chinodya asserts that his narrative is all about “individual and national insanities, individual and national madnenses”, and this chapter explores both. He goes on to stress that “[t]he book is about the terrible logic of insanity, which the average person rarely experiences” (Lomeier 2010). In this statement, Chinodya alludes to the relationship between creativity and “madness”, an intricate interconnectedness that I probe here. One of my main tasks in this chapter, however, is to explore how Chinodya represents the paranoia in Farai’s mind as he shows what it must be like to be pursued by the demons of one’s own imagination. My investigation demonstrates how “madness happens when fantasy takes over and disconnects you from reality” (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005:203).

Existential psychoanalysis views reality as consisting of both the external reality, as well as the internal one, that is, psychic reality (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005). Therefore, in this examination of Chinodya’s depiction of Farai’s mental illness, I consider both realities - the cultural, political and socioeconomic context of post-independent Zimbabwe and what goes on inside of Farai’s mind. For the latter, I rely heavily on Laing’s theory as propounded in *The Divided Self* (1990 Preface) in an attempt to “make madness and the process of going

mad comprehensible". This chapter, therefore, reveals how Chinodya's narrative not only depicts the psychosis Farai suffers, but also explores manifestations of "madness" in the Zimbabwean landscape that surrounds him. Following the lead of numerous other literary critics, I engage with these dynamics evident in Chinodya's fiction by viewing "the language of the literary text as first and foremost a social phenomenon whose social texture and temporal currency is appropriated by the writer to signify certain social issues" (Nyambi 2011: 10). Of importance is not only how he portrays "madness" in the content of his work, but also how the transgressing of boundaries permeates its form. In this chapter I argue, therefore, that *Chairman of Fools* has some characteristics of a psychotic text which are expressed through Chinodya's adoption of postmodernist techniques in his narrative.

### **3.2 *Chairman of Fools* as a Psychotic Text**

A text dealing with any form of psychosis demands, by the nature of the subject, a postmodernist reading whose main characteristics I have highlighted in the previous chapter. Derrida and Foucault had a famed debate<sup>36</sup> over "whether it is possible to represent madness in the language of reason, and, despite their many disagreements, concur that madness is characterized by a radical unsayability" (Stone 2004b:37); an "unsayability" that cannot be dealt with in entirely conventional form. It is postmodernism, then, that can adequately represent psychosis because, as Paul Crawford and Charley Baker (2009:224) clearly state, "postmodern fictions are characterised by their incomprehensibility, fragmentation of linear narrative and narrations, disruptions in spatiality and temporality". They go on to assert that, "in both their style and their content, they are psychotic - one can see elements of thought disorder, paranoia, word salad, neologisms, ideas of reference from the media and a host of other clinically-defined-as-psychotic symptomatology within these narrations" (Crawford and Baker 2009:224).

These critics stress that writing on "madness" demands a language and structure that has a peculiar understanding of reason, is incoherent and non-linear, amongst other postmodernist characteristics. Patrick McGrath (2002), however, highlights the difficulty writing on psychosis poses as it is, by its very nature chaotic, irrational, delusional, and paranoid, whereas the novel requires a narrative that has a clear design. I argue, therefore, that in order to achieve this clarity, there must be some sort of negotiation of linguistic and narrative form

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<sup>36</sup> See Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1965) and Derrida's "Cogito and the History of Madness" in *Writing and Difference* (1978).

in order to convey “madness” because if strictly written in incoherent speech, there is the possibility of the author losing the reader completely. In the same vein, Femi Oyeboade (2002:46) asserts that:

... for a story to work it has to be coherent and plausible. Therefore, psychopathology has to be comprehensible within the total structure of the narrative. Thus, even in an account of a disintegrating mind, the account still has to cohere. This means that Jaspers’ notion of ‘un-understandability’<sup>37</sup> as a criterion for psychosis is usually breached in literature.

*Chairman of Fools* can be considered a psychotic text in its exploration of the paranoid delusions Farai undergoes as he sinks into “madness”. In the text, however, Chinodya obviously negotiates the language and form of his narrative, as he maintains a language that is largely coherent, except during Farai’s actual psychosis. Yet at the same time, he engages non-linearity, temporal fissures and other postmodernist techniques to expose the void and unconventional behaviour that is at the heart of not only Farai, but of his society and the nation at large.

The lack of linearity in the plot itself is evident as Chinodya subtly orchestrates the story to go back and forth in time from the past to the present, as it unfolds the events of the novel. This seems a deliberate ploy to reflect the fragmented psyche of the protagonist when his mind spirals with chaotic thoughts as he moves between reality and hallucinations. It is left to the reader to make a distinction between the blurry lines of fact and the fiction of Farai’s imagination, as my discussion on his mental illness below reveals.

Fundamentally, the theme of “madness” is also explored through the narrative form itself. Stone (2004b) explains this calculated distortion of conventional narration that Chinodya employs. He posits that “many authors writing on madness do in effect pose themselves Kofman’s question concerning speaking the unspeakable<sup>38</sup>, and crucially their texts bear

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<sup>37</sup> Karl Jaspers (1997) regards the lack of understandability as an essential feature of delusions, therefore, of writings on “madness”. It is this characteristic that distinguishes delusions - which are un-understandable - from delusion-like ideas, which although consisting of conviction, incorrigibility and impossibility, are understandable. Nassir Ghaemi (2004: 49), however, contests this as he believes that “[d]elusions are not characterised by any single essential feature”.

<sup>38</sup> When considering the representations of traumatic experience in literature, Sara Kofman refers to the unspeakable nature of trauma when she raises the following question: “How can one speak of that before which

witness to their various attempts to manage and stretch the constraints inherent in conventional narrative forms” (Stone 2004b:12). In *Chairman of Fools*, fragmentation of form begins in the opening chapter of the novel as Veronica thinks about Farai. Chinodya employs radical typographical methods to convey Veronica’s inner psychological turmoil over why her husband has gone mad. When she thinks about Farai, for example, Chinodya distorts conventional typography to emphasise how upset she is: “[t]he word *SELFISH* is branded on your forehead ... You think that I won’t change to become *ME, MYSELF, I, ME*” (p.1). Fragmentation of form is further evident in the rest of the text when Chinodya uses different typography (italicised words) to indicate the shift of narrative voice away from the omniscient third person narrator to interior monologue as he dives into the thoughts of the characters in the novel, such as Farai, Veronica, Sekuru Tumai, Sister Nondo and Wilbert.

### **3.3 National Insanities - Intertextual “Madness” in *Chairman of Fools***

Although Chinodya’s literary works are not overtly political, he situates his stories and his characters against the backdrop of societal change. At a Black History Month in Berlin (February, 2009), Chinodya explained that his fiction “seeks to explore and extend the borders of reality, to question and tease matters of identity, class and culture, the past and the present; to explore the human condition in the most interesting and sensitive way possible”. In *Chairman of Fools*, he accomplishes all of these feats as this analysis reveals. One of the main criticisms of the literary text, however, has been exactly this tendency to question and flirt with historical, cultural and socioeconomic problems without actually articulating possible practical solutions to them. Suffice to say, though, Chinodya - and all the other writers under study here - can be described as Zimbabwean “writers in politics” because, as Ngugi (1997: 19) states:

Whether or not he is aware of it, his (the writer) works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in his society. What he can choose is one or the other side of those forces that try to keep the people down. What he cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics.

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all possibility of speech ceases” (1998:9)? For a more detailed reading of this, see her text *Smothered Words* (1998).

When Chinodya points to “madness” in relation to other texts outside of *Chairman of Fools* he, therefore, engages in intertextuality as a deliberate stylistic device to mirror the cultural and socio-political discourses of the times in Zimbabwe that he writes about, and which are subsumed within the larger plot. Nano Wilson-Tagoe (1999) defines intertextuality as the implicit and explicit interaction between texts, forms, genres and discourses<sup>39</sup>. Here, I use it to mean the connection a literary text has with its non-literary context. As Martha Nussbaum (1995) asserts, literary texts are dependent not only on the author’s creation, but also on the social and historical forces that influence the text’s production and that are in existence when it is consumed. In “Some Notes on Ways to Read Zimbabwean Literature of the ‘Crisis’”, Oliver Nyambi (2011:9) emphasises this link when he states “[i]ntertextuality assumes that literary works are just a kind of texts that are congeneric to other non-literary texts and therefore their meanings can be adequately inferred when the literary text is analysed in relation to these ‘other texts’”. The philosophy behind this concept suggests that a text lacks independent meaning. This is something I bear in mind in my literary analysis of all the primary texts studied.

I argue here that the intertextuality of *Chairman of Fools* points to the existential nature of Farai and the other characters in relation to the world around them. Chinodya’s discourse on “madness”, therefore, includes the economic insanities the nation experienced during the years 1998 to 2008, a period Lloyd Sachikonye (2012:23) refers to as one of Zimbabwe’s “lost decades”. This era was characterised by a steep decline in the country’s economy, which first began with the implementation of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990<sup>40</sup>. This downturn culminated in a full blown economic crisis in 2000, with extreme inflation resulting in the continued devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar<sup>41</sup>. One of the inmates of the annexe, Mr. Pimples, points out to this fiscal “madness” in the text when, while reading the newspaper, he tells Farai, “the dollar has been devalued again” (p.106).

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<sup>39</sup>The concept was developed by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes in the 1960s. For an in-depth overview of intertextuality, see Graham Allen’s *Intertextuality* (2000).

<sup>40</sup> In *The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme: The Zimbabwean Case, 1990-1995*, Alois Mlambo (1997) provides details of the worsening social and economic situation in the country that resulted from this programme.

<sup>41</sup> <sup>41</sup>In 2008, Zimbabwe’s inflation stood at 231 million per cent (Berger 2008). In October 2008, a loaf of bread cost Z\$10,000 (Berger 2008).

*Chairman of Fools*, however, falls short of being classified as committed literature because although Chinodya highlights these economic woes that the nation endures under ESAP, he does not suggest any possible reforms to alleviate the phenomenon that has throttled the fabric of Zimbabwean society. Despite everyone being a “millionaire”, the majority failed to secure fuel and basic goods as it was a time when the country experienced great shortages. The supermarket shelves were empty and fuel became liquid gold. By 2007, this economic chaos resulted in the massive migration of close to 25% of the country’s population (Sachikonye 2012). Families were split up due to the pervasive exodus of people to the Diaspora, especially to neighbouring countries, such as South Africa and Botswana, in search of economic sustenance. In the text, Sister Nondo explains how her husband was retrenched from his job at a shoe factory, and then became one of the many Zimbabweans who joined the “Britain brigade” (p.154), where he trained as a male nurse.

Unfortunately, this separation of families heavily affected the cultural, social, and moral fibre of the Zimbabwean people. One of the dominant boomerang effects of this migration was felt in the increase in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS to such an extent that in 2006, the average life expectancy in the country was reduced to 34 years for women and 37 years for men, becoming the lowest in the world<sup>42</sup>. In *Chairman of Fools*, Fatima alludes to this pandemic that killed so many people when she refers to the “funny diseases around,” (p.7). The “tonnes of condoms at every street corner” (ibid) was one of the many measures the government employed in an effort to curb the spread of the disease. Also, when a new inmate wearing prison garb, who is believed to have murdered his father, is admitted into the annexe, Farai thinks about all the “crazy things” (p.151) people were doing nowadays:

... sleeping with their sons’ wives or with their daughters or sisters in order for businesses to thrive, or to rid themselves, so they believe, of evil spirits or cure themselves of AIDS. Women with barren wombs are stealing babies to appease their complaining husbands. He has even read an article about four women who’d kidnapped a man and taken turns to rape him, leaving him naked in the bush with the note, ‘Congratulations. Now we have given you AIDS’<sup>43</sup>. (ibid)

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<sup>42</sup>For more information on this, refer to the article “Zimbabwe’s Life Expectancy Lowest in the World” in *World Medical News Today* (Monday, 10 April, 2006).

<sup>43</sup>The recent spate of literature on HIV/AIDS in Africa demonstrates that writers acknowledge the tremendous impact on the lives of the African people that this illness has. Southern Africa has been one of the regions hit hardest by the phenomenon and this is reflected in the numerous literary narratives written against the backdrop of HIV/AIDS that has emerged from its countries. In South Africa, for example, the effect of the illness is

Here, Chinodya is obviously critiquing the social and moral rot - the certain kind of “madness” reflected in behaviour which transcends prescribed codes and has become a part of everyday life in contemporary Zimbabwe. Ironically, currently newspapers in the country carry stories of how, as Chinodya highlights, men have become victim to women rapists who supposedly sell the sperms they secure, which are then used in traditional rituals meant to generate wealth or enhance luck<sup>44</sup>. This lends credence to Farai’s belief that “*those people outside annexes are just as ‘mad’ as those within, perhaps even ‘madder’*” (p.162).

Of the Zimbabweans who remained in the country, a considerable number became economic refugees because of the high unemployment rate in the formal sector of the economy. Many people relied heavily on the informal sector for survival, especially in the urban areas. In 2004, even the latter sector was significantly crippled as a result of the government’s urban clean-up campaign, code named “Operation *Murambatsvina*”<sup>45</sup>. Meant to rid the urban areas of illegal activities, the operation not only left approximately 2, 700 000 people homeless, but also destroyed the informal urban livelihood of many families (McGregor 2010a)<sup>46</sup>. In *Chairman of Fools*, Chinodya flittingly refers to it when, while watching television in the annexe, Farai sees “villagers in front of burning shacks ... being bundled into waiting lorries by policeman in riot gear” (p.119).

In addition, the prevailing food scarcity in the country forced many people to travel to neighbouring countries, especially South Africa, to purchase basic goods. In *Chairman of Fools*, for example, at 70 years old, Veronica’s mother becomes one of the new breed of

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depicted in Sindiwe Magoma’s *Beauty’s Gift* (2008), Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2001) and in the collection of poems and short stories from *Southern Africa Nobody Ever Said AIDS* (2004). In Zimbabwe, masculine discourses on the painful reality of HIV/AIDS include Chinodya’s *Can We Talk* (2001) and *Tale of Tamari* (2004), Mungoshi’s *Walking Still* (1997) and Kanengoni’s *Effortless Tears* (1993). Feminist discourses on the illness are explored in Lutanga Shaba’s *Secret’s of a Woman’s Soul* (2006), Valerie Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Tendayi Westerhof’s *Unlucky in Love* (2005) and Sharai Mukonoweshuro’s *Day’s of Silence* (2000).

<sup>44</sup> Incredible as it may seem, the issue of female rapists was a very real terror in Zimbabwe. Many cases were reported to the police in 2011 and 2012. News of different incidents of these “rapes” appeared in various newspapers in the country, as well as on BBC News. Zimbabwean law, however, does not recognise male rape, so three women who were arrested and went on trial for 17 counts of these “rapes” were charged instead with “aggravated indecent assault”. The case, however, was dismissed due to insubstantial DNA evidence, which was a pre-requisite for conviction. See for example, Steve Vickers’ article, “Zimbabwe women accused of raping men 'for rituals’” (2011).

<sup>45</sup> *Murambatsvina* literary means “remove the filth”.

<sup>46</sup> For more on this topic see *The Hidden Dimensions of Operations Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe* (Vambe 2008).

sturdy women trained by harsh economic times to source sustenance for their families in these countries. Chinodya also illustrates the rampant corruption in the country through Miss Fits, an inmate of the annexe who, like Veronica's mother, is a cross border trader<sup>47</sup>. She talks about how the custom officials at the border posts "make things tough for us, seizing our stuff and demanding bribes and treating us like common thieves" (p.109)<sup>48</sup>. As Miss Fits explains, this forced many traders to jump borders risking both life (being shot at the Mozambican border) and limb (being attacked by crocodiles while crossing the Limpopo) in order to eke a living<sup>49</sup>.

It is this same economic "madness" of the times that Chinodya hints at when Farai goes to deliver a paper in Johannesburg and is beaten up before the seminar by a South African man who tells him, "Zimbabwe people stupid, come buy everything here and thieving and broken doors everywhere. Now everything costing more, more for us becous of Zimbabwe people" (p.139). It seems that through this incident, Chinodya somehow predicts the xenophobia that was to follow in South Africa in May 2008, where foreign nationals were brutally attacked by locals and their homes and livelihoods destroyed<sup>50</sup>. This was because of the perceived threat these foreigners posed to the South Africans by "taking up their jobs and committing crimes" (Muzondidya 2010:43). These xenophobic attacks left 60 dead (12 were Zimbabweans) and 80,000 displaced (Muzondidya 2010:43)<sup>51</sup>.

Another kind of "madness" that Chinodya alludes to in his narrative is that of white Rhodesians who refuse to accept the reality of black Independence and the necessity and irreversibility of the land reform programme in the country which inevitably followed. The white ex-farmer Farai meets in the bar, for example, says that he "sold me farm before you

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<sup>47</sup> In post-independent Zimbabwe, there have been high levels of corruption within the public service (Ncube 2008). In 2004, an Anti-corruption Commission was established in an effort to curb this corruption.

<sup>48</sup> There were restrictions on the importation of certain goods, which could only be imported in limited quantities.

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Ignatious Mabasa's *Mapenzi* (mad people) critiques Zimbabwe's failing economy and corruption. Zifikile Gambahaya and Itai Muhwati (2007: 61) explain how the main character in *Mapenzi*, a former freedom fighter who has been mentally traumatised by the war, blames the economic problems the country was facing for reducing "all characters in the novel to the level of mad or foolish people".

<sup>50</sup> The latest wave of xenophobic attacks in South Africa occurred in May 2015. They began in the KwaZulu-Natal Province and spread to Johannesburg. It is alleged that these attacks began "a week after Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, was reported to have said that foreigners 'should pack their bags and go back home'" (Haffejee 2015), although the king denied having made the comment. At least seven people were killed and thousands displaced from their homes.

<sup>51</sup> NoViolet Bulawayo (2011) vividly depicts one such attack in her short story "Shamisos", in which Method, a university drop-out migrates to South Africa and is employed as a gardener. Tragically, however, he becomes a victim of this xenophobia as he is burnt alive in his shack and subsequently dies.

guys started all this land grabbing and turning this country into thousands of little villages” (CF, p.30). This image of Zimbabweans as land grabbers has long since been popularised by Western media<sup>52</sup>. The ex-farmer’s attitude towards land reform stems from what Wonder Guchu (2005) in a review of *Chairman of Fools* calls “the supremacist colonialist mentality that makes him lose touch with the reality of the end of a racist social setting and continue with the stereotyped identity myth about Africans”<sup>53</sup>. Chinodya further alludes to the land issue and to that of “the new settlers” (p.143) in a conversation Farai has over lunch with Georgina, the white woman who is his publisher, and Sisi Maud, his friend. They talk about “hastily abandoned farms and dispossessed white farmers trooping in to seek refuge with friends in the suburbs” (p.165).

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the question of land is a controversial and politically thorny issue in Zimbabwe. The war of liberation in the country was not only a fight for the attainment of black rule, but also for freedom in its entirety, which includes repossession and redistribution of the land. Despite the international criticism of this agenda, what remains undeniable is that this reversed dispossession between the races - the “measure of madness” (Martel 2001:41) in the stance taken by Mugabe - has seen the impossible become the possible for the black majority in Zimbabwe<sup>54</sup>. In order to ensure that this “madness” bears fruit, however, the great challenge that remains for the government is to adequately equip and train these “bungling new farmers” (p.76) who lack the economic clout to do so on their own. This would help to ensure that all agricultural land is productively utilised and that the land reform programme is a success. Not only is the land important for the economic sustenance it is able to provide but also for its ability to bind the people to its bosom and “thus serves as the force behind cultural continuity” (Stratton 1986: 12)<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Also see the way a Zimbabwean author, NoViolet Bulawayo, refers to it in *We Need New Names* (2013).

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Fuller poignantly portrays this mindset through the white ex-Rhodesian soldiers she depicts in *Scribbling the Cat*. Characters such as Riley and St. Medard are men who are willing to kill, or die, to defend their belief in “white superiority in all things, even the ability to kill” (Fuller 2004:26)

<sup>54</sup> That there is no greater joy than ownership of land is vividly illustrated in Kanengoni’s short story “The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror” in *Writing Still* (Staunton 2003). The black farmer takes pride in his field of beans on land which he now owns. Madamombe (2008:98) states that Kanengoni’s story “seems to confirm that the acquisition of land marks the grand finale of external forms of colonialism in Zimbabwe”.

<sup>55</sup> Mungoshi poignantly portrays this aspect of the land in his short story “The Setting Sun and the Rolling World” in *Coming of the Dry Season* (1982:28), when the old father tells his son Nhamo that “[n]othing is more certain to hold you together than the land and a home, a family”.

### 3.4 The Nexus between Creativity and “Madness”

In the previous chapter, I explained how scientific research has lent credence to the claim of the “tortured genius”. Maureen Neihart (1998) reiterates that ingenuity demands the willingness to transgress the boundary between rationality and irrationality and many psychoanalytic studies have explored this connection between creativity and “madness”<sup>56</sup>. She explains how Plato believed that creativity is “divine madness ... a gift from God” (Neihart 1998). Similarly, Albert Rothenburg (1990) argues that deviant behaviour is not only allied to persons of genius or high-level creativity, but it is often expected of them. Mental instability is, therefore, believed sometimes to enhance creativity (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005)<sup>57</sup>. I also highlighted how the relationship between “madness” and creativity has been linked not only to the cognitive domain, but to the affective one too, as reflected in the extreme mood disorders, such as manic depression, that creative people experience. What formerly used to be termed manic depression is now known as bipolar disorder, and is a condition Farai is diagnosed with in the novel.

Creativity itself requires “intense levels of energy, passion and daring” (Somerville 2012:191) and in the text, Chinodya’s protagonist appears to possess all three. Yet somehow Farai’s ingenuity seems to court a certain kind of strangeness and a degree of loneliness. Wilbert, his best friend, acknowledges how Farai had shown signs of unconventional behaviour even in his school years:

*Yet you were always quiet, sometimes, keeping to yourself and studying yourself half-blind, writing precocious, melancholic poems about God and the universe as if the impending weight of the ending world was upon your shoulders. You, the belated virgin imagining yourself Stephen Dedalus’s twin in James Joyce’s A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man! ... Maybe you should have pursued something more practical, like accounts or business administration rather than stick with literature. (p.96)*

His creativity, however, has made him a very successful and well-known writer. In the text, for example, Sister Nondo, who is responsible for the psychiatric ward (the annexe) of the hospital, has read Farai’s book, *Harvest of Thorns*. Just like the policeman who stops Farai for driving under the influence of alcohol, she studied it for “O” level. Mr. Pimples, one of

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<sup>56</sup>For a fuller exploration of this link see Virshup 1995; Jamison 1993; Rothenberg 1990; and Feldman 1989.

<sup>57</sup> It is important to understand, however, that mental instability is not a prerequisite for creativity as creativity can flourish without “madness”.

the inmates in the annexe, instantly recognises Farai on their first encounter. No doubt, Farai is famous in his society for his writing. The mental illness he suffers is, however, related to this creativity. In “On Writing Madness”, Ignes Sodré explains such connectivity this way:

[t]he great artist has a greater capacity to tap into unconscious fantasy than ordinary mortals have, which accounts, in part, for the power of great art. Everybody fantasises, although this capacity, as we know, can be unhealthily inhibited; but when fantasies take over the mind in an over-powerful, over luxuriant way, then this leads to neurosis, or psychosis. (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005:203)

This is exactly what happens to Farai - he experiences a psychotic episode in which the fantasies of his mind seem ever so real as I detail below. On admittance to the annexe, he is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Sister Nondo naively attributes Farai’s mental illness to his thinking too much, and she rereads his book, *Harvest of Thorns*, when Farai is admitted there in order to try to figure out “what goes on in that *sascam*<sup>58</sup> head of yours” (p.130). When she asks him how he comes up with all his creative ideas, Farai responds by saying:

Sometimes the ideas just come, just like that, but sometimes I have to help them along. I don’t know why I write. I suppose it’s like beating oneself on the head with stick, while trying to enjoy the pain, but it feels good when a book is complete and you can say, ‘Here it is’” (ibid).

The text reveals, however, that while in the U.S., the depression and loneliness that Farai endures impair his creative processes. He experiences writer’s block and this loss of creativity contributes significantly to the agitation and insecurity he feels on his return home, and possibly, to his failure to relate to his wife. Kristine Somerville (2012:192) describes how writer’s block causes “varying combinations of hair-trigger temper, irritability, paranoia, egomania and overwhelming disorganization that made maintaining domestic relations challenging”. Added to that, Somerville (2012) believes that rather than providing stimulus for artistic work as propounded by the wound and bow thesis, mental illness can sometimes cripple creativity<sup>59</sup>. This puts a dent to the romantic notion that mental illness actually

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<sup>58</sup>“*Sascam*” is Zimbabwean slang for a mentally disturbed person.

<sup>59</sup> In his essay “Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow (1941), Edmund Wilson gives critical accounts of how artistic creativity has been shown to be closely linked to mental deviations from scientific rationalism. Wilson believes that the artist’s “madness” (wound) is what inspires ingenuity (bow). Art is therefore seen as “the expression of the tortured or ecstatic soul” (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005:178)

enhances creativity<sup>60</sup>. As Somerville goes on to explain, for poets such as Pen Powell and Jack Coulehan, mental illness has been marked by a withdrawal from the world in the same manner that Farai shrinks into a cocoon while in the U.S. For Powell and Coulehan, getting the right treatment and taking medication caused a resurfacing of their creativity (Somerville 2012). Similarly, the medication Farai is given in the annexe and which he continues to take on his release seems to re-stimulate his creative drive to the extent that he is determined to write again on his return to the U.S.

### **3.5 Far from the Maddening Marriage**

On the surface, Farai and Veronica Chari appear to enjoy all the trappings of a middle-class life - they are both employed in good jobs, own a house in the low density suburbs, drive two cars and consider themselves blessed with three children - Rumbi (at high school), Sharai (aged eight) and Ticha (aged six). An exploration of Farai and Veronica Chari's marriage, however, reveals that turbulent waters flow beneath the surface of a seemingly successful and happy union. As the narrative unravels, it becomes evident that the couple has drifted apart. There is no meaningful relationship between the two and both seem just to act out the roles expected of them by their middle-class society. This farce and instability in their marriage is one of the triggers to Farai's "madness" as he appears unable to cope with these changes, as my discussion below reveals.

An insight into their marriage clearly shows the strained relationship between them. The couple has no time to say a simple "good morning" to each other. Farai does not attend church with the rest of the family and there is no intimacy shared between them, both in their marital bed and in their lives. I argue that theirs is a superficial relationship that elicits psychological imbalances in both, which one hides behind the pages of the Bible and the other drowns in the alcoholic contents of a beer bottle. At his older brother's graduation party, as Farai listens to Garai giving thanks to his wife and family for their support throughout his years of studying for his doctorate, Farai "feels hollow, thinking of the emptiness in his own household" (p.168).

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<sup>60</sup>Van Gogh, for example, has professed that "[t]he more I am spent, ill, a broken pitch, by so much more am I an artist" (quoted by Somerville 2012:199). The famous writer and poet, Sylvia Path, however, does not sentimentalise her mental illness this way as she believes that the pain suffered during a period of psychosis overwhelms creativity. Somerville (2012:198) cites her as saying, "[w]hen you are insane, you are busy being insane - all the time. When I was crazy, that's all I was".

As I contemplate Farai and Veronica Chari's marital union, the questions that reverberate in my mind is: Is this not a madding marriage? Is Farai's "madness" not an attempt to move far from its emotional impairment? Chinodya noticeably uses the metaphor of "madness" to reveal what Guchu (2005) terms a "dysfunctional middle-class", which Farai and Veronica Chari are part of. Guchu (2005) describes *Chairman of Fools* as a:

... story of madness that pervades today's marriages that are bound by sound financial standing and not by the heart. It is about pretence as the accepted way of life, where two people brought together by fate put up with each other because as a born-again, the wife cannot leave and because of tradition, the husband cannot walk out. This then becomes a recipe for madness ... it takes a mental breakdown for Veronica and Farai to realise the damage their relationship is causing to each other.

As early as the very first page of the text, there is an indication to the instability within their marriage. Through her musings, Veronica highlights that the ten years of their union prior to Farai's departure to the United States of America (U.S.) were characterised by Farai dishing out "*blame and abuse*" (p.1). His time away has evidently rocked their marital "nest" (p.2), as on his return, Veronica has changed, evolving to become "*ME, MYSELF, I, ME*" (p.1) rather than simply Farai's appendage. As a university graduate she earns a good salary, is passionate about her religion and has bought herself a car. Her bag, her bible and her car keys are all undoubtedly symbolic of her independence; an independence and assertiveness that seems to have grown while Farai was away in the U.S. and which upsets his equilibrium on his return: "He feels envious of her and yet angry with her. A woman can change a lot in twenty short months" (p.2). There is now some uncertainty to their roles that were previously so well-defined, causing a change to the rules of engagement between them.

Veronica makes no attempt to hide from Farai her bitterness at being left behind alone with the children. Neither does she accept his behaviour lightly - almost in punishment for coming home late, Veronica denies him the sexual gratification he yearns for from her and also leaves him no food<sup>61</sup>. This is contrary to what is expected of an ideal traditional Zimbabwean wife, who should willingly feed and sexually satisfy her husband, regardless of his behaviour or

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<sup>61</sup> It is pertinent to note that I do not think that wives "owe" their husbands sexual gratification. The notion of women withholding sex as punishment is a misogynistic construction of femininity that plays to the ideas of women and their sexuality as manipulative. In such a patriarchal and oppressive context, however, women often use their bodies as sites of resistance, as I elaborate in Chapter Seven of this study.

how she might be feeling. This is the kind of woman Farai seems to want. A woman like Fatima, one of his lovers for many years, who Farai sees as belonging “to another culture, a brave old culture that preserved its cult and was not afraid to train women to be real women” (p.142). Fatima who, unlike Veronica, is willing to cook for him even at two o’clock in the morning. She even has beads around her waist meant to sexually please Farai and willingly dabbles in *mupfuwhira*<sup>62</sup> to keep his attention. She is twenty-five but “already wise enough to know that the best way to lose a man was to try and own him” (CF, p.142). Fatima is the antithesis of Veronica and exactly what he would want his wife to be.

Farai blames Veronica’s unwillingness to conform to her traditional role on the fact that she is “too educated” (p.7) and “never went to *chinamwari*”<sup>63</sup>. For Fatima, being educated is no excuse for what she considers negligence on Veronica’s part, as she says “even women with university degrees take traditional courses in looking after their husbands” (p.7). Farai obviously feels threatened by Veronica’s independence. He says, “[t]hat woman is killing herself competing with me ... I make three times what she makes and take care of most things at home but she won’t give me or herself any rest” (p.50). His old school friend, Simbisai, defends Veronica and tells Farai “[m]aybe she is asserting herself after years of docility” (p.50). Unfortunately, there is no one to counsel the couple as traditionally, when a husband has problems with his wife, the counsellor’s role is taken up by the woman’s *vatete* (paternal aunt), but Veronica does not have one, yet another indicator of how dysfunctional the family is.

What is apparent is that Farai regards their home as “his prison” (p.22), which is filled with “[l]ogos, logos ... Veronica’s logos. That’s what this house is all about ... This is what I have to put up with every day” (p.23). He is agitated by what he considers is untoward behaviour by his wife. In turn, Veronica asserts that Farai is “not the person I married and hasn’t been for a long, long, time” (p.128) implying that she is not the only one that has changed in their relationship. She accuses him of being full of self-pity and of worshipping money. The latter allegation is supported by the fact that when he is in the annexe, he asks for his visa card and his brother, Garai, reacts to his request with “See ... He’s here sick but his talking visa cards already! Money, money, money!” (p.116)

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<sup>62</sup> *Mupfuwhira* is a love potion a woman may use to make a man fall hopelessly in love with her.

<sup>63</sup> *Chinamwari* is the initiation of female teenagers into adulthood, where they are taught to be the ideal wife, including in terms of sexual performance. It is mainly practised among Zimbabweans of Zambian and Malawian descent.

By the end of the novel, Veronica reiterates Wilbert's fear of what led to Farai's "madness". She attributes Farai's inability to come to terms with this changed relationship between them as a possible cause for his downward spiral: "*I sometimes fear you broke down because I developed in your absence. I suspect that deep down you are a conservative Shona man, hurting because I grew away from you*" (p.182)<sup>64</sup>. But their marriage, while being one of the causes of Farai's "madness", is also a possible cure for him. Sister Nondo, the matron at the annexe, stresses this when she asks the two:

Are you happily married? ... Because if you're not, it would be like throwing the pills into the river – plop – the medicine won't work. And the traditional option won't work either. Your folks can brew as much beer as they want and you can visit the best herbalists in the country but without you two understanding each other, the patient will never fully recover from this illness". (p.128)

Evidently though, Farai's illness seems to have been the necessary catalyst needed to repair the relationship between them. On his release from the annexe, both make an effort to restore intimacy and tolerance between them, a lack of which had made their marriage a maddening one. At a Saturday afternoon braai<sup>65</sup> at Veronica's church which they attend a few weeks after his discharge, Farai is "witty and sociable, the Farai he was when she first met him" (p.179) and Veronica "hopes and thinks that he is changing, that he will change" (ibid), that they are beginning to achieve some happiness. This gives her inspiration to work hard at their marriage; she sees "her chance to reclaim him. She cooks him his favourite dishes, buys him surprise presents, baths with him; holds him close to her at night" (p.178). In essence, she becomes that "Everywoman" that Farai needs in his life, a combination of all the women he had known. The one he imagined during one of his hallucinations when he picked up a black and white photograph from the ground:

She looks like somebody he has known for eternity, but he cannot remember her name or where he met her. Her short groomed hair looks like Piri's, her nose like Fatima's, her large earrings like Matiedza's, her eyes serious like Rudo's, and they

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<sup>64</sup> From a feminist perspective, Veronica's statement alludes to the traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity within her society, which views the male as the protector and provider and the female as subservient to and socially, financially and emotionally dependent on her partner within a marriage.

<sup>65</sup> "Braai" is the Afrikaans equivalent of "barbecue" and refers to the social custom of grilling meat over an open fire.

are secretly pleading for something he cannot fathom. Her mouth is familiar, fleshy and promising like Veronica's. She is Everywoman<sup>66</sup>. (p.82)

It is, perhaps, this new relationship between them that will help him heal and attain the mental and emotional stability that he requires to avoid going over the edge again. While Sekuru Tumai “insists on *hakata*, the diviner's bones” as surety that Farai's illness will not return, Veronica believes that only prayer can ultimately guarantee this. As Farai spends more time with his family, even taking them on a sightseeing visit to Great Zimbabwe one weekend, Veronica believes that her prayer is being answered. Indeed, for Farai, this quality time spent with his family provides “his opportunity to change, to re-organise himself and start afresh” (p.180); he no longer drinks or spends nights away from home. This “sudden reserve” (ibid) in his lifestyle has brought him a measure of sanity. He settles into a “medicated regime” (p.178), his mind becomes “less distracted” (ibid) and he is able to sleep soundly. Farai realises that in order to maintain the sense of security that now encompasses him and not “relapse into that nightmare” (p.181), on his return to the U.S., he will need to “find some friends and new things to do. And he must write” (ibid) in order to re-establish his creativity.

### 3.6 Farai's Mental Washing Away into Paranoia

A psychotic episode is like a waking nightmare. There is utter terror and confusion. There is also ... 'disorganisation.' Your self loses coherence – it's like a sandcastle with all the sand being washed away. In short, the centre cannot hold. (Saks 2007:348)

This is how Elyn Saks, a lawyer, scientist, educator and author, describes her journey into “madness”. The reason why I have chosen this particular excerpt to begin my discussion on Chinodya's handling of Farai's mental illness is because of the similarities that exist between Elyn's experience and that of the protagonist of *Chairman of Fools*. Although of different gender and coming from diverse worlds, both are successful professionals who have been struck by similar mental disorders, schizophrenia (Elyn) and bipolar disorder (Farai). Both

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<sup>66</sup>Farai's “breaking” a woman up into body parts like this is indicative of sexual objectification. Dawn Szymanski, Lowen Moffit and Erika Carr (2011:8) posit that sexual objectification “occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire”. Their view is based on the objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997) and in this instance implies that Farai is treating a woman as a sexual object whose value lies in how he can use her.

illnesses are characterised by psychosis. The difference between the two is that whereas schizophrenia is a disorder that affects the cognitive domain, bipolar disorder, what used to be known as manic depression, is a mood affective disorder that is mainly about how one feels (Saks 2007:328). In *Chairman of Fools*, Chinodya refers to bipolar disorder as “*a condition that causes unpredictable mood swings and extreme mood shifts ... from overly ‘high’ and or irritable to sad and hopeless and then back again, often with periods of normality in-between*” (p. 177). More importantly, however, the psychological ailments they both suffer adversely affect their sense of self, a point David Mann (1991:216) emphasises when he asserts “what is most important about psychiatric ailments ... is that they can be understood as losses of self”, a fact that is evident in Farai, as I reveal here. These mental illnesses affect one’s subjectivity, resulting in a disorder of the self and of the perception of external reality (Kean 2009). Imagining Sak’s analogy of a psychotic episode to a sandcastle in the opening quotation to this section gives one a sense of the experience that sufferers of these mental ailments endure as they are plagued by a fear of the terror that plays itself time and time again within the walls of their minds.

Chinodya’s depiction of Farai’s journey into “madness” could be viewed as quasi-autobiographical. In an interview with Goodman (2006), Chinodya makes some sort of confession to this. In seeming defence of his own experience with mental illness, Chinodya states:

Four out of five other colleagues have gone through the same experience of bipolar disorder. In Zimbabwe there is the added pressure of fending for one’s family. In the eyes of the public, writers are up against lawyers and accountants. That pressure can destroy us” (Goodman 2006).<sup>67</sup>

Another factor, too, points to the autobiographical nature of the text - Chinodya was a Distinguished Visiting Professor in Creative Writing and African Literature at the University

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<sup>67</sup> On 26 December, 2014, Chinodya was alleged to have stripped naked at a local medical centre in Harare. He was said to have spent the day there scribbling furiously in a note book before the shocking event. This incident subsequently stirred much debate in the local media and the literary arena as to whether or not he was mentally ill, as well as on the relationship between “madness” and creativity. Godwin Muzari (2015) describes it as just one of the many “creative bouts Chinodya is prone to. Virginia Phiri, author of *Desperate* (2002) says: “It’s brilliance, not madness. People do not understand us, but we are used to it” (quoted in Muzari 2015). Literary critic Memory Chirere, however, stresses that “[a]bnormal actions that are shown by writers are common ... It is only that writers are popular and their actions will be noticed more than ordinary people” (quoted in Muzari, 2015). In April 2015, Chinodya was admitted to the Annex Hospital, a rehabilitation centre that houses mentally ill patients.

of St Lawrence in New York (1995-1997), and in his novel, Farai is depicted as a writer and visiting professor at an American university.

Throughout the novel, Farai - whose name means “be happy” in Shona - feels anything but the happiness his name signifies. The novel begins with Veronica thinking about what could possibly be “*eating ... up*” (p.1) her husband, Farai. She attributes his “*phoney, artsy life*” (p.1) as being responsible for him falling into “*the steep-sided pits of ... despair*” (p.1). This is the first indication of his depression in the novel, which seems to be causing harm not only to him, but to his family too. Veronica suggests that Farai has become extremely selfish and seems to have “mangled” his sense of time. He possesses a sense of purposelessness that already, at this juncture, points to the possibility of Farai’s confusion.

A close scrutiny of *Chairman of Fools* proves Farai to be a man of great extremes - he is utterly devastated at the death of his father, but does not even shed a single tear when his brother, Dzimai, dies. Yet, strangely enough, at one point in time when he is lost, it is the spirit of his dead brother - who was schizophrenic - which guides him safely home. When he gets there, completely delusional, he imagines his mother, who had died from cancer, calling out to him from the girl’s bedroom. He goes into the room and finds “[t]here is no whiff of wasting flesh in the bedroom and no logos on the sheets. The bed is empty. But she is there. He hugs the pillows, pats the mattress, arranges the bottles of morphine on the side table and kisses her on the forehead” (p.83). These hallucinations seem so real to him. Ironically, while all this plays out in his mind, from next door Farai hears the voice of Thomas Mapfumo, one of Zimbabwe’s great mbira<sup>68</sup> artists, singing:

*Vane mudzimu havarove woo, heewo wo*

*Vane mudzimu havarove woo, heewo wo*<sup>69</sup> (p.84)

in seeming reassurance of the reality of her presence. Or perhaps, as is believed in African traditional culture, Chinodya may simply be suggesting that this is a case of the spirits of the dead stirring in realisation of the affliction that is attacking one of their own. This scene is a

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<sup>68</sup>Mbira is a classical Zimbabwean musical instrument consisting of flattened metal prongs fastened at one end to a wooden resonator box (*African Music Encyclopaedia*).

<sup>69</sup> Those possessed by ancestral spirits never die, heewo, wo  
Those possessed by ancestral spirits never die, heewo, wo

perfect example of the fusion of fantasy and reality that is a constant ploy Chinodya uses in the novel to depict Farai's psychosis.

Farai subsequently runs out of the house, moving away from "this place of death of and ashes" (p.86) and drives himself to the hospital with the intention of committing himself to the annexe, where his brother, Dzimai, had been institutionalised for months. As is evident later, when he seeks help through prayer, somewhere within his tormented, psychotic mind some sanity still prevails; enough to make Farai realise that he needs some sort of assistance; that his mind is out of control. When he gets there, however, "[t]he annexe walls are sheets of iron. There are no windows. He cannot find the doors. He bangs on the iron walls. Five women with shaven heads, dressed in white sheets, fall from the sky and surround him" (p.86). Terrified, he bolts back to his car and drives away.

What becomes obvious to the reader at this juncture is that, in his demented state, Farai is going through a living nightmare. He, too, acknowledges that "[t]his is hell – he, the man who had it all and messed it up. This is his hell and he will live through it, if only his mind can allow him to rest. This is his hell but he can still see the world outside" (pp.87-88). He is so tormented that he "wishes the crane would demolish his car and his head and finish him off, so that he could be reduced to nothingness. So that his spirit can be freed into space" (p.88). I argue that from a Laingian perspective, the full terror of Farai's experience is such that he feels that the world around him is about to "crash in and obliterate all identity as a gas will rush in and obliterate a vacuum. The individual feels that, like the vacuum, he is empty. But this emptiness is him" (Laing 1990:45). This feeling of "nothingness" does not only begin at this point. Earlier on in the novel Chinodya highlights this existential loss of self when, while at his sister Tindo's house, Farai "feels empty, weightless, lost. He squats over the funnelled hole trying to empty himself of nothing" (p.55).

After his admittance to the annexe, in an attempt to recreate how all this existential loss of self began, Farai recalls his life in the U.S. as a black professor:

... trying to teach creative writing and African Literature to white kids some of whom even struggled to construct sentences and paragraphs. Rich white kids, who flew past him in their twin cabs after evening classes, slowing down as he trudged home in shin deep snow, to yell, 'Want a ride professor?' (p.131)

This incident marks the beginning of some sort of loss of self worth, a questioning of his own identity as an educated and successful black man. Added to this was the feeling of “not being challenged to achieve his best” (ibid), which dampened his initial enthusiasm on arrival in the U.S. His professional integrity is also taken to task as he is swayed by his colleagues to give high grades to low achieving students. All this impact on his own self esteem and his ego is further dented when there is not much excitement as he expected over him as someone who is “black, foreign, African, artistic and ... ‘distinguished’” (p.132).

It was in the U.S., too, that he first develops the great sense of loneliness that dogs him on his return home as he has “no real contact with the people around him” (p.133). While there, he had withdrawn so deeply into a shell to the extent that a black female professor that he worked with tells him, “You need to come out of your cocoon ... You’ve got to tease out matters of race and ethnicity and not sulk or drown in self-pity. Remember, the world cannot change itself for you, and you cannot change it” (p.132). It becomes obvious to the reader that his life in the U.S. is such that it not only affects his identity, but also his creativity and renders him dysfunctional:

He had time, silence, solitude, but he could not write. He was too lonely to put pen to paper, and his impotence made him feel guilty and restless. He went to the library for books, discovered exciting new authors in translation and read voraciously but remained empty and unsatisfied. He ached for company to fill in the void, for the firm grasp of a bottle Black Label in his hand, for cigarette smoke, noise, music, comrades shouting in lively argument, and the banter and laughter of people. (p.133)

All this demonstrates that while in the U.S., Farai failed to carve a niche for himself in “this cruel country” (p.150). And, when he comes home on holiday, his ego is further emasculated by Veronica’s new found independence and the unpaid bills, both of which upset his dominant role within African culture as husband and provider. I contend that the events both at home and abroad challenge his sense of masculinity and eat away at Farai’s existential core to the extent that he loses his sense of ontological security<sup>70</sup>. In the Introduction, I have already mentioned how Laing (1990) perceives ontological security as a firm sense of being

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<sup>70</sup> Constructions of gender can be so deeply embedded in how we locate ourselves in our worlds that challenges to such constructions can also cause existential crises.

that is resultant from an individual's sense of existential order and continuity in his/her life. Similarly, Giddens (1984:375) defines it as "confidence or trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and identity". Giddens (1984) further argues that ontological security is dependent on an individual's ability to give meaning to his/her life. Any event that happens that is inconsistent with this meaning threatens this positive understanding of self and of the surrounding world. This causes ontological insecurity, which is characterised by schizophrenic behaviour reflecting a frantic and alienating "struggle to maintain a sense of being" (Mullan 1995:6), the kind of struggle Farai endures.

Once at home<sup>71</sup>, any contact Farai has with reality and the people around him becomes what Laing (1990) terms an "implosion"<sup>72</sup>, where Farai sees this contact as a threat to his own sense of self, to his identity. This is why, in his fantasy, Farai believes that everyone is against him, that even those closest and dearest to him are part of the grand plan to annihilate him. Laing (1990:79) states that "[t]he paranoid has specific persecutors. Someone is against him. There is a plot on foot to steal his brains", giving strong indications that in writing *Chairman of Fools*, Chinodya must have somehow been influenced by Laing's theory as this is exactly how Farai feels. He tells the police he has called to his home to try to solve the great puzzle unfolding in his mind: "[i]t's all a racket ... Don't you see? It's a big greedy racket and many big people will be exposed and shown for what they are" (p.71). He tells them "about various funerals and the crowds threatening him" (p.74). His disorganised thoughts make it difficult for him to "piece together all the elements of this gigantic puzzle. He has all the pieces, but they won't join together" (p.76). This disjointed thought is evidence of his psychosis, during which he imagines a blue corolla following him - Veronica's car. Her car "represents all he resents about his wife, and the company she works for, And in the last few days, this car has been the elusive harbinger of his fears" (p.126). Delusions, which are a basic characteristic of "madness", envelop Farai.

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<sup>71</sup> The concept of "home" is in itself a contested and loaded one, especially for migratory subjects, as this study illustrates in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Five. There is nothing simple or straightforward about "coming home". See, for example, Aparajita Sagar's "Homes and Postcoloniality"; Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling's *Home* (2006); Magdalena Nowicka's "Mobile Locations: Construction of Home in a Group of Mobile Transnational Professionals" (2007); and David Ralph and Lynn Staeheli's "Home and Migration: Mobilities, Belongings and Identities" (2011).

<sup>72</sup> Implosion refers to the impingement of reality. For further reading on this, see Laing's *The Divided Self* (1990).

Kiran Chandra and Suprakash Chaudhury (2009) state that a delusion is a false belief that indicates abnormal thought content. They go on to stress that “[t]he key feature of a delusion is the degree to which the person is convinced that the belief is true ... regardless of evidence to the contrary” (Chandra and Chaudhury 2009:3). This is obviously the case with Farai. During his paranoia, there is no clear demarcation between reality and fantasy. His psyche suffers from what Elijah, the main character in Robert Muponde’s short story “Touched”<sup>73</sup>, calls “a fusion of fact and fiction - faction” (Chihota and Muponde 2000: 210). This seems a deliberate ploy on Chinodya’s part in order to emphasise the extent of Farai’s psychosis. His narrative technique is such that it becomes difficult for the reader to distinguish what is actually real from what is simply a figment of Farai’s imagination<sup>74</sup>. This, I contend, is the crux of the novel. Chinodya has taken up the challenge of depicting that utter thought disorder that constitutes “madness” leading to a point where:

[c]onsciousness gradually loses its coherence. One’s center gives away. The center cannot hold. The “me” becomes a haze, and the solid center from which one experiences reality breaks up like a bad radio signal ... No core holds things together, providing the lens through which to see the world, to make judgements and comprehend risk. Random moments of time follow one another. Sights, sounds, thoughts and feelings don’t go together. No organizing principle takes successive moments in time and puts them together in a coherent way from which sense can be made. (Saks 2007:13)

In a book review of *Chairman of Fools*, Taurai Chinyanganya (2010) rightly asserts that Farai’s “insanity becomes a metaphor for a broken down existence where man is not in control”. As his mind loses rationality, what becomes real for him is the fantasy that is playing itself out in his mind – the blue corolla stalking him; his wife trying to steal the children away from him as she drives “so many cars at once, so many decoys” (p.73); the news on the radio; the “thumping, marching noises in the ceiling, the black, and brown dogs on the highway and his persistent dreams of being trapped in a mire of human waste ” (p.74). His paranoia stretches to the extent that he has hallucinations of his death, of being buried. He

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<sup>73</sup> In Clement Chihota and Robert Muponde’s short story anthology, *No More Plastic Balls* (2000).

<sup>74</sup> Saks (2007: 111) poignantly expresses the kind of disjointedness that Farai feels as she describes her own delusions: “With psychosis, the wall that separates fantasy from reality dissolves; inside my head, the fantasies were real, and everything was actually happening. The images I saw the actions I took, were all real, and it made me frantic”.

tells a strange couple he meets on one of his journeys that “they are burying me tomorrow” (p.86).

As he dazedly walks around the streets of the city, Farai’s behaviour is such that people around him recognise the unmistakable signs of mental illness: “People avoid him, spinning in a vortex, out of his path. They take one quick look in his direction and turn their faces away. An old woman spits hard at his feet and staggers off in reverse motion” (p.52). The avoidance reflected here is a common strategy people use when encountering a mad person in Zimbabwean society as traditionally, it is believed that coming into contact with him/her may result in the evil spirits or demons that possess that individual being transferred to them.

I argue that all of Farai’s delusions point out to his petrification, which Laing (1990:46) describes as “the dread, that is, of the possibility of turning, or being turned, from a live person into a dead thing, into a stone, into a robot, an automaton, without personal autonomy of action, an *it* without subjectivity” (Laing’s emphasis). And without subjectivity, one is obviously depersonalised<sup>75</sup>. This point is reiterated by the fact that during his psychosis, his car becomes his closest friend, not just a cold, metallic, non-living, non-responding object. He subconsciously passes the subjectivity he lacks to it as “[s]he knew his journeys, his haunts, his deepest secrets. She understood his moods. She almost knew his thoughts” (p.143). “She” takes control of him as he drives around in his confused state as the car “ran on, as if with a mind of its own” (p.146), as it knew the way and safely drives him home. What is evident is that during his psychotic attack, his subconscious mind is controlling the car, while his conscious mind is lost, confused.

At this point in the novel, Farai is evidently suffering from what Laing (1990) identifies as the divided self - one that is embodied and the other unembodied. An embodied self is one in which the subconscious has control over the body, a condition which Laing (1990:67) describes as being when one is “thoroughly 'in' his body”; the unembodied self, on the other hand, is when one feels detached from one’s body (Laing 1990:66). Farai has temporarily disconnected his mind from his body to the extent that “he felt himself alight from it ... He heard himself trudge to the centre ... He felt himself fall on his knees” (p.146). He no longer directly engages in anything and his body seems to automatically react to the events around

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<sup>75</sup> For a more detailed exploration of depersonalisation, see Sartre’s discussion in Part 3 of *Being and Nothingness* (1956).

him. This disembodied state that Farai experiences is, I contend, what Laing (1991:69) describes as one in which “[t]he body is felt more or less as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual’s own being”.

The fact that everyone seems to turn their faces away indicates Farai’s failure to relate to others - what Laing (1990:44) identifies as “engulfment”, which is “felt as a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen”. Laing goes on to explain that because reality threatens engulfment it is, therefore, regarded as the persecutor and the other people in this world pose danger to the one afflicted. This perception of a threat during any personal encounter is also to do with the question of identity:

A firm sense of one's own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment. In this the individual dreads relatedness as such, with anyone or anything or, indeed, even with himself, because his uncertainty about the stability of his autonomy lays him open to the dread lest in any relationship he will lose his autonomy and identity. (Laing 1990:45)

Farai’s lack of his own autonomous identity makes him dread being engulfed. In order to preserve his sense of self, he isolates himself from those around him as for him, there is some sort of security in such seclusion. I further argue, then, that since Farai experiences characteristics that Laing believes define an ontologically insecure person - engulfment and petrification - he can be classified as such.

Existentially, as an ontologically insecure individual, the whole film that is being made about him and playing itself out in his mind, in which he is able to give people parts to play is, I posit, his way of “defending himself against the dangers to his being that are the consequences of a failure to achieve a secure sense of his own identity” (Laing 1990:108). Chinyanganya (2010) describes this as an externalisation of the chaos within him. He is a man who cannot eat, cannot sleep, one who has lost his grip on the external reality around him to such an extent that “[h]e feels trapped” (p.37) and all around him seems to be a

“maddening crowd” (p.37). So he latches onto the unreal - this film being created about him and one which he has control over. For him, it is a “great film that will include everything; a film of film to end all films” (p.29). In order to shoot the film, however, everything has to be in reverse, “[h]e has to retrace every step” back to “that stark moment when he spilled out of his mother’s womb and screamed into a blurred world” (p.28). What becomes clear is that his self consciousness deliberately fuses fantasy with reality in order to gain a conviction of his own existence, to achieve ontological security. In his fantasy, he feels his significance as a flourishing writer, so successful that a movie is being made about him; neither is he weighed down by the problems of his real world - an independent wife, alcoholism and most of all, his utter feeling of loneliness.

I postulate that in his mind, this film does, perhaps, give him back some sense of identity; an identity which has already been compromised in the real world beginning in the U.S., as I expounded earlier. Also, despite being a family man with a wife and two children, he is affected by the intense seclusion that began in the U.S. and continues when he returns home. A woman from one of the bars he frequents describes him as a “very lonely man” (p.68). This sense of aloneness is itself an important characteristic of paranoia. The text alludes to the fact that he is basically a man who “fears attachment. He is a man waiting to be found; a confused being waiting to be recovered and restored to himself” (p.6). Even the pubs that he frequents fail to give him the “familiarity and security” (ibid) he so desires. His best friend, Wilbert, is the only companion that he has kept in constant touch with since his return from the U.S. There is a friendship that goes way back to their school days “nearly three decades ago” (p.5). Yet Wilbert is very different from him. Although a successful director, he still drives around in an old pickup truck and is modest, unselfish, a “quintessential family man” (ibid) who relates to both his immediate and extended family in a way that Farai cannot.

Although he is so tormented by his paranoiac imaginings, the part of Farai’s mind that still remains sane realises the need for some sort of divine intervention. When he meets some boys who are singing church songs on the street, he asks to be taken to a priest. They take him to a church and while two men there “pray long and loud, pressing hard against his head, so their many fingers massage his skull, kneading the deep, empty pain inside him. He feels better already and does not want them to stop” (pp.78-79). But they do, and when the church service begins, Farai feels just like the prodigal son who the preacher’s sermon is about:

Him, the prodigal with the rasta hair, worming his way out of the pew, to the front,  
kneeling on the warm floor, in front of the podium.

Him, who had made a name for himself, and spoilt it all.

Him who had shat in the Lord's face. (p.80)

Thus, this spiritual intervention provides just temporary relief from his mental torment.

It is Wilbert who finally succeeds in getting Farai admitted to the annexe wing of the hospital during one of Farai's psychotic episodes. As he escorts Farai through its doors, Wilbert fears that his "*instability is real, very real. Something I can't fathom*" (p.96). He questions: "*So, this is what madness is about? Stripping off our thin disguises and exposing our deepest insecurities*" (ibid). I argue that from a psychoanalytic perspective, Wilbert's assertion shows that he obviously views Farai's mental illness as a peeling away of the secondary mental processes of the psyche - what Freud (1977) terms the ego and superego - which are responsible for the rational, logical and orderly part of the mind. He realises that Farai has been left to the mercy of his id - the primary mental process which constitutes the unconscious part of the psyche which is predominantly passionate, irrational and controlled by basic instincts, such as the libido, aggression and fear (Freud 1977). What his statement also signifies is the very fine line that exists between sanity and insanity.

During his pondering, like Veronica, Wilbert thinks that perhaps she is responsible for her husband's slide into the realms of insanity: "*I fear Veronica might have been too hard on you, getting carried away with her church stuff and refusing to give you room to be yourself*" (p.97). The tendency to blame the woman is a familiar and quintessentially misogynist one. Furthermore, Wilbert's statement, although appearing simple, is deeply loaded as it raises two important aspects. Firstly, it highlights the instability of the marriage between the two, secondly and more importantly, it points to the question of Farai's existential "self", both of which I explored above. At this point, however, I want to expand on the latter, to further probe the question of Farai's sense of identity as he relates to the Zimbabwean world around him that he has to live in on his return from the U.S.

My literary analysis of *Chairman of Fools* makes me attribute Farai's failure to relate to his African community around him as being one of the causes of his mental breakdown. This is in addition, undeniably, to his unstable relationship with his wife because, as Huot (2003:1)

explains, the “onset of madness is the corruption of identity”. When he comes home from his stay in the U.S., he experiences some sort of cultural alienation because of his absorption of western values, behaviour and beliefs. I contend that Chinodya attempts to give an insight into the possible effects of cultural alienation on the individual’s psyche in the manner Jean Rhys explores the same in *Wide Sargossa Sea* in her account of Mrs. Rochester’s “madness”<sup>76</sup>. In *Chairman of Fools*, Farai’s stint in the U.S. seems to make him fail to “fit in” so to speak, and he even feels alienated from those around him, who are supposed to be closest to him. This intense feeling of displacement manifests itself in his agitated behaviour, which is reflected in, for example, the abrupt detached manner in which he treats his flat tenant. He appears divorced from his Zimbabwean identity, his Africanness<sup>77</sup>, a concept which I elaborate on in the next chapter. Chinodya himself categorically states that “if we lose our Africanness, we lose ourselves” (Goodman 2006).

To reiterate Chinodya’s assertion, I turn to Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments*, which gives a good indication of the effects of this cultural alienation by what is commonly known in Africa as the “been-to” malady<sup>78</sup>. Set in post-independent Ghana of the 1960s, *Fragments* centres on how the protagonist, Baako - a classical “been-to” - returns home from the U.S. feeling completely alienated from his society and subsequently dives “into the mental exile of madness” (Ayi Kwei 1969:139)<sup>79</sup>. This seems precisely what happens to Farai. Getting strength from Katarzyna Szmigiero (2011:1) assertion that “[m]ental illnesses are intimately intertwined with the way we see the world and ourselves, with our personal features and

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<sup>76</sup>Antoinette (Mrs. Rochester) is a West Indian who, through marriage, is immersed in English society and culture. In “Madness in Literature: Device and Understanding”, Robin Downie explains how Rhys’ literary text “shows how a changing cultural context can affect a person’s grasp of identity, and how loss of identity can be a factor in the creation of one kind of madness” (Saunders and Macnaughton 2005:51).

<sup>77</sup>Africanness infers that which belongs to the black people of Africa, an African identity. The term invokes the elements of race and territory (Mhishi 2010) and is problematic in that it has been subject to different interpretations, chief of which is the view that Africanness is the antithesis of modernism. In “Post-colonialism, Memory and the Re-making of African Identity” Idowu Williams (2009:434) states that “Africanness is not only a defence of African culture but a defence against modernism ... it means that modernity and Africanness constitute a negation of each other”. As I elaborated in Chapter Four, some critics (Appiah 1992; Mudimbe 1994; Ferkiss 1996; and Kalua 2009) contend that such an essentialistic discourse of African identity in the postcolonial era fails to take into account the fluidity of African identity, that is, “the constructed nature of the modern African identity (Appiah 1992:61).

<sup>78</sup> In the African context, a “been-to” is someone who has lived abroad.

<sup>79</sup>Similarly, in one of the first accounts of psychic ailments depicted in literary discourse by a black writer in Zimbabwe, Thompson Tsodzo’s *Garadichauya* (1975) seems to purport that such a loss of identity can only lead to “madness”. The novel points to cultural alienation as being central to the main character, Phineas Kamunda, being labelled as “*anopenga*” (he is mad). Tsodzo explores how Phineas’s excessive westernisation sets him apart from his community and its norms. In his monolingual village, Phineas’ ramblings in English hardly make any sense to those around him; what becomes apparent from his characterisation is that, indeed, the demarcation between sanity and insanity becomes blurred when one loses one’s sense of self, one’s identity.

personality”, I argue here that the loss of a part of his African identity - which was already compromised by a Christian upbringing that made him denounce some of his traditional values and beliefs - is further deepened by his encounter with westernisation in the U.S.. It is my contention that the combination of these two experiences contributes significantly to the fragmented psyche that leads to Farai’s mental breakdown as he moves too far away from his African identity, his heritage. Sekuru Tumai laments this existential abyss in which Farai has fallen and blames it on his father, as is evident in my exploration of traditional and cultural beliefs on “madness” below.

My discussion here no doubt reveals how Farai’s loss of his existential sense of self intensifies during his mental illness, which is diagnosed as bipolar disorder. Jerod Poore (2002) writes about a comparable experience with bipolar disorder and explains how his “core identity” was changed to such an extent that he felt that he was no longer himself. Similarly, Clara Kean’s (2009:1034) first-person account of her own struggle with psychosis lucidly describes just how profound a challenge such a loss is:

[w]hat lies behind the symptoms is a tormented self. . . Despite the ‘usual’ voices, alien thoughts and paranoia, what scared me the most was a sense that I had lost myself, a constant feeling that my self no longer belonged to me.... The clinical symptoms come and go, but this nothingness of the self is permanently there.

On his release from the annexe, Veronica acknowledges this tremendous loss of Farai’s understanding of self. In a card that she gives him on his return to the U.S., she stresses the need for him to be confident about himself, to have, I argue, a sense of existential certainty: “*Above all, learn to love and believe in yourself*” (p.182). Her hope is that his psychological breakdown may have somehow allowed him to grow and that one day, he would be able to “*educate the world*” (p.182) through writing about his experience. The question I pose, then, is if we consider this literary text to be quasi-biographical, is that not exactly what Chinodya is attempting through a *Chairman of Fools*?

Towards the end of the novel, although Veronica “works hard to resurrect him, to rebuild him” (p.178), Farai acknowledges, however, that she still “never asks him what he went through and how it began. He wonders why she never asks. And he would so much like to

talk to somebody about it so that he can begin to recreate and understand what happened” (p.179). What worries Farai, however, is “[h]ow does one begin to talk about it all, to retrace events and to apologise? ... Hadn’t he, in that short, terrible, tangle of days stripped himself bare for all to see” (p.160)? His mental illness has been such a traumatic experience for him and there is within him, a great need to tell; he needs someone to be able to bear witness to the trauma he has faced. Saks (2007:289) brilliantly illuminates this need to tell, to remember:

There is a powerful urge in each of us to talk about our traumas. ‘A psychotic episode is like experiencing trauma ... And the best way to take away the power of trauma is to talk about what happened ... If and when they can, people who have been traumatized will tell what happened to them, over and over. The telling and retelling may become tedious for friends, but it is healthy and important.

This externalising of the event is crucial for Farai’s full recovery (Felman and Laub 1992) as it is through this telling that Farai would be able to “gain control of intrusive memories” (Brison 1999:46) of his mental trauma. Talking about it would make it possible for some sort of remaking of his self as he tries to make sense of this traumatic memory through its telling and re-telling. It would also allow him to more readily reintegrate into his family and social life, and to re-establish “connections essential to selfhood” (Brison 1999: 104).

### **3.7 Returning to the Source: Shona Cultural Beliefs on “Madness” and Its Treatment**

As I elaborated in Chapter Two, in Zimbabwe’s Shona<sup>80</sup> traditional culture, mental illness is regarded as mainly caused by witchcraft or as a result of evil spirits. The fact that it is considered a spiritual matter means that psychological imbalances affect not only the individual concerned, but also his/her community. Therefore, “the curing of mental illness usually takes on the form of family therapy in which the healer or diviner - in Southern Africa mostly called the *nganga* – takes on the key role”. (Veit-Wild, 2006:22). For the African society, the purpose of curing the illness is not meant only just to rid the individual of his mental illness but also to make certain that the order and constancy of the affected community is restored (Veit-Wild 2006).

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<sup>80</sup> The Shona, one of the largest communal-cultural groups in Zimbabwe, constitutes approximately 75% of the population of Zimbabwe (Viriri and Mungwini 2009: 180). The Ndebele account for an estimated 16%.

Chinodya acknowledges this Shona traditional perspective of mental illness in *Chairman of Fools*. It seems that he makes Sekuru Tumai instrumental in bringing out the voice of the Zimbabwean traditionalist on the cultural beliefs on “madness”. His uncle, Sekuru Tumai, is the one who wants to take Farai to see “somebody” (diviner) in the Eastern Highlands, someone “who can see into the mists of time” (p.115). He questions the cause of Farai’s mental illness, as to whether it is due to “*stress, drink, or the chemistry of the brain? Or was it the ill winds, or the sour breath of wronged ancestors*” (p.171)? At Farai’s graduation party, he points out how happy their ancestors will be, highlighting the importance ancestral spirits play in any family celebration or family woe. He goes on, however, to stress to the Chari family that:

Open your eyes. Look at how things have happened in this family. Look at the way we lost your mother, father and especially your brother Dzimai: cancer, stroke, schizophrenia. Their deaths were too close together and not natural I’d say. I’ll say it again, I am not happy with the way our close family have died. (p.169)

What Sekuru Tumai is suggesting is that all these calamities could have their roots in bad winds (*mamhepo*). In Shona traditional culture, for example, epilepsy is seen as a consequence of an evil spirit within the afflicted family. On death, an epilepsy sufferer is buried beyond the homestead boundaries in an attempt to break the curse so that the evil spirit is not passed onto living members of the family. This is the reason why there is no traditional ceremony conducted to return the spirit (*kurovaguva*) of the epileptic person who has died into the homestead. Farai actually seems to acknowledge the possibility of *mamhepo* having struck the family as the narrator states that “[t]he chains of deaths in his family following so close on each other had unnerved him” (p.141) to the extent that he thinks “[p]erhaps something was amiss and he would be the next to fall” (ibid). For Sekuru Tumai, all the misfortune in the Chari family point out to the fact that “there is something serious that needs to be attended to” (p.169). He encourages the family to seek the help of diviners who know about the spirit world and can therefore carry out the necessary appeasement rites to rid the family of ill-fortune. For him, all the coincidences that occur during Farai’s illness point to a force that guides and protects him, one that “should be claimed and acknowledged” (ibid).

Sekuru Tumai’s belief seems supported by the fact that at one point in the novel when he gets lost, Farai is guided home by the spirit of his dead brother, Dzimai. He hears the spirit speak:

“Son of my mother, I was like this before you. Let me show you the way home” (p.84). From a black Zimbabwean perspective, the possibility of the Chari family being struck by “*mamhepo*” (evil spirits) comes up when you consider that, firstly, his father and brother died within a week of each other and secondly, both brothers have been afflicted by a mental illness. Traditionally, when “*mamhepo*” strikes a family, there is a need for some sort of cleansing ceremony (*bira*), of the type Sekuru Tumai suggests in the novel.

It seems, however, that within the family, Sekuru Tumai is “the lonely advocate of the spirits, outvoted by silence” (p.170). This may have a lot to do with the middle-class upbringing that the Chari family have been exposed to, one in which Christian beliefs seem to take precedence over traditional ones<sup>81</sup>. Sekuru Tumai’s disgruntlement with this reliance on western remedies for misfortunes in the family echoes that of the Old Man and his wife, Japi, in Charles Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain*<sup>82</sup>. Sekuru Tumai believes that this unwillingness to engage with the ancestral spirits leaves the Chari family “*naked to evil spirits*” (ibid). He believes that it is Farai’s father’s decision to disassociate his family from their kinsmen, “his real relatives”, who subsequently “*conspired to turn the ill winds on his house and his family in order to isolate and punish him. That man saw calamity after calamity. Epilepsy, schizophrenia, cancer and now this*” (ibid); “this” referring to Farai’s bipolar disorder. He emphasises the need for a *bira*, to “*plead with your ancestors to clear the mist and sweep your path for you*” (ibid). But for the Charis, the traditional is “*the unknown*” (ibid) because of their devout Christian beliefs. Sekuru Tumai asks “*Who are you to spit in the face of the ancestors, and your culture*” (p.171)?

Yet that seems exactly what they do. Farai’s family prefer the western form of treatment for mental illness as opposed to the traditional way that Sekuru Tumai advocates for and Fatima, Farai’s lover, alludes to. Despite Sekuru Tumai raising the issue, at no time do Farai’s wife and immediate family make an effort to follow this route. This avoidance may be regarded as a sort of denigration of their own traditional belief system, which Kahari (2009:160) describes as a result of a “general subservience to European thought patterns”. It seems that

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<sup>81</sup> In many urban families, however, Christian and traditional beliefs interweave and mutually reshape one another, as I elaborate below.

<sup>82</sup>Japi says of their son, Kuruku, and his family, “[o]f course, they would rather go to church where they pray to someone of another tribe who doesn’t know anything about them ... Any wonder why this family is slowly being eaten away” (Mungoshi 1975:130-1).

through Sekuru Tuma<sup>83</sup>, Chinodya attempts to provide an exposé of Zimbabwean non-western beliefs as relates to the cause and treatment of “madness”, while at the same time showing the disparaging view many black Christians have of their own traditional beliefs as they are often still locked in a colonial mentality. Chinodya, thus, succeeds in depicting the cross-cultural society that exists in Zimbabwean society, within which:

The uneasy co-existence of traditional beliefs and Christianity and other modern beliefs within these postcolonial subjects is underlined by the fact that the former is posited as a site of primitiveness and atavism and the latter a site of modernity and progress, a consequence of the othering of African belief and knowledge systems dating back to the colonial era. (Mutekwa 2010: 172)

Unlike the Charis, however, some educated Zimbabweans in the cities practice the syncretic form of Christianity, which I highlighted in the previous chapter. These middle-class black families seek western medicine for most illnesses, but a significant number secretly visit the traditional realm when confronted with the psychological ailment of one of their members. In “‘Down But Not Out’: Critical Insights in Traditional Shona Metaphysics”, Advice Viriri and Pascah Mungwini (2009) stress how the traditional belief system continues to inform the Shona people’s lives and activities<sup>84</sup>. They explain that when faced with problems, the Shona people dip into solutions with ideas taken from modern science, Christianity and Shona traditional metaphysics. They articulate this synergy with great clarity:

Even by the bedside the patient who is now in the custody of the modern health institution, will more often than not get some rubbing or massaging with traditional medicine from and a sip or two of the holy waters blessed by a faith healer without the hospital staff ever noticing it. As such the three different and often taken as antagonistic world views are brought in to kind of complement each other, the scientific represented by modern medicine, the Christian represented by the faith healer and the traditional African one represented by the traditional healer. (Viriri and Mungwini 2009:190)

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<sup>83</sup> *Tuma* literally means “send me” in English.

<sup>84</sup> Viriri and Mungwini (2009:189) state that “[t]he traditional healer occupied a central position in the cosmology of the Shona and was an important cog in the whole traditional metaphysics and social ontology”.

This is the case even with regards to mental illness, as Chinodya illustrates through some of the inmates of the annexe. In the text, for example, Mr. Pimples, a former secretary of a large company, believes his “madness” is caused by witchcraft. He explains how his managing director “thought I was out to get his post, so he went round the country to find things to fix me with” (p.106). His family and him have no qualms about trying “everything, doctors, herbalists, *n’angas*<sup>85</sup> and *biras*<sup>86</sup>” and even prophets to cure him of his mental illness. This syncretic indulgence is contrary to candid reliance solely on traditional healing in such instances in the manner Kanengoni reveals in *Echoing Silences*<sup>87</sup>.

### 3.8 The Twilight World of the Fools and Their Chairman

Zimbabwe has three psychiatric hospitals that treat the mentally ill. Firstly, there is the annexe, which is part of Parirenyatwa Hospital in Harare and which Chinodya seems to refer to in *Chairman of Fools* to illustrate how modern science attempts to manage and contain mental illness. Then there is also Ingutsheni in Bulawayo and Ngomahuru in Masvingo. This means that mental health care is largely centralised in the urban areas, making them not readily accessible to rural communities. Yet a scrutiny of the various inmates in the annexe shows how Chinodya deliberately highlights the fact that mental illness does not discriminate; it attacks people from all walks of life. There is Farai, the professor and creative writer, Mr. Pimples, the company secretary, Miss Fits, the cross border trader, Hypotenuse, the mathematics teacher, John White, the singer, Peter Ndlovu, the soccer player, Taxi Driver, and Mazitulela, the religious man, amongst others. What is significant in Chinodya’s text is that in the psychiatric unit that Farai is admitted to, “[t]his twilight world has its own principles, a baffling resemblance to the ‘real’ world out there, replete with the trappings of power and submissiveness, and hierarchy and a curious semblance of order” (Chinodya in Loimeier 2006). Saks (2007: 99) explains how, despite being constantly controlled by drugs, the mentally ill are able to deal with daily routines when she states that, “[p]sychosis is like an insidious infection that nevertheless leaves some of your faculties intact.

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<sup>85</sup>Traditional healers

<sup>86</sup>Cleansing ceremonies

<sup>87</sup>When the main character, Munashe Mungate, goes mad, his family organise a *bira*, to ward off the avenging spirit of the woman Munashe had killed. His family readily acknowledge this avenging spirit as the cause of his “madness”, and take the necessary precautions. Unfortunately for Munashe, these steps are taken too late, but although he dies immediately after the ceremony, the Mungate family has succeeded in ridding itself of the avenging spirit.

Although on admittance to the annexe, Farai sees it as “a prison ... a trap” (p.95), he quickly settles into the daily and ordered routine of the annexe, a routine which calms him. He relates well to both the inmates and those working there. After a few days within its walls, the annexe proves to be anything but the prison he anticipated it would be. It, in fact, allows him to enjoy what he could not in the normal, outside world - food, sleep and minimal stress:

He thinks of himself here, away from home, with nothing to worry about but food, pills and sleep. No stress here, just the mindless cycle of eating and sleeping. No newspapers, no bills, no wife, no women, no children, no car, no hangovers, no police, no page-proofs, not even any dreams” (p.131).

He evidently also feels more in control of his self and his senses in the sanatorium. Knowing that the hospital staff are constantly watching him for signs of improvement in his condition, “he puts on his best behaviour” (p.153) so that they will trust that he is well enough to go home.

During Farai’s stay in the sanatorium, elections are conducted in order to elect a committee for the Patient’ Welfare Committee. Farai is elected as the leader and becomes the “chairman of fools” (p.125), responsible for the well-being of the annexe’s inmates. He sees the elections as a charade, an attempt to give “this mediocre place a weak semblance of the clawing world out there” (p.156). A treasurer and a secretary are selected and they hold a “proper” meeting, with the secretary taking down minutes. The manner in which the elections are conducted and the first meeting held, and even the way in which the inmates go about their daily routines somehow point to what Chinodya describes as “the inner obstinate logic of the most misunderstood condition” (Loimeier 2010). He clearly illustrates that in this “twilight world of madness” (Loimeier 2010), there is still some sort of order and principles that are very similar to the real world outside its walls.

When Farai is released from the annexe after spending just exactly a week there, Sister Nondo believes that Farai should consider himself lucky that his mental illness can be contained by taking a few pills every day, unlike those suffering from incurable diseases, such as cancer or AIDS. Farai, however, wants to tell her about “ailments that medicine cannot heal” (p.153), such as, I argue, a dented ego, or lost sense of identity. Or, more

importantly, he wants to tell her of the void he is facing in his life that makes it feel so empty. He is sad to leave and is afraid of what awaits him in the world outside its walls. Similarly, a nurse at the outpatients department of the annexe is cynical of Farai ever being completely cured of his mental illness: “[n]obody who is hospitalised here is ever ‘discharged’ ... You’re still a patient, maybe forever” (p.171). Looking at it through the lens of trauma theory, I advocate that perhaps this final “discharge” can only happen when, as I mentioned above, Farai is able to externalise the events of his mental illness by talking to someone about his traumatic experience. Alternatively, from a traditional cultural perspective, one can suggest that this exoneration may only be conceivable if Farai and his family engage in the traditional cleansing rituals that Sekuru Tukai feels are necessary.

A few weeks after his release from the annexe, Farai returns there to replenish his medication. The long queue he finds at the outpatients department testifies to the large numbers of people in the country who have had either a mental or emotional breakdown of sorts. And these are people from diverse backgrounds, “singled out from the camouflage of homes, streets, villages, farms and workplaces to receive the salutary little white pills” (p.173). In Zimbabwe, it is estimated that one in every four people suffers from a mental illness (Masvikiro 2002). Those receiving treatment, therefore, are just a few of the

... thousands out there, the poor, the ‘mad’, the forgotten or the neglected, who have never taken a pill; people caked black with dirt and matted with lice, given up on or neglected or unfound, daily trampling accustomed streets and footpaths; untiring unsleeping zombies ransacking bins and garbage heaps and bedding on pavements and alleys and in burrows. (pp.173-174)

Chinodya continues to raise the issue of the physical and emotional survival of these people when he questions:

But how come they never get hit by passing cars? Or die of food poisoning - or do they? Or get bitten by snakes? Do they catch flu? Pneumonia? Do they ever sleep? Do they dream? And if they are women, what do they do with their cycles. And what theatres of horror have they each starred in, the ones that are lined up here? What scenes of their lives have been shot? What cameras? What lenses? How have they retraced the steps back to themselves? (p.174)

### 3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, my main aim was to explore Chinodya's varied depictions of "madness" in *Chairman of Fools*. I have shown how the form of the text itself illustrates Chinodya's negotiation with postmodernism as it is a largely coherent narrative, even as Farai transgresses the borderlines of sanity. It is evident from my discussion that Chinodya's allusions to cultural, political and socio-economic discourses are indicative of both national and individual insanities - the "madness" of the times in Zimbabwe. In addition, my literary analysis has shown that Farai is indeed "more or less touched" (Jamison 1993: 2), therefore augmenting the contention that there is a symbiotic relationship between "madness" and creativity. Whether this ingenuity is more acute during actual psychotic episodes is, however, debatable as Chinodya demonstrates that Farai's creativity is actually negatively influenced by his psychosis.

With Farai still in mind, my discussion has shown that it is a combination of two crucial factors - an unstable marriage and an existential loss of self - on a creative individual who already borders insanity that inevitably triggers a traumatic mental breakdown. Cultural alienation too, has played a significant part in this loss, and Farai's struggle in the text exposes his need to rediscover and restore himself to his African identity. I have also illuminated how his mental illness unquestionably further distorts Farai's sense of self, his identity. Brendan Stone succinctly sums how "madness" affects on sense of self:

The experience of madness, then, seems to throw the stability of human identity into question. In the event of acute psychic crisis what may have been previously assumed or taken for granted is thrown open to challenge and uncertainty, and the basis of what makes selfhood feasible may need to be urgently reformulated. (Stone 2004b:10)

Significantly, this chapter has shown that in *Chairman of Fools*, Chinodya points to the three main ways that "madness" is treated within Zimbabwean society - religiously (through Christianity /faith healers); medically (the sanatorium); and culturally (through traditional healers and rituals). He uses the Charis to show how some black Zimbabweans - consumed by a colonial mentality which marginalises and denigrates traditional beliefs and practices - view modern medicine or Christianity as the only sources for the treatment of mental illnesses. The antithetical Sekuru Tumai, however, who has a firm grounding in a rural

upbringing, is illustrative of how rural societies mostly still consider the traditional healer as being able to provide a cure for psychological ailments.

Given this backdrop, as Zimbabwe charts ahead in its search for a national identity, the nation's never-ending task has to be to "reclaim traditions that had been debased during colonialism" (Waite 2000:239). I contend that this reclamation should include the fight to integrate traditional medicine with modern science in the treatment of mental illness; that the nation should be able to "reshape traditional medicine into a health service parallel to western medicine" (Waite 2000:235). Two prominent Zimbabweans have been instrumental in pushing forward the agenda towards this end - the late Professor Gordon Chavunduka who, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, is a renowned authority in traditional medicine, and the late Herbert Ushewokunze, Zimbabwe's first Minister of Health. Despite his brief reign of the ministry (1980 to 1981), Ushewokunze managed in 1981 to push two significant bills through parliament - one to recognise traditional medicine and another to register and regulate traditional practitioners. A key feature of the latter bill was the acknowledgement of traditional medicine as an existing form of health care that should work alongside western medicine (Waite 2000).

In the next chapter, I move on to examine how, unlike Chinodya, Gomo depicts "madness" not as a psychological breakdown, but as a breakthrough. My analysis of Gomo's *A Fine Madness* will show how he valorises "madness" in his exploration of the violence of Africa's "world war" in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe's role in it. I argue that the "fine madness" in the text is synonymous with the search for freedom from the new kind of imperialism that persists in the post-independent era in Africa.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LIBERATING “MADNESS” IN THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST DISCOURSE OF MASHINGAIDZE GOMO’S *A FINE MADNESS*

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored how Chinodya depicts the mental illness that his protagonist experiences partly because of a compromised sense of identity. In this particular chapter, I engage with the concept of “madness” not as indicative of a loss of identity, but instead, as grounded in a search for it. Ronald Laing’s (1967:3) assertion that “madness need not be all breakdown, it may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal” aptly describes how Gomo conceives the phenomenon in *A Fine Madness*. Gomo’s debut literary text articulates the crisis of the historical experience of the African in neocolonial states in relation to autonomy<sup>88</sup> and identity. In “Identity and Dignity in the Liberation Struggle”, Amílcar Cabral (1972:44) states that the formation of an individual or collective identity is “an objective agent arising from the economic, social and cultural aspects which are characteristic of the growth and history of the society in question”. Identity is, therefore, “the expression of a culture” (Cabral 1972:44). It is this important aspect of identity that Gomo raises in his narrative.

In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi (1982:2) declares: “Imperialism is total: it has economic, political, military, cultural and psychological consequences for the people of the world today”. It is this psychic wounding of the African as a result of his/her encounter with colonialism that is Gomo’s main concern in his narrative as this chapter shows<sup>89</sup>. *A Fine Madness* is a patriotic poetic prose narrative that reveals Gomo’s Afrocentric vision very

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<sup>88</sup> Idowu Williams (2009:437) asserts that the concept of autonomy is “a critical, significant idea that shows as rewarding the assignment of remaking and reconstructing African identity in the postcolonial sense”.

<sup>89</sup> In the context of this chapter, “African” or “Africans” is used to refer exclusively to the black person/race of Africa. I am, however, aware of the contentions surrounding the delineation of who is an African, as well as cognisant of the ambivalent nature of African identity. Antony Appiah (1992:62) goes so far as to contend that the notion of the African was actually a “very European concept” born out of colonialism and “the product of a European gaze”. In “Africa without Africans”, Jidefor Adibe (2009:16) classifies three main schemes that can define an African, namely, “identification by race, by geography (territoriality) and by consciousness (that is, commitment to Africa)”. The problem with categorising “African” on the basis of race is that it suggests that all black people are Africans. Secondly, it excludes those non-black who are African by virtue of citizenship, birth and territoriality. Lastly, it waives the consciousness necessary to be defined as such. It would also be interesting to read Thabo Mbeki’s speech “I Am an African” (1999) which preceded the adoption of the Constitution Bill that same year in South Africa. Also see Wayne Visser’s (2005) poem “Am an African” for the articulation of the definition of an African based on having an African consciousness.

similar to that propounded by negritude scholars, such as Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor<sup>90</sup>. In a typical negritude stance, Césaire (1938) advocates for the freedom that the African people can find in “madness” in his long poem, “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land” when he questions the perverted reasoning behind such Western discrimination against them:

Reason, I will sacrifice you to the evening wind  
You call yourself the language of order and system?  
For me, you are the crown of the [colonial] whip  
... Because we identify ourselves with the dementia *praecox*  
Our treasures are therefore the self-thinking madness  
The madness that shouts  
The madness that frees itself

Césaire’s anti-colonial discourse points out how the colonisers resort to the “thingification” of the colonised as a justification for their imperialist domination of Africa. His poem above, therefore, suggests that such imperialism creates a situation where for the colonised, the logic of reason has to be transgressed in order to attain a measure of freedom. It is this conceptualisation of “madness” that Gomo adopts in *A Fine Madness*, in which he provides an understanding of the phenomenon that is divorced from its conventional meaning. This chapter, therefore, investigates Gomo’s literary interrogation of Africa’s continued reliance on imperial political and economic systems and adoption of Eurocentric social and cultural values. It explores how his discourse of “madness” serves as an attack on the supposed logic of imperialistic oppression as he queries the rationality of an ideology that grounds itself on Africa’s continued subservience in the neocolonial era<sup>91</sup>. The title itself speaks strongly against imperialism.

In articulating the crisis of the varied historical experiences of neocolonial African states in relation to the autonomy and identity, Gomo is heavily influenced by the postcolonial

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<sup>90</sup> Negritude is a cultural movement that was formed by black intellectual scholars from French speaking colonies in the 1930s. The movement is centred on issues of race identity and the fight against imperialism. It seeks to affirm black pride and African heritage by promoting a rediscovery in an authentic African self.

<sup>91</sup> As mentioned in the introductory chapter, neocolonialism implies the continuity of imperial oppression. Neocolonial forms of subjugation come in the guise of modernisation and development that includes economic control of African states through financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In *Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* Nkwame Nkrumah (1965:xi) describes neo-colonialism as “the worst form of imperialism” and stated that “for those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress”.

theorising in Frantz Fanon, Ngugi, Bhabha's anti-colonial discourses. In *Wretched of the Earth*, for example, Fanon (1967a) represents the struggle against anti-colonial oppression and injustice as not only a physical fight, but also a psychological one. My analysis in this chapter shows how *A Fine Madness* elucidates the psychological warfare that the African must partake in the postcolonial era. It demonstrates Gomo's belief in the need for an Afrocentric assault on Eurocentrism within the African continent. Furthermore, the postcolonial theoretical discourses of these renowned scholars have been crucial in shaping Gomo's concept of the nation-state.

One of the significant tenets of anti-colonialism that Fanon, Ngugi and Bhabha articulate is that of resistance, which they perceive as constituting subversion. To these scholars, resistance signifies the systematic political and military fight against colonial hegemony and its economic structures (Jefferess 2008)<sup>92</sup>. In *Postcolonial Resistance: Cultural Liberation and Transformation*, David Jefferess (2008:5), however, reads further into Fanon's anti-colonial discourse and asserts that he emphasises the "liberatory potential of resistance". Similarly, Jefferess perceives resistance not only as a theoretical concept, but also as indicative of political agency and transformation. He considers resistance as accounting "for the way in which other forms of domination and exploitation – patriarchy, capitalism, caste, etc. are interrelated with colonial power" (Jefferess 2008:180). As is shown in this chapter it is this conceptualisation of resistance that Gomo harnesses in *A Fine Madness* as he uses the motif of "madness" to raise questions about identity and language. I reveal how he regards such resistance as a pre-requisite for social change in postcolonial Africa<sup>93</sup>. For Gomo, then, resistance is akin to liberation. Therefore, his conception of "madness" strongly intertwines with the African's struggle for freedom from imperialistic domination.

Additionally, my analysis in this chapter shows how the transgressing of the borderlines of rationality is viewed as a positive and necessary move towards the attainment of freedom from the mental shackles of neocolonial imperialism, the "head of darkness" legacy that pervades independent Africa. Ironically, Gomo's chosen setting for his literary text is the

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<sup>92</sup> Jefferess (2008) criticised Bhabha's notion of resistance as being overly reliant on subversion. Although he believes that Fanon's idea of resistance is commendable for its assertion of humanity, he condemns its Manichean notion of power that demands violence.

<sup>93</sup> As noted in my Introduction, the term postcolonialism has aroused much debate as it is fraught with ambiguity. Suffice to add here that like in the colonial period, the postcolonial era is still evidenced by continued resistance to imperial domination.

Congo that Joseph Conrad denigrates in *Heart of Darkness*. It is set against the backdrop of the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which raged from 1998 to 2003 and claimed approximately six million lives. It has been coined “Africa’s World War” (Williams 2013:81) because of its magnitude. Gomo has had a first-hand experience of its wrath as he took part in the war as a member of the Zimbabwean contingent that had been sent there to assist the Congolese army in the battle. It is from this vantage point that he explores the “madness” of this war in which Africans fought against each other in a nation that had been independent from colonial rule for more than three decades. In the meanwhile, as the war rages, the Belgian and Portuguese imperialists deliberately stifle “the development of a strong state, army, judiciary and education system, because it interferes with their primary focus, making money from what lies under the Earth” (Snowman 2013). Yet paradoxically, Gomo chooses to see it as mainly as the battle between whites (west) versus blacks. The irrationality of the black on black violence that the narrator is witness to during this war was also caused by the greed of corrupt politicians, and this is a fact which Gomo underplays in his literary text. In the Preface to *A Fine Madness*, Ngugi criticises this glaring weakness in Gomo’s first-hand account of the DRC war when he states that “by subsuming class divisions in Africa under the struggle between two colour monoliths, he denies himself a perspective that might better explain the emergence of postcolonial dictatorships and their actual relationship to the Western corporate bourgeoisie” (p.2). Ironic too is that this war was being fought on “[t]he land the Belgian Leopold once called his own private property” (p.104). Despite this obvious flaw, this chapter exposes the crucial role Gomo’s literature plays in its proliferation of the necessity for freedom, decolonisation and an authentic African identity on the continent. In his envisioning of an authentic African identity, Gomo makes use of the notion of strategic essentialism, which “entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentialising and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives”(Eide 2010:76). In the reconstruction of the African identity which has been debased and battered by colonialism, strategic essentialising can become a positive force in the promotion of this recovery. This chapter elucidates how Gomo’s narrative is an obvious attestation to the need for the mental revolution among Africans that Fanon (1967) calls for in *Wretched of the Earth* in order for true liberation to be achieved.

Adopting an anti-imperialistic stance, Gomo attacks the West’s puppeteering role in this brutal conflict. He also condemns the “new style imperialism” (Ngugi 1993:64) evident in

post-independent African nations. In his attack, Gomo's narrative is glaringly Afrocentric. As a result, it becomes crucial at this point to elucidate the tenets of Afrocentrism<sup>94</sup>. The underlying premise of an Afrocentric identity is the black colour of one's skin, that is, it is racial<sup>95</sup>. At the core of the ideology is an Afro-centric consciousness, which Tunde Adeleke (2009) defines as a perception that is maintained by subscribing to African values, ideals and idiosyncrasies and conceiving corporeal realities from an African viewpoint. He argues that from the Afrocentric standpoint, "[t]he African identity, as black psychologist Amos Wilson acknowledged, is essentially and functionally a protest identity. To be African is to embody and reflect anti-European ethos" (Adeleke 2009: 89). Afrocentrism, then, is about having African agendas grounded within African frameworks. In its interrogation of the imperialistic discourses and the process of decolonisation, the ideology demands "a search for essential cultural purity" (Ashcroft et al 2004:40) and is based on a Manichean concept of reality.

It is pertinent to note here, however, that Fetson Kalua (2009) explores the concept of identity in the African context and strongly contests the essentialist notion of a pure African identity. Kalua (2009:26) believes that "the logic of blackness is loaded with slippage and can itself be disrupted given that, like whiteness or yellowness, black identities are multiple and heterogeneous". He therefore, cautions against essentialising blackness by disregarding this "shifting nature of African identity" (Kalua 2009:20). He further highlights how the arguments surrounding identity revolve around the Afrocentric and the Eurocentric debate. What becomes evident from his contention is that a "pure" African identity is problematic to define (Kalua 2009:20). Therefore, Kalua (2015) argues for a definition of an "intermedial" African identity in the twenty-first century that emphasises a respect for differences among Africans, one that is "more fluid and contested than any transcendent regimes of cultural certainty and legitimacy would want us to believe"<sup>96</sup>.

Bearing this in mind, therefore, I acknowledge that as this chapter reveals, Gomo's portrayal of the African in *A Fine Madness* is an essentialist one. This chapter shows, however, that it

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<sup>94</sup>The term Afrocentric was first coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in the 1960s in response to the oppression Afro-Americans suffered. Pioneers of Afrocentricity include Cheik Anta Diop, David Walker, Martin Delany, Edward Blyden, Molefi Asante, Maulana Karenga and Marimbe Ani, amongst others.

<sup>95</sup>Critics such as Adeleke (2009) and Ali Mazrui (1963) criticise this essentialism within Afrocentrism. Adeleke (2009:136) outlines the "superficiality of race and Africa as identity constructs". They both believe that the collective identity of blacks as "African" was, in fact, "a Eurocentric imposed identity construct" (Adeleke 2009:136) and a "colonial creation" (Mazrui 1963:89).

<sup>96</sup>Kalua (2015) explicates that intermediality (state of in-betweeness) is "a model for articulations of identity which not only promote the reality of the 'Otherness' of ourselves but also teach us what it means to be human".

is also a necessary one given that Gomo's main objective in his narrative is to instil the pride of blackness within the African. My analysis demonstrates that implicit in Gomo's patriotic narrative is the need for an African identity to be born out of an Afrocentric consciousness. This calls for the black person to be "located and centered within African culture" (Adeleke 2009:152). As Mambo Mazama (2002) stresses, the ultimate goal of Afrocentricity is the reclamation of African freedom and imagination; the recovery of African cultural memory. This chapter, then, reveals how Gomo calls for this re-membering in *A Fine Madness*. I illuminate how he represents the necessity for this decolonisation of the mind (Ngugi 1982) in his critique of the African's parroting of the language and culture of the oppressor.

In *Long Walk to Freedom* Nelson Mandela (1994:264) proclaims:

A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

Although it is contentious as to whether anyone can really be "truly free", this chapter shows how Gomo elucidates the necessity to search for this kind of freedom, as in *A Fine Madness* he configures "madness" in relation to freedom and aligns it to the search for identity, for *ufuru*. As I mentioned in Chapter One, *ufuru* is a term George Kahari uses to connote the search for freedom. Implicit in *ufuru* is the need for "natural self-assertion and the re-discovery of black identity" (Kahari 1990: xi). Kahari (1990) goes on to explain that the concept of *ufuru* as depicted in literature should inculcate a sense of nationalism and patriotism among writers and their readers so that they are not misfits in their own country. In this literary analysis, which is concerned with identity, Sabelo Gatsheni's (2011:38) definition of nationalism is pertinent. He describes nationalism as "an identitarian phenomenon, that is, it provides a medium and constitutive framework for the formation of collective identities". Nationalism embodies anti-imperialism. Sabelo Ndhlovu-Gatsheni (2011) further argues that nationalism is not merely an anti-colonial phenomenon and in many instances, African nationalist leaders define nationalism as the narration of the Africans oppression and exploitation by foreigners<sup>97</sup>. This chapter, therefore, highlights how Gomo's

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<sup>97</sup> It is pertinent to note, however, that Ndhlovu-Gatsheni (2011:38) perceives the philosophy as a discursive formation that in itself consists of tensions and contradictions.

text strongly promotes this sense of nationalism as he suggests the need for Africans to move beyond a cancerous colonial mentality, as my discussion below reveals.

#### 4.2 Linguistic Miscegenation as a Cultural Vehicle

Gomo's poetic narrative consists of thirty-four short chapters that comprise of a tapestry of diary entries and are written in such a way that his language and form reinforce his theme of liberation. His choice of the hybrid poetic prose narrative is significant since the genre lends itself to "madness" in its redefinition of the parameters of conventional language use<sup>98</sup>. This postmodernist transgression of linguistic norms begins from the very fact that this form is neither purely prose nor poetry, as it crosses the prescriptive boundaries of these two literary genres. Given the content of *A Fine Madness*, this is an appropriate narrative technique as the subversive potential of its straddling form adequately expresses the theme of resistance, as well as that of the questioning and redefinition of boundaries within the African context. It is, I posit, Gomo's way of "writing back" to the Empire, as is further evidenced by the language he uses in his narrative, which I highlight below<sup>99</sup>. This artistic deviance has a liberating effect on the reader; it reiterates the spirit of freedom from the mental chains of neocolonialism on the part of the African that Gomo calls for in the content of his narrative.

Gomo's abundant use of paradoxes in the text is just one example of the "mad" writing typical of prose poetry. Cleanth Brooks (1947:3) describes paradox as "the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry" as an author is able to recreate the meaning of language through its use. The meanings of words, therefore, can change and shift depending on how they are placed next to each other (Brooks 1947:3). This stylistic narrative technique is reflected throughout Gomo's fiction. It is evident in some of his sectional titles, such as "A savage peace", "Show me an honourable destitute" and "The beauty of imperfection" and climaxes in the literary title of the text itself "*A Fine Madness*". How can "madness" be fine? It is difficult to envisage it as such. Yet the paradoxical meaning of *A Fine Madness* is one that envisions "*ufuru*", the total freedom of Africa from imperialist and mental bondage. Gomo equates the fight against the inferiority

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<sup>98</sup> As a literary genre, prose poetry was first defined by Charles Baudelaire (2011[1919]: 25) as "the musical though rhythmless and rhymeless, flexible yet rugged enough to identify with the lyrical impulses of the soul, the ebbs and flows of reverie, the pangs of conscious".

<sup>99</sup> In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) argue that postcolonial authors should substitute hegemonic colonial discourse through various liberating strategies. As regards language, they contend that postcolonial authors should "seize language, re-place it in a specific cultural location and yet maintain the integrity of ... Otherness" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989:77).

complex that is the legacy of colonisation in postcolonial Africa to a necessary and fine “madness”, despite the seeming illusiveness of such a vision. In the imperialist setting, the trope of “madness” has traditionally been used negatively to evoke a colonial discourse that opposes African irrationality to European rationality. Gomo, however, paradoxically sees positivism in this binary in his perception of “madness” as a necessary reaction to the physical and psychological violence of colonialism on the part of the African. For him, the phenomenon is not indicative of colonial trauma (as is the norm in scholarly debates) but rather symbolises a fight against imperialism. His stance indicates “madness” is a metaphor of both resistance and liberation and earmarks the refusal by the African to remain oppressed within an independent nation. These seemingly illogical statements in Gomo’s paradoxes, then, are rich in metaphoric meaning. Through them, he demonstrates the power of the artist to recreate meaning in language and to defy conventional linguistic norms. At the same time, he allows himself a freedom in his choice and use of language. It is an autonomy that is further reflected in his use of terminology that has stereotypically been used to describe the African, such as “barbarians” and “gods of evil” to define the colonisers in some kind of reverse denigration. I argue that this freedom in form correlates to the freedom Gomo anticipates inspiring in Africans through the content of his narrative, as my discussion below demonstrates.

In *A Fine Madness* Gomo also adopts diverse indigenisation strategies in order to create a culturally meaningful discourse. Like the West African authors Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, he uses language as an ethnographic tool as he distorts the conventional use of English by often mixing it with Shona in his poetic narrative. This hybrid code of language is achieved, for example, when he employs Shona proverbial expressions, idioms, syntax and lexical items within his discourse in many instances in the narrative. In “The Nightmare”, for example, Gomo writes about how ‘the traditional men who were Tinyarei’s kinsmen wondered *kuti chii chainge chapinda muvana va Mhofu*’<sup>100</sup> (p.70). In “Divine Abstraction” the narrator reflects, “[a]nd again she said, *Nyika ino ndeyeropa*”<sup>101</sup> (p.18).

I contend that Gomo’s linguistic miscegenation is symbolic of resistance. His form in itself denotes the cultural decolonisation Ngugi (1982) calls for in *Decolonising the Mind* as he seeks to remind the reader that Africans were not simply “*tabula rasa*” but had essence prior

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<sup>100</sup> “...wondered what had got into African children”.

<sup>101</sup> “Precious blood was shed for this land”

to the arrival of colonialism<sup>102</sup>. The vernacular transcription of Shona syntactical and lexical items is a style deliberately crafted to reflect a Shona cultural matrix and to create an indigenised textuality. This indigenisation of English, then, allows for the expression of the Shona imagination and worldview. Within the African debate on the use of the English Language as a medium of expression, which I previously illuminated in Chapter Two of this thesis<sup>103</sup>, Gomo seems to have heeded Achebe's argument that the colonial language should be hybridised and made to bear "the weight and the texture of a different experience" (Nebbou 2013:26)<sup>104</sup>.

Gomo even defies syntactical conventions through his limited use of punctuation in his narrative. This striking use of loose diction throughout his poetic narrative in his mostly unpunctuated writing craftily echoes the perpetuity of oppression under neocolonialism as being an inevitable part of the African's existential reality. Sentences end unpunctuated, and instead of regular punctuation, Gomo makes repetitive use of the word "and" to join his ideas together. This conjoining word is deliberately used with dramatic and rhythmic repetitiveness to evoke the sense of continuity of oppression outlined above in its obvious mirroring of the seemingly never-ending hold imperialism has over the African continent. I further argue that the postmodernism evident his fractured paragraphs are in themselves symbolic of the African's fragmented psyche as a result of this encounter. This postmodernist writing style is significant because, as Patricia Moran (2007:3) argues it emphasises "interiority, memory, psychological verisimilitude, and personal isolation, and its development of fragmented, non-linear plots, provides an ideal medium for the transcription of traumatic experience"<sup>105</sup>. Gomo also makes repetitive use of the questioning rhetoric as a deliberate stylistic technique meant to draw the reader into a conversation about the maddening consequences of this fragmentation of identity. I posit, therefore, that postmodernism, is an effective linguistic vehicle that allows Gomo to drive his theme of resistance against colonial hegemony.

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<sup>102</sup> "Tabula rasa" is a Latin phrase that means "blank slate".

<sup>103</sup> As I mentioned earlier, critics like Ngugi (1982) argue that the use of the language of the colonial masters causes the African people's dislocation from their culture and history.

<sup>104</sup> In 1975, Achebe gave a speech on "The African language and the English Language" in which he justified the writing of the African Literature in English. He stated, "[t]he English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Coburn and Lehrburger 1968: 266).

<sup>105</sup> In Chapter Two of this study, I provided an elaboration of the essential characteristics of postmodernist writing.

### 4.3 Re-membering Africa: Breaking the Colonial Mirror

Ngugi (2009:6) argues that colonialism has resulted in the fatal “division of the African from his land, body and mind ... Whereas before he was his own subject, now he is subject to another”. His argument underscores the importance of re-membering these dismembered entities for the African to be able to reclaim a wholeness of being. This means that patriotic narratives such as Gomo’s, then, become significant in promoting this search for an authentic African identity in which the African’s subjectivity is restored. This quest is a necessary one given the two main legacies that imperialism bequeathed Africa, namely, the denunciation of African identity and the imposition of western culture and worldview (Chukwuokolo 2009). These legacies are the reason why in *House of Hunger*, Marechera starkly portrays Africans in the colonial era as “whores” as the excerpt below shows<sup>106</sup>:

And beneath it all our minds festered; gangerous. Gangsterish .The underwear of our souls was full of holes and the crotch it hid was infested with lice. We were whores; eaten to the core by the syphilis of the white man’s coming. (Marechera 1978:75)<sup>107</sup>

Remi Akujobi (2009) states that in Marechera’s postmodernist text, the quest for socio-political, cultural and economic freedom signifies the black man’s search for self-definition and identity. This quest is necessitated by the fact that imperial repression dehumanised the Africans by entrenching within their psyche a Eurocentric consciousness, as well as a profound sense of negation that inevitably results from this “colonisation of psychic space” (Kelly 2004:13)<sup>108</sup>.

In *A Fine Madness*, Gomo raises some pertinent issues in relation to the false sense of ontological security of Africans under neocolonialism<sup>109</sup>. He questions: “Should any African person be happy to be buoyant in imperialistic waters” (p.48)? The historical African experience under neocolonial conditions has been such that the land and the means of

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<sup>106</sup>Marechera’s “house of hunger” metaphorically refers to a lack of freedom.

<sup>107</sup> In literature, the image of the whore usually symbolises sexual transgression and emancipation. I argue that its significance here, however, is in the negative image of commodification that it evokes a sense of the Africans having sold their souls to the white people and as such, given up their subjectivity.

<sup>108</sup> Significantly, Oliver Kelly (2004:13) further discusses how this kind of oppression results in the abjection of blackness as it “operates through a debilitating alienation based on estrangement from the production of value in a hierarchical system of values through which some bodies are valued and others are devalued or abjected”.

<sup>109</sup>Ngugi (1993:71) asserts that “[a] neocolonial regime is, by its very character, a repressive machine. Its very being, in its refusal to break with the international and national structures of exploitation, inequality and oppression, gradually isolates it from the people”.

production remain controlled by imperialist powers. Gomo, therefore, justifiably castigates the precarity of an existence that relies on “Western insolence or racist arrogance” (pp.48-49). Such a sham can only lead to the paradoxically “savage peace” (p.44) that forms the title of this chapter. How could anyone be happy with a “diabolically savage” (p.49) peace riddled with “silence, poverty, landlessness and dependence” (ibid).

Undoubtedly, then, as Gomo’s narrative suggests, the struggle for independence in Africa is tied to the fight for the land. From a Fanonian perspective, re-appropriation of the land is necessary for an authentic freedom to begin. Fanon (1967a) correctly asserts that for the Africans, land is invaluable because it is the most tangible asset that can bring them sustenance and more significantly, dignity. Similarly, Gomo emphatically points out that “sovereignty that is devoid of land ownership is superficial and liable to dislocation because it is unanchored by the life-giving earth on which people build homes and live and draw a means of livelihood” (p.146). On gaining Independence, the constitution of some African nations restored the land to the black people, yet in reality ownership of the land was still firmly entrenched in white hands, as is currently the case in South Africa (More 2011). In his literary narrative, Gomo tackles this incongruity that prevailed immediately after Independence in Zimbabwe where, in an agro-based economy, the white minority still possessed control of the most of productive agricultural land in the country. Gomo’s land discourse in *A Fine Madness* makes reference to this neocolonial condition that the country faced at the time which was reflected in the lack of meaningful redistribution of land to the black majority. The narrator questions the kind of democracy that would have “four thousand Europeans whose loyalties lie with our enemies/controlling the means of production in a sovereign state/of thirteen million landless black people whom they all hate with a passion that is demonic” (p.49)<sup>110</sup>? Gomo’s land discourse echoes the official nationalist narrative on the land reform as representing “the long overdue reclaiming of a key national and spiritual resource and thus a glorious act of final decolonisation” (Primorac 2006:2).

I argue, therefore, that because Gomo believes that “[u]nempowered choice is not freedom” (p.149), he implies that the immorality of this imperial situation requires the kind of

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<sup>110</sup> The racism and hatred of white Rhodesians of their black counterparts that Gomo touches on here is lucidly illustrated in Alexandra Fuller’s *Scribbling the Cat*. It is reflected in the various names the white soldiers have for blacks, such as “gondie”, “munt” “gooks” etc., which are extremely derogatory. This categorisation of people on the basis of their colour signifies a racist ideology (Ratcliffe 2004:20). For a more detailed exploration of racism as an ideology that justifies economic inequalities see Marger (1991).

“madness” that was evident in President Robert Mugabe’s launch of the Fast Track Land Programme, which I elaborated on in the previous chapter. The programme is in itself avant-garde<sup>111</sup>, the very reason why it has been identified as the “Third *Chimurenga*”<sup>112</sup>. Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2007:105) contend that this agrarian war has made Zimbabwe not only a revolutionary state, but also a radical one, which they identify as “a peripheral state which has rebelled against neocolonialism”. Conversely, using the concept of the grotesque, Gatsheni-Ndhlovu and Muzondidya (2011) contend that there is incongruity in the kind of nationalism propagated by the Third *Chimurenga*, which these critics declare has aspects very similar to Nazism and Facism. These critics believe that it is a nationalism that relies on the philosophies of nativism and racial exclusiveness to mobilise the masses, as well as emphasises “issues of patriotism and unqualified loyalty” (Ndhlovu and Muzondidya 2011:8). Whether radical or grotesque, one cannot deny the significant role that this kind of nationalism plays in the fight against imperialism.

Political emancipation is crucial to the achievement of African autonomy. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi (1993:51) stresses that the West maintains political and economic dominance of African nation-states in the postcolonial era by “erecting and supporting the most reactionary and the most repressive civil or military dictatorship in the world”. This seems to have been the case during Mobutu’s reign over the DRC. In his anti-imperialistic stance, Gomo gives an essentialist attack of the West’s puppeteering role in the brutal war that followed Kabila’s reign. In “Savage peace”, the narrator fails to make sense of the “madness” of this conflict where Africans are pitted against and kill one another. Gomo illustrates the devastating effects of this war as the narrator witnesses how people “bargained to survive on rotting venison” (p.46). The narrator regards the war as nothing but “[a] menacing confusion that scourged mankind” (p.47). The streets in Boende are filled with Zimbabweans, Namibians, Congolese who are all part of “the madding crowd of wretched people” (ibid) belittled by imperialistic oppression. In this chapter, Gomo also takes a swipe at the foreign-backed opposition parties “whose hands would be greased by anti-people Rhodesian

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<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Ngugi’s *A Grain of Wheat* illustrates the importance of the repossession of the land as an indicator of freedom from colonial domination. Ngugi depicts how for the new Kenyan bourgeoisie, *Uhuru* (freedom) meant replacing the coloniser without changing the socio-political and economic structures, whereas *Uhuru* for Gikuyu peasants signified a break with the colonial past and the restitution of the usurped land to the black masses of Kenya.

<sup>112</sup> In *We Need New Names*, Bulawayo depicts the invasion of white owned farms by black people. One of the invaders tells the white farmer that “[m]aybe you’ll understand one day this has to be done, you know” (Bulawayo 2014: 117).

barbarians to struggle against their own people” (p.47). Gomo’s narrative suggests the “madness” of such people who “agitate for a surrogate democracy in which a minority European population calls the shots” (p.48). This neo-imperialistic condition is evident in most post-independent African nations in which there exists “neocolonial puppet rule tailored to protect the minority interests of capitalist manipulators” (p.41). Unfortunately, Gomo does not fully explore the role of the African ruling elite in maintaining the status quo. The West’s prostituting of Africa was made easy by the fact that it was usually a “thoroughly colonised petty-bourgeoisie” (Ngugi 1993:70) who took over the reins of power from the former colonial masters.

Gomo explores the theme of political and economic enslavement in “The wasp is corrupt”. In some African cultures, the wasp is seen as a symbol of evolution and control over one’s destiny. Ironically here, however, Gomo uses the image of the wasp to relay the African’s continued subservience and lack of control over their political and material circumstances under neocolonialism. In his article “Cultural nationalism in Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*”, Rodwell Makombe (2014) underscores the anti-imperialism evident in Gomo’s narrative from a cultural nationalist perspective. He discusses how the relationship between the wasp and the caterpillar that Gomo writes about signifies that between Europe and Africa. The wasp (Europe) uses “subversive venom” to kill the caterpillar (Africa) in order to ensure the continued existence of her own descendants. The “fat caterpillar” (p.61) becomes nourishment for the imperialist oppressors’ progeny. Gomo asks: “What corruption can be worse than imperialist oppressors training and sponsoring terrorists to destabilize Africa for rejecting their dominant rule” (pp.60-61)? It is apparent, then, that in this chapter, Gomo depicts how Africa’s wars, like that in the DRC, serve as conduits through which the West plunders the continent’s vast mineral resources (Makombe 2014:92) for its own enrichment. These persistent wars and instability they create is symptomatic of the West’s perpetual rape of Africa and her resources and the bid to secure a hegemonic hold over the continent, as my discussion below elaborates.

In the opening chapter entitled “Tinyarei”<sup>113</sup> Gomo, begins his narrative with a romantic vision not only of Zimbabwe, but of Africa as a whole. This negritude-style romanticism, very similar to that found in Okot p’ Bitek’s *Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol* (1989) is clearly

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<sup>113</sup>*Tinyarei* literally translates to “give us a break” in English.

depicted in his personification of Africa as Tinyarei, “an older woman aged in beauty” (p.4). “Madness” is evident in this unconventional twinning of age and beauty. His glorification of this old “perfect thing” (ibid) defies conformist definitions of beauty that normally associate it with youth and suppleness and evokes an image of loyalty. In Africa it is actually considered taboo to fall in love with or marry an older woman, yet the narrator expresses a “raging, turning and twisting passion” (ibid) for Tinyarei which is as fervent and constant as the eternal Flame of Independence that burns at the top of Harare’s kopje, symbolising Zimbabwe’s sovereignty. His love for her undoubtedly embodies a very strong sense of patriotism. Away from her, he misses Tinyarei “with wretchedness that was like madness/A very fine and enjoyable madness” (pp.7-8)<sup>114</sup>.

Yet as his narrative continues, in “The rape” Gomo reveals how she is gang-raped by “exploiters from the West” (p.89). This use of the rape metaphor is a typical rhetoric in anti-imperialist literature<sup>115</sup>. He uses the image of the deflowered virgin to illustrate how “Africa had unintentionally defied Europe and America to love her/And now she lay sprawled on her back ... And they took turns on her/Germans, Americans, British, French, Portuguese, Belgians/The whole lot of them” (p.89). He describes them as “a union and treaty of economic rapists” (ibid). Gomo goes on to depict how this exploitative relationship is maintained as the rapists provide “huge sums of money as/pre-natal aid to nurture the unwanted pregnancy to a/Healthy delivery of their bastard offspring that would/Inherit Africa and hand it back to them” (ibid). He further explores the theme of exploitation in the whorish image of the African “funeral men” who solicit Tinyarei’s body in exchange for British currency (p.69). Gomo here chides those in power in independent African states for pimping off their country’s natural resources and wealth by “signing contracts that shackle [them] to European commerce” (p.5). This “promiscuous transaction” (Makombe 2014:87) signifies an obvious loss of freedom. The whorish image recurs in the strange dream the narrator has in “Nightmare”, where Tinyarei wears crimson, “the colour of the courtesan” (p.66). She prostitutes her freedom and becomes “a woman for all men” (p.67). The narrator feels betrayed by her. He derides the obvious exploitation he sees taking place in Africa that is perpetuated under the guise of globalisation. I argue that Gomo uses the metaphor of

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<sup>114</sup> From a feminist perspective, it is extremely important to note that the language that Gomo uses in his personification of Africa as a woman is explicitly gendered. Apparent too, is the sexual objectification of Tinyarei, whom the author hopes long to be “possessed”, “penetrated” and “touched like a baby” (p34-35).

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* (2000), Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* (1977), Vera’s *Without a Name*, and Marechera’s *Black Sunlight* (1980).

Tinyarei's African womanhood being commodified to stress that any commercialisation of Africa's wealth to the West signals the demise of Africa.

Gomo then deliberately switches to the vernacular to illustrate the disparaging regard Africans often have of each other when the narrator's ability to sustain Tinyarei, financially and otherwise is questioned: "*Kuti unomupei*"<sup>116</sup>? It is my contention that Gomo uses the narrator to symbolise the African masses who lack the financial capability to tap into their country's resources because of the status quo that exists. This, however, is not the only limiting factor. I posit that Gomo's narrative illustrates that one of the obstacles to Africans harnessing the continent's resources in order to achieve economic emancipation is their continued reliance on the West for sustenance. The narrator asks: "what unfortunate condition of destiny attached liberated men to tormentors as dogs attach themselves to cruel masters" (p.143)? Ngugi (1993:52) suggests that such a predicament exists because "under neocolonialism, the cultural and psychological aspects of imperialism become even more important as instruments of mental and spiritual coercion". Therefore, getting rid of the entrapment neurosis is a pre-requisite to the strengthening of the Africans' economic prowess. This is why, I want to argue, Gomo points out the "madness" of falling in love with Tinyarei (Africa) as being a precondition to jealously guarding her body (wealth) from those who possess the means to exploit her.

In "Toxic waste and songs of war", therefore, Gomo stresses that in the search for autonomy and an authentic African identity, "Africa must take pleasure in peeing neocolonialist Europe and America into the dirt ... Africa must wrest her destiny from exploitative hands and taste the absolute beauty of rebellion against neocolonial dictatorship and double standards" (p.96). Gomo here alludes to the many hues of oppression Africans have suffered under both colonial and postcolonial domination. In "The horizon", he questions why in an independent continent, "Africa continues to see and hear white people talking and meting out justice on her horizon" (p.52). The consequence of this is that Africa continues to be "beleaguered by terrorist groups and opposition parties sponsored by the same powers to destabilize African democracies that threaten to overwhelm white minority influence" (ibid). Although Gomo has been accused of essentialism in his West vs Africa stance (Nyambi 2011; Ngugi 2010), he no doubt raises the important aspect of Western complicity in the destabilisation of

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<sup>116</sup>What can you offer her?

African nations. This is why Gomo suggests the need for Africans to break all ties with their ex-colonisers in the struggle for autonomy because, as Audre Lorde (1984:112) states, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change”. Like Lorde did in reference to the black feminist fight against patriarchy and racism, Gomo’s narrative also makes it clear that Africans cannot fight imperial oppression using the same logic and systems that have justified their subjugation because in such a struggle, “only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (Lorde 1984:111).

Lorde’s illustration here reflects the historical experience of some African countries in which not much change is evident in their socio-political and economic landscapes as the former colonial masters ensure their continued hegemonic grip through the economic policies that are imposed on them through, for example, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. For instance, in Zimbabwe, these global entities imposed the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme which, although meant to revitalise the economy had an adverse impact as it exacerbated the economic hardships in the country as I have already highlighted in Chapter Three of this study. In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi (1993:83) laments this pseudo-independence in these African states, which he asserts was signified by “the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly”. Gomo starkly portrays this image of the neocolonial condition in his narrative.

On the socio-cultural level, Gomo explores the psychological entrapment of the African by a colonial mentality. Imperialism not only resulted in the political domination and economic exploitation of the colonised people, but also separated them from their identity and culture. The kind of violent assault that is meted out on the African’s psyche through imperial toxin is vividly illustrated in Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967a) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967b). Fanon (1967a) stresses how because the oppressors deny the Africans their subjectivity and destroy their cultural system, the latter are able to be easily manipulated and assimilated. This subjugation imprisons them in an inferiority complex. It is a violence that leads to such psychological fragmentation that African children “commit fratricide and trash their own sovereignty and heritage” (p.61). In the postcolonial era, this culminates in a people “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon 1967b: 18). This fragmentation of identity then leads to the constant questioning of the African’s ontological existence: “In reality, who am I?” (Fanon

1967a:250).

In his narrative, Gomo emphasises this existential uncertainty, in which the Africans' mentality still seems to suffer from a colonial hangover in the postcolonial era. He points to the definite need to break away from the psychological shackles that continue to bind them in this period when he laments that "[i]t must surely be tragic to be an African blank and writable CD ... just there, available for any programme, even to self-destruct" (p.57). This nullification of African culture has provided a legitimate armament for colonial domination as the colonisers use Christianity and education as weapons - both key points in the inculcation of socially learned behaviour - to embark on the destruction of the African culture through the "denial of African identity and the foisting of western thought and cultural realities and perspectives on Africans" (Chukwuokolo 2009:29). This inevitably leads to the African's psychic dislocation.

In "The light of Western civilization" for example, Gomo reveals how this cultural alienation caused the African to denigrate his own cultural practices, spirituality and knowledge systems, opting instead to valorise Western culture, values and religion. Gomo here depicts the white missionaries as accomplices in the dispossession and servitude of the African people. He also castigates the education system on the continent which distanced the educated elite from their culture and "deliberately alienated its victims from the masses from where they come, so that when they went back, it would not be to foster unity that bred nationalism but individualism that advanced the capitalist cause" (p.39).

In "Tinyarei", Gomo explicates how the early missionaries to Africa encouraged the black people to denounce their "pagan" names. They were given new English names when they became Christians to ensure that they did not bear the "burden" of their heritage. Similarly, in "Satanic causes", Gomo derides African people who "take unholy causes to the holy altar of God and pray that they continue to owe their livelihood to exploiters without a conscience" (p.134). The implication here is that no "right thinking African" (p.134) should promote the perpetuation of imperialism. In "*Kufa kunesu machewe*",<sup>117</sup> Gomo metaphorically portrays African people as being possessed with the evil spirit of imperialism that ensures their continued subjugation. He writes about how they wander like "mad people, *semhuka*

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<sup>117</sup> Death is with us for real

*dzakarasirirwa*<sup>118</sup> (p.103) throughout he mazes of “First Street, East Gate, West Gate, Sam Levy”, all these areas synonymous with “so-called sophistication” (ibid). Gomo’s narrative thus reveals how some Africans were subtly manipulated into having a Eurocentric perspective of their existential reality in the socio-political, developmental and cultural spheres. Chidozi Chukwuokolo (2009:31) remarks that “[t]his Eurocentric notion pervades all aspects of life in Africa”.

In seeming response to the images of Africa that began with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Itai Muhwati (2006:4) cautions that Zimbabwean authors need to guard against a replication of descriptions of Africa as the “dark continent” and of the African people as a shapeless mass of lifeless, worthless, wandering and whitewashed black bodies. He questions:

Haven’t others seen us as *Mapenzi*?<sup>119</sup> In the same vein, haven’t others seen Africa as *Masango Mavi*<sup>120</sup>, House of Hunger, Walking Still, Shadows, Chairman of Fools, Without a Name? In this regard, what are the implications for agency, transcendence, posterity and the race’s race of life if we authenticate such discourses that promulgate violently imposed images of ourselves? (Muhwati 2006: 1-2)

Gomo’s patriotic discourse of “madness” seems to have somehow heeded Muhwati’s counsel as he, in negritude-like style, depicts “madness” as a necessary transcendence from the mental chains of colonialism that restrict the existential potentiality of the African continent and its people. When the narrator leaves the Christian church, the priest considers him mad for doing so. Yet, in Gomo’s articulation of this act of self-definition, “madness” serves as a counter-discourse to imperial domination (Makombe 2014). He takes the cultural war a step further by making use of reverse stereotyping, referring to the Europeans as “barbarians” and “pagans”. I concur with Makombe’s (2014) perception that this typecast reversal is an obvious stylistic attempt to discursively restore African dignity that has long been disparaged by colonialism. Gomo is undeniably influenced by Fanonian philosophy in his literary attack on the colonial mentality that still binds the Africans in neo-colonial states. Under imperialism, the white person renders the black person abject, a conceptualisation which the black person, in turn, internalises, hence the self-hate evident in the adoption and imitation of European culture and values that results in what I want to term a “head of darkness”, the type

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<sup>118</sup> ... like cursed animals

<sup>119</sup> Mad/foolish people

<sup>120</sup> Hostile Jungle

of mentality that Tambu exhibits in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, as becomes evident in my analysis of this literary text in Chapter Six of this study. Whereas Conrad's main character was pre-occupied with conquering the "darkness" of African culture he thought pervaded the Congo, Gomo's patriotic narrative encourages the elimination of the subsequent Eurocentric worldview that some Africans adopted as a result of the penetration of imperialistic "light". Gomo therefore views the transgressing of the borderlines of rationality as a positive and necessary move towards the attainment of freedom from the mental shackles of imperialism - the "head of darkness" legacy that still exists to some extent in independent Africa. This is the reason why in an effort to re-connect with the masses and the African historical memory, missionary educated nationalists, such as Joshua Nkomo, Leopold Takawira and James Chikerema donned animal skins and hats in order to project their African consciousness and authentic African leadership (Ndhlovu-Gatsheni 2011).

Furthermore, Eurocentrism is apparent in the use of the language of the former colonial masters on the continent by the African people. In the chapter entitled "Impeccable English and French" Gomo explores the issue of the marginality of indigenous languages which "have been arrested and inhibited by colonialism" (p.54) within the postcolonial era. This creates a diglossic situation in which these indigenous languages are somewhat shunned. The dominant use of colonial language in post-independent Africa plays an essential part in the continued perpetuation of colonial hegemony and the entrenchment of a colonial mentality into the African psyche. Gomo highlights how through the reliance on the colonial language, which subsequently transmits its culture, Africans have become shackled by a colonial mentality. The "madness" of such a scenario is that this mental handicap would be worn:

... like gold and/ diamond jewellery to be shown off by speaking impeccable English and French right down to accents on/the streets of African capitals, in homes, in businesses, in parliament, in schools and everywhere,/even if it distorted/and inhibited effective communication since it is a language/that bears the mind and identity of a people (p.55).

In "Eyes are strange" a Special Air Service man deplores this immersion in the colonial language and culture that has resulted in African children "speaking in colonial tongue yet surrounded by neocolonial squalor" (p.27). Gomo perceives this linguistic idiosyncrasy as serving as "a security measure ensuring that even if Africans were to remove the shackles of

slavery from their ankles and waists and wrists and necks they would still be shackled in the mind” (p.55). His narrative suggests the “madness” of such language diglossia since “its language that bears the mind and identity of a people” (ibid) because it is through it that a people convey their culture. In independent Zimbabwe, the widespread ethnocentrism that prevailed was reflected in the vernacular first names that Zimbabweans bestowed on their children as an expression of their historical and cultural pride. Ironically, though, there was no corresponding mirroring of the importance of this heritage through the promotion of the use of nation’s indigenous languages by these children. Instead, there was an apparent massacre of these languages as evidenced by the “nose brigade” generation that surfaced in the urban areas of the country<sup>121</sup>. They mostly spoke in the language of their former colonial masters and prided themselves in their mastery and perfection of it. This language assimilation was further exacerbated by the fact that the English Language remained the official language of communication in the independent nation. Language is undeniably the transmitter of a people’s culture, as I have already indicated in Chapter Two. This being the case, is this overuse of the English language sounding the death knell of the traditional cultural heritage that is embedded in Zimbabwe’s vernacular languages? Gomo alludes to this when he classifies colonial languages as “subversive languages that alienate African people, socially engineered to take away their identity and compromise their self-determination” (p.56). He sees the adoption of the languages of the former oppressors in neocolonial African states as also compromising the personal liberty of those who have not mastered them. The “fine madness” that Gomo demands of African people would necessitate the moving away from “such retrogressive diglossia and reverse it to bring mother tongues into government, industry and commerce” (p.57).

“The nightmare’ is significant for its portrayal of the great appetite some Africans have for westernization. Gomo here denigrates this excessive consumption of foreign ways and values. The narrator describes how women wear “false teeth, false nails, false/eyelashes and false hair that made them false people/And they frowned and pouted very red lips and spoke in false accents” (p.69)<sup>122</sup>. The youths drink cases of Johnny Walker whiskey “with abandon,

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<sup>121</sup> Nose brigades’ is a colloquial term used in Zimbabwe to refer to those black people who speak English with the “white’ accent of the former British colonisers.

<sup>122</sup> In *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*, Okot p’Bitek (1989) similarly castigates this self-alienation of the black woman. In “The Woman with Whom I Share My Husband”, Lawino condescendingly describes her husband’s concubine: “Her lips are red-hot/ Like glowing charcoal, She resembles the wild cat/ That has dipped its mouth in/ blood,/ Her mouth is like raw yaws/ It looks like an open ulcer/ [...]Tina dust powder on her face/ And it looks so pale;/ She resembles the wizard/Getting ready for the midnight/ dance”.

undeterred by the prospects of liver cirrhosis, when their bodies would not be able to dispose of the foreign toxic waste” (ibid). Gomo is, here, giving an exposé of the imperial “cultural bomb” Ngugi warned against, which has caused the dearth of African cultural norms, values and identity. Ngugi argues that this weapon of mass destruction has succeeded in dismembering the African body and soul and annihilating their culture. His utterance in *Decolonising the Mind* is so crucial to this analysis:

The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from the wasteland. (Ngugi 1982:3)

The distinct loss of identity that mental slavery embedded in the African psyche is evidenced by the “ambi-generation” that emerged on the continent in second half of the nineteenth century (1960s onwards). Gomo makes reference to these “African daughters who reject *en mass* the colour black as they creamed their faces to the colour mutations of white women” (p.70). He no doubt condemns the illogicality of all these foolish deformations that are done as some African women attempt to emulate the European standard of beauty and which, from an existential psychoanalytic perspective, are indicative of a deeply embedded self-hate. This devaluation of blackness is further reinforced by the misconception by a significant proportion of their male counterparts who equate a black woman’s “lightness” to beauty<sup>123</sup>. Jessica Hemmings (2005:174) argues that skin bleaching is not simply an act of vanity, but is an act of erasure that is driven by “a need not only to be perceived as another, but to embody that other”. She describes this skinning of the face as “a self-willed mutilation” (Hemmings 2005:178)<sup>124</sup>, a distortion that not only conceals blackness but illuminates how racism penetrates and disrupts self-worth (Hemmings 2005). This attempt at whiteness, is therefore,

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<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, the fame that Lupita Nyong’o has received as the “New Face of Lancôme” (2014), a renowned French cosmetic and skin care company, is a positive development to the redefinition of African beauty. Nyong’o demonstrates a comfort in her very dark skin and natural hair. Her fame has resulted in what has been called “the Lupita effect” in the world of fashion and glamour (Bennet 2014). In an interview with Leslie Bennet entitled the “The Breakthrough: Lupita Nyong’o”, she remarked that “European standards of beauty are something that plagues the entire world - the idea that darker skin is not beautiful, that light skin is the key to success and love” (Bennet 2014). Ironically though, she first came into the limelight for her debut acting performance as a brutalised slave in “12 Years a Slave” (2013).

<sup>124</sup>For an in depth analysis of the ambi-generation, see Hemmings “Altered Surfaces: The Ambi Generation of Yvonne Vera’s *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*”.

a revelation of a false consciousness that reiterates these black women's subjugation<sup>125</sup>. I contend that here, Gomo shows how the colonised subject endeavours to imitate the white person's looks and behaviour. This attempt to achieve "whiteness" is not unique to the African continent but has also made a dent on Afro-American culture as depicted in, for example, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* (1970) in which the black female protagonist yearns for blue eyes. Although from diverse continents and of different sex, both Gomo and Morrison raise the fundamental problem of the devaluation of blackness through their literary texts. Gomo points to the need to cancel this black self-hatred in the African through a revaluation of African values and culture, a formidable feat that would most certainly require "a fine madness" to achieve.

Many other instances in Gomo's narrative indicate that he is concerned not only with the political war in the DRC, but also with the battle that needs to be fought to reclaim African culture and pride. Re-affirming this culture, which has been continually denied and denigrated by the imperialists, becomes essential to the psychological and cultural emancipation of the Africans in the postcolonial era. The cancerous colonial label needs to be torn off their values and beliefs. As Adeleke (2009:68) argues, "African culture thus served as a weapon of struggle, of self-definition, and of counterhegemonic identity construction"<sup>126</sup>. Gomo's narrative, therefore, suggests that given that the African cultural memory has been disrupted by the two broad legacies colonialism left in Africa, what becomes necessary with Independence for this to be achieved is a cultural battle to foster regeneration and renewal of the indigenous culture, a "return to the source" (Cabral 1973)<sup>127</sup>. This is because, as Cabral's nationalist ideology highlights, culture plays a central role in contesting colonial hegemony. Cabral (1970) believes that as an instrument of resistance to imperialism, culture's value lies in its ideological grounding of the dominated society's physical and historical experience. He argues that "with a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation" (1970, paragraph 3, line2). A formidable indigenous culture, then, becomes a potent weapon of resistance to colonial hegemony. Likewise Ngugi (1982) contends that the

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<sup>125</sup> It is pertinent to note here that some scholars regard women's emulation of beauty norms as a strategic choice since it carries social capital (Hill Collins 1991; Thompson and Keith; 2001; Hunter 2002). In "If you're light you're alright: Light skin colour as social capital for women of color" Margaret Hunter 2002 argues, for example, that skin lightening is a much more complex phenomenon than simply trying to lighten skin to look pretty. In systems of gendered and racialised structural inequality, women often make very sophisticated choices in order to negotiate their way in settings that oppress them.

<sup>126</sup> For cultural nationalist Maulana Karenga (2014:4), culture is "the basis of all ideas, images and actions. To move is to move culturally, that is, by a set of values given to you by your culture".

<sup>127</sup> Cabral's anti-colonial discourse stresses the cultural component of imperialist repression.

process of decolonisation would require some sort of re-membering for the moulding of an authentic African identity in the postcolonial era. Re-membering necessitates the restoration of the African cultural memory that has been disfigured and repressed by the trauma of colonialism. Re-membering what it means to be African is crucial to the restoration of an authentic African identity. Vera (2001:116) critically points out that “it is an understanding of what has happened, in knowing where the rain began to beat us that we can begin to find our autonomy”.

I argue that this is why when Tinyarei’s corpse is taken to London after her inevitable death, the traditional men and spirits of the First *Chimurenga* fight for their daughter’s body back because “they could not see the logic of a post-mortem in London” (p.71). It needed to be done at home. Through this struggle, Gomo strongly indicates the importance of knowing “where the rain began to beat us”. Possessing this knowledge is an essential step towards the retrieval of the cultural values of African people in the search for an appropriate identity in the neocolonial phase of the continent’s history. This call for the reclamation of African identity is evident in “Tinyarei”. While in the messing bunker at Boende, the narrator revels in his “madness” and proudly introduces himself to his comrades as “Warrant Officer Class Two Takawira Muchineripi, alias Comrade, alias Changamire” (p.8) because, he states, “it felt awfully nice to be all the names the British priest had refused in Sunday School” (p.8)<sup>128</sup>. For the narrator, this act of naming is indicative of self-determination. It is a necessary ontological declaration of his identity. Similarly, In “Toxic waste and songs of war” Gomo challenges Africans to rise out of the neocolonial era and become autonomous and patriotic. The narrator emphasises that like the pleasure derived from peeing out toxic waste from the body, “Africa must take pleasure in peeing neocolonialist Europe and America into the dirt” (p.96). This cleansing ritual represents the essence of an ensuing national identity. In this search for “*ufuru*”, for identity, the narrator envisages “the beauty of rebellion” (p.96) as Africa is able to “wrest her destiny from exploitative hands” (p.96). He calls for Africa to have its own song that would “guard black children against the racist indulgences of the West” (p.98). Gomo here delineates the unifying element of song within Africa’s socio-political matrix as it plays a vital role in fostering ideological cohesion. Patriotic songs promote nationalism through the major themes found in them, such as resistance to

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<sup>128</sup> Gomo clearly explains that whereas the name “Takawira” is indicative of colonial bondage, “Muchineripi” denotes victory as it is a verbal challenge to a fallen enemy. The two names together, therefore, represent an allegory (p.8). He goes on to state that “Changamire is a traditional ruler and also a title of reverence when addressing elders” (ibid).

domination and independence, amongst others. They help shape the movement towards a collective identity and an empowered national consciousness. The narrator stresses this power of song:

Alone and enchanted by the Congolese dawn, I saw why it is necessary that each nation should have its own song ... /A song around which all the voices would rally, making the whole nation one and reluctant to split/A song that would eternalize nationhood (p.98).

Fanon's (1967c:86) warning that "[t]he freedom of the state does not mean, as neocolonial leaders claim - the freedom of the human being" reverberates in Gomo's narrative. Implicit in Fanon's argument is that an external liberation granted by the former colonial masters cannot be equated to true freedom. Genuine liberation can only be achieved from within through the attainment of an identity built on an existential self-consciousness, that is, the Africans must liberate themselves from the mental slavery caused by a Eurocentric worldview. At his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature, Harold Pinter (2005) declared that:

When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror - for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us".

The last part of this extract is significant to the understanding of Gomo's Afro-radical stance on identity. His narrative constantly alludes to the Africans' deceptive image of their reality. Gomo reveals that this deception, this wearing of the "white mask" is what has led to the Africans ingrained conception of themselves as the insignificant "other". It is a self-image riddled with negation, one that has, unfortunately, become an inevitable part of the African psyche, culminating in what Fanon (1967b:5) describes as a "massive psycho existential complex". I argue here that in *A Fine Madness*, Gomo fervently demonstrates that liberation from such an inferiority syndrome entails breaking the colonial mirror. It is only by moving away from the imperial baggage this mirror's image throws back that the search for "*ufuru*", for the consolidation of a reconstructed black identity, can begin<sup>129</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup>Interestingly, this contemplation on the correlation between mirrors and identity brings to mind Michael Jackson's 2009 song entitled "Man in the Mirror", which promotes change within oneself. I believe that this song was significant in representing his deeply troubled struggles with his self-image and sense of identity.

It is not surprising, then, that in Gomo's literary text, the narrator envisages himself as one of the "real men" (p.11) destined to fight for the liberation of Africa and guard her sovereignty by getting rid of the imperial chains through breaking the colonial mirror. Such men are driven by the "[f]ear of what African people could become should Africa sit back and let the zombies among her children be sponsored into self-destruction and neocolonial slavery" (p.51). Gomo's narrative testifies that "the bitter taste of liberty" that David Diop wrote about in his poem "Africa" (1956) needs to be sweetened through purging imperialist dominance and thought. It is only by discarding the different facets of colonial denigration and drinking from an anti-imperialist fountain that the African can win the battle for freedom. Significantly, this is why Gomo's literary creation can be considered an example of what Fanon (1967a:238) succinctly classifies as a nationalist "literature of combat" because:

It calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation; it is a literature of combat because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is combat literature because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space. (Fanon 1967a:238)

Despite the glorious feeling of nationalism that these fighters in the war of resistance feel, Gomo does not deny the pain and deep sense of loneliness that often envelops them. In "Eyes are strange", while the fighters sit around the Congolese fire, the narrator acknowledges this enigma as he watches the eyes of the Special Air Service man whose eyes "told the story of blood and loneliness" (p.28). Gomo stresses, however, that these afflictions are overshadowed by the Afrocentric battle to ensure that:

African people must know that it must be a matter of technique to carry a demonized/ Zimbabwe and a beleaguered Africa to independent prosperity/Africa people must know that sometimes it is fine to be mad/Africa people must know that a madness they believe in must be a fine madness/A VERY FINE MADNESS (p.169).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The advent of imperialism in Africa caused a brutal dis-membering of the continent's memory and culture through dispossession, exploitation and the psychological scarring of the African psyche. The attainment of Independence by the different African countries should

have culminated in a re-membering process; a reclaiming of African memory to signify an end to imperial psychological, political and economic domination. Yet this analysis has shown that Gomo laments the “flag” Independence evident in some of these postcolonial nations. At the official launch of *A Fine Madness* (Harare, 26 October, 2010), he made one of the objectives of his narrative abundantly clear when he stated that that it is intention “to make African children learn from the story of ignorance, recklessness and death around the mouth of the imperial cave. And, if any should think that it is mad to do so, I must insist that it is *A Fine Madness*” (Zvinonzwa 2010). His narrative, therefore, marks a patriotic cry for a total freedom from all the physical and mental shackles colonialism has imposed on the African. Ngugi argues (1993) that Africa can only be re-membered through the Pan-Africanist vision that Gomo implores for in his narrative. Therefore, my literary analysis in this chapter has revealed how Gomo’s narrative illustrates that any meaningful transition into freedom from oppression must entail a disruption of the logic and systems of imperialism so that African sovereignty and identity can be restored. More importantly, Gomo stresses the necessity of reforming the African’s fragmented psyche and sense of alienation through a process of decolonisation. It must take “a fine madness” for the African to break the colonial mirror in order to destroy the self-image it reflects and reclaim subjectivity. This process of decolonisation is pertinent for the moulding of a modern existential identity within the African continent which, as Idowu Williams (2009:441) makes succinctly apparent, is “still in a state of potentiality”.

Moreover, my analysis in this chapter has revealed how *A Fine Madness* reflects Gomo’s grounding in an African worldview, as his whole “madness” dialogue on African identity is undeniably ethnocentric. It has shown how the philosophies of the prominent scholars - Cabral, Césaire, Fanon and Ngugi - have heavily influenced the revolutionary ferment in Gomo’s Pan-Africanist stance. Significantly, my discussion in this chapter has revealed that Gomo’s *A Fine Madness* is a classic example of anti-imperialist literature that is targeted at removing the psychological imprints of the colonial legacy from the minds of the black people of Africa. He uses literature as a weapon against imperial hegemony by chronicling a part of the history of African resistance to neocolonialism so that “it is inculcated into the mental make-up of African children as a security vaccine, immunizing black children against Eurocentric prejudices, subversion and dominance” (p.27). In his poetic prose, the narrator envisages an intricate link between the Devil’s Cataract and him in the “almost maniacal desire to be free” (p.66) that they both exhibit. Yet considering the depth of the colonial

mentality's penetration of the black man's psyche, this freedom, indeed, requires African's to experience "a very fine madness" in the search for identity. Such individuation would require the cultural re-membering that my analysis in this chapter has alluded to. This resurrection of African memory would, Gomo seems to argue, form the basis of an African cultural renaissance and wholeness that would, in turn, give birth to *ufuru*.

The pertinent question that remains, however, is can Africa really achieve total emancipation from imperialism? As my analysis has shown, Gomo's poetic prose implies that true freedom from colonialism can be achieved only when Africa succeeds in obtaining power that is untainted by imperial influence. Yet Zimbabwe's postcolonial history has revealed that despite vigorous efforts through the Land Reform Programme and the indigenisation drive, the country seems to have moved away from Western colonisation into Eastern dependence. This has been fuelled by the "Look East" stance adopted by the government that has currently engineered China into becoming one of the major foreign exploiters of the nation's resources<sup>130</sup>. Despite these reservations, I want to state that although based on the bleak war in the DRC, an optimistic streak certainly runs through the narrative. As Ngugi attests, "Gomo's Africa may bear the mark of tragedy, the heart of darkness of European making, but out of it, are possibilities if Africa learns to unite and protect its own" (p.2).

In the next chapter, I proceed with the male discourse on "madness" in a scrutiny of Chikwava's *Harare North*. My focus will be to show how the nameless protagonist in the narrative finds himself in a diaspora that is not only physical, but also psychological and emotional. The trauma of this experience negatively impacts on his sense of ontological security and identity and causes him to spiral into insanity.

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<sup>130</sup> Under the indigenisation programme, all companies are expected to have at least 51 per cent shares/stakes owned by Zimbabwean nationals.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE WRETCHED OF THE DIASPORA: TRAUMATIC DISLOCATION IN BRIAN CHIKWAVA'S *HARARE NORTH*

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how Gomo perceives “madness” as a means to defy the logic of political and cultural imperialism. This particular chapter investigates Chikwava’s depiction of the phenomenon as mental illness caused by the trauma of displacement in *Harare North* (2009). It traces the narrator’s journey into insanity as he attempts to deal with the cultural and psychological trauma of living in the Diaspora in metropolitan London after having had a mainly rural upbringing in Zimbabwe. I show how the young protagonist is confused, alienated and frightened by the harsh demands of life as an illegal immigrant in this foreign city. He is also hampered by the psychological baggage of his past life as a Green Bomber. Ruby Magosvongwe (2013:102) states that “[g]reen bombers are huge green flies associated with stench, toilets and garbage dumps or places where faecal matter is abundant. Using this image for the youth militia means that they are viewed as scum or scavengers”. My literary analysis, therefore, closely examines the factors that push his mind “out of gear” (p.153). I apply David Laing and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theories to expose how the repression and fragmentation caused by the trauma of dislocation and alienation affect Chikwava’s narrator. This existential disorientation manifests in a “madness” that torments him by the narrative’s end. This chapter also highlights the cultural fragmentation that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora suffer as they adopt values and attitudes that contravene the cultural norms of the homeland. Furthermore, it exposes the ontological insecurity that these immigrants face as a result of their precarious existence.

Chikwava’s narrative is mainly set in London, where the protagonist, a nameless narrator, migrates to in an attempt to raise some money. Prior to 2002, there were no visa requirements for Zimbabweans entering London. Consequently, there was a great influx of migrants from Zimbabwe into the British capital and this is why it became known as Harare North, hence the title of Chikwava’s literary text. Even after visa restrictions were implemented, relocations continued, although these were much fewer than during the pre-2002 period.

These migrations have been mainly instigated by both economic and political reasons<sup>131</sup>. According to the United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, approximately two hundred thousand Zimbabweans live in Britain, of which the majority are part of Zimbabwe's elite and middle class (McGregor 2010a), who often, however, fail to maintain this status in the Diaspora. The economic crisis that the country was facing largely instigated these relocations. I have already discussed some of the highlights of this economic downturn, such as ESAP, the Land Reform Programme and "Operation Murambatsvina" in Chapter Three<sup>132</sup>. Suffice to note here that the Mugabe government subsequently regarded those who opted to leave for the Diaspora as "traitorous and in league with imperialism" (McGregor 2010a:9). Yet ironically the narrator, a Green Bomber firmly indoctrinated with nationalist rhetoric, chooses the UK as a place to reside temporarily.

Based on research done on Zimbabweans living in the UK, Mbiba (2005:30) describes how they "appear in every corner of the UK". He explains how between 1997 and 2004, Zimbabweans mainly secured employment in the health and care industry (old people's homes) and in warehouses (Mbiba 2005:30). Taking care of the elderly has led to the derogatory label BBC (British Bottom Cleaner). They were also commonly found in "3D" jobs, that is, those that were "dirty, difficult and dangerous" (Mbiba 2005:33). Unfortunately, the paradox of migration to the UK was that although the move signified status these Zimbabweans, most of whom had been part of the middle class in Zimbabwe, were subjected to "dirty, demeaning, feminized works" (McGregor 2010b:179). Consequently, they were caricatured by those back home as the BBC in language that is indicative of loss of status and abjection (McGregor 2010b:179).

Chikwava moved to London in 2000 and, as a result *Harare North* is mainly based on his observations of the experiences of African migrants who have sought asylum there (Kociejowoaski 2011). In an interview with Africa Writing Online (2009), Chikwava states that his narrator is nameless because "he is a dissociated voice". He stresses that the alien environment that migrants find themselves immersed in largely accounts for the fact that a substantial number end up either in a mental asylum or in prison (Africa Writing Online 2009). The uprooting that they experience often leads to psychological problems because

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<sup>131</sup> For a more detailed exploration of Zimbabwean's migration to Britain, see Mbiba (2012). Similar migrations occurred to neighbouring countries, such as South Africa and Botswana, as Chapter Three reveals.

<sup>132</sup> For a detailed analysis of this crisis, see McGregor (2010).

“exile mimics depression” (Chikwava 2009). It is pertinent to note, however, that there is a significant difference in meaning between the terms “exile” and “Diaspora”. Exile suggests banishment whereas the idea of Diaspora evokes choice (McGregor 2010b). Beacon Mbiba (2005) suggests that the term “Diaspora” has derogatory connotations implying that the immigrants of developing countries are expected to return to their homeland<sup>133</sup>. He indicates that the denigration of the term is reiterated in the fact that it is hardly used to refer to Europeans who have relocated to another country (Mbiba 2005)<sup>134</sup>. McGregor (2010b), however, illuminates how the term “Diaspora” has shifted from its academic and political meaning and has been used by migrants to identify themselves as a community. She further suggests that since 2000, Zimbabweans living out of the country have adopted the term as a popular discourse that serves as an ascribed label for these migrants (McGregor 2010b)<sup>135</sup>.

Implicit in the concept of the Diaspora is movement and displacement, as well as globalisation. This displacement can be emotionally and psychologically disturbing as becomes apparent in this literary analysis. This is because displacement signifies “the loss of home, social relations, work, rights, predictability and ontological security” (Hammer, McGregor and Landau 2010: 68). Not only are many Black Zimbabweans subjected to exploitation of their labour and social oppression in varying degrees of intensity - racial prejudice is also an inevitable part of their existential reality. Consequently, life in the Diaspora often entails mediating “in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford 1999:224). A diasporic consciousness, therefore, often constitutes a sense of marginality, loss, and exile, especially when one fails to engage positively with the diasporic experience. This is because, as this chapter shows, the Diaspora “opens up a historical rift between the locations of residence and the locations of belonging” (Gilroy 2002:329).

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<sup>133</sup> Ray Somner (2003:59) posits that the term applies to “all expatriate groups who chose, or were forced to leave their native countries for a variety of reasons, including indentured labour and the slave trade”. Similarly, Stephane Dufoix (2008:54) defines Diaspora as “a national and ethnic or religious community living far from its native land”.

<sup>134</sup> It is pertinent to note that in Zimbabwe, the term also has positive connotations, as living or being there is associated with financial success and stability.

<sup>135</sup> In this thesis, I use the term “diaspora” differently from its normative meaning as I am more concerned with the sense of movement and displacement implied in the concept, regardless whether the migrants are legal or illegal. As such, from this perspective I consider the illegal immigrant as very much a part of the diasporic community. This is because I believe that both categories of migrants suffer from a diasporic consciousness and subsequent trauma.

Muchemwa (2011) notes the new focus in the postcolonial Zimbabwean literary tradition which has shifted to the urban and the global. He identifies Chikwava's *Harare North* as being among one of those texts reflecting this shift, especially with regards to the origination of a new consciousness and the reconfiguration of identities in the context of migration. The other texts he places in this category are Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2007) and Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2007), the latter which I analyse in the next chapter. Muchemwa (2011: 401) describes such texts as marking "the geographical migration of Zimbabwean literary tradition and bringing into sharp focus lines of connection and reconnection and disengagement". In this chapter I further argue that although the title of Chikwava's narrative alludes to the reformulation of a sense of "home" and identity, this is something his protagonist resists doing<sup>136</sup>. He fails to realise that the deconstruction of the physical space of "home" should translate to a corresponding reconstruction of one's sense of identity and belonging. This is why Patricia Noxolo (2014) identifies *Harare North* as a novel of displacement, whose form and content articulate the materiality of dislocation, as is made evident in my literary analysis. She posits that within such a context of displacement caused by migration, "the body is often the locus of identity and difference ... the body is out of place and often ultimately either symbolically or actually dismembered" (Noxolo 2014:77).

## 5.2 Turncoating "Madness": Making Language and Form Sweet

Chikwava's literary text is undeniably postmodernist. I concur with Ranka Primorac (2010) assertion that Chikwava's narrative in *Harare North* is greatly influenced by Marechera's writing style. The creative processes evident in his narrative point to some of the characteristics of postmodernist writing, such as non-linearity, fragmentation and lack of closure. Noxolo (2014:301) stresses that *Harare North*'s "fragmented style resonates with the experience of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), following the narrator through vivid dreams, flashbacks, delusions and ultimately disintegration". I contend, therefore, that Chikwava's choice of form reflects the repercussions of the narrator's traumatic experiences

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<sup>136</sup> Thabisani Ndlovu (2010: 119) argues that home is more than just a physical space when he states that "[h]ome speaks of kinship networks as part of belonging, in which social relations validate an individual as a human being". It is regarded as a secure place of refuge that nurtures people and allows them to regenerate (Ndlovu 2010:). Notably, however, the notion that "home" is a place of safety has been thoroughly critiqued by feminist theorists. In fact, numerous studies suggest that women and children are at their most vulnerable in the "home". The perpetuation of the myth of "home" as a private space of safety only tends to exacerbate this vulnerability (Stanko 1998; Moran and Skeggs 2004; and Weir 2013).

in Zimbabwe and in the Diaspora. His stylistic structure is deliberately designed to mimic the trauma of displacement that the protagonist feels in the Diaspora. It also reflects the trauma he experienced during the violent acts of torture and murder that he was a part of in Zimbabwe. Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1994) is relevant to any discussion of torture. Scarry (1994) argues that the pain inflicted during torture is often associated with power by the perpetrator. This is evident in the narrator's mistaken conception of torture as, in fact, an act of meting out "forgiveness" (p.19) as I elaborate below. Scarry further suggests that the interrogation conducted during torture serves to deconstruct the victim's existential reality. Moreover, I argue that the narrative's form echoes the trauma of the possible rape he experienced while in prison there which, although never explicitly portrayed, is hinted at as he remembers jail as "full of them people that carry likkle horrors such as them sharpened bicycle spoke and they want you to donate your buttocks so that they can give you Aids; if you refuse the bicycle spoke go through your stomach as though it is made of toilet paper" (*HN*, p.21)<sup>137</sup>. The narrative's disjointed linear chronology is evident in the narrative's movement from London to Harare and other places in Zimbabwe in the flashbacks Chikwava uses to delve into the narrator's past at various instances.

Chikwava postmodernist style is also significant in his choice of language for his narrative, which echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's view that "[l]anguage is a sweet madness" (2006:175). It is apparent in the semantic oddity that appears in his use of English. He, for example, completely distorts the word "little" into "likkle" when he writes about Sekai's "likkle sausage dog" (p.13) that she keeps in the apartment. Other examples of semantic oddity are in the wrong subject-verb agreements that he uses, such as "they is"; the use of "they" instead of the possessive pronoun "their" as evident in the phrase "mothers in they tracksuits" (p. 1); as well as the unusual use of adjectives, as in the expression "loud looks" (p.7). This linguistic creativity significantly lends to the "madness" of form in *Harare North*.

The use of the English language, or the language of the former colonial masters, has been an issue of great debate in the literary world. In Chapter Three, I highlighted Chinodya's argument on his use of the English medium for his creative writing. In the previous chapter, I revealed how Gomo makes use of language mixing in his literary text. Similarly, Chikwava

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<sup>137</sup> This explains the great fear he reveals throughout the narrative of having possibly contracted AIDS, despite having tested HIV negative (p.21; p.71; p.154; p.211; p.212; p.217; p.224; p.226).

uses Shona syntax and morphology within his narrative as a stylistic innovation that transcends the normative use of the English language. Additionally, he makes use of both Shona and Ndebele idioms. Like Chinodya and Gomo, Chikwava believes in the necessity of “inflecting the English Language to carry the weight of the African experience” (Primorac 2010: 260). He, however, goes further than both authors by distorting the conventional English language through making use of Zimbabwean urban slang fused with Caribbean patois (Primorac 2010).

Chikwava’s linguistic style is similar to that adopted by Ahmadou Kouroma in his fiction *Les Soleils des Indépendances* (1968) and *En Attendant le Vote des Bête Sauvages* (1998)<sup>138</sup>. Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, this indigenisation of the English language by mixing it with and borrowing from the mother-tongue is a creative stylistic technique which Chantal Zabus (1991:23) refers to as “the writer’s attempt at textualising linguistic differentiation and conveying African concepts, thought patterns and linguistic concepts through the ex-colonizer’s language”. In the same vein, Gabriel Okara (1963) suggests that African ideas can be used effectively by literally translating them from the indigenous language to the European language he writes in. In 1962, at a conference in Makerere, African writers agreed that “it is better for an African writer to think and feel in his own language and then look for English transliteration approximating the original” (Maphphele 1962). It appears that this consensus has influenced a great number of African writers.

I argue that Chikwava similarly experiments with the English language as he writes back to the Empire - ironically from its soil - by inflecting a vernacular flavour in his narrative. He seems acutely aware that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the masters’ tools can never take apart the master’s house (Lorde 1984). As literary discourse often reflects the political structures of a society, in a revolutionary stance Lorde chose to “subvert grammatical conventions” (Rudnitsky 2003:474) of syntax in her poetry in order to craft a new language that would symbolise freedom. Likewise, Chikwava skilfully manipulates the imperial language in order to create what I want to describe as a Zimbabwean-flavoured English. There are several linguistic strategies he devises to achieve this. Firstly, he makes use of

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<sup>138</sup> In an interview with Mocef Badday (1970), Kouroma stated that, “I adapt my language to the African style ... I simply let go of my temperament by distorting a classical language otherwise too rigid to let my thoughts flow freely ... I thus translate Malinke into French, breaking the French to find and restore the African rhythm”.

Zimbabwean urban slang, like in the phrases “more fire” (p.18) and “*maface*”<sup>139</sup> (p.94). He also indulges in the sporadic scattering of Shona and Ndebele words within his narrative, such as “*Amai*” (mother), “*mwanangu*” (my child), “*mamukaseyi*” (morning greeting), “*umbiyiso*” (ceremony to bring back the spirit of the dead into the homestead) and, “*umgodoyi*” (homeless dog). More importantly, though, he makes use of transliteration by adopting a hybrid linguistic code that is heavily influenced by the Shona language and culture<sup>140</sup>. By this I mean that he distorts the English language linguistic rules in order to convey Shona concepts and accommodate Shona speech patterns, such as the use of the subject and representative pronoun together in, for example, the “Me, I” that he uses repeatedly in his narrative in reflection of the narrator’s identity as “the original Shona native”. Similarly, there is obvious mother-tongue translation when Chikwava writes about how the narrator’s cousin and his wife house him on his release from detention: “they sleep me in the spare bedroom” (p.13). This deformation of the English language is, I posit, Chikwava’s attempt to create his own pidgin English. This linguistic miscegenation is an effort to capture authentically the narrator’s socio-cultural idiosyncrasies. Combined with an obvious postmodernist writing style, this deliberate deconstruction succeeds in subverting the power structures that the English language represents, that is, the hegemonic domination of the imperialists over the ex-colonised. I contend that this hybrid linguistic code that Chikwava employs is easily recognisable by the native speakers of Zimbabwe, but is difficult for the non-native speaker to readily appreciate. The narrator’s constant use of the double pronoun “me I”, for example, can be interpreted as arrogance, yet this is a typical Shona linguistic expression, that is, in this instance English language graphological units are replaced by the Shona equivalent. This may make for some heavy reading on the part of the non-native Shona speaker, as the narrative may be difficult to comprehend and require a lot of concentration. I argue that this linguistic transgression is an attempt to achieve what Chantal Zabus (1991:) identifies as “a literary third code”. This code exemplifies the location of the indigenised language “in the overlapping space between other tongue and mother-tongue” (Zabus 1991:2) so that the reader is able to uncover the cultural layers and contestations that brew beneath the use of the other tongue. In other words, Chikwava’s linguistic “madness” succeeds in redefining and subverting the former colonial master’s language by distorting and re-appropriating it to convey the Shona and Ndebele cultures of

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<sup>139</sup> “Buddies”

<sup>140</sup> Moses Alo (1998:5) defines transliteration as a “process whereby the units of one language, e.g. words, structures, are replaced by those in another language”.

Zimbabwe and, therefore, he succeeds in making it his own. My supposition here, too, is that this indigenisation of language is a deliberate stylistic technique on Chikwava's part to reflect his protagonist's staunch African worldview. Chikwava's form, then, replicates its narrator's character as an "original native" who resists western propaganda of his reality and uses his African identity as a weapon against cultural imperialism. Therefore, I concur with Ruby Magosvongwe's (2013:110) deduction that "[b]y using corrupted English forms to suit the communication needs of this black Zimbabwean narrator, Chikwava renders the book into the oeuvre of protest literature".

### **5.3 Diasporan Identity: Cultural "Madness" and the Trauma of Belonging**

Chikwava's narrative provides a pertinent reflection of multiculturalism in the UK. While looking for work on the internet, the narrator discovers the important contribution that immigrant people make to the UK economy. This contribution translates to the equivalent of "one mars bar in every citizen's pocket every year" (p.24). Living in this diasporic space has, however, both positive and negative effects on the identities of its immigrant population. McGregor (2010a:4) states that "[d]iasporic identities are, of course, intimately shaped by the politics of receiving countries and by unfolding events back home". This suggests that the socio-political climate that the immigrants live in and the individual's sense of identity play significant roles in the identity formation of these immigrants.

As I have mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, Zimbabweans formed a significant part of this group of people. There were four main routes by which Zimbabweans moved into Britain, namely, as a visitor, as an asylum seeker, as a student and through a legal work permit (Pasura 2012)<sup>141</sup>. Michael Perfect (2014:158) describes *Harare North* as a novel that "addresses the question of the relationship between London's multiculturalism and the shortcomings of the British asylum system" and my discussion below highlights some of these weaknesses. Dominic Pasura (2012:154) emphasises how illegal immigrants encounter individual and structural constraints in the labour market, "as well as the manifestation of territorial, organizational and conceptual borders that define the migrant as the 'other'". McGregor (2010b:128) explains that because they are abjected by British society, illegal migrants "have an acute awareness of dehumanisation, of their potential exploitation and

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<sup>141</sup>Between 1996 to 2006, approximately 19,370 Zimbabweans made applications for political asylum in the UK (Pasura 2012).

exposure to bodily risk”<sup>142</sup>. Migrant Zimbabwean workers are mainly engaged in unskilled, low remuneration jobs that are insecure due to the constant fear of possible arrest and deportation because of their “illegal” status. They face a hostile environment characterised by discrimination, prejudice and racism that subsequently causes a strengthening of their ties to the homeland (Pasura 2012). These strong economic and social ties with friends and relatives are evidenced by the regular and substantial remittances that are sent to Zimbabwe (Bloch 2008). In addition, Zimbabweans in the homeland have high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of their relatives in the Diaspora whom they believe are financially secure. This adds pressure to the already stressful lives diasporans lead. In *Harare North*, for example, Shingi’s relatives “keep writing letters demanding money at each turn. Money for this, money for that, money for everything” (p.2).

McGregor (2010b) describes how Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK suffer civic exclusion as they are denied the rights to work, study and utilise the skills they possess and live in constant fear of deportation. Much research has been done on the precarious position of asylum seekers that renders them vulnerable within the diasporic space they inhabit (Waite, Valentine and Lewis 2014; Gill 2009; Philmore and Goodson 2006). The trauma that these asylum seekers experience is embodied in the bodily, material and psychological hurt they are exposed to as a group (Waite, Valentine and Lewis 2014: 320)<sup>143</sup>. Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK, then, are basically “a constituency that is vulnerable and insecure” (McGregor 2010b:139). This is apparently the case with the narrator and the other Zimbabwean migrants portrayed in *Harare North*<sup>144</sup>. Chikwava depicts how, in the foreign space they occupy, the narrator and his Zimbabwean counterparts live “a reptile kind of life, that kind of life of surviving by mutilation in the big city and living inside them holes” (p.2). This suggests a restricted and marginalised sort of existence. The displacement that they experience is very similar to that felt by the black people living within the cracks in urban areas of colonial Zimbabwe as depicted in Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*, which I explore in Chapter Seven of this study. Added to all this is the fact that the Diaspora itself is a ruptured

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<sup>142</sup> McGregor (2010b:128) defines abjection here as “a forceful and dehumanizing act of exclusion, in which the expelled are rendered disgraced and shamed, and accorded purely negative value”.

<sup>143</sup> Waite, Valentine and Lewis (2014:320) elaborate that asylum seekers and refugees experience “bodily hurt as a consequence of physically demanding work environments; material hurt as a consequence of financially exploitative terms of employment which often results in destitution and psychological hurt as a result of their fears of deportation and violence/abuse” [emphasis in the original].

<sup>144</sup> For a detailed exploration of how Zimbabweans in the UK cope with insecurity and the attack on their identities, see JoAnn McGregor’s “Diaspora and Dignity: Navigating and Contesting Civic Exclusion in Britain” (2010b).

material landscape. This precarious existence leads to a sense of ontological insecurity in the characters in Chikwava's narrative, "a sense of a loss of confidence in their self-identity" (p.2)<sup>145</sup>.

McGregor (2010b) investigated how Zimbabweans cope with insecurity and the attack on their identities in the UK. She based her insights on interviews conducted between 2004 and 2005 involving over 80 participants in different categories of employment and legal situations. She highlights how migration to the UK "was encouraged by fantasies of a luxurious life" (McGregor 2010b:124). For most Zimbabweans, going to the UK was mainly an economic migration. This is the case with the narrator. He envisages the UK as the best place to raise money. A significant number of the migrations there, however, were politically motivated as some Zimbabweans fled persecution for their affiliation to opposition parties. After the UK imposed visa restrictions on Zimbabweans, the asylum system became "a major route into irregularity" (McGregor 2010b:11) for them. Paradoxically, however, the narrator is a perpetrator of political violence, not its victim. Yet he seeks this route of entry into London. Like most Zimbabweans there, he becomes trapped in the asylum system. He has not much option but to seek unlawful employment. McGregor (2010b:125) describes how such employment of Zimbabweans in the UK is "a testimony to the erosion of the system and enforced criminalization of people who have been forced to work illegally in order to survive".

Testimonies of illegal immigrants precarious existence in *Harare North* is evident in Chikwava's portrayal of the Zimbabwean inhabitants (Aleck, Shingi, Tsitsi, and Farayi) who live together in a Brixton squat, which has rotting floorboards and the smell of bad cooking. Chikwava exposes the "madness of the life they lead in the Diaspora as one of "trawling through the neighbourhood's bins and skip finding good things that wasteful Londoners throw away" (p.35-36). Even their beds have been hauled out of the trash. Alec, for example, has lived in the UK for more than four years and yet is still illegal and cannot secure lawful employment as he has had his asylum application rejected and does not have a work permit. Despite his long stay in London, he is still subjected to the exploitation that the rest of the inhabitants endure. In the vicious fight for survival in the Diaspora, Alec capitalises on the squat that has been left in his care by an English couple who have gone to India by charging

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<sup>145</sup> Anthony Giddens (1990:92) refers to ontological security as "the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the surrounding social and material environments of action".

fellow Zimbabweans “a whipping 35 pounds a week” (p.120) to live there. The narrator describes him as “a head boy that has turn into a proud, hard man as he take on the world” (p.35). A former fruit and vegetables vendor in Zimbabwe, he is employed as a BBC in Croydon. In the homeland, this kind of care work is usually associated with women and considered degrading and emasculating. This feminisation of work that Zimbabwean men find themselves is indicative of the “abnormality” of the diasporic life that they lead. It does, however, also point to the problematic nature of the gendered constructions of work and identity that is perpetuated even within this foreign space. Engaging in feminised work induces a sense of humiliation in them. This is why Aleck feels ashamed of his job and lies to his housemates that he is a shop manager in order to maintain his masculine dignity around them. The narrator cruelly makes fun of him when the truth comes out: “Aleck picking old people’s kaka off beds then coming here walking around like the district administrator coming every time to collect tax even when we have nothing” (p.18).

When the manipulative narrator finds out the truth about how Aleck came to be in charge of the squat, he refuses to “get eaten with my eyes open” (p.121) like a sardine. Using this knowledge as a weapon, the narrator proceeds to undermine Aleck’s authority in the Brixton squat they occupy, eventually driving him out of the flat and taking over its helm. The irony of it is that the narrator refuses to be exploited, yet he is exploitative as evidenced in his relationship with those around him. He, for example, blackmails his cousin Paul’s wife, Sekai, when he discovers that she is having an extra-marital affair with a Russian doctor. He also has no qualms about sponging off Shingi while selfishly saving his own money.

Another character in the narrative who is employed as a BBC is Comrade Mhiripiri. As the commander of the Green Bombers in Zimbabwe, Comrade Mhiripiri was a no-nonsense man who instilled in the “jackel breed” the philosophy that “[f]or war traitors, punishment in the best forgiveness” (p.19), in this instance “forgiveness” refers to “corrective” measures that include beatings and torture. It is this for this meting out of punishment that the narrator gets into trouble with the police. Under Mhiripiri’s instructions, he leads a group of Green Bombers who brutally mete out “forgiveness” on a traitor, which results in his death. He is subsequently arrested and when he is released on bail, Comrade Mhiripiri tells him that he needs four thousand dollars to bribe the police handling the murder case so that his docket disappears. Comrade Mhiripiri was someone in whom the narrator had a great deal of faith and trust. He represented a father-figure to the narrator and stood as an icon of patriotism for

him. When the narrator discovers that Comrade Mhiripiri had deceived him and lied about the bribe required, he feels betrayed. With the Zimbabwean police after him, Comrade Mhiripiri materialises in London as a vagabond identified as Master of Foxhounds, who the narrator regularly encounters in Brixton Park. Mhiripiri's betrayal is significant in that it renders the narrator's purpose for migrating to London futile. This places a tremendous dent on his ego and intensifies his sense of insecurity. There is, too, mad irony in the fact that the once respected commander of the youth militia is now an economic migrant who has taken on the demeaning job of "looking after old people that poo in they pants every hour" (p.61).

Like the narrator, Tsitsi, one of the inhabitants of the squat, is from a small rural village in Mashonaland East in Zimbabwe. She stays in the Brixton squat after having run away from a tyrant aunt who had hauled Tsitsi to the Diaspora to babysit for her. She is also an illegal immigrant as her visitor's visa has expired. Tsitsi is just seventeen years old but already has a baby, which she almost dumped in a pit latrine after it was born. It turns out that Aleck is the father of this baby and is the reason why he takes her under his wing when her aunt throws her out. Chikwava depicts her as woman with a "battered wife kind of thinking" (p.131) as she continually tolerates both physical and verbal abuse from him. Alec tries to keep her away from alcohol because not only is she too young to consume it, but also because he believes that "with all she problems, if she get taste of alcohol things go like spaghetti inside she head and she maybe lose it" (p.95). The narrator describes her as an unsophisticated girl with "the kind of madness that is always inside them rural people" (p.58). Yet she is crafty enough to survive the hardship of life in the Diaspora by renting out her baby for fifty pounds at a go to single mothers who want to get hold of council flats especially allocated to this category of woman. The narrator seems to have a strange sort of relationship with Tsitsi. He is both gentle and violent towards her. Despite her tender age, to the narrator "she look like real mother" (p.33). She somehow embodies a mother-figure for him in London. He enjoys watching her breastfeed and is protective of her when Aleck abuses her. Yet he wants her to leave the Brixton flat because of the financial burden she imposes on Shingi's resources, which he wants to monopolise solely.

Shingi is a character that plays a significant role in the narrator's life. He has been the narrator's close friend from the time they were children. He is a "totemless child" (p.10). This lack of patrilineal connection and subsequent lack of cultural roots implies a vulnerability to

*mamhepo*<sup>146</sup>. It translates to psychological and spiritual insecurity, which is further deepened by the loss of his mother at a very young age. His vulnerability is worsened by the community's belief that his father, believed to be a guerrilla fighter in the liberation war, had "spill wrong blood and those spirits is avenging now and affect whole family" (p.11). Similarly, the narrator believes that the bad luck that surrounds Shingi is because he is being punished for the sins of his father. He actually claims that Shingi is afflicted by *ngozi* (an angry spirit), which is "slowly getting Shingi's head out of gear" (ibid). When Tsitsi leaves the squat, this seems to have a great impact on Shingi, who harboured emotional feelings for her. His life then takes a turn for the worse as he befriends street people, begins "smoking skunk" (p.160) and even stops going to work. Indeed, bad winds seem to stalk him in Harare North and he finally ends up a destitute drug addict who rummages for food in the bins of the mental backstreets. In an interview with Ranka Primorac, Chikwava explains his attraction to the phrase "mental backstreets" which occurs repeatedly in the narrative: "It appealed to me as a piece of ambiguity, where it can be a backstreet that is in your head, or a backstreet that is really out there, and mental - crazy things can happen (Primorac 2010:259). It is in one of these alleys that Shingi is fatally stabbed. He obviously represents the many Zimbabweans who have migrated to the UK who fail to achieve economic success there and "lose the game and end up dying ... leaving behind debts and shabby clothes" (pp.43-44).

Chikwava states that "Interestingly, Shingi came into my mind as an image of broken glass - the cracked glass stuck to my mind before the person came" (Primorac 2010:259). Strangely enough when I first read this, I at first thought that I had got the characters mixed up and that Chikwava was, in fact, referring to his protagonist. This is because this is an image I would associate with the narrator, as my discussion on him below reveals. Perhaps this, too, was what was in Chikwava's mind, the reason why he deliberately makes him double up as Shingi by the end of his narrative, just to reinforce exactly how psychologically lost and alienated the narrator becomes. My contention here is, therefore, that despite the obvious differences in personalities - Shingi being the introverted, stammering, shy man as opposed to the arrogant, cocky and manipulative narrator - beneath their external masks both are equally ontologically insecure and seemingly strongly affected by *mamhepo* blowing through their lives.

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<sup>146</sup>Bad winds

On the narrator's arrival to Brixton, Shingi becomes his significant other. He welcomes the narrator into his heart and his "home", the Brixton squat that he inhabits. He is even willing to share his bed with the narrator. Theirs is, generally, a "loud friendship" (p.36) as reflected in the constant laughter they share together. In one of his rare tender moments, the narrator tells Shingi, "[w]e is proper family now" (p.156). Shingi then, becomes the closest he has to family in Harare North, as I illustrate in my analysis on the narrator below. His relationship with his cousin and Paul and his wife, Sekai, although consisting of familial ties, lacks the psychological and emotional bonding that he shares with Shingi. Yet sardonically, the remorseless narrator mercilessly exploits him. Shingi's fate after he is attacked in an alleyway by a tramp in a fight over food is ambiguous. Chikwava seems to leave the reader to conclude his end, as he does not clearly indicate whether Shingi survives the fatal stabbing. The narrator, however, madly hallucinates about Shingi returning to the Brixton squat as a paraplegic who is bound to a wheelchair. He is forced to take care of Shingi and "wipe the comrade's bums so many times, shove his body around and wash his soiled pants" (p.195). In this delusion he is satirically turned into a BBC, a fate he dreaded most.

This chronicling of the life of the inhabitants of the Brixton squat points to the vulnerability of their existential reality in the Diaspora. Their lives are characterised by exploitation, destitution, failure and the trauma of displacement. The narrator is also exposed to this precarious existence. He is not supposed to work until his application for asylum is approved. Like his counterparts, he can only get one of the 3D jobs. He refuses, however, to get a job as a BBC because he considers himself a "principled man" (p.65) who will not stoop so low as to find success in a "undignified pooful way" (ibid). Yet he finds a dirty and dangerous job "shifting mud" (p.49) at a Wimbledon housing construction site. As his employers know that he is "illegal", they put him on an "emergency tax code and thief away heaps of my [his] money" (p.44). From the ninety-eight pounds he earns per week, he is left with sixty-eight pounds after this deduction. This is just one example of the exploitation immigrants in the UK face from unscrupulous employers. Soon he realises that "Harare North is a big con" (p.51). This assumption is backed by the fact that many of the illegal immigrants in the country exist with fake identification cards or EU passports, which they can access at a cost of three hundred pounds and become whoever they want to be. Shingi, for instance, buys a fake French passport that identifies him as President Chirac. This incongruity portrays London as a "mad" place where "you can become labourer, sewage drain cleaner and then French president, being many people in one person" (p.53). I argue, however, that Shingi's

crazy act emphasises the deep sense of dislocation and alienation that results from living in the Diaspora. Sadly, he is proud of this non-achievement when he tells his flatmates “I ... I am not original n-native now ... W ...we is not the same any more” (p.54). Sadly, however, he is, forced back into his insecure self when he is found out by immigration officials and subsequently loses his job - for the third time. This leaves him in “big trauma” (p.63) and his life takes a turn for the worse. The close friendship that he had with the narrator also crumbles and he demands that the narrator starts buying food and stop pretending as though he possesses Shingi (p.66). The narrator insists that he still possesses Shingi, yet ironically, when he goes insane he is, in fact, possessed by Shingi, as I elaborate below.

The narrator’s cousin Paul and his wife Sekai are Zimbabwean immigrants who have legally settled in London and both have work permits. Their existence in the Diaspora is not as precarious as that of the characters’ described above, as they possess the material security of having the necessary documents that legalise their stay and owning a comfortable home. Moreover, they earn a substantial regular income as they are both gainfully employed - Paul is a rural and urban planner and Sekai a nurse. This married couple, nonetheless, plays a significant role in revealing the cultural alienation and fragmentation those in the Diaspora suffer. Their life exposes the upsetting of cultural norms and values, as well as the disintegration of family life that affects many Zimbabweans in the Diaspora.

The couple have been married for ten years and are childless, something considered a great cause for concern within an African marriage in which children are prized. In a typically male chauvinist stance, the narrator considers Sekai’s childlessness as the reason for not knowing her place as a woman as being confined to the home. He believes that if Paul had “only once put Sekai through pain of birth, maybe she will have know she place and start give his relatives the respect she have to give them (p.13). Motherhood would keep her reasonable and busy. Their marriage has been rocked by infidelity as Paul cheats on his wife and she retaliates by having an affair with a Russian doctor.

The narrator believes that life in the Diaspora has turned Sekai into a “lapsed African” (p.5). Her reception of the narrator, her husband’s cousin, does not in any way reflect the

*Ubuntu/Unhu* nature of African culture<sup>147</sup>. She makes no effort to hide her discontent with the narrator's appearance in their lives. When she goes to pick him up from the detention centre on his release after having been detained for eight days, "[s]he not even bother to shake my hand" (ibid) and there are no pleasantries exchanged between them. She is also unwilling to share their food with him. This goes against the grain of African cultural values, in which the concept *Ubuntu/Unhu* is an integral part of being African. The narrator specifically declares that Sekai "no longer remember who she is, or where she come from" (ibid). She throws the groundnuts that he has brought for them from Zimbabwe straight into the bin right in front of him. She does not even have the courtesy to do so behind his back. This outright disrespect of his gift is not characteristic of Zimbabwean society.

Although the narrator and Paul are cousins and grew up in the same rural township, they have noticeably grown apart and are uncomfortable around each other. The narrator notes how Paul seems "to have forget how to hit it off with me" (p.7). Most of the time that the three of them are in the couple's apartment, they "sit in the lounge in funny silence" (ibid). The fact that he is eager to get rid of his cousin is indicative of the fracturing of cultural values in the Diaspora, as traditionally, one's home is always open to extended family members.

The contravention of traditional cultural values and norms by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora is also evident in a conversation the male inhabitants of the squat have. As the narrator, Shingi and Farayi talk about Zimbabwean women in Harare North, they laugh about how "they is getting funny ... All of them is turning into lesbians or prostitutes" (p.93). The narrator blames this culturally unacceptable social behaviour on the "lack of real men" (ibid). He obviously does not consider lesbianism as a sexual orientation and believes that men like them (Shingi, Farayi and himself) can "cure this silliness in one night" (ibid)<sup>148</sup>. Since in both

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<sup>147</sup>The "*Ubuntu/Uhnu*" philosophy is a belief in the human bonding that connects people to one another and is based on the premise that "I am well if you are well too".

<sup>148</sup> This discussion by these men highlights the issue of curative rape. Alexa Mieses (2009) refers to corrective rape as an act of sexual punishment against lesbians for violation of the conventional gender role presentations. She further explains how survivors of corrective rape in South Africa reported that they also experienced verbal abuse as the perpetrators indicated how they were "'teaching a lesson' to the woman, showing them how to be a 'real woman' and what 'a real man tastes like'" (Mieses 2009:2). Similarly, Roderick Brown (2012:45-46) describes corrective rape as "rape perpetrated by straight men against lesbian women in order to 'correct' or 'cure' their 'unnatural' sexual orientation". He indicates how cases of corrective rape have been reported in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Jamaica. Mkhize *et al* (2010) state that from 2006 to 2009, there have been more than 10 reported cases of the rape and murder of young black lesbians in South Africa. Among these was the case of Eudy Simalene, the 31 year-old national team soccer player who was raped and murdered on 28 April, 2008.

Shona and Ndebele culture homosexuality is considered taboo, in this playful bantering by these Zimbabwean men, just like in the chilly reception that the narrator receives from his cousin and his wife, Chikwava once again emphasises the loss of cultural values, the diasporic “madness” that is manifest among the Zimbabwean community in London.

#### **5.4 The Shattering of Self: Diasporic Displacement, Trauma and the Nameless Narrator**

*I lie on my bed listening and wearing my past like it is some very tight gown; I don't want no one tugging at it. - Chikwava, Harare North*

This opening quotation, for me, signifies the nameless narrator's refusal to move out of the space that embodies his country of origin in order to reconfigure his identity to his present territoriality. Muchemwa (2011) suggests that this declaration reveals the narrator's fear of being exposed to the law, considering his illegal status and his past as a Green Bomber. From a psychoanalytic stance, however, I argue that the utterance significantly reveals a fear not of his external safety, but of his internal one. This denial is a bid to secure a protective layer around him as he is afraid of losing his sense of identity given the foreign, multicultural and hybrid space he inhabits. His paranoia in remaining cocooned to his past and his cultural memory, however, renders him unable to deal with the onslaught of his present reality and the consequent implications to his sense of identity, as my discussion below reveals.

As a young patriotic Green Bomber, a true “son of the soil”, the narrator gallantly echoes Zanu PF political rhetoric and is willing to “defend the country from them enemies of the state who have break loose inside house of stones” (p.125). From the beginning of the narrative, the narrator expresses his reluctance to migrate to London: “I never wanted to leave Zimbabwe and come to this funny place but things force me” (p.16). The only motivating factor to this dislocation has been his need to raise the five thousand dollars in order to pay a bribe of four thousand dollars to the police investigating the political murder he was conspiracy to so that his docket disappears. The remaining one thousand dollars is meant to reimburse his uncle the money lent to him for the air fare to London. He arrives in London, therefore, with the intention of staying just long enough to “get myself good graft very quick, work like animal and save heap of money and then bang, me I am on my way back home” (p.6) .

Although he lies to the immigration officers that he is a member of an opposition party in Zimbabwe and is running away from further persecution, as the narrative unravels it turns out that he is, in fact, a member of the infamous Green Bombers. The mad irony of this young man's claim is that he is actually escaping imprisonment for his part in the torture and murder of a supporter of the opposition party. It is ironic too that despite his role in the murder of another man, the narrator thinks of himself as "a principled man" (p.8), a man who possesses a great deal of dignity and knowledge. He is granted entry to London because, as he boasts, the story that he tells the immigration officers on his arrival at Heathrow airport is "tighter than a thief's anus" (p.4). After he is released by the immigration officials, the narrator goes to live with his cousin Paul and his wife, Sekai. What becomes apparent from the chilly reception he receives from them is that they are not happy to accommodate him. There is none of the usually warm welcome that is traditionally expected among relatives, with Sekai making no attempt to hide her displeasure at the narrator's intrusion into their lives.

Muchemwa (2011:103) describes the narrator as "disturbingly unsentimental and manipulative for his age and shows a surprising readiness to seize every opportunity to his advantage". As a member of the "jackal breed" (p.17), the narrator is often portrayed as a perpetrator of violence, mostly against Zanu PF political opponents. He identifies his membership of this group as one with "a big and proper purpose" (ibid), and it is being a part of it that instils within him the illusive sense of power and the displays of arrogance that characterise his relationship with the other characters. From the surface, then, Chikwava's narrative portrays the narrator as an insensitive, ruthless opportunist who does not hesitate to use violence when he feels cornered and trapped, or when the need arises. He really comes across to the reader as a detestable and exploitative character, as revealed in his manipulative interactions with those around him - he blackmails Sekai, after discovering her affair with a Russian doctor; he lives off his friend Shingi and ruins the possibility of a relationship between Tsitsi and Shingi because he feels threatened by her financial and emotional dependence on Shingi; he drives the other inmates of the squat away; and he plays a hand in Shingi's spiral downwards into a life of drugs and destitution. He really is an anti-hero. Yet, I argue, Chikwava succeeds in drawing the reader's sympathy for him so as to be able to envisage the vulnerable and displaced young man that lies underneath the "mask of traditional African masculinity" (Muchemwa 2011:403).

Much as the narration depicts him as an obnoxious and manipulative man, his present violent behaviour in London has been set in motion by his past experiences. In the narrative, he boasts of how Green Bombers are trained to “smoke them enemies of the state out of they corrugated-iron hovels and scatter them across the earth” (p.8). Even with these obviously negative traits, from a psychoanalytic perspective and in view of his age and vulnerability, I perceive him rather as a victim, too, of the political violence and atrocities he is encouraged to carry out, as they leave him psychologically wounded. I posit, therefore, that despite his seeming arrogance and confidence, the narrator is really just a naive man who fails to negotiate the insecurities of life in the Diaspora. Beneath the masculine exterior lies a mis-educated young man of twenty who feels extremely disoriented in the diasporic space that has now become his existential reality. It is from this insecure position that he is exposed to the folly of life in Brixton where he learns that “life is not fair. Life make you think that you is frying bean sprouts and then out of nowhere you wake up and find that you is frying wire nails” (p.17). This scepticism is constantly repeated throughout the narrative (p.17; p.21; p.103; p.105; p.165; p.212).

His life in Brixton is signified by an unembodied state of temporality and symbolic lack, as his asylum application has not yet been approved and therefore he is still “illegal” (p.2). He exists in a state Creswell (2011:650) identifies as one of “long-term limbo”. This precarity of existence as an illegal immigrant puts his sense of ontological security under pressure. He is only able to secure a job at a fish bar after he “steals” Shingi’s identity by using his particulars, since Shingi’s asylum application has been approved. The obvious implication of such an unstable corporeality is an accompanying sense of insecurity, a feeling of being “neither here nor there”, of non-belonging. Therefore, his lived experience in London is really one filled with tension. He feels as though he has been “washed off on some new and unfamiliar shore” (p.96). His life has essentially become undefined and unpredictable; it is one in which he feels very powerless and exposed. This is evident when the children who visit the fish bar where he works laugh at him and he tries to counter their derision by giving them a “powerful look” (p.100). He also feels uncomfortable when his boss, Tim, keeps asking him questions about himself.

More importantly though, the narrator has a very essentialist conceptualisation of identity and is reluctant to reinvent his identity within the disorienting space and place he occupies. The need for a reformulation of identity is, however, implicit even in the title of the narrative

itself: *Harare North*. Life in the Diaspora entails one of inner transformation and constant negotiation of identity between the inborn culture (home) and the physical surroundings and culture that one is immersed in, so as to forge some sense of belonging to the latter. Such mediation is pertinent in order to counter the experience of psychological and cultural displacement typical of migration. As Paul Gilroy (2002:238) expounds, “Diaspora is a concept that problematises the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location and consciousness”. Reconfiguration of identity, then, becomes a necessary survival strategy in such a case of hybridity when an individual is caught in-between two cultures. Yet the narrator resists this reconfiguration, opting instead, to remain the “original native”. He categorically asserts that “some memories is not meant to be pissed just because you can” (p.159).

Many instances in the narrative point to the narrator’s determination to hold on to his past, some of which I will discuss. For instance, the narrator’s mother died more than a year before his arrival in London. His great wish is to raise money to be able to organise an “*umbiyiso*” for her, which has not yet been done<sup>149</sup>. It appears, however, that his mother died from an overdose of something not clearly stated, but her actions clearly hint at suicide.

Unfortunately, in traditional Shona and Ndebele culture, in cases of unnatural death this ceremony is not usually carried out, as it is believed that this suicidal tendency could return within the family. This is probably the reasons for the family squabbles that are preventing the “*umbiyiso*” from being carried out. Additionally, the old suitcase that houses all that he possesses in the Diaspora has no material worth attached to it, but it is extremely valuable in its psychological and emotional significance. To him, as something he inherited from his mother and which carries her "smell", it represents home. Like Shingi, it is a signifier of his identity; of where he belongs. His paranoia over it, then, is not because of what it contains, but of what it stands for given his precarious existential reality in the intimidating diasporic space he now occupies. Moreover, as someone who has reluctantly migrated to London, life in the Brixton squat proves to be one of displacement, disorientation and trauma. As Muchemwa (2013: 156) asserts, he is nothing more than “a very fragile, homeless immigrant sharing the backstreets of the metropolis”.

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<sup>149</sup> “*Umbiyiso*” is a traditional ceremony normally conducted a year after the funeral to welcome back to the homestead the spirit of the deceased, which is believed to be wandering in the wilderness in the meantime. It is also meant to facilitate the transition of this spirit into the spirit world. The Shona equivalent of this ceremony is called “*kurova guva*”.

The narrator also initially refuses to believe the news he hears about the invasion of his mother's village because of the diamonds that lie beneath the earth. The land on which the village is situated is being overtaken by a mining company owned by an army commander who, sardonically, uses the Green Bombers to forcibly move the villagers off it. They are supposed to be resettled elsewhere<sup>150</sup>. He prefers to think about this news as just propaganda that is designed to 'scatter your mind all over like leaves at the mercy of winds and you lose what you believe in hand have no weapon to fight. Then you never get out of Harare North' (p.68). The non-closure of the narrative does not make it clear whether or not he is able to leave London, but what becomes apparent from his assertion is that the denial of this reality is a unsuccessful attempt to safeguard his ontological security, to keep his past wrapped firmly around him. Thus, because his mother's village also stands as a reliable signifier of his identity, acknowledging this external threat to his subjectivity would, therefore, translate to internal insecurity and would denote further discontinuity of self.

Towards the end of the narrative, both at home in Zimbabwe and in the temporary space he now occupies in the Diaspora, life as he knows it begins to crumble. When he discovers that Comrade Mhiripiri is in London and had actually pulled a "jazz number" on him, he is thrown into mental confusion. His purpose for coming to London and his plans for the future are rendered futile. At one point in his disorientation, he confronts Master Foxhound (the street man who is, in fact, Comrade Mhiripiri) in the park, "[y]ou have become traitor ... so what was it all for, the struggle" (p.183). At this point, he relives the trauma of his violent act as he dragged a traitor, into the forest "to give him plenty of forgiveness" (ibid)<sup>151</sup>. The remembering of these traumatic events is triggered by the trauma of displacement he suffers in the present. Greatly influenced by Freud's essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Cathy Caruth (1995:4) has redefined trauma in order to account for the "structure of its experience" [emphasis in the original] where the traumatic event is experienced belatedly<sup>152</sup>. As Caruth (1995) stresses that it is the belated re-remembering of an experience that has been repressed

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<sup>150</sup>Ruby Magosvongwe (2013:104) emphasises how the post-2000 movement of people in Zimbabwe from their villages because of the diamond mining wave disconnected them from their land, "denying them securities embedded therein. Their sense of belonging is also constantly threatened, especially their spiritual and environmental connections with the land".

<sup>151</sup> McGregor asserts that post-Independence politics in Zimbabwe deteriorated to such an extent that all Zimbabweans who were not politically affiliated to the ruling party, ZANU PF, were regarded as traitors and enemies of the state, culminating in a "politics of hate" (McGregor 2010a:2)

<sup>152</sup> For aspects of this influence refer to Abigail Ward's chapter on "Psychological Formulations" in John McLeod's *The Routledge Companion to Post Colonial Studies* (2007).

that constitutes trauma, I contend, therefore, that these traumatic memories of his participation in a brutal murder of an opposition party member, and the violence of his rape in prison intensifies the trauma of his present sense of alienation and displacement and overpowers his psychological well-being. Added to that, there are constant reminders that all is not well at home by different characters in the narrative and the knowledge that the village where his mother lay buried has been wiped out by Green Bombers (p.177). His fear that his mother's bones would be dug up and exposed to the natural elements reveals his pain and sense of fragmentation:

Soon Mother's grave maybe end up being dig up by some machine, get wash by rain and she bones come out in the open and get bleached by the sun just like bones of dead bird and no one is going to care. (p.74)

The psychological pain of this knowledge becomes too much for him to bear, "[t]he rush of whirlwind inside my head scatter me all over. Mother, she lie heavy in my heart. The head swirl" (p.178). He also receives news from one of the Green Bombers, Original Sufferhead, that "the jackals is scattered ... the movement have lost its way ... Zim no longer exists" (p.159). All the tangible aspects of his identity - his mother's village, the youth militia, his country - are in disarray. All that he identified with at home has been destroyed. He retreats "into the blue hills inside my skull" (ibid) as he attempts to psychologically disengage from his existential reality. He wanders through the streets of Brixton trying to "allow things to bleed out of my head" (p.199). He cannot eat, cannot sleep and does not bath.

Returning home<sup>153</sup>, then, becomes inconceivable for him. In this state of psychic uncertainty and a heavily corroded sense of self, the diasporic space he occupies becomes even more hostile and threatening. The ontological insecurity as a result of what is happening at home, therefore, combines with the stress of life in the Diaspora to weigh heavily on his mind and cause his further self-disintegration. The narrator acknowledges that "[t]he winds is howling through house of stone, tall trees is swaying and people's lives beginning to fall apart, everything start to fall apart now" (p.204)<sup>154</sup>. From an existential psychoanalytic perspective, though, I contend that because the strongly nationalist narrator's entire sense of identity is

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<sup>153</sup> As I mentioned in the Chapter Three in my literary analysis of the protagonist's return home from the U.S., the concept of returning "home" within the context of migration is rather problematic.

<sup>154</sup> In this instance, the "house of stones" refers to Zimbabwe.

embedded in Zimbabwe, his “home”, his anguished thoughts also point to his own ontological degeneration. Like Farai in *Chairman of Fools*, he suffers a dislocation in which “one’s centre gives away” (Saks 2007:13). All that has been meaningful to him and the past that he so jealously guarded have been torn away. Indeed, the country’s collapse signifies the demise of his own corporeality.

This culminates in a disruption to his identity and, at this point, he begins to give in to his trauma. Evidence of his trauma lies in the dreams he has like, for example, the dream of his mother on his twenty-second birthday while he is a Sekai and Paul’s house<sup>155</sup>. In it, the images of his mother and home are significantly tied together. He visualises her sweeping the floors of their house and while she does so, she tells herself “[y]our house is like your head ... you have to keep sweeping it clean if you want to stay sane” (p.24). Tragically, the narrator fails to keep his mind clean of the trauma and pressure of life in the Diaspora.

The narrator’s masculine and manipulative façade drops when the vicissitudes of insecurity climax with Shingi’s disappearance from his life. In order to fully grasp why this event causes the narrator’s downward spiral into insanity, it is important to understand what Shingi represents to him. In the Diaspora, Shingi stands for all that is familiar and has been a constant force within his life. He has been his compass and anchor. Not only has Shingi been instrumental in giving the narrator physical shelter, but he has also provided a psychological and emotional guard. In the narrator’s alienated state, in which he has felt fragmented, betrayed, confused and displaced, Shingi seems to be the only tangible human connection he has within his emotional diaspora. He is a metaphor of “home” in the foreign space that the narrator occupies in Brixton. Shingi has the same significance to him as his late mother’s smell that the suitcase still emits. Consequently, when Shingi is violently attacked and stabbed in an alley in one of the “mental backstreets” - an event he witnesses - the cocksure, arrogant Green Bomber is completely traumatised not only by the violence of the act itself, but also by a perceived loss. He, therefore, refuses to accept the reality of the possibility of Shingi’s death, given his critical state. He thinks to himself, “Shingi lie in intensive care in deep sleep ... But he will be okay” (p.188). Some time after the fatal incident, he realises that he has to try to go there because “I have to talk. Say something so the heart stop feeling so heavy” (p.189). Yet he fails to summon up the courage to visit Shingi in hospital and does

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<sup>155</sup> Kohut (1997:109) identifies such dreams as “self-state dreams” which represent an endangered self. He argues that dreams may represent a disconcerting state of self-fragmentation (Kohut 1997:109).

not see him again. The narrator's pondering reveals how, "[t]his Shingi now sit tight inside me. I have not eat none of the porridge or steak that I have cook yesterday because there's heaps of worry inside my head" (p.181). There is no doubt, then, that Shingi's absence ruptures both his external and internal sense of ontological being, placing a further dent on his already unstable mental state.

Diasporic displacement and traumatic memory, therefore, tug at his psychological seams to expose his alienation. His dissociation manifests itself in the depersonalisation and disembodiment he feels<sup>156</sup> and leads to a breakdown of his sense of identity. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this dissociation can be considered an expression of "disintegration anxiety" (Kohut 1977:105), which is basically a fear of the loss of one's existential reality that results in a shattering of self. With this loss of all that is familiar, the "very tight gown" he wore around him as a protective layer unravels leaving him traumatised and emotionally exposed.

I argue that with the loss of all that is tangible in his life, the repressed emerges to combine with his sense of alienation and fragmentation. The unconscious trauma that the narrator experiences is not only a consequence of physical assault or danger, but also a result of an "internal assault on the ego" (Caruth 1996:8). The psychological consequences of this trauma results in the violation of his gaze. His perception of his existential reality becomes distorted to such an extent that he fails to distinguish his hallucinations from his external reality. I will not repeat here Laing's theory of petrification, which explains this phenomenon as I have already discussed it extensively in Chapter Three of this study. What I will stress, however, is that these delusions are stirred by the ontological insecurity that his diasporic life imposes on him. In one of his hallucinations, for example, he envisages himself taking care of a wheelchair bound Shingi:

He's back in our house. In wheelchair. He can't talk. I feed him because now he can't even move one finger. I take him to the toilet. Again. Again. And again. I wipe the comrade's bottom so many times, shove his body around and wash his soiled pants until this turn into strong arguments for banning of food. (p.195)

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<sup>156</sup> Laing (1990:69) postulates that in such a state of disembodiment, "[t]he body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of an individual's own being".

This hallucination illustrates his loss of his sense of self as in it he, bizarrely, has become a bottom cleaner, not of a British though, but of his deformed and disabled compatriot. It reflects a complete soiling of his “original native” masculine identity that no amount of wiping can restore.

These delusions are, no doubt, an indication his loss of sanity. This mental instability is apparent when he spends a considerable time confined to the Brixton squat. The habitat, which has been the nearest thing to what he could call home in this foreign place, begins to deteriorate in seeming alliance with his state of mind. The sink gets blocked, the kitchen cupboard door loses its hinges and the cupboard floor starts to rot - “everything fall apart” (p.214). With a screwdriver and a claw hammer, he takes the kitchen cupboard apart and rips out the floorboards in an insanely obsessive hunt for a rat, which he is determined to kill. Having lost all sense of logical reasoning, he believes that “[t]he rat want to keep me in London now” (p.216). As days fly by, he is “scared stiff” (p.217) of dying in this foreign place. He lives on nothing but diet coke and bread. Through all this trauma of insanity, there is no one he can relate to and no one to turn to for help. He is truly mentally lost and physically alone as he breathes “black bitter wind into the house” (ibid). When he eventually deserts the squat and ventures out, his continued mental destabilisation is evident as he walks half-naked down the middle of the streets with the remaining link he has to his past and his home - his suitcase - clasped firmly on his head:

I walk on the white line with my suitcase on my head. Nothing can hit my head. I feel like *umgodoyi* the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villages relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the winds. That’s why *umgodoyi*’s soul is tear from his body in rough way” (p.226).

The arrogant, remorseless, violent and manipulative “original native” that characterised the narrator in the introductory pages of Chikwava’s narrative has been reduced by the trauma that surrounds him to feeling as vulnerable and insignificant as the “*umgodoyi*”. His stay in London, designed to be an economic opportunity only succeeds in nullifying his existential sense of self and driving him into insanity.

With this loss of sense of self and mental instability, he experience self-negation to such an extent that he seemingly becomes Shingi as he suffers from a split subjectivity. The fact that

the narrator becomes possessed by Shingi and literally takes over his identity and his life is evident when he speaks to Shingi's relatives in the UK on his mobile phone as though him, responds to letters from Shingi's family in Zimbabwe, and even goes to the extent of sending them money, nearly depleting all his savings. I perceive his splitting of the self into two (Shingi and him) as a denial of self as a consequence of a dissociative state. This internal adoption of Shingi's identity is not only an unconscious illusion that his existential self is not under threat, but it is also evidence of the narrator's denial of trauma. This refutation, I contend, is an attempt at reconstituting his own shattered self. It is what Arlow Jacobson (1966:164) describes as a process whereby the ego attempts to "recover and maintain intactness by opposing, detaching and disowning the diseased part". This is evident in his insanely poignant imaginings towards the end of the narrative when the narrator muses:

Soft rain start and get the tarmac wet so them street lamps reflect off the wet tarmac doubling up in numbers. Even me – there is my double image reflected on the wet tarmac ... Shingi's trousers is missing now, I am only in his underpants ... I look down into the puddle ... I can see Shingi looking straight back at me". (p.229)

Mirrors not only can distort an image but they can also destabilise the mind as "they are a metaphor of the unfamiliar coming to light and threatening one's identity" (Perfect 2014: 118). Freud explains the concept of the mirror that Chikwava alludes to as the narrator sees his double on the wet tarmac as one that signifies the doubling of the self, which validates my argument on the narrator's split subjectivity. Freud (1999: 234) describes this doubling as "marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own ... there is doubling, dividing and interchanging of self". This doubling is a desperate attempt to retain some sense of control over an uncontrollable, precarious reality; a psychological buffer meant to counter an overwhelming sense of obliteration. As Laing (1965) stresses, forgoing one's autonomy becomes a way of furtively protecting it. He further elaborates on this schizoid attempt at safeguarding one's sense of self:

If the whole of the individual's being cannot be defended, the individual retracts his lines of defence until he withdraws within a central citadel. He is prepared to write off everything he is, except his "self". But the tragic paradox is that the more the self is defended in this way, the more it is destroyed. (Laing 1965:80-1)

I contend, therefore, that the narrator's absolute blurring of identity and failure to differentiate between Shingi and himself is because Shingi has become his extraneous self. This is further evidenced when Chikwava writes: "I shake my head and Shingi shake his head until I start to feel dizzy. Why he want to shake me out of his head like so, me I don't know" (p.229). The narrator has, no doubt, been consumed by Shingi who is "literally inside his head vying for control of over his body" (Perfect 2014:176) and the two identities have become one. The confusion as to who he is really is so manifest that the subjective "I" that dominated the narrative from the beginning and indicated a false sense of agency suddenly becomes the objective "you" as he refers to himself in the second person.

The narrator's interchanging of the self is so manifest that by the end of the novel that he even appears to have inherited Shingi's deformed "stump finger" (p.35). He states, "My stump finger now feel cold and sore from carrying suitcase" (p.229). I agree with Michael Perfect's (2014) supposition that this inheritance of Shingi's deformity confirms the narrator's complete loss of his sense of identity, as is apparent in his reference to himself in the second person. I further argue, however, that what this narrator experiences at this point provides further evidence of his doubling of self. Sadly, this attempt at restitution fails and the narrator plummets deeper into insanity.

After he forgets to lock his suitcase while wandering insanely along the streets of Brixton, all that remains of his belongings scatter over the street: "Nothing is left inside suitcase except the smell of mother ... its full of nothing" (p.228). Muchemwa (2013:156) perceives this emptying out of the suitcase as accentuating "the contestation of identity as territoriality bound and autochthonic". As the suitcase and what it contained stood as a signifier of his identity, I therefore further argue that this incident marks his obliteration of self, a complete loss of identity. What little sanity remained is obscured as Chikwava's plot ends with the narrator disembodied and devoid of agency as he runs through the streets with nothing on except his underwear. He is so enveloped by insanity that he stands "there in them mental backstreets and one big battle rage even if you have no more ginger for it" (p.230).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter has been to show how the nameless protagonist in *Harare North* finds himself in both a geographical and psychological diaspora. Of particular interest in this

discussion has been the language and style that Chikwava adopts to carry the content of his narrative. My analysis shows that a postmodernist style is apparent in the form of his narrative which is essentially fragmented, non-linear and lacks closure. There is also evidence of semantic idiosyncrasy in his literary work. Additionally, this chapter has revealed how Chikwava allows Shona and Ndebele speech patterns, lexical items and idioms to shape his narrative discourse in *Harare North*. What comes through to the reader is an indigenised language and a narrative style that possesses a distinct African flavour. This linguistic miscegenation is ironic given the diasporic background of his literary text. It does serve, however, to emphasise the cultural displacement that the narrator feels from being immersed in a foreign space.

Additionally, this chapter has revealed that the sense of displacement the narrator feels is because London “seems only to threaten and reject him” (Perfect 2014:178) as it “allows for human beings to exist in an underworld of criminality, destitution and insanity” (Perfect 2014:178). The ontological insecurity and trauma of belonging because of an illegal status is also evident in the experiences of most of the other characters in the novel. Furthermore, my analysis has portrayed the cultural alienation that often results from life in the Diaspora as becomes evident in the loss of cultural values and family affiliation.

Significantly, this chapter has shown that the tragedy of the narrator has been his failure to reconcile a migrant identity in order to establish some sort of belonging in the new, foreign space he occupies by developing a diasporic consciousness. I have revealed how the narrator’s capricious behaviour and insane thought patterns are a result of the trauma of the violent experiences he suffered in his homeland, Zimbabwe, as well as the psychological pressures of immigrant life in Harare North that lead to his sense of dislocation and dissociation. In doing this, I have harnessed the trauma theory, as well as the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Laing in order to represent the psychological experiences of the narrator’s split subjectivity and disintegration of self. After completely falling apart, the narrator sinks into the sanctuary of insanity.

The next chapter begins my literary analysis of the feminist discourses of “madness” as reflected in the lived socio-political and historical experiences of black women in selected postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. It explores the different textures of social, political and economic “madness” that are depicted in Gappah’s collection of short stories, *An Elegy for Easterly*. More specifically, it shows how “madness” manifests as trauma and depression in

the main female protagonist in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, as she deals with the gendered and psychological repercussions of her country's transformation from colonial Rhodesia into independent Zimbabwe.

## CHAPTER SIX

### POSTCOLONIAL ‘NERVOUS CONDITIONS’ IN PETINA GAPPAN’S *AN ELEGY FOR EASTERLY* AND TSITSI DANGAREMBGA’S *THE BOOK OF NOT*

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I investigated the discourses of “madness” as represented in the literary works of Zimbabwean male writers, namely Chinodya, Gomo and Chikwava. Particularly, my literary analysis in the previous chapter has shown how Chikwava portrays how the narrator goes insane as a result of the combination of the trauma of cultural displacement and the trauma of violence. In this chapter, I embark on an examination of the female discourses of “madness” in Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) and Dangarembga’s *The Book of Not* (2006). This reflection continues in the next chapter as I delve into Vera’s feminist narratives in *Without a Name* (1994) and *Butterfly Burning* (1998). My shift in focus considers these women writers’ portrayal of female protagonists who experience both overt and covert violence that is meted out on their bodies, psyches, souls and spirits within a postcolonial phallogentric society.

To begin with, the first section of my analysis in this chapter centres on Gappah’s representation of “madness” in her collection of short stories. In an interview with Africa Writing Online (2009), Gappah states that “the most appropriate fictional response to the madness of Zimbabwe may be a comic novel”. This chapter shows how, through the lives of her characters, Gappah uses comic writing to parody the chaotic nature of the socio-political and economic “madness” that prevailed in the post-2000 era in Zimbabwe. Like *Writing Still* (2003) and *No More Plastic Balls* (2000), Gappah’s collection of short stories, which are heavy with irony, portray the disillusionment of the ordinary people<sup>157</sup> with this state of being as they struggle to achieve their dreams and ambitions. This fight occurs in an adverse environment that is economically unstable. The characters in the stories are forced to adopt various survival strategies to cope with the pressures of such a life.

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<sup>157</sup> I am aware that the phrase “ordinary people” is problematic because “there is something elitist in the idea itself” (Hall 2002:8). In this chapter, however, I use it to refer to the mass of people in the country who do not enjoy the privileges of the ruling elite.

Gappah has been criticised as having “[w]estern based perceptions of artistic creative aesthetics” that “influence her choice of subject and writing” (Magosvongwe 2013:210). Ruby Magosvongwe (2013:211) goes on to assert that in her short stories, Gappah embraces a “political agenda of social criticism”. Gappah’s literary work is, to some extent, blatantly political in its attack on President Mugabe and his political regime, such that some of her stories tend to lose their creative appeal as they leave little to the reader’s imagination. “At the Sound of the Last Post” is a glaring example of this. Despite this obvious flaw in her work, however, my literary analysis in this chapter shows that her “madness” discourse represents the socio-political and economic existential reality of the people of Zimbabwe in the post-2000 era. Significantly, in her short stories, Gappah constructs the mental illness of her characters as an analogue of the environment in which they live and provides a dominantly female gaze of the economic hardships and social malaise that inflict their society.

The post-2000 period in Zimbabwe was one characterised by an economic crisis that ravaged the country, adversely affecting the quality of the lives of the people. In Chapter Three of this study, I extensively discussed how the ramifications of the this fiscal meltdown were so severe that the economic insanities the nation experienced during the years 1998 to 2008 led Sachikonye (2012) to describe this era as a lost decade. I will not repeat these details here. Suffice to note that in her short stories, Gappah highlights some of the outcomes of the economic downslide of this era, such as the hyperinflationary environment, the critical shortage of fuel and basic commodities and the increasing migration of Zimbabweans to the Diaspora in a bid to sustain themselves, as my analysis reveals. In this chapter I show how, through sardonic humour, she also addresses the politically tense environment that prevailed within the country at this time, as well as the devastating consequences of the HIV/AIDs pandemic that tore at the social fabric of Zimbabwean society.

In the second section of this chapter, I demonstrate how Dangarembga’s narrative in *The Book of Not* gives literary life to Ngugi’s (1982: 3) warning that colonialism may succeed in making many black people “see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement”. In my discussion of the cultural alienation the black people of Africa suffered as a result of the onslaught of colonialism’s powerful weapons, education and Christianity in Chapter Three, I pointed out that one of the devastating consequences of this was the fragmentation of the

African identity. In this chapter I show how the protagonist, Tambu<sup>158</sup>, fails to appropriately place herself within the white space of Sacred Heart, the boarding school that she attends, by letting her past “speak” to her (Hall 1990:226)<sup>159</sup>. This leads to a “madness” that manifests as depression as her mind submerges under the pressure of assimilation<sup>160</sup>. A depressed person is “generally drawn to the most negative meaning that can be attributed to ... events” (Frost 1985:189). This chapter illustrates how this self-negation emanates in Tambu. Cognitively, depression is defined as “an abnormal state of the organism manifested by signs and symptoms such as low subjective moods, pessimistic and nihilistic attitudes, loss of spontaneity and specific vegetative signs” (Beck: 1967: 2001-202)<sup>161</sup>. This cognitive definition of depression is pertinent to my analysis in this chapter as I show how “madness” manifests as depression to affect the protagonist, Tambu, to the extent that nihilism, shame, guilt and low self-esteem dominate her mental make-up. I also show how *The Book of Not* illuminates the pain of blackness under the racial segregation and oppression of colonial Rhodesia through the experiences of the only six black students Sacred Heart, which is a predominantly white school for girls.

I use Laing and Fanon’s existential psychoanalytic theories to portray Tambu’s struggle with her sense of identity. Her Eurocentric viewpoint works to instil a sense of alienation within her in a manner that affirms Fanon’s (1967a: 251) contention that colonialism is “a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: ‘In reality, who am I?’”. I show how many instances in the narrative echo Fanon’s “black skin, white masks” psychology. When viewed from an existential psychoanalytic lens, the destabilising effect of trauma manifests as “madness” because of the psychic scarring that the colonised subjects experience as a result of colonisation as this chapter reveals.

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<sup>158</sup>Tambu is a contracted version of the Shona name Tambudzai, which means “to give trouble”. I posit that her name signifies the troubled identity that inhabits her.

<sup>159</sup> In “Cultural Identity and the Diaspora”, Hall suggests that the past is crucial in the formation of cultural identity when he states that cultural identity has “its histories-and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us”.

<sup>160</sup> Depression is what used to be known as melancholia in the past. William Styron (1992:7) describes depression as “an order of mood, so painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self - to the mediating intellect - as to verge close to being beyond description”. He goes on to state that “the horror of depression is so overwhelming as to be quite beyond expression” (Styron 1992:83).

<sup>161</sup> Similarly Smith (1987:6) delineates depression as typified by a sense of “loss, low self-esteem, worthlessness, shame, guilt and hopelessness”.

In *The Book of Not*, Dangarembga also illuminates the devastating and traumatic effects of the violence of the war of liberation, which is more fully explored in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (2003) and Vera's *Stone Virgins* (2002). Like Mazvita in *Without a Name* Tambu is caught up in the trauma of the war. Dangarembga's narrative captures the violence that was part of the transformation of the country from colonial Rhodesia to independent Zimbabwe. Through her depiction of Tambu's traumatised condition, Dangarembga validates the categorisation of her narrative as trauma literature. Therefore, in this analysis of Dangarembga's literary text, I use the trauma theory as a valuable analytic tool to explore "madness" in its manifestation as trauma.

Stuart Hall's (1990) discussion of cultural identity is pertinent to my examination of Tambu's struggle with identity. He considers cultural identity as a "a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being' ... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by , and position ourselves within the narrative of the past ... It is only from this second position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of the 'colonial experience'" (Hall 1990: 225). My analysis shows how it is this positioning of self within the "nervous conditions" of colonialism that Dangarembga exposes through Tambu in *The Book of Not*.

## **6.2 The Political, Social and Economic Shades of "Madness" in Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly***

This section of my analysis focuses on Gappah's depiction of the "madness" trope in her short stories. It illuminates how Gappah's narrative is a fictional response to the social, political and economic "madness" that prevailed in Zimbabwe. In my discussion of *Chairman of Fools* in Chapter Three I acknowledged the tremendous impact that HIV/AIDS has had on the lives of the people in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Despite the rampant spread of this disease across the country, *An Elegy for Easterly* is a testimony to the social malaise and sexual deviance within the community, especially among the wealthy and politically powerful men whose economic clout allow enable them to maintain "small houses". In the Zimbabwean context, "small house" is colloquial phrase used to refer to a woman involved in an extramarital affair with a married man.

In "The Sound of the Last Post", for example, Gappah exposes the social decadence of the rich and politically powerful men in Zimbabwe. She uses the story to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic that viciously spread across the country. In this short story the narrator, Esther,

reveals how even nationalist heroes were “being culled” (p.18) by the disease. Esther is the widow of a “gallant soldier” being buried at a “Funeral of Dead Heroes” (p.5). She reflects on how her husband had proved “his virility in the three children that he had with a woman he had been married to even as he was marrying [her] in a London council office” (p.9)<sup>162</sup>. Esther continues her fervent attack on her husband’s lack of morality in her conclusion that “like the worthless dogs that are his countrymen, my husband believed that his penis was wasted if he was faithful to one woman” (p.12). In the same vein, in “Mupandawana Dancing Champion” the Member of Parliament who owns the funeral parlour at Mupandawana Growth Point where M’ dara Vitalis worked “could naturally not confine his prosperous seed to only one woman”(EE, p.119) and therefore has four wives, one of whom has an illicit affair with the narrator of the story.

Gappah further explores the HIV/AIDS scourge in “The Cracked Lips of Rosie’s Bridegroom”. It is obvious to the wedding guests that the bridegroom has this illness which “speaks its presence in the pink redness of the lips” (p.202). The narrator makes apparent that the bridegroom is responsible for recklessly spreading the disease as his first wife died from it and he has “also buried two girlfriends, possibly more” (p.200). Yet the bride, Rosie, is either oblivious to, or deliberately ignores the “sickness that screams its presence from every pore” (p.199), that is “alive in the darkening of the skin, in the whites of the eyes whiter than nature intended” (p.199).

Moreover, in “The Sound of the Last Post”, the social “madness” of the society is depicted when Esther discloses how one of the heroes recently buried at the Heroes Acre “was not the fine upstanding family man of the presidential speech but a concupiscent septuagenarian who died from a Viagra-induced heart attack while inside an underage girl’ (p.24). Gappah further explores this rape motif in “An Elegy for Easterly” when the narrator’s husband in this short story rapes the mad Martha Mupengo<sup>163</sup> when he follows her to her slum house and forces himself on her. He takes advantage of Martha’s mental instability to exploit her femaleness and she falls pregnant from this abuse. Realising the “horror” of his actions after the rape, as he runs off to his house the narrator’s husband repeatedly tells himself, “this is not me

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<sup>162</sup> This also speaks to constructions of masculinity. See, for example, Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde’s *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* (2007).

<sup>163</sup> In Shona, “mupengo” means “the mad one”.

...This is not me” (p.48). Despite the pledge he then makes to God and his ancestral spirits that in future he would “touch no woman other than his wife” (p.48), he does not abide by this promise as “he later gave in to Rebecca and Juliet and others” telling himself that “these others meant nothing at all” (ibid). In addition, what is significant in this story and in “The Cracked Lips of Rosie’s Bridegroom” is that contrary to the norm, it is the male subject and body that is objectified by the female gaze. In the latter story the male body is objectified as diseased.

The theme of male promiscuity is continued in “At the Sound of the Last Post when Esther labels the newsreader as the “first whore” and describes how she becomes the mistress of four different politicians, including Esther’s husband. Gappah further explores this vilification of women as whores when Esther reflects on how her late husband madly “plunged himself into every bitch on heat” (p.2). It also appears in the disempowered image in which Esther describes her husband’s mistress as a “vacuous beauty” (ibid). In “The Maid from Lalapanzi”, Gappah once again reiterates this whorish image when the female protagonists refers to the “whores who slept with men to whom they were not married” (p.47).

Gappah comically hints at this social “madness” of urban life in Harare when the narrator in “The Mupandawana Dancing Champion “was relieved to escape the headaches of Harare with its grasping women who will not let go until your wallet is empty” (p.114). Sardonicly, the acronym of this story, MDC, is the abbreviation of the name of the main political opposition party in the period that Gappah writes about. Unlike most of the other stories, the main setting of this story is Mupandawana Growth Point, the township of a rural area. It abounds with humour. The narrator of this story describes how, after thirty years of hard work at a furniture-making factory which has shut down, M’dara Vitalis is forced to stop working because of the adverse economic climate. He is given three pairs of shoes as his pension; one pair for each of the ten years that he had worked. Disillusioned, he retires to his rural home near Mupandawana Growth Point and makes coffins for a living. He participates in the dancing competition at Why Leave Guesthouse and Disco-bar where, despite his age, he danced all the other competitors “off the floor to the sidelines” (p.124). Unfortunately on the last night of the competition, in the exhilaration of the dance, as he rolls and shakes on the ground, he twitches and convulses. The crowd egg him on “relishing in this new dance” (p.128) without realising that these moves were actually the throes of death. Although

essentially a comic story about an old man who dances himself to death, the narrative hints at what Gappah (2009) calls “the paranoia of ZANU PF”.

In “Midnight at the Hotel California”, the narrator is a hustler in “the new Zimbabwe where everyone is a criminal” (pp.258)<sup>164</sup>. Although an insurance salesman, he often sells fuel on the black market at a critical period in time when the nation faces a crippling fuel shortage and long, snaking queues at fuel stations become the order of the day. On one of his trips to sell insurance to miners in the small mining areas, he checks into Hotel California Bed and Breakfast. He spends an evening drinking with the male proprietor, who later joins him in his room. The narrator describes how, “[w]ith mounting horror, I watched as he took off all his clothes except for his underwear and got into the bed beside me” (p.272). Through this short story, Gappah becomes one of the few black Zimbabwean writers to explore the subject of homosexuality within an undeniably homophobic society. This exposé of deviant sexuality hints at a tearing of the conventional social fabric.

There is a predominantly feminist perspective on the trials and tribulations that the characters in the short stories endure within the socio-political and economic “madness” within the country. Not only are the narrators of these stories mainly female, Gappah also addresses issues that strongly relate to the patriarchal delimitations of womanhood. In “The Sound of the Last Post”, for example, the narrative provides a subtle attack on a society that condemns a childless woman like Esther, “a fruitless husk” (p.9), as the “lowest form of womanhood, womanhood without womanliness” (ibid). The paradox of this disempowering image of women’s value lying primarily in their role as reproducers is that it occurs at a period of the national history that reflects a determination to empower women<sup>165</sup>. In the political arena, for example, the country now has a thirty-five percent female representation in Parliament and women make up forty-seven percent of Senate<sup>166</sup>.

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<sup>164</sup> Although rather exaggerated, Gappah’s image here serves to highlight the severity of the economic crisis as people sometimes resorted to illegal means of ensuring their economic sustenance, such as the popular “burning” (illegal exchange of foreign currency) of money.

<sup>165</sup> In the next chapter, I elaborate further on this disempowering representation of women’s importance lying in their roles as wives and mothers in my analysis of Vera’s literary texts.

<sup>166</sup> Feminist political scientists, such as Amanda Gouws (2011), have done important work on how the issue of female representation in government impacts the feminist political agenda. Basically, there is a strong argument that merely having more women in politically powerful positions does not necessarily benefit women. See for example, Anne Marie Goetz’s (2002) “Shortcuts to Power: Constraints on Women's Political Effectiveness in Uganda”, Joni Lovenduski and Azza Karam’s (1998) “Women in Parliament: Making a difference”, Shireen Hassim’s (2009) *Perverse Consequences?* and Homa Hoodfar and Mona Tajali’s (2011) *Electoral Politics: Making quotas work for women*.

Like Esther, Josphat's wife suffers the stigma of childlessness in an "Elegy for Easterly". She suffers a series of miscarriages in which "the babies slipped and slid out in a mess of blood and flesh" (p.38). She believes that these miscarriages are caused by the witchcraft engineered by various relatives. In desperation, she seeks spiritual help for her problem but to no avail. She is so tormented by her inability to conceive that she is constantly haunted by dreams of a crying child. Her obsessive desire to have a child makes her take advantage of the death of Martha Mupengo to secure one.

Martha Mupengo is a harmless mad woman, who lives in a slum on Easterly Farm. She goes around the city lifting up her dress and asking for twenty cents. She is raped by Josphat and falls pregnant from this violation. On the night that Martha delivers her baby, Josphat's wife steals the baby from Martha's dead body, who has died during the process of delivery. As there is no one else in the room, Josphat's wife madly cuts the umbilical cord by chewing on it with, so desperate is she to secure this baby that her husband has fathered. The narrative describes how "[t]hrough a film of tears, she chewed on Martha's flesh, closing her mind to the taste of blood, she chewed and tugged on the cord until the baby was free" (p.46). Despite the horror of her act, she feels elated because Martha's death allows her to become the mother she so desperately needs to be. As the baby cries in response, she holds it to her chest and feels "an answering rise in her breasts" (ibid), which makes her sob and laugh at the same time. She makes the baby suck on her empty breasts. Given the cultural expectations of motherhood, which I explore in greater detail in the next chapter, and the stigma of the "barrenness" that she has had to endure all of her married life, this elegiac moment of Martha's death signifies a new life for her. This adoption of her Martha and her husband's baby signals the substantiation of her African womanhood.

"Something New from London" and "My cousin-sister Rambanai" both highlight the massive outward migration of Zimbabweans to Diaspora as they flee the economic challenges in anticipation of better financial opportunities there, as my analysis in the previous chapter has revealed. Unfortunately though, life there often results in the traumatic fragmentation of identity. In "Something nice from London", Lisa, who works as a nurse in London is able to send British pounds to the Chikwiro family in the homeland. Her mother receives the remittance and then exchanges them for billions of Zimbabwean dollars through the financial black market. This somehow alleviates the economic hardships that the family faces. The

short story, however, ironically depicts how instead of getting something nice from London, the Chikwiro family receive the cremated remains of their son. The concept of cremation usurps the Shona conventional practices when burying the dead that traditional culture demands. Tabaona Shoko (2008:20) illustrates that even with the high death rate in Zimbabwe and corresponding shortage of burial space in urban areas, the Shona people resist cremation as a viable alternative as they consider it as “alien and unAfrican”.

In “My Cousin-sister Rambanai” Gappah reveals how the narrator’s cousin, Rambanai takes on a new diasporic identity and like Tambu in the *Book of Not*, becomes alienated from her home environment. Truly Americanised, she returns from the United States of America to attend a funeral but is unable to return there because her passport has been endorsed. As she explores the different parts of the city, she often returned home “distracted” from some of these excursions because “there were so many flies” (p.221) around. The narrator describes how she produces “wails of dismay” (ibid) at the sight of the flea markets in Avondale. Rambanai is seemingly oblivious to the economic depression in the country that has turned the country into a “nation of traders” as “her Zimbabwe was frozen in 1997, the year she had left ... a Zimbabwe without double digit inflation, without talk of stolen elections” (p.222). The closing down of companies and industries in Zimbabwe has resulted in the official unemployment rate spiralling to 11.3 percent of the 6.3 million that were employed in 2014 (ZIMSTAT 2014). In a hyperinflationary economic environment that has “reached three million three hundred and twenty-five percent” (p.7) and everyone has been turned into poor billionaires, informal trading is one of the survival strategies many of the unemployed resort to in a bid to sustain their families. Rambanai’s alienation from this reality that surrounds her no doubt causes the strange behaviour and restlessness that characterise her return.

Gappah also emphasises how Rambanai is able to secure a new identification card and passport under a false name by bribing the officials at Makombe Building. The adversities during the economic crisis lead to massive corruption in the country, which was rampant in government institutions, especially the Passport Office. This was because of the huge number of Zimbabweans who wanted to secure passports in order to migrate to the neighbouring countries and the Diaspora in search for economic sustenance. The narrative describes how “in exchange for yet another envelope Rambanai is fingerprinted and documented. Thus it went on; in exchange for yet another envelope, someone in Mukwati Building got her police clearance” (p.281). Through this blatant corruption and bribery, she is able to acquire a new

identity and becomes Langelihle Chantal Nduluka<sup>167</sup>. Since her original passport had been endorsed by the American Embassy, this reinvention of self becomes a necessary survival strategy in order to once again escape the destitution, despair and disillusionment that have become the existential reality of the ordinary people in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, she does not seem to do well in the Diaspora as she is unable to pay back her debt to the narrator.

After quitting their jobs, like Rambanai, the narrator and her husband are able to secure visas to London “the Harare way” (p.234) by bribing someone at the British embassy. They “join the three million people who had left the country” (p.233) as they migrate to London. Both work in the unlit corners of Britain’s health care system as the British Bottom Cleaners that I highlighted in the previous chapter. The sense of displacement that they suffer in the diasporic space leads to misery and anxiety, a mentally unstable condition that is further exacerbated by the unexpected hard working conditions. In their now demeaning jobs (the narrator used to be a teacher and the husband an engineer/rural and urban planner), these characters “took out the frustration of [their] existence by visiting little cruelties on geriatric patients” (ibid).

The short story “Mupandawana Dancing Champion” also touches on the economic crisis in Zimbabwe when the narrator laments how “the price of everything went up ninety-seven times in one year” (p.113). Sardonic humour is evident in his “sunny prediction that inflation was set to go down to two million, seven hundred and fifty-seven percent” (p.129-130). Gappah’s sense of disillusionment is apparent when it seems that because of the high rate of HIV/AIDS in the country, “the only real growth is in the number of people waiting to buy coffins” (p.114). In “At the Sound of the Last Post”, Gappah alludes to the abnormal electricity supply situation in the country in which the national Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority fails to meet the nation’s demands. Therefore, the urban population- like their rural counterparts - are forced to rely heavily on alternative sources of power, such as solar energy, fuel generated power and wood. The narrator describes how the Warren Hills that surround the Heroes Acre are “denuded, with stumps remaining where the trees were, the green trees now the brown wood that replaces the electricity that is not to be found in the homes” (p.5). Gappah here uses the “madness” motif to expose the resultant land degradation that results from the abnormally low electric power supply in urban areas.

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<sup>167</sup> This marks the beginning of a complex process of identity formation.

“In the Heart of the Golden Triangle” depicts a world “where achievement is everything” (p.109). In sharp contrast to the near-destitute lives lived by the majority within Gappah’s short stories discussed above, this narrative is about a class of people who live an excessively plush and pretentious lifestyle within a “golden triangle” in which their elitist status cushions them from the shattering consequences of the economic crisis within a country where the majority suffer. Instead of haggling for survival strategies, the female narrator “spends the day trying to fill in the hours” (p.104). She does not have to rely on the almost empty shops that often even lack the very basic commodities as she flies to South Africa for her grocery shopping. Ironically, she shops alongside the wives of cabinet ministers, “even as their husbands promise to end food shortages” (p.106). Yet despite being able to evade the prevalent economic problems through the buffer that their wealth provides, these foreign shopping women of the “golden triangle” are unable to shield themselves from the social “madness” of the AIDs scourge, as I have discussed above, and the narrator fears getting the “red lips” characteristic of the disease if her husband “continues to establish small houses all over the city” (p.108).

Paradoxically, in “An Elegy for Easterly”, Gappah depicts the poverty and squalor of Easterly Farm in sharp contrast to the wealth and well-built houses of the elite of the ‘golden triangle’. She writes about the life of the people living in this slum. They have been resettled on this piece of land after falling victim to “Operation Murambatsvina”. They live in “houses of pole and mud” that have “thick black sheeting for walls and clear plastic for windows” (p.27). These seemingly temporary structures denote the precariousness of their existential reality. These residents of Easterly Farm once again become victim to the state-driven clean-up campaign as their “homes” are demolished by bulldozers for a second time. Through the discussions that the residents have about “Operation Murambatsvina” and of Easterly Farm as the bulldozers raze their “homes”, it becomes apparent that the demolitions are not only taking place at this farm, but also at Porta Farm. Furthermore, it is made clear that these demolitions are not restricted to home dwellings but extend to include the marketplaces where struggling ordinary citizens attempt to secure their livelihood, such as the Union Ave flea markets, Mupedzanhamo and Siyaso<sup>168</sup>. The last of these is well-known as

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<sup>168</sup> Dangarembga here adopts the actual names of the places in Zimbabwe. Porta Farm is located along the Bulawayo Road somewhere between Harare and Norton. Mupedzanhamo and Siyaso are both open markets

the place where “it was not unknown for a man whose car had been relieved of its tyres or its radio and hubcabs to buy them back from the man into whose hands they had fallen. At a discount” (p.36). These displacements lead to the ontological insecurity of those dislocated.

In the “Annexe Shuffle” and “An Elegy for Easterly”, Gappah articulates the long regarded view of “madness” as a female malady through her mentally insane characters from starkly different worlds; Emily, a law student from a middle-class background in the former and Martha Mupengo, an impoverished slum dweller in the latter. Emily suffers from schizophrenia and is incarcerated in a mental institution, the Annexe, while Martha roams around the city lifting up her dress and asking for twenty cents. It is ironic that the twenty-cent used to be a silver coin and yet she asks for this at a period in time when the country used only bearer cheques printed on bond paper as its currency. Gappah’s feminist discourse interrogates the patriarchal ideologies with regards to women in these stories.

Significantly though, I perceive Gappah’s short stories as exposing how mental illness can be symptomatic of the society in which the mad person is emerged. I argue here that in Gappah’s “madness” discourse, the mental illnesses that her female characters suffer in the “Annexe Shuffle” and “An Elegy for Easterly” mirror the chaotic socio-political and economic environment within which they live. As Robert Barret (1998:466) states, “there is a particular nexus between schizophrenia and society, for anomalies are always reflections of the wider social order”. These characters symbolically represent much of what has gone wrong within their world because “the ‘schizophrenic’ has encoded in it, as an anonymous and liminal category, the capacity to symbolise society and its ills” (Barret 1998:489).

Through Martha Mupengo’s mental illness in “An Elegy for Easterly”, Gappah not only succeeds in symbolising the social and economic state of the nation, she further uses her character to highlight the thoughts and feelings of the “normal” people around her. Gappah uses Martha to emphasise the human capacity to persevere in the face of problems encountered as is expressed in the conversations the people have about her and around her. They do not crumble under the weight of the social pressures that they endure.

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located in Mbare’s high density suburb of Harare. Mupedzanhama specialises in selling imported second-hand clothes at very cheap prices. Siyaso mainly sells hardware, goods and building materials, amongst other items.

In “The Annexe Shuffle”, Emily is admitted to the annexe, the mental wing of Parirenyatwa Hospital after being diagnosed with schizophrenia. Putting Emily into this enclosed space is what Elaine Showalter (1985) considers a means of establishing a fixed boundary between mental illness and sanity, so that society is protected from the dangers that the insane pose. Such confinement, however, hampers female agency and independence. Despite Emily’s protest that “I should not be here” (p.59), the “force of her father’s will” (p.60) ensures that she is confined to the annexe. As my discussion on both Chinodya and Chikwava’s literary texts have shown, mental illness disrupts an individual’s sense of identity. This distortion of identity is more acute in the case of psychosis. David Mann (1991:216) stresses that psychiatric ailments like schizophrenia “can be understood as losses of the self”, a feeling that affects Emily. Mental illnesses are, therefore, evidenced by the sense of fragmentation of self that the sufferer experiences.

Just like in the mental institution in Chinodya’s *Chairman of Fools*, the annexe contains people from all walks of life - a Catholic sister, an army sergeant, a hotel manager and a law student. Ironically, all its inmates deny their insanity. Yet in the world inside the annexe, the inmates burn in the fire of their “madness”. Ezekiel, for example, is haunted by “the buzzing of a thousand phantom mosquitos” (p.55). Another of the annexe’s inmates, Matsheki, experiences a “madness” of a “malevolent bent, an ungentle madness that requires restraints, not just pills” (p.65). She tells Emily that she is a flesh eater who has devoured all her babies. I argue that as children symbolise the future, her “madness” symbolises how a diseased, corrupt and immoral society can destroy the nation’s fruitful prospects. Emily herself is “a mind diseased” that is experiencing “a rooted sorrow” (p.57). She is said to have given into the “madness” of depression by talking to herself after being dumped by her boyfriend. In line of my argument above that contends that mental illness in Gappah’s fiction is indicative of the socio-political environment in which her characters live, I suggest here that the inmates of the annexe are the “choir of the mad” (p.68) as through them, Gappah is able to sing the song of the “madness” prevalent in Zimbabwe that was an inevitable part of the nation’s existential reality.

Additionally, I argue that Gappah uses Emily’s mental condition and loss of a sense of self to symbolise the ordinary people’s reaction to the economic collapse and social decadence that signify the post-2000 era in Zimbabwe. Emily’s sorrow could be seen as representing the disillusionment the vast majority of the population experienced during this period as the

analyses of some of the stories in Gappah's collection have shown. In her state of psychological disorientation Emily cannot "even trust her own hand, her own thoughts, her very actions betray her, everything is against her, everything is wrong, so wrong" (p.60). I contend that this feeling reflects the social malaise of her society where everything is so wrong with the rampant corruption, violation of human rights, and sexual deviance that is evident in some of the short stories in this collection. Everything is so wrong with the political tensions between the nation's political parties that causes the infringement of individual rights and freedom, just like Emily's own rights are brushed away "like an inconvenient fly" (ibid) by her patriarchal father, who ensures that she is committed to the annexe. Emily's ability to withstand further heartbreak, I argue, is synonymous with the resilience of the ordinary Zimbabwean who is able to survive the economic hardships that confront the nation.

### **6.3 Being and Nothingness: Trauma, loss and alienation in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not***

In *The Book of Not* the protagonist suffers from a sense of nothingness which results in her being consumed by self-negation. As a result, Dangarembga's narrative resonates with her feelings of disappointment and despair because of her non-achievements, as my discussion below reveals.

*The Book of Not*, which is a sequel to *Nervous Conditions*, is a narrative directed by Tambu as an adult narrator who looks back at the thoughts and experiences of the younger Tambu. It continues the story of the protagonist that was begun in its predecessor. Dangarembga's follow-up to *Nervous Conditions* is set against the backdrop of the liberation war and the first years of Independence in Zimbabwe. The narrative spans her high school days at the cusp of Independence when the liberation war was at its peak. Tambu is one of the few black girls selected to attend the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart<sup>169</sup>, which is a prestigious boarding school. The narrative proceeds to depict her struggle to achieve a productive and independent life in the period immediately following Zimbabwe's independence. The story depicts her as an individual obsessed with recognition and self-achievement. As she begins her education there, she believes that she "had to be one of the best. Average simply did not apply; I had to be absolutely outstanding or nothing" (p.25).

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<sup>169</sup> The name of the school already signals the gendered script that the pupils will be taught.

Run by nuns, the Sacred Heart professes to be a humane and charitable place, yet there is still evidence of racism as evident in the fact that there are still white spaces at the school which the black girls cannot occupy, such as the whites-only toilet. Racial segregation is also evident in the fact that all the African students, regardless of form level, are confined to one dormitory. It is apparent in the daily insults the black girls endure from Bougainvillea, one of the white students. Likewise, racial prejudice is ostensible when despite achieving the best results at 'O' level, the award is given to a white student, Tracy, the justification for this bypassing being that Tracy was an "all rounder" (p.155). Moreover, the black girls are forbidden from using their vernacular language within the school. Ngugi (1985:20) underscores the psychological wounding that the black child endures when forced to speak English when he rightfully asserts, "[i]f you punish a child for speaking his mother-tongue what are you really doing to the mentality of that child? You are really making him hate the language which was the basis of his humiliation".

More significantly, racial segregation reflects in the fact that touching between the races is strictly forbidden at the school such that when it does occur, it is considered abnormal. This explains the utter shock the black girls reveal when in Sister Catherine's attempt to comfort Tambu after her fight with Ntombi, she touches Tambu's chin and Ntombi's head: "A white hand on hair! We gaped! We had never seen it" (p.78). It elucidates why after having touched Sister Catherine's hand Tambu feels that "I had soiled my teacher in some way" (p.32) because of the belief in the impurity of her race. A consciousness of this racial prejudice is what makes the African girls fear touching their white counterparts in the corridors, at the assembly line and while they passed food to each other in the dining hall. Any kind of touch between the races, therefore, translated to agony and humiliation. Tambu elicits the terror the black girls felt of this constant need to watch and contain themselves in the relationships and dealing with their white counterparts: "We spent alot of time consumed with this kind of terror. We didn't speak of it amongst ourselves. It was all too humiliating, but the horror of it gnawed within us" (p.59).

It is within this racially hostile and demeaning context Tambu's consciousness develops. Therefore, I concur with Rosanne Kennedy's belief that Dangarembga's narrative provides a female perspective to Fanon's theory of the "nervous conditions" of colonial subjects when she categorises the novel as highlighting "the ongoing denial, forgetting and unspeakability

of racism” (2008:102). While I do not condone the “white mask” psychology that Tambu embraces, as I reveal in my discussion below, I contend that such traumatic psychological exposure to racism no doubt contributes to the peeling away of her sense of self and a subsequent desire to mimic what to her mind is a superior self. Unfortunately, this mental disorientation implodes into a sense of not-being and certainty in the inferiority of her race. When she is caught and reprimanded for using the whites-only toilet, for example, Tambu madly blames it all on the fact of blackness and transfers her self-hatred into anger at her fellow blacks:

Idiotic women! The fools who couldn't use a decent sewerage system! ... Had these people I was forced to identify with been more able, those bathrooms would have been open to all. No one would have been standing here in this humiliation ... Oh, I felt yet another surge of dislike for the other girls in my dormitory! (p.71)

Fanon's (1967a: 106) words echo this sense of guilt and terror Tambu feels of being black in a racist world, this “feeling of not existing. Sin is black as virtue is white. All those white men ... cannot be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am not good”. As my discussion makes clear she, in fact, personifies and desires the “Other” (Fanon 1967a:128), a desire that translates to a hatred of herself and anything that reminds her of her blackness - her skin, her people, her culture, her profession and her mind. Understanding this psychological warfare that she endures in her process of “unbecoming” allows the reader to sympathise with her, despite the selfish and detestable projection of the white gaze in her condescension of all the signifiers of her identity.

Having read *Nervous Conditions*, a reader may anticipate that Tambu would enter the racist space of Sacred Heart with enough psychological armour to withstand the threat that such an environment would have on her subjectivity. Ironically, in Dangarembga' debut novel, her parting thought as she leaves her home and family and heads for Sacred Heart seems to affirm a grounding in her people and culture. As her family and friends urge her not to forget them, she pronounces: Don't forget don't forget...If I forgot them, my cousin, my mother, my friends, I might as well forget myself and that, of course could not happen” (p.188). Moreover, at the end of that narrative Tambu declares, “something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and to refuse to be brainwashed” (Dangarembga 1987:204). This assertion suggests a determination to get a western education without losing her cultural

values and sense of identity. Yet the adult narrator in *The Book of Not* reveals how the younger Tambu's existential reality has been infiltrated by a colonial mentality to such an extent that she believes that the white people's ways are better than her own. Once at Sacred Heart, she does forget the essence of her being; her roots. She becomes, in all essence, a good assimilated "native", a typical "Uncle Tom" character<sup>170</sup>. What stirs in my memory at this juncture is her mother's warning in *Nervous Conditions* about the problem Tambu's anglicised cousins, Nyasha and Chido, face: "It's the Englishness ... it will kill them all if they are not careful" (Dangarembga 1987:204). Contrary to her declaration, in *The Book of Not*, Tambu undeniably fails to resist the negative impacts of her expansion and there is evidence in the narrative to suggest that her western education has succeeded in "killing" her by brainwashing her into believing in the inferiority of her race, her people and her culture; a belief that dents her own sense of self-worth and subjectivity, leading to an ontological insecurity.

Tambu's behaviour when she goes back to her village during the school holidays reiterates her alienation from her people and her culture. She dreads returning to the rural home that she grew up in, which she does only three times in the year. She cannot stand the poverty and the drudgery of "fetching water from the river, the juddering paraffin lamp light and *sadza*<sup>171</sup> with only one, extremely small portion of relish" (p.7). Her mother acknowledges that Tambu has, indeed, grown beyond her and has become firmly entrenched in a Eurocentric worldview when she describes her as "*wekuchirungu* ... you white people" (p.7). Her emotional outburst in *Nervous Conditions* where she accuses Tambu as being influenced by Maiguru's white ways: "You think that I am dirty now, me, your mother" (Dangarembga 1987:140) somehow rings true in *The Book of Not*. As Tambu matures, these negative feelings toward her mother do not change. This becomes evident later on in the narrative when she attempts to visit Tambu in Harare. As Tambu contemplates the possibility of her mother's stay with her, she reflects that, "[a]s usual in my dealings with Mai [mother], shame welled up. Was there any misfortune in the world as bad as being the daughter of this woman" (p.228). Not only does Tambu despise her mother, she also considers her past rural life as "my unmentionable origin" (p.231).

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<sup>170</sup> The "Uncle Tom" epithet commonly appeared in Afro-American Literature on slavery to describe a black person who was excessively obedient to the white master and was complicit in the oppression of his/her race.

<sup>171</sup> Thick porridge

Tambu's failure to identify with her mother and the village she grew up in leads to a fragmented sense of self. Within her second year at Sacred Heart, she experiences dissociation from her past that translates to a disintegration of her identity. She becomes what Gugu Hlongwane (2009:449) identifies as a "piece of person". As I illustrated in the previous chapter in my discussion of the nameless narrator's sense of fragmentation, the maternal figure and "home" signify an individual's core sense of identity, of belonging. This failure to relate to both is indicative of a definite "absence of anchoring" (p.9). As someone who was "being transformed into a young woman with a future" (p.11), she deplures what she considers the non-achievement of her rural mother who she believes has caved in to the weight of African womanhood. Tambu is affected by "the awful covetous emptiness in her eyes, and ... the nothingness upon which she stood as upon the summit of her life" (p.9). She begs God to make her not end up like her mother. Paradoxically, however, this same sense of not being engulfs Tambu throughout the narrative in her attempt to "become more of a person" (ibid), pursuing her till the narrative's end. As she has a similar abhorrence for her father, Tambu adopts Maiguru and Babamukuru as her parents. In her mind because of their education and social standing, they are more the kind of parents she would want to identify with.

The determination to detach herself from her cultural past and familial bonds, however, places her in an "emotional diaspora" (Wurtzel 1999:168) that manifests in her continued feelings of emptiness and in her nihilistic delusions<sup>172</sup>. These illusions are evident in her false belief that she can identify more with the white students rather than her black counterparts from the African dormitory. She actually knits balaclavas for the Rhodesian soldiers, an act which she mistakenly perceives as a means of ensuring "our common security" (p.148). Paradoxically, this act of complicity shows her misguided allegiance with the colonial regime that perpetuates a supremacist ideology that objectifies her and relegates her to the status of a second class citizen. Her delusions are also obvious when on her return to school from a holiday spent at her village, Tambu forces herself into an emptiness; a state of "nothingness". She notes how even the "[s]chool too seemed empty because now, after these holidays, it was impossible to relate to anything" (p.20). Through the articulation of these feelings, Tambu underscores her negation of reality and subsequent negation of self. Thomas Ogden (2012: 20) explains this state of being when he asserts that "the melancholic is doomed to experience

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<sup>172</sup> According to Mosby Medical Dictionary (2009), nihilistic delusions are "a persistent denial of the existence of particular things or of everything, including oneself, as seen in various forms of schizophrenia".

a sense of lifelessness that comes as a consequence of disconnecting oneself from large portions of external reality”.

Tambu’s identity crisis is further evident when, frustrated at not being able to attend the “A” level science subjects lessons at Umtali Boys High (a neighbouring government school because blacks were not allowed on its premises) she questions: “Am I a Rhodesian” (p.153)? This query no doubt implies that Tambu identified with colonial Rhodesia, white culture and white ideology. From a Fanonian perspective, this is symptomatic of “nervous conditions” syndrome of a “white mask” psychology which expresses itself in the “wretchedness and anxiety” (BN, p.153) that continually dogs her. Significantly, towards the end of the narrative, when her mother calls to inform Tambu of her intention to visit Harare, sensing her daughter’s reluctance to see her she reminds Tambu of her origins and her past: “I want to ask are you aware who gave birth to you? Can you tell me which stomach you came out of! Or do you think you dropped from a tree big and ripe like that! Or sprang from a well” (p.226).

Not only does Tambu fail to identify with her familial bonds and “home”, she also refuses to identify with the historical fact of her blackness, as evident in the sense of alienation she feels from the violence of the war and its consequences to her people. As she recalls the incident of her sister’s leg being blown off - a traumatic event that opens *The Book of Not* - she expresses that, “I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at the primitive scene” (p.28). Instead of the anticipated anger and pain, there is an element of self-blame and a sense of humiliation here for having been privy to this scene. Another traumatic event she experiences is depicted in the novel when, petrified, she is forced to witness the liberation fighters beating her uncle for being “one of those souls hankering to be one with the occupying Rhodesian forces, *Mutengesi*<sup>173</sup>” (p.6). She is expected to watch the violent act in order to instil loyalty in her. Although such violence is, from a Fanonian perspective, meant to be creative “in order to produce a sense of nationalism and collective history” (Fanon 1967a:93) it is, nonetheless, destructive in terms of the psychological scarring that inevitably results from the witnessing of this brutality. These multiple traumatic experiences contribute significantly to her depression. Tambu’s dejection is evident when she states, “[h]ow miserable I was, for nothing lay in my power” (p.3). This mentally unstable state is

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<sup>173</sup> “sell-out”

intensified by her negativity and sense of loss of identity from being caught between to differing cultures within a changing socio-political landscape. Even when Babamukuru exposes his scars from the violent beating by the guerrilla fighters, a beating she was witness to, she:

... 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. But as I was not, I could feel nothing.  
(p.187)

I argue that this self-blame and refusal to “feel” is, in fact a denial of her trauma. Lenore Terr (1990:8) states that psychic trauma is quickly internalised in the victims mind immediately after the traumatic event/s. Therefore, this witnessing of her sister’s dismembering and uncle’s brutal beating overpowers her mind and scars her psyche. Much as she may deny any effect on her of these incidents of violence, it is apparent that throughout the narrative she suffers belatedly the pain of her trauma. This supposition is based on Caruth’s definition on the belatedness of trauma, which I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the narrator’s deferred experience of it in *Harare North*. Tambu, therefore, cannot repress the flashbacks of, for example, images of Netsai’s dismembered leg spinning in the sky that repetitively emerge in her mind, indicative of her belated mental stress and reaction to these traumatic events. Here, Dangarembga uses repetition as a literary strategy to underscore Tambu’s trauma because, as Whitehead (2004:86) writes, “[r]epetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression”. These images appear, for example, as her class translates images of war in a Latin lesson (p.31); when her African students accuse her of betraying the black race by knitting items for the Rhodesian soldiers (p.130); and when she learns about how Ntombi’s aunt and other family members are massacred by the very Rhodesian forces that she knits for (p.173).

Subsequently, Tambu transfers her trauma into anger. Transposing trauma through rage is what some theorists (LaCapra 2001; Felman and Laub 1992) identify as the delayed effect of such a traumatic episode. The anger that Tambu is often susceptible to in the narrative, then, is symptomatic of her trauma. When she is reprimanded by the headmistress for using the whites only toilet, the headmistress’ jokes that no one was to be cut in half, to which Tambu

responds by thinking, “how angry I was with Sister, talking to us like that, making jokes about our flesh and how some people thought it was divisible” (p.74). Yet she directs her fury at Sister Emmanuel towards Ntombi, a fellow black student, and they engage in a fist fight. In such moments, as she becomes consumed by anger, the intense emotional feeling, in turn, triggers a re-remembering of the past traumatic events which have been internalised in her mind. It becomes a means of articulating her trauma as evidenced when, during the fight she screams: “Do you know my sister? Do you know Netsai? She is my little sister. Do you know where she’s gone to” (p.78)? The last Tambu had seen of Netsai before this incident was when she was being driven away to the hospital after her leg had been blown off by a landmine. Tambu had witnessed this horrific scene while the strings of her heart “strained and tore” (p.3) as she watched the spinning leg “as it rotated, moving up to somewhere out of it” (ibid). Not only does this event represent a brutal image of the war, it further pre-empted the resultant splintering of the psyche that Tambu suffers from witnessing the violence of it. As William Chigidi (2009:47) attests in his study of Shona war fiction, “[o]ne cannot experience such horrors, either as a witness or a perpetrator, and hope to emerge out of it unscathed”. In her normal mental state, however, Tambu experiences what Ronald Granofsky (1995: 109) identifies as “dichotomous fragmentation”. She, therefore, separates the horrific incident from her existential self in order to “preserve the worldview as it was before the trauma ensued” (ibid).

Tambu is not the only character in the narrative whose trauma triggers anger. When the black girls in the dormitory confront Tambu about her knitting for the Rhodesian soldiers, Ntombi lashes out in rage at Tambu’s misdirected loyalty and alienation from her race when she shouts at her:

What’s making you do this! As if you don’t know that some things are cursed! Oh, just jump into a pot of hot oil! Just jump in, *usvuuke!* *Usvuuke!*<sup>174</sup> Then you will be what you want. It will make you look like them, all pink like a European!” (p.141)

This angry outburst is prompted by the trauma Ntombi has experienced not only on the collective level of race, but on an individual one as well. Like Tambu, she too has been exposed to the atrocities of the war. As Ntombi accuses her of being a “sell-out” in this one of their numerous fights, Tambu describes how “[s]he had the look in her eyes that made me

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<sup>174</sup> In Shona “*usvuuke*” literally means when the skin peels off.

stand still for a moment and wonder what, in her own holidays, she had been brought to witness” (p.140). In her anguished state, Ntombi rambles about “the limbs we would miss, the nature and temperature of rods that would be inserted into our various orifices” (p.141). It later on in the narrative becomes apparent that one of the origins of her trauma occur when she is made to bear witness to her aunt’s nine-month old baby’s head being dipped into boiling water by the Rhodesian soldiers until it drowned, after which the dead baby’s head was viciously bashed against a rock. This horrific event happens after her aunt was accused of feeding the “terrorists” (p.172). It was a brutal act meant to get her aunt to disclose the whereabouts of “*vana mukoma*”<sup>175</sup>. The aunt subsequently committed suicide and everyone at her homestead was killed. In her traumatised state, she recites Shakespeare: “[b]lood ... and destruction shall be so in use/And dreadful objects so familiar/That mother’s shall but smile when they behold/their infants quarter’d with the hands of war” (p.173)<sup>176</sup>. By this telling, Ntombi has “released some fetid load” (p.174) in an effort to unburden her psychological wounding by speaking of her trauma. I posit that Ntombi’s revelation of her pain and suffering undeniably affects Tambu, despite her declaration that she particularly did not care (ibid). She unconsciously sinks into a state of despair in which she exhibits “strange behaviour” and fails to make sense of the “unfamiliar seizures” and “fits of weeping” (ibid) that attack her.

Through these two young women’s trauma and Tambu’s subsequent fragmentation, Dangarembga exposes how colonialism caused the mutilation of bodies and the dismembering of black identities. In other words, Tambu exemplifies the erosion of the subjective being that Fanon (1967) warned would accompany a colonised psyche as the black person annihilates his/her sense of self. This can cause him/her to proceed from “humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair” (Fanon 1967b:43).

Tambu’s self-negation in dealing with her traumatic memory through self-effacement, however, does also point to her fragmented sense of identity and false consciousness as a result of her internalisation of a “white mask” psychology. My discussion above no doubt indicates that Tambu has been psychologically colonised as is evident in her adoption of a Eurocentric worldview for her African reality. I argue that the collective trauma of blackness

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<sup>175</sup> “*Vana mukoma*” literally means elder siblings and in this context refers to the guerrilla fighters.

<sup>176</sup> This quotation is from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (Act III, Scene I) when Anthony regrettably predicts the terror of the bloody war that would follow his murder of Caesar.

that Tambu suffers is evident in her sense of alienation from her family, her home and her culture. Her grounding in all these aspects of her life as an African has been weakened. As Kai Erikson (1991:471) emphasises, collective trauma embodies “a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community”. The debilitating effect of this psychological disorientation manifests in an identity crisis and is compounded by the individual trauma she has experienced as a result of being a witness to harrowing events of the war. In Chapter Three, I illuminated the fact that the protagonist of *Chairman of Fools* lacks an autonomous identity. Similarly, Tambu lacks a firm sense of her own identity and is, therefore, assimilated into the white culture and values that she is exposed to at Sacred Heart. This leads to a sense of ontological insecurity very similar to that experienced by Farai, albeit for different reasons. Her disorientation is a result of her ruptured familial bond and distorted sense of indigenous *Ubuntu/Unhu*, a viewpoint that is essential in the formation of any African identity<sup>177</sup>. Her conception of the philosophy has undeniably been shredded by the colonisation of her mind. Her western sense of individualism is evident when she declares: “What I was most interested in was myself and what I would become” (p.11). This aspiration of individual success at the expense of the community is a characteristic that flows over from her younger days as depicted in *Nervous Conditions* when she accepts her brother Nhamo’s death as “the price of her own freedom” (Sugnet 1997:39). Furthermore, it is paradoxical given her intention to live by embracing the African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Unhu*. This distorted sense of identity is apparent in her constant attempts in the narrative to marry the traditional ideal of *Ubuntu/Unhu* to a western value system. Significantly, this estrangement and fragmented identity plays a crucial part in evoking the constant depression and nihilism that characterise her life at Sacred Heart.

As she continues to swallow the white colonial mentality this leads to what Laing terms “engulfment” (1965: 45), a concept Laing (1965:5) explains thus: “If a man hates himself, he may wish to lose himself in the other; then being engulfed by the other is an escape from himself”. She becomes a divided self. Laing’s explanation is the reason why I argue here that Tambu’s disconnection from her past and self-hatred through her internalisation of the white gaze leads to a trauma of blackness. This trauma similarly translates into a chronic depression and is evidenced by her state of not-being. Depression causes numbing and an annihilation of emotion and, ironically, a distinct intensification of anxiety (Crawford 2009:241). Elizabeth

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<sup>177</sup> The ethnic philosophy of *Ubuntu/Unhu* is based on the communalist concept of “I am well if you are well too”.

Wurtzel (1999:19) characterises this mental illness so well when she describes how depression:

... involves a complete absence: absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest. The pain you feel in the course of a major clinical depression is an attempt on nature's part (nature, after all, abhors a vacuum) to fill up the empty space. But for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, waking dead.

It is this neurosis, I believe, that leads to Tambu's failure at "A" level and her poor performance at university. It shows itself in her attempts at invisibility<sup>178</sup>. More significantly, it manifests in her loss of self such that for her, it becomes "harrowing to be part of such undistinguished humanity" (p.211). This depression, in turn, leads to her persistent negation of self. Every act of negation subsequently constitutes the disengagement of her consciousness. As a result, her depression contributes significantly to her disintegration of self.

Tambu is so disoriented by her state of depression that she is unable to appreciate the positive aspects of her life. She is, instead, preoccupied with those parts of it that are negative, such as her failures and the non-recognition of her achievements. So consumed is she by depression that she does not envisage any hope in her future prospects. Elizabeth Wurtzel (1999) succinctly explains this loss of perspective by stating that a human being is capable of surviving almost anything if there is a foreseeable end to it, but depression compounds daily such that there seems to be no end. The fog of depression is "like a cage without the key" (Wurtzel 1999:168).

Locked in this mentally debilitated state, even with the birth of Independence instead of celebrating this hard won freedom with other blacks, Tambu thinks: "I could never, after all the years at Sacred Heart and Fridays in the town hall, bring myself to believe that Rhodesians had died" (p.198). Her skewed summation on this eve of the new dispensation reveals how she undermines the historical significance of the war that has culminated in

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<sup>178</sup> I acknowledge here that shame can also lead to attempts to make the self invisible.

peace talks between the warring parties. In addition, it shows the extent to which she perpetuates the good/evil and black/white dichotomies of imperial thought:

I assured myself happily that the phenomenon was due to a bigger and better motive on both sides: a desire to desist from chopping from chopping away lips, ears, noses and genitals from the bodies of people's relatives by the elder siblings; a desire to develop a larger, kinder heart on the part of the Europeans. (p.198)

Ironically, knowingly or unknowingly, Tambu's thoughts regurgitate Conrad's "heart of darkness" images of her own people as cruel and evil and the whites as unblemished and kind. Yet both sides committed unspeakable atrocities during the violence of the war, as is made apparent in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (2004) and Alexandria Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat* (1997). This loss of her sense of African identity and misguided allegiance evokes Steve Biko's (1978: 28) contention that:

Reduced to an obliging shell [the black subject] ... looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he [sic] regards as the 'inevitable position' ... The black man has become a shadow, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave and ox, bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

As a result, Tambu's adult life in independent Zimbabwe turns out to be one marked by frustration and failure. After a mediocre pass in her university education, she is forced to teach, a profession she considers as being "much too low" (p.199). Depressed, her self-esteem suffers another set-back because "it seems only rejects were required to shape our nations' children" (p.199). Her overwhelming sense of failure at this point in her life is evident when she declares, "[o]h, how low I was falling, as though I had broken a glass fool and, hurtling through, would end up splintered once more in the mess of the homestead" (p.199). Her lamentation expresses her shattered sense of self. The "wretched room" (ibid) that she rents in Greendale mirrors her despondent mental state, as its "murkiness sucked [her] in, tossed [her] around and drowned [her]" (ibid).

When she is able to get a better job as a copy editor at an advertising agency, in a cruel twist of fate, Tracy Stevenson, the white girl who was given the award that should have been hers for the best "O" Level results, becomes her boss. Once again, at this workplace Tambu is

susceptible to racism, frustration and an overwhelming sense of non-achievement. Her deflated sense of self within her professional life at this agency is obvious in the manner in which she relates to the black receptionist (Pedzi) and the “tea boy” (Raphael) (p.219). When Pedzi greets and compliments her, the highly insecure Tambu cannot connect with her because she believes that “this girl who looked like a goddess was mocking” (p.214). Yet when the “tea boy” rudely disrespects her over a tea mug, she thinks that she deserves such treatment. In a meeting with Dick, a senior copy editor, to discuss a campaign for a hair product specifically designed for black hair, the reader is exposed to one of the rare moments that Tambu is happy in the narrative. She thinks, “I cannot recall when I had been happier ... For now I had moved forward and been recognised as a result of my own resources” (p.234). Yet when Dick disappoints her by taking credit for her ideas on the product, Tambu does not confront him over this creative theft and chooses, instead, to resign from a job that she knew she was competent to handle. This inability to articulate the injustice of an act that puts Dick’s name to her work is indicative of her self-negation and self-hatred. This low self-esteem makes her feel that the new nation had “no place for me” (p.246). Psychologically lost and emotionally torn, like Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu at this point epitomises the “wretched of the earth” (Fanon 1967a:182). As the narrative closes, homeless and unemployed, she ponders:

What was I going to do now? ... There was no longer a place for me with my relatives at the mission. I could not go back to the homestead ... where Mai would laugh at me daily ... I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future there was for me, a new Zimbabwean. (p.246)

Lost and alienated, with nowhere to go, her aspirations in life have been completely quashed and with an obscure future ahead of her, she continues to wallow in her state of non-being; her state of “not”. Tambu’s end is a pessimistic one, as she fails to free herself from the inferiority complex she has internalised as a result of the psychological wounding colonialism has meted on her psyche.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Although obviously cynical and subjective in her representation of the post-2000 era in Zimbabwe, Gappah’s short stories provide a challenge to patriotic narratives, such as Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*, as she illustrates the vulnerability of the ordinary people, especially women,

in the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. Her literary text is a satirical exposure of the socio-political and economic “madness” of this contemporary era as the nation limped through a devastating economic meltdown. In my literary analysis, I have shown how Gappah articulates the struggles and resilience of the people in a hyperinflationary environment characterised by severe shortages of basic food commodities and fuel, as well as constant electricity supply cuts. The chapter demonstrates how the latter have to creatively engineer survival strategies in order to navigate these hardships of their external reality in the face of an economic meltdown.

My discussion has also revealed how their creative survival tactics stretch to beyond the country’s borders as these existential challenges have led to migration to the Diaspora by some of the characters. I have shown how in her short stories, Gappah portrays migration as “alienating and transporting some of the economic migrants into the space of demeaning jobs that result in the constitution of disillusioned and displaced identities” (Manase 2014:67). What has also emerged from my analysis in this chapter is the fact the mental illness of some of her characters somehow represents not only the economic anomaly in the country, but also the political tensions and social malaise in existence during this era.

Moreover, this chapter has demonstrated that the violent and divisive nature of colonial culture, as reflected through racial segregation, is a theme that underpins the *Book of Not*. I have illustrated how the changing cultural and political context affects Tambu’s sense of identity and used Laing’s theory of the divided self to explain her splintered identity. Significantly, this literary analysis has shown how Dangarembga alludes to the need for her protagonist to re-member her identity, which has been fragmented by her encounter with colonialism’s profound weapons of cultural annihilation - Christianity and education. I have illuminated how Dangarembga uses the “madness” motif as a metaphor for the trauma Tambu experiences as a result of this liaison. It has been evident in this analysis that “[t]rauma is a shattering trope ... that disarticulates memory, identity and meaning” (Kurtz 2014:424).

In this chapter, then, I have shown how Tambu’s indoctrination of white ideology through her exposure to it at the boarding school she attends succeeds in disrupting the type of identity formation hinted at in *Nervous Conditions* that caused her wariness of western beliefs and values. Instead, Tambu proceeds to wholly consume these. *The Book of Not*, therefore,

exemplifies the psychological scarring of the psyche that Fanon emphasises in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967b). It is, therefore, a classic example of “how colonialism is internalised by the colonised, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors” (Sardar 2008: x). This adoption of a white mask psychology leads to a fragmented sense of self that manifests as depression and her life is characterised by despair and nihilism. Through Tambu, Dangarembga points to the need for the process of a decolonisation of the mind for Tambu to move away from her “nervous conditions” and achieve some sort of mental stability. I am optimistic in pre-empting that Dangarembga’s third book in the trilogy of Tambu’s life - tentatively titled *The River Running Dry*<sup>179</sup> - will reveal Tambu’s attainment of this psychological growth and the subsequent negotiated reincarnation of the firm sense of identity she possessed in *Nervous Conditions*. This growth is necessary considering the fact that the distorted identity of an individual ultimately impacts on the identity of the nation at large. Within the changing socio-political and cultural Zimbabwean landscape in the postcolonial era, I would conclude that Dangarembga’s narrative hints at the necessity for a reformulation of identity as the nation charts its way forward, given the hybrid external reality. Like its predecessor and Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*, *The Book of Not* inspires the continued struggle for an African identity in the aftermath of colonialism in order to avoid becoming a “not”.

In the next chapter, I proceed with the feminist discourses of “madness” in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature by examining two of Vera literary texts, namely, *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*. My analysis will show how the female protagonists in these narratives use their bodies as sites of resistance to the oppression they endure within a patriarchal and colonial context. The chapter shows how Vera expresses the “madness” motif through the subversive potential of their female bodies.

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<sup>179</sup> Lily Mabura (2010) suggests that “*River Running Dry*” is Dangarembga’s working title for the third and final novel in the trilogy of Tambu’s life. It has not yet been published to date.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BODIES ON THE FRONTLINE: SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSES OF “MADNESS” IN YVONNE VERA’S *WITHOUT A NAME* AND *BUTTERFLY BURNING*

#### 7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I began an investigation of the feminist discourse of “madness” as revealed in Dangarembga’s and Gappah’s representations of the trope in their literary works. In this chapter, I continue my probing of the female perspective of “madness” by examining Vera’s *Butterfly Burning* and *Without a Name*. In this literary analysis, I also bear in mind Felman’s (1993:16) view on the trauma of sexual difference when she asserts that “every woman’s life contains, explicitly or in implicit ways, the story of a trauma”. Women’s experience of trauma, however, differs as it is dependent upon various factors such as their location, race, class, age, and sexuality<sup>180</sup>. As Kristine Klement (2010) expounds, within patriarchal discourse, women’s trauma is so readily viewed as “madness”, a point I elaborate on below as I explore how in Vera’s texts, female “madness” manifests itself as violence, hysteria and abjection. It is no wonder, then, that Jane Marcus (1986:1) poses these interesting questions: “Is madness a condition of gender? Does woman’s very otherness constitute a case of madness”? Or is it, as Clara Escoda Agustí (2005:30) asserts in her attempt at deconstructing “madness”, that the mechanism of labelling a woman mad “mirrors and radicalises the liminal position that the black female already occupies in patriarchy’s dichotomous systems of discourse”?

Liz Gunner and Neil Kortenaar (2007) liken Vera’s writing to that in Marechera’s literary texts in its focus on “madness” that is in itself a violent repercussion of violence. My exploration of “madness” as violence in Vera’s fiction highlights this perspective to some degree. I, however, align my literary analysis more closely to Margaret Chipara and Gibson Ncube’s (2012:7) contention that the “madness” in Vera’s texts “present a liminal space through which there is a destabilising and blurring of boundaries between what is and what could be”. My analysis of Vera’s literary texts is, therefore, greatly influenced by Thomas Sasz’ (2006:12) conception of “madness” as:

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<sup>180</sup> These markers of difference intersect in complex and shifting ways.

... a potpourri of emotions and behaviours, expressed verbally or more often non-verbally, composed of a variety of ingredients any of which may be dominant in any one case. The ingredients are anger, aggression, fear, frustration, confusion, exhaustion, isolation, conceit (megalomania, narcissism, self-dramatisation) cowardliness, and difficulty getting on with others.

It is pertinent at this point to emphasise that all societies possess what Judith Butler (1990a) describes as performative accounts of gendered subjectivity<sup>181</sup>. Like Butler, Kathleen Lennon (2010, paragraph 28) argues that “[f]emininity and masculinity become, broadly, bodily styles which our bodies incorporate to yield a gendered subjectivity”. She believes that gendered performances are, therefore, acted out based on the different social scripts assigned to males and females (Lennon 2010, paragraph 28). These characterisations reiterate male dominance and treat women as social outsiders, the abject<sup>182</sup>. Agustí (2005) contends that the intensity of the experience of such oppression can culminate in “madness” or female violence. Similarly, I highlighted in the introductory chapter to this study how this repression that women suffer under a colonial and patriarchal symbolic order may alienate them from their expected gendered roles<sup>183</sup>. This transgression from the norm is sometimes considered “madness” in their society<sup>184</sup>. In the same vein, Buchi Emecheta (1980:1) contends that transgression is seen as “not only exceeding boundaries or limits ... but as resistance, protest and escape - mostly those who transgress societal norms are subsequently labelled as mad, bad and abject”. She goes on to explain the duality of transgression as both liberating and having severe negative consequences. In this chapter, therefore, I reveal Vera’s correlation of women’s identity and “madness” in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning* as her female protagonists transgress gendered norms.

In both literary texts, Vera depicts “madness” as a form of hysteria. Hélène Cixous argues that hysteria is in itself a form of subversion of the logic of patriarchy and describes it as “the

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<sup>181</sup> As Judith Butler (1990a: 42) argues in *Gender Trouble*, gender is “an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*”. [emphasis in the original]

<sup>182</sup> Unlike Kristeva, who perceives the abject to be “a bodily response anchoring the formation of the psyche” (Lennon 2010 paragraph 29), Butler believes the abject to be a “category of exclusion created by discursive norms” (Lennon 2010 paragraph 29).

<sup>183</sup> According to Kathleen Lennon (2010, paragraph 13), the symbolic is “a public system of meaning and language, what, for Lacan, allows us to become subjects; for it assigns us our social positionality and tells us what is proper for male and female bodies”.

<sup>184</sup> In this chapter, transgression is being used to question the repressive perception of space and sexuality. As cultural theorist Tim Creswell (1996:9) explains, in “normative geographies”, which define our roles and space in society, transgression is used to “delineate our construction of otherness” and challenge the symbolic order.

nuclear example of women's power to protest" (Cixous and Clement 1986:154). In seeming acknowledgment of this contention, Patchay (2003:147-148) argues that:

... rather than seeing hysteria as anterior to the symbolic order, women's desires and the pain of its 'disarticulation' should be seen as threatening the (masculine) symbolic order ... since women's subjectivities begin with the body,<sup>185</sup> a body which is inscribed by patriarchal discursive practice, it is significant that this body rebel against the practices that define and constrain it.

In this chapter, therefore, I explore the feminist discourse of "madness", the hysteria in Vera's texts as reflected in the subversive bodily acts of her female protagonists in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*. This discourse embraces the question of the gendered oppression women experience within a peculiarly Zimbabwean postcolonial context. In analysing Vera's representations of the trope, I use a feminist lens that is grounded in psychoanalysis. I consider such a gaze necessary because one of the concerns of psychoanalytic feminism is the relationship between feminist literary criticism and the discourse of "madness". Alongside Kristeva's theory of the abject,<sup>186</sup> I use it here particularly to examine the coupling of women's "madness" and subversion in the fight for identity in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*. This symbiotic relationship is expressed in and through the female body, which is used as a subversive text against phallogocentric repression. It is a union that raises the question of power and presents the black women of colonial Rhodesia with a way of "speaking" against the gendered oppression they suffer within a racially prejudiced and patriarchal society whose machineries work to relegate them to a position of the "other". It is my contention here that the various female characters in Vera's literary texts use their bodies as sites of resistance in a battle against this relegation as they seek self-definition in a society that mainly values women for their sexuality<sup>187</sup>. I argue that

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<sup>185</sup> Such an association between women and the body is problematic as it implies that a woman's gendered cultural identity is attached to her sexed body. Butler (1990b) argues that the genesis of gender - whether feminine or masculine - is reinscribed and consolidated through time and is not necessarily tied to the materiality of the body. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler (1993:3) goes further to challenge "the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" which does not leave room for marginalised identities (such as transgender, lesbian and gay identities).

<sup>186</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter One, Kristeva's notion of the abject is described as the operation of the human psyche that is fundamentally related to the constitution of subjectivity.

<sup>187</sup> In "Body, Sexuality and Gender", Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski (2005) point out the relationship between the three terms. They believe that they are "closely related to each other, each term questioning the other: bodies and sexuality that are transgressing concepts of gender, gender that is probing body and sexuality (Veit-Wild and Naguschewski 2005:29). They further emphasise that in an African context, the three concepts

Vera's novels show how, through their bodies, her protagonists attempt to recreate their identities as black women and upset the phallogocentric grounding of their ontological corporeality. Their "madness" then, is depicted as some sort of agency<sup>188</sup> as they "take active, often very courageous steps to improve their lives" (Murray 2011:141). This transgression is manifest in both the content and form of the literary texts, the latter which I expound on next.

## 7.2 The Experimental Nature of Vera's Writing Style

Like hands, Vera's words knead through the knots of a worn and aged back, untying the preconceptions in the spine of another man's past.

Like hands, Vera's words reach and stroke the tender spots - uninvited - where we are rarely touched, where it hurts; we find nerves anew.

Like hands, Vera's words give but also take: and we are forced to give as well ... The words, like hands, will find you. (Rachel Malis 2005)

Malis' poem, I believe, succinctly sums up how Vera writes "near the bone" (Vera 2003:70) in both of the literary narratives under scrutiny here to portray intimately the experiences of her female protagonists within a postcolonial and patriarchal African context. In these narratives, the reader is drawn into the texts to bear witness to the trauma and "madness" that Mazvita (*Without a Name*) and Phephelaphi (*Butterfly Burning*) endure as a consequence of the oppression they suffer within their societies.

Vera is an acclaimed writer and one of the most prominent black female authors to have emerged out of Zimbabwe's literary arena. She has a writing style that makes it difficult to classify her as any particular kind of writer because of the ambiguity and experimental nature of her work<sup>189</sup>. In *Without a Name*, for example, her narrative techniques reflect some of the characteristics of the mad writing that I outlined in Chapter Two, namely, fragmentation, chaos and silence. I argue that the non-linearity of the novel's form transgresses conventional writing techniques. It seems that the narrative is orchestrated out of the mental anguish that the main female protagonist, Mazvita, goes through - it begins at the end of the plot and is told through a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards between the past and the present. This

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form a particularly contested space, because the power relations that impact on body and sexuality extend beyond gender alone to include race, ethnicity and the colonial legacy (Veit-Wild and Naguschewski 2005:29).

<sup>188</sup> Sen (1985:203) defines agency as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important". Butler (1992) posits that agency is about confronting the power discourse that is external to the subject. This implies that agency is all about freedom and empowerment, both of which Vera's protagonists struggle for in the literary texts under study.

<sup>189</sup> See, for example, Hunter (2000), Attree (2002), Kostelac (2006), and Hart (2009).

seemingly illogical sequencing of events is in apparent reaction to the disorientation, confusion and pain that Mazvita experiences as she attempts to reconcile herself physically and emotionally with the heavy, secret burden she carries on her back - the child that she has murdered<sup>190</sup>. In her exploration of this distortion of form, Carolyn Hart likens Vera's writing to that of Marechera. She notes how the latter's "explanation for non-linear narratives lacking closure acknowledges aesthetics indigenous to African cultures and resistance to colonial imports" (Hart 2009:14). As *Without a Name* is, undeniably, about resistance, its form is indeed a reflection of the content it carries.

As mentioned above, Vera succeeds in skilfully drawing the reader into the plot through "rhythm and repetition, by sensuous detail and emotional appeal rather than by a linear drive forward in character development" (Gunner and Kortenaar 2007:3). This use of recurring imagery and rhythmic repetition of phrases is characteristic of postmodernist writing. It is particularly evident as she describes her protagonists' "mad" acts<sup>191</sup>. Vera's choice of language is obviously designed to appeal to the reader's sense of sound. This deliberate use of sound functions to represent the mental and emotional states of her characters. In *Without a Name* Vera uses song in many instances in the novel. Not only is it used to emphasise the sense of fragmentation Mazvita feels, but also to reveal the healing power of *mbira*, as I elaborate below. Hunter (2000:235) points out that Vera's "repeated metaphors and insistent, short phrases lend an incantatory, near ritualistic effect". In *Butterfly Burning*, a good example of this is when Vera depicts how the black men make use of song as they cut grass along Makokoba's<sup>192</sup> roadsides as a form of resistance. There is a rhythmic movement to the men's labour as "[t]he men cut and pull. Cut and pull. They bend cut and pull. It is necessary to sing" (*BB*, p.2). It is a rhythm associated with *kwela* music. As Lizzie Attree (2002:67)

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<sup>190</sup>It is pertinent to note at this point that maternal infanticide in literature should always be considered in relation to the cultural background in which the act occurs as well as the experience of the woman involved who has committed the act (Harvey 2007: 4). As Brandy Andrew Harvey asserts (2007:3) "it is only through the story of the mother who commits infanticide that one can read the event and its relation to the larger cultural moment. Considering the act independent of both ultimately results in a labelling of the woman as evil or insane (Harvey 2007). In an analysis of Yvette Christiansë's South African representation on infanticide in *Unconfessed*, for example, Murray (2008b: 37) describes how the female character, Sila is labelled as "mad" by some of the characters in the novel after she kills her nine-year old son in order to protect him from enduring "the psychological and physical pain and degradation" that mark the life of a slave. Their stance obviously is a reflection of how "society in general saw the killing of a child as the ultimate perversion of a woman's mothering instinct" (Murray 2008b:36). Rich (1995) argues that there must be a distinction between maternal infanticide born from such social injustice and infanticide as a deliberate social policy.

<sup>191</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Vera's non-linear narratives as well as her use of images and repetition see Hart's (2009) "In Search of African literary Aesthetics".

<sup>192</sup> Makokoba is a township in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city.

argues, “[t]he sound and rhythm of *kwela* resists suppression amidst harsh brutality”<sup>193</sup>. Helen Mugambi (2005) argues that such saturation of the text with song and music signifies the “seizure” of the coloniser’s language and its relocation so that it becomes the idiom of the colonised. She further explains that such saturation creates “an enabling environment in which other language experiments can be tested” (Mugambi 2005:247).

Apparent as well in her fiction is Vera’s unconventional use of sentence structure. In *Butterfly Burning*, as Phephelaphi self-aborts, there is the use of one word sentences like, for example, “Is. Is. Is. The soil just is. It does not move, no kindness to it. It is a violent quiet” (*BB*, p.105). In addition, this excerpt reveals Vera’s rhythmic use of language, mentioned above, as well as the poetic nature of her prose that is evident in most of her literature. In *Without a Name*, for example, Vera repetitively writes “It is yesterday” (p.101; p.102) in an effort to convey the confusion in Mazvita’s mind as she merges the past with the present. This disorientation is a consequence of the mental pain and fragmentation she experiences.

### 7.3 “Madness” and the City in *Without a Name*

*Without a Name* is set in 1977, a year in which the liberation war in the then Rhodesia was at its peak, particularly in the rural areas. Vera uses the journey motif to signify Mazvita’s psychological quest for freedom as she moves away from rural Mubaira and the trauma of her rape to Harari<sup>194</sup>. Like many other black people, she seeks the liberating promises of the urban location<sup>195</sup>. Vera, however, depicts the social “madness” of the city through Mazvita’s experience in it, and through the relationships she has with the people that she meets there. For Mazvita, the city seems the best location to satisfy her yearning for “a future in which she would look back and feel fulfilled” ( p.54).

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<sup>193</sup> Similarly, Corwin Mhlahlo (2012) considers *kwela* music to be one of the ways in which some blacks reveal awareness of their oppression and resistance to it. This struggle is encapsulated in the very name “kwela”, which originates from Ndebele noun “*i-kwelo*, which denotes a shrill, whistling sound that encourages confrontation (Attree 2002). For a more detailed exploration of the significance of *kwela* music, see Attree’s (2002) “Language, Kwela Music and modernity in *Butterfly Burning*”.

<sup>194</sup> In *Without a Name*, the capital city is spelled as “Harari”, which was the name of the first high density residential area (formerly called townships) designated for blacks under the colonial regime, the period Vera writes about. The name itself was a corruption of the Shona word “*haarari*”, which means one who does not sleep. This suburb represented the entry point for blacks coming into the city from the rural areas. Significantly, after independence, the capital city (Harare) derived its name from this suburb.

<sup>195</sup> The idea of the city as liberating is a problematic one for women because like all spaces within a patriarchal society, it is profoundly gendered. Diana Jeater (2000:36) provides a detailed analysis of how, early in the twentieth century, both white and black women “did not have a ‘place in town in which their identity could be asserted”. She goes on to explain how, in the 1940s, black men claimed the urban spaces as “male space” and as such was considered “no place” for women (Jeater 2000:31). This did not mean that there were no black women living in the towns, but simply that it was generally considered that they did not belong to its environment (Jeater 2000).

Before she leaves for Harari, she tries to convince Nyenyedzi, the lover she meets after the rape, to go with her. Their interactions are represented as gentle and caring. This intimacy and tenderness in their love is symbolised in his renaming<sup>196</sup> her “*Howa*”<sup>197</sup>, a very delicate and succulent edible fungi. She does not tell him about the rape, about how she associates the land with it and therefore cannot feel any loyalty to it. Nyenyedzi, however, will not leave his rural land for what he believes is a “strange unwelcoming place” (p.24). He considers Harari a place of chaotic “madness” where “[y]ou cannot even trust your own shadow”<sup>198</sup> in a place like that. Some people have robbed and killed their own parents in that place” (ibid). He is convinced that life in the city would only succeed in burying them. In seeming agreement with him, through Mazvita’s wild wanderings through the streets of Harari, Vera depicts the social “madness” prevalent in the city which showers false promises in its inhabitants of “an easy wealth ... an easy love, an easy life, an easy death. *Nyore Nyore*”<sup>199</sup> (p.15). It is a city full of chaos, a place with a “wild and stultifying indifference” (p.16), one in which, for the black people, “[i]t was necessary to be poor” (p.16). Mazvita is, however, determined to go there. This determination is fuelled not only by her desire to seek her own individual freedom there, but also to free her mind from the trauma of her rape by the guerrilla fighter and watching her village being burnt to the ground and her people being consumed by the flames. So she leaves the stable and loving relationship with Nyenyedzi and opts instead for a life in this new and unknown location.

When she first arrives in the city, she feels “a rare freedom, eagerly anticipated” (p.46). Her ambitious mind grasps its illusive promises. She believes that a life in the city would allow her to “influence and change definitions of her own reality, adjust boundaries to her vision and banish limits to her progress” (p.34). She is determined to find a job that is not an extension of her role as nurturer: “She had not come to the city simply to nurse the children of strangers. She would look for another kind of employment” (p.58).

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<sup>196</sup> Although apparently done with affection, the fact that Nyenyedzi renames Mazvita is indicative of his assertion of authority and control over her by virtue of his maleness. The specific power dynamics of this renaming cannot, therefore, be ignored as this no doubt sets the parameters of the relationship between them.

<sup>197</sup> *Howa* is a Shona word meaning mushroom.

<sup>198</sup> Here, Vera suggests that the shadow, which is an extension of the body, betrays it. Betrayal is a recurring theme in Vera’s works.

<sup>199</sup> *Nyore* is a Shona word which literally means “easy”. In Zimbabwe, *Nyore Nyore* is the name of a well-known credit store with easy terms for the purchase of mainly clothes and furniture. Here, Vera’s use of the term seems to emphasise how easy it is for black people used to rural life to be swayed by the elusive promises of the city.

Ironically though, once there, Mazvita hates the city in which she had hoped to find freedom. It turns out to be a place that houses “the cries of abandoned dreams, of apparitions of laughter fuelled with desperation, of voices pained” (pp.18-19). Like Nyenyedzi warned, Harari is a place of chaos and lost identity, which hides its old, in which both men and women wear trousers (p.46) and where slavery is married to freedom (p.47). It is a place where “[s]kins fell to the ground” (p.27), where people encountered “the skinning of their faces ... The unusual ritual of their disinheritance” (ibid) and where “the ancestors knew them not” (ibid). In Chapter Three, I outlined how, in traditional Shona culture, calamities are bound to strike if the ancestral spirits turn their backs on the living. The man she meets on the bus that takes her back to Mubaira tells Mazvita how corrupt the city is, and suggests that it is a place where “[a] woman can lose her head”<sup>200</sup> (p.52) and where under every rock lurks a scorpion beneath it.

While in the city, she has a strange relationship with Joel, which reveals her unconventional approach to her association with the opposite sex. Their relationship begins with “no discussion, no agreement, no proposal” (p.50). They proceed to simply live together without the necessary traditional rituals that Nyenyedzi was so insistent on. There is no love lost between them, both using each other for their own ends. For Mazvita, “Joel made Harari accessible” (p.57). As mentioned above, the city is a gendered space and Joel serves as an instrument for her “freedom” in it. He offers her a respite while she looks for a job and for Joel, Mazvita is someone to take care of him and his household. This is ironic as it belies her attempt to resist a stereotypical feminine role by not wanting to be a babysitter. Much as she enjoys the non-committal relationship with Joel, the loveless sex between them stirs the memory of her rape, which she had attempted to wrap in silence. One night, as she lies beneath him, she remembers her trauma and “heard herself cry” (p.66), a cry that “expanded into the hollow spaces within her, into the silence she had conceived for herself, into the past of her memory” (ibid). What Mazvita did not understand was that “the cry had defeated the silence in her body, that the cry was a release dangerous and regrettable” (p.61). She did not understand that the hollowness that she feels can only be filled when she acknowledges her trauma; that she can only begin to heal when she goes back to the scene where the rape was committed, as I highlight in Section 7.5 below.

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<sup>200</sup> This statement points to the stereotypical belief in the psychological and emotional frailty of women. The gendered assumptions here suggest that women cannot possibly cope with the demands and challenges of life in the city, implying therefore, that the city is no place for a woman.

#### 7.4 Transgressive Female Sexuality and the Colonial Township of *Butterfly Burning*

Vera is one of the many African women writers, who include, for example, Calixthe Beyala (Cameroon), Pauline Chiziane (Mozambique) and Ken Bugul (Senegal) who intricately explore female sexuality in their fiction. Margaret Chipara and Gibson Ncube (2012:1) articulate that these women writers:

... problematise female sexuality and create an ontological episteme, through the deployment of literary tropes that use “madness”, which not only destabilises post-colonial patriarchal power hierarchies but also allows the female protagonists to navigate the “nervous condition” that is the lot of women in Africa.

One of Vera’s main concerns is with this repression of the female individual. Yet she further reveals how the city allows women to explore and use their sexuality, as this literary analysis shows. As opposed to the rural setting, it is mainly in the city that black women begin to question this “nervous condition”. They see the city as a site for possible emancipation, a place in which to “reclaim and express subjectivity” (Nuttal 2005:186). This was evidently the case with Mazvita in *Without a Name*, as my discussion above demonstrates.

Vera’s plot, however, is not restricted to the exploration of female “madness”. She additionally reveals the “madness” of the “irrational oppression of racial segregation that permeates every aspect of living” (Berndt 2008:10) for the black people in the cities of colonial Rhodesia. It is a scenario in which they have little or no control over their lives. Those who cut grass along the roadsides, for example, endure a life in which “[t]he work is not their own and it is summoned. The time is not theirs: it is seized. The ordeal is their own” (pp.2-3). They are marginalised, dehumanised and not much freer than the blacks in the rural areas as they “live within the cracks. Unnoticed and unnoticeable” (p.3). Life within it forces them to “slide past walls, to walk without making the shadow more pronounced than the body or the body clearer than the shadow<sup>201</sup>. It means leaning against some masking reality - they lean on walls, on lies, on music” (pp.3-4). This is because black people are banned from walking on the pavements in a city they work in and are only accepted within its location as

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<sup>201</sup>Murray (2008a: 14) states that “[t]he shadow provides evidence of the presence of an object, but it is not itself a physically present object. The shadow can only occupy the space from which the object to which it refers is absent” I argue, therefore, that Vera’s repeated reference to the shadow in the text is significant as it a metaphor for the black man’s repressed identity in the city where they are denied subjectivity and rendered invisible.

house servants and workers. Vera prompts the reader to identify the “madness” in, for example, the fact that Fumbatha, Phephelaphi’s lover, who has been responsible for building a great part of the city cannot freely walk through it.

Despite these restrictions found in the city, Katrin Berndt (2008) states that the new “freedom” that the urban location offers to black women and the limitations that come along with these new possibilities are pertinent aspects of Vera’s narrative. In the same vein, Robert Muponde (2005) argues that here, the black woman is able to discover new ways of defining her selfhood in relation to others. He stresses that “[f]or the woman in the city, this process involves re-reading and re-authoring the body for self, away from the standard constructions of male control, a regime whose destruction the city aids” (Muponde 2005:25). This is apparent in Vera’s portrayal of her main character, Phephelaphi<sup>202</sup>.

When Vera first introduces Phephelaphi to the reader and to Fumbatha, she is rising out of the Umgazi River, a seeming part of it. Geographically, the river is a liminal space as it flows in-between divided solid ground and yet belongs to neither side. Irene Gisenan Nordin and Elin Holmsten (2009:7) define the liminal as “a transitional place of becoming, a state of flux between two different states of being”. They posit that the concept of liminality is concerned with “borders and states of in-betweeness” (Nordin and Holmsten 2009:7). It is, therefore, characterised as a rites of passage involving the transformation of an individual. This liminality is to become a metaphor of Phephelaphi’s existence, as my literary analysis illustrates. Vera depicts her protagonist as bold, confident and courageous. Fumbatha describes her as “a being entirely from the water” (p.23). Krzysztof Fordoński (1999:3) states that in more defined state, water is used to symbolise female sexuality. He proceeds to describe water as “a symbol of change, fluidity and variability” (Fordoński 1999:3). In a similar vein, Phyllis Ann Thompson (2005) suggests that the rivers often cannot be contained by their banks and daily rechart their course. With this symbolism in mind, I argue that from the onset, Vera represents Phephelaphi as a woman destined to resist constriction of her sexuality and her selfhood. This depiction of overflowing boundaries as something to be celebrated rather than feared and shamed provides an obvious challenge to dominant

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<sup>202</sup> Lizzy Attree (2002:66) gives a detailed analysis of the multiple connotations associated with Phephelaphi’s name, most significant of which are “take refuge in, escape to”, “blow at, blow of wind”, “fly” and “storm”.

discourses about female sexuality<sup>203</sup>. Fumbatha acknowledges not only her feminine attractiveness, but also the fact that Phephelaphi is obviously a strong person: “Her beauty was more than this, not expressed in her appearance alone but in the strength that shone beneath each word, each motion of her body” (p.21). She possesses a “shimmering presence” (p.23) which destabilises his world. This is because whereas “Phephelaphi represents fluidity and movement ... Fumbatha stands for stasis and stagnation” (Lunga 2002:193)<sup>204</sup>.

Under this male gaze, his first thought is to possess her, to claim her as his own: “Fumbatha had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet from which birth had severed him”<sup>205</sup> (ibid). Yet Phephelaphi is a woman who is not satisfied with simply being some man’s possession. She is determined to find herself, to be someone more than just “for loving” (p.68) by a man. Phephelaphi asks a pertinent question: “How did a woman claim a piece of time and make it glitter” (p.70)? She is determined to “find what she could here, from within her own land, from her body”, acknowledging that the search for her own identity, other than being Fumbatha’s kept woman, begins with her body. Her appreciation is such that “[s]he wanted a sense of belonging before that kind of belonging that rested on another’s wondrous claim, being herself because she was a flower blooming in her own green pool, to be able to pick the flower which she was herself” (p.81). Berndt (2008:195) describes this excerpt as “probably a woman’s most unique and passionate celebration of her body in contemporary Anglophone Zimbabwean literature”.

Phephelaphi’s ambitious and independent mind is in sync with her body. Hers is a quest to experience a life beyond the borders of poverty and drudgery, beyond the “[o]ne room. Four corners” (p.77) that she shares with Fumbatha. Despite him holding her tight, holding her

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<sup>203</sup> What immediately comes to mind here is Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994: 202) argument on how women’s “corporeal flows”, such as menstrual blood and breast milk, pose a threat to the social symbolic order. By overflowing its boundaries, the leaking female bodies - what Grosz (1994: 203) interestingly terms “modes of seepage” - become sites of shame. Grosz (1994: 205) further contends that “menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and the wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks, uncontrollable, indicates the beginning of an out-of-control status”.

<sup>204</sup> I acknowledge that Violet Lunga offers a very binarised understanding of feminine and masculine attributes. What is important in her assertion, though, is the emphasis on Phephelaphi’s mutability.

<sup>205</sup> Here, Fumbatha construes the land, like Phephelaphi, as something to be possessed. In literature, the land-as-woman symbolism depicts the land either as a “nurturing, giving maternal breast” (Kolodny 1975:9) that provides sustenance, as signified in the Mother Africa trope, or as virginal, waiting to be conquered. Metaphorically, then, the land is conceived as being female. This equation of women and the land is indicative of men’s desire to control and exploit both. Ecofeminists believe that men dominate both women and the land using the same logic for doing so. See, for example, Biehl (1991), Mies and Vandana (1993) and Warren (1997).

closely, Phephelaphi yearns for “that fraction of time that would belong to her” (p.70), a very ambitious longing considering that the 1940s in colonial Rhodesia was not ready to accommodate black women like her who desired a life that transgressed the domestic sphere.

Vera’s description of Phephelaphi confirms that she is evidently a woman who is very comfortable with her body and her sexuality. Murray (2009c:14) asserts that she is very much aware “of the extent to which every aspect of her being is shaped by the fact that she is a woman”. This self-awareness is intensified through the relationship she shares with Deliwe, the shebeen<sup>206</sup> queen, who sells illicit brew. It is Deliwe’s nonconformist lifestyle that makes Phephelaphi gravitate towards her. She is attracted to and admires Deliwe’s powerful identity as she reigns over her shebeen and its occupants. Deliwe is presented as perceptibly very self-determined. Phephelaphi follows her “like a starved animal. She thinks of Deliwe as “some kind of sun and herself some kind of horizon” (p.54). In Deliwe, this unconventional woman, Phephelaphi sees part of the woman she would want to be - independent and defiant. Deliwe’s rebelliousness is evident not only in the fact that she sells illicit liquor but also in her use of her body to express resistance. She sleeps without any clothes on, an act Corwin Mhlahlo (2012:11) describes as a “nocturnal nude confrontation of the policemen that raid her in the middle of the night”. Ironically here, the female body, normally regarded as an object that should be shielded from view, for her becomes a disarming weapon. Vera writes of how Deliwe “always went to bed as naked as the day she was born ... She liked to see the expression in the policemen’s eyes then took her time dressing while the policemen shouted and called her a miserable wicked woman” (p.52). Her nudity, thus, becomes an act of resistance and protest against the black policemen’s nightly invasions of her shebeen. Mhlahlo (2012:11) further elaborates how Deliwe “makes a personal and politically conscious choice to stand up to the new settler system and rebel against its laws and black minions. She, however, does not stop at lawlessness but adds nudity to her arsenal”. Unfortunately, however, these nude protests often result in brutal beatings and detentions (Mhlahlo 2012). The hatred with which Deliwe regards these policemen is such that she feels that they were “not only capable of eating their own vomit but slicing open the stomachs of their own mothers (p.50). So she constantly resists and belittles their authority.

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<sup>206</sup> A shebeen is an illegal drinking place located in the township.

Another female character who uses her sexuality as a weapon of resistance is Zandile, who “deploys sex to wield power and revenge on the institution of colonialism” (Mhahlo 2012:11). Like the other female protagonists in the literary text, she uses her body as an instrument of resistance to exercise power over her colonial masters and her black male counterparts, making “no distinction between white men and black men when it comes to pleasure and exchange” (p.33). She, however, makes her white clientele pay for her sexual services, yet her black men get them “at no charge. She risks only the serenity of her own mind” (p.34), this unsettling being the price she instead pays. Vera portrays her as a prostitute who casually steals cigars from her white lover simply to throw them away, to express her disdain of him. Yet she entangles herself in the black men’s lived experience under colonialism. As she sleeps with them, she examines their wounds of oppression and she bears witness to their bloodied backs and blistered ankles, to their “wrists embroidered with the shame of constant struggle” (ibid). It is, however, the “frenzied city love” (p.35) that she shares with Boyidi that inspires her to move away from the “madness” of prostitution as he “holds her mind together” (ibid) and turns this “lunacy to good fortune” (ibid). I describe prostitution as “madness” here because women who engage in it are considered to be involved in sexual relations that transgress the culturally sanctioned social norms. This is why in different societies prostitutes have invariably been labelled as “loose women”. Prostitution has proved to be a problematic issue for feminists, who have reflected conflicting views on it. Some radical feminists (Shrage 1989; Barry 1995; Pheterson 1996), for example, argue that prostitution perpetuates patriarchal hegemony as it reduces women to mere sexual objects. In contrast, existential feminists (de Beauvoir 1949; Pateman 1994; and Lucas 2005) contend that prostitution actually empowers women as it allows them to be in control and escape dependency on men. This suggests that prostitutes enjoy both sexual and financial autonomy. I agree with Carol Pateman’s (1994:191) argument that when having sexual relations with a prostitute, “[t]he man may think he ‘has’ her, but his sexual possession is an illusion; it is she who has him ... She will not be ‘taken’ since she is being paid”. Pateman (1994:191), therefore, considers the prostitute to be a “quintessential liberated woman”. Her sexuality is used as a weapon for economic gain.

The *kwela*<sup>207</sup> music Phephelaphi hears in Deliwe’s shebeen is instrumental in developing within her a passion for her body even greater than Fumbatha’s love of her physical beauty.

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<sup>207</sup> Attree (2002:72) states that “[t]he Xhosa and Zulu *khwela*, meaning “climb on”, also has sexual connotations and *kwela* is part of the expression of the sexual freedom of the 1940s”.

She is continually drawn to the shebeen because of it. This is because *kwela* music enacts “a defiance of definition, a refusal to be pinned down” (Attree 2002: 73). Sofia Kostelac (2006) posits that *kwela* offers one of the few modes of resistance that could be engaged in without resulting in violence. Through it, repressed desires are released and tentative dreams inspired. Similarly, Nwakanma (2013) reiterates that the subaltern is able to speak through *kwela* music. In *Butterfly Burning*, Vera describes *kwela* as “a searing musical moment, swinging in and away, loud and small, lively, living ... This word alone has been fully adapted to do marvelous things, It can carry so much more than a word should be asked to carry: rejection, distaste, surrender, envy and full desire” (p.3). More importantly, just like for many other black people in Makokoba, Phephelaphi’s fascination with *kwela* music is premised on an existential perception of freedom in which *kwela* expresses an alternative autonomy (Mhlahlo 2012). This is true, too, of the *kwela* dance that they engage in, and which she encounters in the shebeen. The dance “enables a momentary transcendence of the physical and psychological restrictions of the colonial space” (Kostelac 2006: 55). It counteracts the psycho-existential effects of colonial oppression and marginalisation the black people suffer as they live within Bulawayo’s cracks. It is listening to *kwela* music that allows Phephelaphi to imagine an existence that transgresses the one she is confined to. As Violet Lunga (2002:196) points out:

It is through music that Phephelaphi is able to cross the inner boundaries and spaces imposed by culture and time. It is after listening to music that Phephelaphi’s dreams to become a nurse becomes clearer. And thus she begins to feel and question the limits that her relationship with Fumbatha imposes.

This dream of becoming one of the first black nurses in Makokoba is, however, shattered when she falls pregnant and she is full of “anger and anxiety” (p.92). Her pregnancy brings discord to the harmony between her mind and her body as it threatens to cripple her professional goal. Her mind, therefore, rejects the child that she carries in her womb and she decides to self-abort. The self-abortion that she performs signifies a transgression of the border between the inside and outside of her body. I contend that this crossing symbolises the disintegration of the symbolic order as it represents a rejection of motherhood, which I discuss in greater detail in section 7.5 below.

## 7.5 “Madness”, Motherhood and Abjection: An Unholy Trinity?

In *Politics of the Female Body*, Ketu Katrak (2006:3) significantly points out that “[d]espite tragic and negative conclusions – madness, death, suicide ... in women’s texts it is important to recognise the strategic use of those same female bodies, often the only available avenue for resistance”. Recognising this, I contend that Vera’s black female subaltern in her literary texts uses her body as a weapon in the fight against gendered colonial and patriarchal oppression. This battle occurs within a system that expects her to remain silent, denies her subjectivity and renders her invisible (Ussher 2003). Through the “mad acts” that I explore in detail in the next section, Vera’s female protagonists “speak” through their bodies to subvert gendered inscriptions imbued in the phallogocentric discourse of the postcolonial African context. In *Without a Name*, Mazvita commits infanticide and in *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi aborts and commits suicide<sup>208</sup>.

Marie Denise Shelton (2004: 351) contends that when a woman’s sense of self is compromised in this way, she can resort to such aberrant acts in a bid to escape the “existential disease of belonging nowhere, of being deprived of identity”. Both of Vera’s literary texts poignantly illustrate that in such a contested space, these acts are clear indications of a “madness” that reveals the subversive potential of abjection. Here, I perceive abjection as a form of “madness” as it signifies a destabilising of boundaries entrenched within the symbolic order<sup>209</sup>. As I mentioned in the Introduction to this study, Julia Kristeva (1982) defines abjection as that which disturbs identity, order and does not respect borders or rules. Similarly, in *Sexual Subversions* Elizabeth Grosz (1994) postulates that abjection embraces a subject’s desire to transgress his/her ontological corporeality. It is, therefore, a locus from which the female subaltern can challenge their constrictions and proceed to become “a deviser of territories, languages, works” (Kristeva 1982:8). The “madness” of Vera’s protagonists, therefore, articulates itself as abjection as this chapter demonstrates.

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<sup>208</sup> Infanticide is the intentional killing of an infant (Westhuizen 2009:1). Suicide is defined as “the deliberate taking of one’s life. The deliberateness of the intent is essential to defining suicide” (Jaworski 2012:1).

<sup>209</sup> In the same vein, Faulkner (2010:119) contends that “[b]eyond the established order, the abject is both repulsive and attractive: motivating the subject at a subterranean level of affect, because it subsists beyond the grasp of ordered thought. Abjection, thus, also indicates “madness” - the dissolution of order, of identity, and of time and space”.

The implication behind both of Vera's narratives, however, is that there is method to the "madness" in the female characters' mad acts of abortion, suicide and murder of a child, as they subvert the socio-cultural gendered meanings associated with their bodies through them. Significantly too, through the depiction of these transgressive acts in her texts, Vera challenges the valorisation of motherhood in traditional patriarchies so that her protagonists' bodies are removed from a conventional discourse (Namulondo 2010). This rejection of motherhood can be seen as subversive because, as Carole Boyce Davies (1994: 137) argues "the mark of motherhood inscribes the domination of men into women's bodies". From a radical feminist perspective, motherhood is a role "dictated by a social order premised on a division of labour between the producing masculine and reproducing feminine" (Lorraine 1999:83). Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Lucia Valeska (1984) believe that the danger of motherhood lies not only in its restriction of women to the domestic sphere, but also under such prohibitive and inflexible patriarchal law, it entails the negation of female subjectivity and identity (Kostelac 2006). This contention that motherhood negates female identity is, however, problematic when applied to twenty-first century women who are no longer confined to the domestic sphere and now also work outside the home. For these women, motherhood can become part of a new identity and subjectivity. African womanists, therefore, view the concept of "motherism" as an alternative to the notions of women's agency posited by western feminists. Yusuf-Bakare (2003) explains how for these theorists, "motherism" is seen to constitute the symbolic core of a powerful subject position, which contests what they see as the Western feminists' view of women's social disempowerment and symbolic lack. They contend that this paradigm allows for "a shift of focus from man at the centre and in control to the primacy of the role of the mother/sister in the economic, social, political and religious institutions (Amadiume 1997:152). Similarly, within the Zimbabwean context, however, motherhood is perceived as one of the ultimate goals of women (wifehood being the other)<sup>210</sup>. Thus, in such a society that culturally valorises motherhood, as is emphasised in the Nigerian proverb "Mother is Gold" (Murray 2011:151), this narcissism reflects Mazvita and Phephelaphi's determination to achieve agency and subjectivity<sup>211</sup>. Both these female characters endure self-inflicted pain to do so.

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<sup>210</sup> From a feminist perspective, this valorisation of motherhood is problematic because although it is promoted at a discursive level, at a practical one the assumptions and power dynamics at play within the society often work to denigrate and subjugate women and mothers.

<sup>211</sup> Spivak (1987:202) contends that subjectivity materialises when an individual engages in "those elements of social consciousness imperative for agency, namely, deliberative and individuated action.

The valorisation of motherhood is pertinent to this analysis as it explains, to some extent, why a rejection of maternity may be viewed as “madness” in our society and I will, therefore, elaborate on it here. Berndt (2008:197) views motherhood as “a patriarchally idealised condition that is, especially in African societies, still viewed as essential for the completion of a woman’s identity composition”. In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich (1995) delineates motherhood as an institution constructed by patriarchy, but experienced by women. Consequently, most radical feminists<sup>212</sup> who promote “a philosophy of evacuation” (Nnaemeka 1997:5) call for a rejection of motherhood as a starting point to achieving freedom from this patriarchal construct. They regard motherhood as an institutionalised space that is oppressive to women<sup>213</sup>. Some African womanists, on the other hand, regard motherhood as “the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women” (Oyewumi 2001:1096). They believe that motherhood is affirming and argue that it should not be viewed as an oppressive institution but as “an experience (‘mothering’) with its pains and rewards” (Nnaemeka 1997:5). This requires taking into account the humanistic aspect of motherhood. They suggest that it is possible for a woman to be “mother” on her own terms, “while rejecting the abuses (physical, sexual, emotional, etc.) of the institution of motherhood under patriarchy” (Nnaemeka 1997:5)<sup>214</sup>. For African womanists motherhood, then, is considered just one of the many faces of womanhood.

Some of these African womanists (Sudarkasa 1987; Oyewumi, 1997; Nzegwu 2001) further argue that sexual asymmetry is not internal to African societies, and contend that gender was not an organising principle in these societies before the advent of European influence (Yusuf-Bakare 2003). They believe that there was a dual sex system in pre-colonial Africa in which men and women had complementary roles. The premise of these African womanists’ argument is that “women’s sexual and reproductive capacities do not determine their second class status” (Nzegwu 2001:20). For these theorists then, patriarchy is considered as “an imported and imposed concept” (Yusuf-Bakare 2003: 11) and as a result, “the category of ‘woman’ is seen as having no theoretical or existential purchase in African societies” (Yusuf-

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<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Firestone (1970), Simone de Beauvoir (1974) and Kate Millet (1977).

<sup>213</sup> Radical feminists argue that women’s oppression is directly linked to her biology, her femaleness (Firestone 1970).

<sup>214</sup> African women writers, like Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood* 1988), Mariama Bā (*So Long a Letter* 1981), and Flora Nwapa (*Efuru* 1979) criticise some of these abuses of the institution of motherhood in the African context.

Bakare 2003: 11)<sup>215</sup>. Despite this contention, however, what is evident in contemporary African societies like Zimbabwe is that female identity is intricately linked to motherhood, and it is this connection that concerns Vera in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*.

I argue that Vera's female protagonist's desire to "vomit the mother" (Kristeva 1982:47), therefore, seems a necessary narcissistic act as it is a means of establishing a sense of identity. The (m)other has to be expelled from the self for this process to begin. In *Black Sun* Kristeva (1989:27) goes on to contend that this loss of the mother "is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on our way to autonomy". This implicates a disruption of the existing social and symbolic order and its cultural inscriptions of maternity and reflects their determination to achieve agency and subjectivity<sup>216</sup>. As I illustrate in the section that follows, Vera's protagonists use the power they have over their bodies as a disarming weapon. Their mad, violent acts of infanticide, abortion and suicide can be viewed as "a strategy of resistance and choice" (Lawrence 1994:157). Eva Hunter (2000:239) points out that Vera's consistent undermining of the glorification of maternity is characteristic of Western matrophobic writing which purports that motherhood threatens "not only a woman's opportunity to exercise her abilities in a broader field than the domestic, but even her psychic survival". Hunter goes on to suggest that Vera's attack on the institution of motherhood is done so taking into consideration "the abuses of gender politics that continue to oppress women in post-independent Zimbabwe" (Hunter 2000:59). She locates her female characters in phallogentric colonial and patriarchal systems that oppress them, driving them to "madness"<sup>217</sup>. Their fight for self-definition is fought against the backdrop of a larger struggle of the black race against colonial domination, which I highlighted above. I want to argue that through their subversive acts, these women battle to (re)create an identity within the constraints of a space that is contested along racial and gendered lines. Ironically though, these restrictions to their subversion speak to the complexity of agency within oppressive structures.

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<sup>215</sup> This claim has been debated extensively. Shula Marks and Elaine Unterhalter (1978), for example, argue that in even before the onslaught of colonialism female subordination existed in both matrilineal and patrilineal African societies. Belinda Bozzoli (1983:155) also suggests that a "patchwork quilt of patriarchies" in which women were oppressed were evident in pre-colonial African societies and that colonial patriarchy only served to modify or further entrench these systems.

<sup>216</sup> Spivak (1987:202) contends that subjectivity materialises when an individual engages in "those elements of social consciousness imperative for agency, namely, deliberative and individuated action".

<sup>217</sup> In *The Heart of the Country* (1976) J.M. Coetzee similarly explores how the unequal gender relations within a colonial African society drive Magda, his female protagonist, off the edge of sanity. Ayo Kehinde (2006:170) posits that Coetzee's literary text "foregrounds symptoms of madness that emerge as a result of excessive patriarchal suppression".

In both *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Vera explores her protagonists' self-awareness in a manner that juxtaposes Imogen Tyler's (2009:77) contention that feminist theory should "resist the compulsion to abject" and in its place "imagine ways of theorising maternal subjectivity that vigorously contests the dehumanising effects of abjection". Contrary to Tyler's criticism, I contend that in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning* Vera points instead to the "transgressive potentiality" (Covino 2000:1) of Kristeva's theory of abjection<sup>218</sup>. Deborah Covino (2000:1) sums up this transgressive quality within abjection: "the abject woman becomes a subversive trope of female liberation: she speaks an alternative, disruptive language, immersing herself in the significances of the flesh, becoming wilfully monstrous as she defies the symbolic order". What is evident in both of Vera's literary texts is her protagonists' desire "inhabit alternative bodies and spaces" (Covino 2000:30).

Kristeva's theory of the abject, then, is pertinent to my analysis in the next section for two main reasons. Firstly, for its view of how the abject structures subjectivity (Creed 2007), with the maternal as the primary abject and, as a result, the maternal becomes key to the founding of the self. Since the transgressive potential of abjection lies in the fact that it offers the possibility for the reconstruction of identities, I therefore use the abject in this chapter to support Vera's protagonists' rejection of the symbolic order and her overlying themes of female subjectivity and redefinition of self. By virtue of their sex, Mazvita and Phephelaphi embody the abject, yet they challenge the borders that delineate their corporeality. Secondly, the abject in this chapter is important here as an understanding of the concept allows for an illumination of the beauty of the grotesque<sup>219</sup>, especially as I demonstrate how Vera's protagonists become "wilfully monstrous"<sup>220</sup>.

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<sup>218</sup> Winifred Mennighaus (2003: 365) describes Kristeva's theory of the abject as "the newest mutation on the theory of disgust". It is also related to Mary Douglas's study on purity in *Purity and Danger* (1991) in which she discusses the concept of clean and unclean body.

<sup>219</sup> Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and James Muzondidya (2011:3) point out that "[i]n the literary sense, the grotesque is something that creates an uneasy mixture of the strange, gory, ugly, incongruous, unpleasant, baffling, bizarre and weird with the pleasant, fantastic, appealing and captivating, therefore provoking both empathy and bafflement".

<sup>220</sup> It is pertinent to point out here that within patriarchal ideology, the woman has always been thought of as monstrous in relation to her vagina (seen as signifying the castrated other) her reproductive function and menstruation. She occupies a body that is deformed, bulges and leaks. Barbara Creed asserts that within this ideology, the monstrous-feminine is conceptualised as being closely related to sexual difference and castration (2007:1). She states that "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (Creed 2007: 1).

## 7.6 Feminine Rage and Vera's Women Who Kill

The power relations that exist within a colonial and patriarchal African context like Zimbabwe confine the black woman's agency. The knowledge and understanding of this constriction is what offer her "mechanisms for resistance to these constraints and assumptions" (Thompson 2003:13). In *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, Vera portrays her protagonists as women who are determined to transgress the restrictive gendered codes that confine them to the domestic sphere<sup>221</sup>. Mazvita and Phephelaphi are women who search for "symbolic space ... a possibility for experimenting with alternative identities" (Davis 1997:12) as a way in which to engage feminist aesthetics to empower their female bodies. They strive to retrieve their female bodies from being objects of male desire and instead attempt to ground their identities in bodies that are resolute and assertive (Namulondo 2010). I reveal here how Mazvita intentionally kills her progeny in the *Without a Name* and Phephelaphi wilfully endures abortion in *Butterfly Burning* in order to attain this new space and identity. The violence that they resort to traverses the female/male gender binary that associates violence with masculinity and femininity with nurturance, order and stability (O'Neill and Seal 2012). Research has shown how violent women "have been constructed as emblematic of dangerous womanhood" (O'Neill and Seal 2012:47) because they threaten the symbolic order and upset the cultural notions of femininity.

### 7.6.1 Infanticide in *Without a Name*

Katrin Berndt (2008) asserts that *Without a Name* narrates Mazvita's desperate effort to remain physically and mentally whole during the atrocities and calamities of the military and cultural war in colonial Rhodesia. It is during this period that Mazvita is brutally raped by a guerrilla fighter. The rape psychologically destabilises her to the extent that she lacks a coherent, stable identity, symbolised by her loss of the power of speech and control over her body. Catherine MacKinnon (1997:42) categorically states that "[i]n feminist analysis, a rape is not an isolated event or moral transgression or individual exchange gone wrong but an act of terrorism and torture within a systematic context of group subjection".

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<sup>221</sup> As such, I believe that these literary texts can readily be classified as postcolonial feminist novels because, as Obi Nwakanwa (2013: 40) contends, this type of literature enables "the female subject of the novel to speak for herself against the codes of law, convention and culture, and other forms of authority which makes the subject unable to fully symbolically constituted". Even when Mazvita loses the ability to speak, she speaks through her body.

While she is being raped, Mazvita's mind disconnects itself from the trauma her body is experiencing. Daniella Malluche (2009:4) argues that this sort of reaction is "one of the many defences an individual uses under stressful life events". Vera describes this disassociation when she writes how "[h]e tore at her dress, pulled her legs away from her. He removed her legs from her body and she lay still, not recognising her legs as her own"<sup>222</sup> (p.85). During the traumatic event, she endeavours to "close him out, to keep the parts of her body that still belonged to her, to keep them near to herself, recognizable and near" (p.29). Tragically, the rape itself marks the beginning of her mental and emotional disintegration. She fails, at this point, to limit the soldier's violation of her body and he succeeds in claiming "parts of her body ... against all resistance and tears" (ibid).

Mazvita experiences a sense of fragmentation and at this point begins a disassociation of self from the land of her birth. Her disconnectedness from the land is exacerbated by the very fact that the soldier who rapes her had "grown from the land ... The land had allowed the man to grow from itself into her body" (p.31). It has been complicit in her violation. The "menacing quality of the land" (Murray 2011:165), therefore, signifies colonial oppression and this is why Mazvita is unable to relate to it. Immediately following the rape, she is left with a feeling of nothingness, "an emptiness of her body" (p.30), the beginning of an obvious self-negation.

Rino Zhuwarara (2002) states that the violent and arbitrary act of rape proclaims the dominance of the male and renders the female powerless. Many feminists, however, argue that rape is never arbitrary. Barbara Merhof and Pamela Kearon (1971:233), for example, contend that rape is a political act by "a powerful class on members of a powerless class". Likewise, Susan Brownmiller (1975:5) posits that rape is "nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear". In *Under the Tongue*, Vera (1996:31) portrays how Muroyiwa's rape of his daughter steals "the light of the moon and its promise of birth". Similarly, I argue, the soldier's rape of Mazvita robs her of her "light". It is a violation that "denies her what is essential to her, which is her body and herself and her own particular search" (Vera 1998:79-80). As a

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<sup>222</sup> As I expound in Chapter Three, the idea that women are seen as unconnected body parts symbolises sexual objectification. Reducing a woman to body parts suggests that she is not whole, that she lacks subjectivity. This gendered fragmentation of the female body has been explored extensively by feminist scholars. Laura Mulvey (1975), for example, identifies how the male gaze derives pleasure from objectifying and fragmenting the woman's body parts. See also Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Galili Shaha's *Fragments and Wounded Bodies* (2007) and Dawn Szymanski, Lauren Moffitt and Erika Carr's *Sexual Objectification of Women* (2011).

consequence of this, just like Zhizha in *Under the Tongue*, the inside of Mazvita's head "has swallowed darkness" (Vera 1996:135). She sinks into "a hole so deep and dark" (p.86) and no-one can help her to carry the pain she feels.

After the rape, Mazvita desperately tries to transport herself from "the whispering he had spread between her legs" (p.28) by shrouding herself in silence, a silence that is an attempt to cleanse her of her trauma, to remove the memory of it: "She sheltered in the silence. The silence was hers. The silence was a quietness in her body, a deafness to the whispering" (ibid). This silence reinforces her state of liminality. Yet she mistakenly believes that this silence can be a new beginning for her, that she would grow from it. The extent to which Mazvita's mind divorces itself from her body is further emphasised in her refusal to acknowledge her pregnancy: "Mazvita had lost her seasons of motherhood. She did not question this dryness of her body" (p.29).

Even after leaving rural Mubaira and running away to Harari, it becomes evident, as I mentioned above, that Mazvita cannot escape the trauma of the rape, which leaves her in this state of denial of the actual event and its consequences. Her body betrays her quest for freedom in the city when her subsequent pregnancy proves that "[t]he past was more inventive than she was, and laid more claim on what belonged to it. The baby had chosen her, risen above its own frailty in order to hinder her" (p.87). Despite this Mazvita is, however, determined that the child she has given birth to, a possible progeny of this rape, should not deny her the "new angle to her reality" (p.8) that she desires. So she kills her baby while consumed by a "madness that made her press her palm down again, over the baby's eyes" (p.93). She rejects the baby because "it pulled her back from her design to be free" (p.64). Vera describes how the "elaborate and fierce energy to free herself from this baby" (p.94) drives her into "a violent but calculated trance. Mazvita sought her freedom in slender and fragile movements, finely executed" (ibid). As she strangles the baby with a tie "She did not pause. She claimed her dream and her freedom" (p.96). The diction that Vera uses such as "fierce", "violent, and "trance" evoke the image of a woman out of control, whose mind has completely disconnected itself from the actions of her body. Vera writes that Mazvita's "determination was amazing. She stood outside of her desire, outside herself. She stood with her head turned away from this ceremony of her freedom, from this ritual of her separation" (p.95). I contend, therefore, that Mazvita's murder of her child becomes a battle to reclaim her body, her identity. Having murdered her child, Mazvita is "without a name" (p.101),

without a subjectivity. This un-naming in itself, I believe, symbolises the rejection of her old self. She becomes a “subject in the process of constituting itself” (Kristeva 1982:47) as she seeks to rename herself and (re)create her identity in order to re-enter the symbolic order.

In her chapter on “Violence: The heart of maternal darkness”, Rich (1995) posits that the value placed on being a mother often traps a woman in the violence of the institution of motherhood. She goes on to discuss the contentious issues of infanticide, abortion and single motherhood, and suggests that motherhood should not be forced on a woman but should be a matter of choice<sup>223</sup>. In the same vein, Sarah Namulondo (2010:108) argues that Mazvita’s killing of her baby is “a social consequence that exposes as inadequate the very idea of a definitive truth about motherhood even in an African context”. Namulondo alludes here to how the valorisation of motherhood on the African continent has reinforced the fundamental role that reproduction plays in facilitating the gendered socio-political repression that black African women endure. Despite coming from diverse backgrounds what is apparent is that these feminist critics suggest that infanticide provides a contestation of society’s essentialist image of the mother (Harvey 2007). In this traumatic event of killing her child, Mazvita proves to be both a victim and an agent. I contend that in the act lies empowerment as Vera deliberately uses it to allow her character to speak through her trauma against the social injustices she has had to endure. There is agency in this violent rejection of maternity, which is more often than not characterised as “the ideal of a nurturing and altruistic femininity” (Kostelac 2006:81) as Mazvita is able to define her experience and generate an alternate destiny. As Brandy Harvey (2007:12) argues:

... the infanticidal mother employs the power seized in the control over living and dying and asserts that power through self-defining narration in her move from a position of subjection to one in which she claims agency. In such a move, the mother is unable to relinquish her culturally given identity; however, she succeeds in claiming a space in which she exists according to her own conditions”.

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<sup>223</sup> Rich (1995: 258) considers the power a mother has over the life of a child as evidenced by the many women who “have killed children they knew they could not rear, whether economically or emotionally, children forced upon them by rape, ignorance, poverty, marriage, or, by the absence of, sanctions against, birth control and abortion”.

Undeniably, Vera's plot in *Without a Name* suggests that she shares Kristeva's psychoanalytic philosophy that "motherhood negates the subjectivity and identity of the mother"<sup>224</sup> (Kostelac 2006:84). I contend, therefore, that Mazvita's "madness" in killing the offspring of her violation is a deliberate act designed to give her freedom to move into what Bhabha (1994:1) in *The Location of Culture* identifies as a "third space". She is determined to "be able to initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha 1994:1) divorced from motherhood; her violent act is a radical refusal to be tied down by her biology, as maternity would only work to circumscribe her ambitions. This "ritual of separation" symbolises her rejection of the (m)other in order to find her sense of self. The child is expelled from her body because of what it symbolises in its materiality; it becomes the abject. This is evident in the fact that in the narrative, Mazvita does not acknowledge herself as a mother when she reflects: "*Amai*. It had never referred to her, that *Amai*, at least not specifically" (p.40). The child's death, then, signifies her freedom, her ability to take on a new identity.

Unfortunately, however, in the instance that she is supposed to have gained her "freedom", she feels a sense of disassociation engulf her once again as she is left "[b]ewildered and standing outside of her own self" (p.96). Now that the child is dead, Mazvita wonders: "Where can I go and remain whole? Who will help me carry this pain? She had not anticipated such a hollow feeling, such emptiness" (p.86). The reader gets a sense of the fragmentation and confusion that Mazvita experiences that gives evidence to the existence of trauma. Ironically, this disorientation that she suffers after the killing of her child signifies her own loss of freedom. As Mazvita straps the dead baby onto her back, the abnormality of what is a typical and familiar action between mother and baby is that in this instance, the baby is dead. In an interview with Jane Bryce Vera explains that "[t]his moment, frozen like it is, is so powerful that I can't lose sight of it, visually or emotionally. From it I develop the whole story, the whole novel: how do we get to this moment when the mother does this. Everything ripples around that, the story grows out of the image" (Bryce 2002:219). The intensity of the sense of fragmentation and disorientation she feels tragically manifests itself in the lullaby she sings to the dead baby on her back. Vera writes:

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<sup>224</sup> In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva proposes an essentialist conception of maternity as a process in which the maternal body becomes "the stakes of a natural and 'objective' control. The maternal body is the module of a biosocial program" (Kristeva 1980:241).

Mazvita.<sup>225</sup> She remembered her own name and sang it to her baby. She sang deep and slow. She sang deep deep, from her insides to her baby, a lullaby that came from the recesses of an ancient memory. The tune was familiar, yet coarse ... It was a song lyrical and free. She sent a song from her back to the waiting child, fed that baby with her song, with her name. The song was the only thing that belonged to her and that she could still remember” (pp.41-42).

Here, Vera makes use of a song normally associated with motherly love and tenderness to elucidate the horrific reality of this infanticide and its effect on Mazvita.

As she moves around the city with the dead baby on her back, she has delusions of “a lump growing on the side of her neck” (p.3), a clear indication of her psychological disintegration. The unburdened secret she carries of the baby she has killed destabilises her mind so much that she loses her centre, “the centre in which her thoughts had found anchor” (p.3). I have already elaborated on the devastating effect such a loss has on the psyche of an individual in my literary analysis of *Chairman of Fools* in Chapter Three and *Harare North* in Chapter Five, so I will not repeat it here. Suffice to say, at this point her fear is that she would completely lose her sense of self. She experiences nightmarish hallucinations:

Her skin peeled off, parting from her body. She had suffered so much that her skin threatened to fall pitilessly to the ground. It hung from below her neck, from her arms, from her whole silent body. The skin pulled away from her ... the skin fell from her back. She was left stripped, exposed, bare wide across her back”. (p.4)

This dissolution of the borders that separate the inside and outside of her body seems to symbolise a metaphoric return to the semiotic and signifies her loss of a sense of self. Kristeva (1984) explains the semiotic as the pre-oedipal stage in which the infant experiences unity with the mother and “the place where the subject is both generated and negated” (Kristeva 1984:28). It therefore refers to the pre-symbolic order in which there is no definition of self. I argue, therefore, that what Vera suggests here is that this re-experience with the semiotic is an indication of an annihilation of her protagonist’s identity.

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<sup>225</sup> Ironically, in Shona “*mazvita*” means thank you. Yet given her unfortunate circumstances and the trauma of her rape, she has little to be thankful for.

Mazvita's disorientation causes her to be unable to distinguish what is real from the delusions of her mind. Her mind loses all coherence. Jessica Murray (2009a:11) contends that "[t]his inability to demarcate fiction and non-fiction clearly is particularly acute in a traumatised person". Therefore, on initial reading of the text, it is difficult for the reader to determine what is real and what is not. As the reader goes further into the text, it becomes evident that at this point Mazvita is identifying with the dead baby on her back who she has strangled (Shaw 2004). The psychological trauma that Mazvita experiences involves a transgression of boundaries and the hallucinations are "an important corollary of this breakdown of the borders of the self" (Huot 2003:4). This results in "a confusion of identity, a sense of alienation from one's own body, a loss of the clear distinction between subject and object, inner and outer" (Huot 2003:4). This is evident in the fact that as she moves around with the "heavy" weight of the dead baby on her back, in her confusion, she sometimes thinks of the baby as alive. She is haunted by what she has done and desperately tries to:

... detach her head from her body ... If she could remove her head and store it a distance from the stillness on her back ... She would be two people, she would be many. One of her would be free. One of her would protect the other. She wanted one other of her, that is how she conceived her escape". (p.19)

Significantly, as Mazvita confusedly wanders the streets of Harari with the dead baby on her back, Vera makes the reader bear witness to the trauma Mazvita suffers, which is so intense that "[s]he had turned blind, the blindness rose from within her and overwhelmed her entire face. She no longer spoke. Mute, wounded, she moved through the streets and wept" (p.10). I argue that what obviously burns silently within her, as is the case with Farai in *Chairman of Fools*, is the desire to "speak" her trauma, to have someone attest to it. Yet who would bear witness to this trauma? As Laub (1992:69) puts forth, victims of trauma require "an empathic listener ... Another who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognise their realness". Similarly, Vickroy (2002) posits that for a traumatic memory to lose its power over an individual, some form of reconstruction and re-externalisation must take place. Laub and Vickroy's argument is plausible when Vera writes:

Some kinds of truths long for the indifferent face of a stranger ... There is nothing to lose between strangers, absolutely no risk of being contaminated by another's emotion; there are no histories shared, no promises made, no hopes conjured and

affirmed. Only faces offered in improbable disguises, promising freedom”. (pp.10-11)

It is, I contend, this unavailability of a listener that is partly the cause of the silence she envelops herself with. Mazvita reveals this desperate need to verbalise her trauma when she is confronted by the sight of the aprons. As she buys one with which to strap the dead baby to her back, “in a state of quiet nervousness” (p.10), Mazvita contemplates telling the woman who sells it to her about what has happened to her, about what she has done.

At this time, however, Mazvita dreads the probable risks her confession might result in. Yet while on the bus that was taking her back to her village to bury her dead child, she chastises herself: “She should have talked to the woman who sold her the white apron. She was sure that the woman would have listened” (p.90). The journey proves to be a taxing one for her as she is still full of tension and confusion. Mazvita desperately tries to hold onto “the last strands of sanity to propel her steadily forward” (p.43). When she hears an old man playing the *mbira* on the bus, she feels that for her, hearing it played is a necessary respite. Its sound reaches her “in subduing waves, in a growing pitch, in laps of clear water ... She breathed calmly in the water. The *mbira* vibrated throughout the crowd, reached her with an intact rhythm, a profound tonality, a promise graceful and simple. She had awakened” (p.43). I concur with Helen Mugambi’s (2005:426) contention that by saturating the text, as well as Mazvita’s body with song and music, Vera allows her female protagonist to encounter “the redeeming and healing power of *mbira* (song culminated into music)”<sup>226</sup>. With the sound of the *mbira*, the process of restoration can begin as she feels forgiveness and reconciliation. By forcing her to remember, the *mbira*’s “glorious searching sound visited her, sought her out, found parts of her which were still whole ... She waited for the sound to circle her with a new promise of freedom” (p.70).

This sense of recovery is further augmented with the burial of her child in Mubaira. Vera writes of how Mazvita hopes to begin “without a name, soundlessly and without pain” (p.102). I contend that this unnamng represents her re-entry into the symbolic order and the beginning of a recreation her identity. Moreover, there is a re-membering of the traumatic loss of her people. The past and the present merge within her mind: “It is yesterday” (p.101).

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<sup>226</sup> For a more detailed exploration of song in Vera’s works, see Mugambi’s (2005) “Speaking in Song: Power, subversion and the postcolonial text”.

She remembers their voices. The healing process, which began with the sound of the *mbira*, continues. There is, however, no closure to Vera's narrative as this restoration is not yet complete by the end of the literary text. What still remains is for her to get over the "deep, hollow and lonely silence" (p.103) of her rape and the killing of her child.

### **7.6.2 Abortion and Suicide in *Butterfly Burning***

*Butterfly Burning* is what Obi Nwakanwa (2013:39) describes as "a psychological exploration of feminine abjection". Hunter (2000:31) suggests that its focus is "more specifically than in any of Vera's previous works on the unbearable pressures that pregnancy and motherhood may impose on women, by contrast with their idealization". I add to these contentions by arguing that Vera's concern in the literary text also includes Phephelaphi's search for agency. Unlike the other female characters in the township who are either prostitutes, companions to the male black workers or shebeen queens, Phephelaphi is a woman who refuses to be defined by her sexuality. She has an ambitious desire to secure an alternative destiny than simply being Fumbatha's (her lover) kept woman. She wants a career and the independence that comes with it. She, therefore, sets her sights on becoming the first black nurse in Makokoba, as nursing was the one of the few alternative destinies for an educated black woman in the 1940s, the period in which the novel is set<sup>227</sup>.

Phephelaphi's resolve to pursue this career path is indicative of her fight to become an agent of her own (hi)story, thereby rejecting cultural and historical definitions of her subjectivity (Kehinde 2006). More importantly, "[i]t was not being a nurse which matters, but the movement forward, the entrance into something new and untried" (p.71). Yet her birth mother, Zandile, spitefully attempts to discourage her by reminding Phephelaphi that "[y]ou are not a man ... Makokoba is unkind to women like you who pretend to be butterflies that can land on any blossom they choose" (p.110). Phephelaphi's determination, however, is no pretence. Undaunted by the negativity that surrounds her with regards to what she can be, she sends in an application to train with the local hospital and is successful. Unfortunately, her letter of acceptance comes at a time when she is pregnant. This is when she makes a calculated decision to self-abort.

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<sup>227</sup> Although the occupation itself simply transforms the role of women as care-givers into the public domain, in this period of time it does signify a movement out of the confining private sphere.

As Phephelaphi deliberately self-aborts, her body becomes a battlefield<sup>228</sup> in the struggle against a gendered existence. Vera writes that it is “[h]er own hand inserting an irreversible harm” (p.98) as she pierces the foetal sac with a thorn. Her body is in control and she experiences “[n]o fear. No excitement” (p.98). Vera describes this violent act over twelve pages and her deliberate choice of diction emphasises how the self-abortion signifies a doing away of an identity that is shrouded in femininity or domesticity. Vera writes that Phephelaphi:

... receives each motion of her body and the liquid spreads over her arm, over the sliding nylon in her fingers, and the unborn child too small to be a child, just mingling within the nylon, something vicious and impolite amid the lace spreading along the hem, and the elastic gathering the nylon into pretty pink frills that glisten, shimmer, cupped in her hand. She closes her hand secretly (pp.104-105)

The hand closing over the “nylon”, “lace”, “hem”, colour “pink” and “frills” symbolises Phephelaphi’s refusal to be confined to the domestic sphere.

Unlike during the rape of Mazvita, when the land seems to move in collusion with the rapist, as Phephelaphi aborts, the land is still and only “[h]er body accepts each of her motions” (p.99). She endures “her own agony spilling over some fine limit of becoming” (ibid) as she battles the cultural inscriptions of her body with her body. It is the only weapon she possesses as “her fingers merge with the agony of her release ... for she desires desperately what is beyond the pain” (ibid). It is a pain so excruciating, both psychologically and physically, that her mind intermittently totters between sanity and insanity. As Berndt (2008:125) poignantly articulates, to Phephelaphi “the agony of abortion symbolises a border she has to cross before she reaches the road she has to follow ... she desperately wants to start the process of becoming”. This mental instability is reflected in mad illusions in which she imagines that “[s]he is lightning, burning like it. She is fire and flame, she is light” (p.100), ironically predictive of her own end. Immediately after the successful self-abortion, it is expressed in

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<sup>228</sup> Over the centuries and across the globe, women have constantly engaged in a battle for control over what happens to their bodies. Natalie Angier (2003: 10) argues that the power struggle between men and women has been “over the same valuable piece of real estate - the female body”. Radical feminist Germaine Greer (2000:135) stresses that the female body is a site of resistance in the struggle for emancipation in *The Whole Woman* when she asserts: “A woman’s body is the battlefield where she fights for liberation. It is through her body that oppression works, reifying her, sexualizing her, victimizing her, disabling her. Her physicality is a medium for others to work on”. See also Veit-wild (2006), Berndt (2005), Butler (2004), Mills (2003) and Conboy and Stanbury (1997) for a further exploration on the female body as battlefield.

the “lone woman’s mad quiet laugh, rich with fateful recognition and regretful desire” (p.102).

The foetus is expelled into “a coarse cradle of thorn” (p.103) and Eleni Coundouriotis (2006: 67) explains how the semantic closeness of this phrase to the crown of thorns that Christ bore “renders the fetus resting within this cradle into a powerful and, of course, sacrilegious image; the fetus must die so that Phephelaphi can be reborn”. Its expulsion, therefore, signals her own rebirth: “[t]he heart beating is hers, her arms, and she is she. She has emerged out of a cracked shell ... She has endured the willed loss of a child” (p.107). It is willed because her pregnancy “stands in the way of her moulding her identity according to her own desire and of achieving a position of some stature and economic independence in her social world” (Hunter 2000:235). The self-abortion, then, allows Phephelaphi to retain her absolute determination to self-develop, to “be somebody”, to “do something” (p.64). Her attempt to (re)create her identity denotes an embracing of the abject. Carolyn Shaw (2004:44) aptly describes the significance of this re-embodiment when she points out that in this act “Phephelaphi is the ultimate agent, giving birth to herself in the act of terminating her own motherhood”, thus achieving a new sense of identity. Sardonicly, though, Phephelaphi is herself a product of rejected motherhood. Her biological mother, Zandile, gave her away when she is still a baby because “[a] child was an agony then ... she needed lightness. That is what the city offered, not the burden of becoming a mother” (pp.143-144).

The abortion would allow her still to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. Accomplishment of this goal would be an obvious subversion of a socio-symbolic order that recognises a woman’s value in her relationship to a man either as his sexual object (Zandile and Gertrude), or as his extension (Phephelaphi). She realises that her search for subjectivity, for an identity other than Fumbatha’s woman begins with her body; “She had to find what she could here, from within her own land, from within her body” (p.70).<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> As the female body is the locus of social and cultural inscriptions of difference and identity, feminists believe that women have to take into account its “specific contextual materiality” (Shildrick and Price 1999:5). They argue that agency is just one of the many phenomena embodied within the female body. Since, as Iris Young (2005:9) posits, “the woman lives her body as object as well as subject”, she can look within herself to transform or contest her lived bodily experience. For major theoretical positions and perspectives on the female body see Katie Conboy and Sarah Stanbury’s *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (1997) and Barbara Brooks’ *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (1999).

Regrettably, however, motherhood is insistent and Phephelaphi later falls pregnant for a second time. In this part of her plot, Vera seems to signal the power and persistence of biological determinism within patriarchal societies, that is, the notion that “biology is destiny” (Lind and Brzuzy 2008:381). Having found out about the first abortion, Fumbatha abandons her. Determined as she may be to achieve agency, Phephelaphi is, undoubtedly, traumatised by the self-abortion and left psychologically scarred. This is the reason, I believe, why even though she has been accepted to train as a nurse, she cannot perform a second abortion and opts instead for suicide. Her decision is further influenced by Fumbatha’s desertion of her and Deliwe, her role model’s betrayal, both of which have a profound effect on her psyche. Fumbatha’s rejection of and profuse anger with Phephelaphi when he finds out about the abortion shatters “her entire core and she became nothing, even more than she had ever thought possible” (p.123). At this point she suffers a negation of self and experiences a fusion of delusions and reality. She imagines her birth mother, Zandile having her stomach sliced open to remove a child. Images of intimacy with Boyidi (Zandile’s boyfriend) flash through her mind and it is not very clear to the reader whether she has been physically abused by him, or whether these images are just a figment of her imagination, given how mentally affected she is. Ketu Katrak (2006:10) explains this reaction to her lover’s abandonment as “the psychological and subconscious holds of female conditioning through mythological stories and cultural norms that define a woman”. This is affected by the value placed on her relationship to a man, as well as to her role as reproducer<sup>230</sup>.

At this point, Phephelaphi is undoubtedly extremely traumatised and she sinks into a “madness” in which she sets herself alight after dousing herself with paraffin. Tragically, she becomes a “butterfly burning”, smoldering in “[a] woman’s solid flame” (p.130). In her moving soliloquy while her body is ablaze, she categorically states: “I am nothing, I am not here. Here is a place you can belong. I no longer belong. I am not here” (p.126). Existentially, she does not belong to the feminine space allotted to her and is obviously ahead of her time in aspiring for the kind of freedom that her country is not ready to give her<sup>231</sup>. I argue here that her death is a recognition that the historical and socio-political space that she occupies is not

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<sup>230</sup> Literature by African women writers has persistently criticised their society’s valuation of a woman according to her ability to conceive. Women who fail to do so are castigated for not being “real” women. See, for example, Vera’s *Nehanda* (1993), Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* (1979), Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1988), and Lauretta Ncogobo’s *And They Didn’t Die*.

<sup>231</sup> The notion here that freedom is something that can be given implies that it is not a natural freedom that every person has a right to, especially as it pertains, in this instance, to the woman. This notion belies Sartre’s (2007) declaration in *Existentialism and Humanism* that every individual is free.

yet as fluid as she is. I, therefore, agree with Berndt's (2008) assertion that this negation of her physical existence is, in fact, an act of self-assertion; it "grants her the fulfilment of her highest ambition, her yearning for a space where she could be herself ... she creates her own space within the blazing fire"(Berndt 2008:196). Her suicide, then, becomes a concerted effort to transcend a state of liminality, what Fetson Kalua (2009:25) identifies as "a disembodied and protean form of signification"; a precarious condition characterised by disorientation, confusion and paradox. Thus, setting herself alight is a strange sort of agency that allows Phephelaphi's "woman self" (p.128) to tear away as she reduces her body to "[a]n enticing spectacle of severe horror" (ibid). In this ultimate collapse of the self into a state of complete abjection she reaches what Lacan terms "*jouissance*"<sup>232</sup> and what Kristeva describes as "the sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us - and that cancels our existence" (Kristeva 1982:210). This is evident in the fact that the grotesque horror Vera poetically writes on the outside of Phephelaphi's body as she burns contrasts sharply with the poignant beauty she feels within it, as she takes control of her body which, once again, becomes a feminine disarming weapon:

The fire moves over her light as a feather, smooth like oil. She has wings. She can fly. She turns her arms over and sees them burn ... She is a bird with wings spread. She falls into a beautiful sound of something weightless rising, a blue light, a yellow light, the smell of skin burning. (p.129)

Phephelaphi's death by self-immolation is no doubt a horrifically violent and painful one. Yet like her self-abortion, there is a mad, purposeful courage and determination to her act, which allows her to achieve a sublime status. Paul Zezela (2007:14) argues that Vera's protagonist's battle "for self-definition and self-generation, to transcend the cruel dichotomies of their lives appear doomed and futile". Contrary to this contention, I want to posit that Phephelaphi's self-immolation is neither defeatist nor ineffectual. Her suicide can be seen as yet another deliberate bodily confrontation with the repression of her ambition and Fumbatha's betrayal of her; as an act of agency. Phephelaphi welcomes the fire that consumes her body. She adopts suicide as a means of asserting her self-identity and breaking through oppression. Her

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<sup>232</sup> Jacques Lacan uses the concept of "*jouissance*" to explain the spiritual or sexual ecstasy that both males and females attain. More significantly, the woman is able to achieve a supplementary *jouissance* which "goes beyond the phallus" (Lacan 1982: 45). Kristeva (1982: 9) similarly uses the term to denote the establishment of subjectivity when she describes it as "a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth".

“madness” provides a space for escape from a repressive ontological existence. Phephelaphi’s self-destruction is then, I contend, one that symbolises choice, as well as power, over her destiny as she expresses her rage against the colonial and patriarchal history that has written such an abject script for her. As Hunter (2000) alludes, it is the only means of freeing herself from an existential prison and immortalising her aspirations. And as Mazvita yearningly declares in *Without a Name*, “[d]eath was another kind of freedom” (p.64). Phephelaphi is “dying in her own storm ... knowing that no matter when, no matter how, she will eventually rise into her own song” (pp.129-130). This “mad” suicidal act is, to her, a reclamation of her body, an excruciatingly painful attestation of her love for herself as it confronts her marginalisation in both the domestic and public spheres with “[a] touch, her own genuine touch; to love her own body now ... finally she has done so, embracing each part of herself with flame, deeply and specially” (p.129).

Contrary, then, to the presupposition that Phephelaphi’s death represents a failure in her battle to find “an outline” (p.91), a sense of self, I conceive her suicide as self-affirming. In “The ‘Mad’ Intentions of Those Who Suicide”, Katrin Jaworski (2012:1) poses important questions pertaining to suicide: “Can agency in suicide be called rational, or is it inevitably attributed to madness, and therefore irrational? What if it is rational precisely because someone is ‘mad’”? Jaworski (2012) proceeds to answer these questions by suggesting that intent in suicide has to be understood by taking into consideration not only individual actions, but also the social norms and assumptions which impact on the individual’s decision to self-destruct. Those who commit suicide are often believed not to be in a normal or “right” state of mind. Jaworski (2012:2), however, argues that the act of suicide itself involves the “discursive mechanics of intent and agency”. Her assumption is supported by Cathy Charmaz (1980), who has done extensive research on the meaning those who commit suicide construct for their decision to self destruct and purports that their choice is a way of asserting control over one’s self. Whether a consequence of a sound or insane mind, I remain steadfast in my contention that Phephelaphi’s death signifies a wilful choice to remain true to herself. Kristeva’s (1982:3) assertion that “I abject myself within the same motion through which I claim to establish myself” can readily apply here. Phephelaphi’s “madness” in desiring suicide, strange as it may seem, is because for her, a state of liminality is existentially unbearable. In this instance, she has deliberately chosen to remove herself from the oppressive world of colonial patriarchy as she is “ready to be harmed, to be freed” (p.129).

This affirmative action is designed to protect her self-identity and she preserves an impermeable agency right up to her last breath:

All she has to do is stop holding her breath and let go ... So she does, releases her breath which she had held tightly down, a knot under her chest. As she lets go she feels nothing except her wings folding. A bird landing and closing its wings. (p.130)

Her triumph is reinforced in the image of a bird spreading its wings, symbolic of the catharsis in her horrific end. The beauty of her death is embedded in the diction Vera uses to describe it such as “flame”, “sunlight”, “lightning”, “rainbow” which evoke images of metamorphosis rather than death. Just like the liquid breeze of the hanged rebels’ struggle for freedom lived on in the hearts of the black people under colonial Rhodesia, the “liquid breeze” (p.150) of Phephelaphi’s fight for female emancipation would surely stir the minds of many women when they read *Butterfly Burning* and recognise the agency that her death represents.

My argument in this section has revealed, therefore, how Vera succeeds, through her poetic and poignant handling of Mazvita’s infanticide and Phephelaphi’s self-abortion, in illustrating that their “madness” in rejecting maternity is no more than a struggle for non-gendered subjectivity. Their fight is an attempt to transcend a female identity confined to the domestic sphere. Instead of being horrified by these women who kill, the reader is made to empathise with them because, as Namulondo (2010) contends, taking away their progeny’s life is a way to reclaim their bodies. It is a palpable contestation of their gendered roles within an African milieu in which maternity is glorified. But as Carolyn Shaw (2004:39) suggests “women who free their sexuality from domesticity and male dominance do so at the cost of their reputations, their motherhood and sometimes their lives”. Despite these risks, through their bodies Vera’s protagonists no doubt give voice to the need to end such suppression as a pre-requisite to the black woman in Africa achieving agency and empowerment within the public domain. Thankfully though, contemporary Zimbabwe now offers us more weapons than just the female body, such as legislation, with which to be able to achieve our full potentialities.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

The main focus of this chapter has been to reveal a feminist discourse of “madness” through an analysis of Vera’s *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*. I have shown the experimental

nature of Vera's writing style that has made it difficult to classify her as any particular kind of writer. What is evident from this analysis, though, is that she makes use of postmodernist techniques, such as non-linearity of plot, unconventional use of typography and lack of closure to carry her content. This transgressive style reflects the trauma, mental anguish and disorientation that her protagonists suffer. Furthermore, I have revealed the "madness" of life in an urban location in Zimbabwe during the era Vera writes about. In particular, for the black people, this urban life is associated with "freedom", new possibilities and an "easy life". My analysis has also demonstrated how the township has allowed black women to explore and exploit their sexuality.

More significantly, though, I have explored how the "mad" acts of infanticide, abortion and suicide that Vera reveals in her literary texts signify intentional resistance against the sexual and cultural politics that the patriarchal institution of motherhood entails within the African context. They are calculated responses to move out of what Phyllis Ann Thompson (2003:6) articulates as a "rigidly defined socio-sexual space" that does not offer much room for their aspirations. What has been evident is that Mazvita and Phephelaphi use their "madness" to "bring their suffering to a *logical* conclusion" (Nnaemeka 1997:20) [emphasis in the original]. Culturally, the greatest value of a woman in the Zimbabwean context lies in her role as the nurturer and reproducer of society. My discussion here has revealed that the rejection of motherhood in both literary texts offers a contestation of this corporeal identity. Vera's protagonists illustrate their determination to transcend the prescribed female space allocated to them. The "geographies of pain" (Lionnet 1997:205) that they endure in this struggle index the reclamation of their bodies and a search for embodied subjectivity and freedom. In a quest for selfhood, their bodies become a discursive strategy that subverts phallogocentric identification and challenges the gendered bodily inscriptions that make motherhood synonymous with womanhood. As Omolola Ladele (2009:82) asserts, "[b]y reconfiguring and challenging dominant narratives, women are able to de-scribe themselves from the periphery".

This chapter has made apparent that from a feminist perspective, the kind of "madness" that Vera portrays in her protagonists' attempt to transcend liminality illuminates black women's persistent attempt to push Zimbabwean society forward so that as a nation we "move towards an account of African gendered experience that does not assume fixed and inevitable hierarchies, but stresses transformation and productive forms of contestation" (Yusuf-Bakare

2003:10). African cultural patterns and behaviours are not concrete, but rather continually transforming (Fanon 1967a; Cabral 1994) to accommodate “the whole body of efforts made by a people” (Bhabha 1994:152) to (re)create them. That this cultural fluidity has taken aboard the African woman’s liberation and agency is evidenced by the continuing latitude and performative identity contemporary African women experience in the public sphere. Liberia<sup>233</sup> and Malawi,<sup>234</sup> for example, have had women at the political helm, and Zimbabwe has had its first woman vice-president<sup>235</sup>. Although the struggle for gender parity on the African continent is by no means over, great strides have been taken towards this end. Such imaginative interrogations of women’s struggle for agency and identity as they attempt to transgress gendered boundaries, such as Vera’s, are examples of African women writers’ narratives that can be instrumental in getting us there.

The next chapter provides a conclusion to this study. It summarises the key aspect of my analyses of the various literary texts as they pertain to the depiction of “madness” in the postcolonial fiction of the authors studied. Furthermore, I give an evaluation of my interpretations of these representations. The chapter concludes by offering a suggestion on a possible future research that has emanated from this study.

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<sup>233</sup>Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (18 January 2006 to present)

<sup>234</sup>Joyce Banda (27 April 2012 - 31 May 2014)

<sup>235</sup>Joice Mujuru (6 December 2004 to April 2015)

## CONCLUSION

The scope of my thesis has been restricted to the depiction of “madness” within selected postcolonial Zimbabwean fiction with the view to exposing the gendered discourse of the phenomenon in the literary works of both established and relatively new authors. Although “madness” has been used as a significant motif in literature in Africa, not much critical attention has been given to its literary representations in Zimbabwean fiction. The scholarly criticism that does exist has tended to concentrate on the postmodernist writings of Marechera. Yet there is no doubt that what has emerged from this study is that “madness” is a popular discourse in Zimbabwe’s literary arena. Consequently, my aim in this study has been to enrich the sparse critical scholarship on “madness” by demonstrating how it resonates within the set parameters. My literary analysis has shown the varied meanings of “madness” that abound in Zimbabwean literature. This I have achieved by interrogating the fiction of six authors deliberately selected to represent a gendered discourse on the trope, namely, Chinodya, Gomo, Chikwava, Gappah, Dangarembga and Vera. While my analysis of Chinodya’s, Chikwava’s and Gomo’s literary texts have provided a male discourse on “madness”, Vera’s, Dangarembga’s and Gappah’s narratives have provided female perspectives of the trope. Of particular note has been Vera’s representation of “madness” as subversion of the restrictive patriarchal and cultural conception of women and their roles within society through the borderlines of the female body in both *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*.

This study also represents a determination to provide an indigenous perspective of these authors’ representations of “madness”. This localised viewpoint has, therefore, served to allow a deeper understanding of the various cultural nuances and perspectives that shape their depictions. I have been guided in my investigation by the following key research questions: How do the selected Zimbabwean postcolonial writers depict “madness” in their literary texts? To what extent do historical and socio-cultural factors influence their conceptualisation of “madness”? To what extent is feminist writing on “madness” a subversive discourse aimed at overturning a dominant patriarchal discourse? How does “madness” manifest itself in the writer’s choice of literary style and narrative form?

The gendered narratives that I have analysed have revealed that the phenomenon’s various forms appear in stylistic ways that are, perhaps, more subtle than Marechera but are,

nevertheless, just as profound. The differing hues of “madness” that appear on the country’s literary coat are apparent in the authors’ conceptualisation of the phenomenon as not being limited to insanity. This study has shown the variety of meanings “madness” creates as evidenced by these writers’ depiction of it as trauma, as alienation, as depression, as subversion, as freedom and even as a sign of the socio-political and economic landscapes in Zimbabwe. My analysis has demonstrated how these postcolonial authors have even made “madness” manifest in the language, structure and style of their narratives. Specifically, I have demonstrated that the unconventional narrative forms that Gomo and Chikwava use illustrate that the “madness” discourse transgresses normative forms, since reasoned discourse cannot contain the narrative within its structures.

Chapter Five of this study, for example, has shown that the creative processes that Chikwava adopts in *Harare North* point to a distinctly postmodernist writing style. The characteristics of fragmentation, disjointedness and non-closure in the sequence of events are deliberately designed to effectively reflect the content of the narrative in its mirroring of the narrator’s sense of dissociation and fragmentation. Chikwava’s linguistic miscegenation in the narrative through the use of semantic oddity and the adoption of a hybrid linguistic code through the indigenisation of the English Language proves to be a way of writing back to the Empire. This deformation is deliberately meant to inflect an indigenous Zimbabwean flavour to his literary work. Furthermore, the form embodies the mental instability that the narrator suffers as a result of his trauma and failure to redefine his sense of identity in order to formulate a new diasporic consciousness. This study, then, has revealed that the language and form of “madness” is mainly characterised by a postmodernist writing techniques.

An existential psychoanalytic viewpoint has been crucial to this study because, from a Fanonian sense, “only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex” (Fanon 1967b: 31). I have deliberately chosen this stance because over the years and globally, psychoanalysis has been made to bear witness to the history of mental illness and the whole “madness” phenomenon. As both Fanon and Laing’s psychoanalytic theories explore man’s search for wholeness, they have been particularly important in this literary analysis. Fanon’s theories of colonial pathology have provided useful insights into the understanding of the colonised subject’s struggle for identity as evident in the “nervous conditions” and “white mask” psychology that inflict the black man. His study on the neurosis of blackness has highlighted

how colonial hegemony created a fragmented self on the part of the colonised as evidenced in the inferiority complex the Africans suffered that led to the imitation of the colonial master's language, culture and customs in the development of a sense of self-worth and subjectivity. Fanon's theories have been significant in highlighting how the traumatic experiences of the protagonists in postcolonial Zimbabwe resonate as "madness" in a large part of this literary analysis. Chapter Six, for example, has exemplified the devastating effects of this mentality in the psychic scarring Tambu suffers. The study has demonstrated how her internalisation of a Eurocentric view of her race and culture culminates in a profound belief in her own inferiority and that of her people. This results in a subsequent nullification of subjectivity, in a sense of not-being. This self-negation is a testimony to the collective trauma of her people as a result of the psychological brutality of colonialism. This "false understanding of ourselves" (Biko 1998:363) has, to a large extent, been a creation of imperial forces as black people's history, culture and identity are uprooted through education and Christianity. This false consciousness has been a legacy difficult to erase as it has become deeply embedded within the black person's psyche leading to a dismembered identity, as Tambu's experience has shown, and as is evident in the manner in which many modern religions in Africa castigate traditional religion, values and beliefs.

In addition, given this fractured identity, Laing's theorising on the divided self has significantly shaped my illumination of the various forms of existential precarity that affect the protagonists in Chinodya's, Chikwava's and Dangarembga's fiction. In my interrogation of *Chairman of Fools* and *Harare North*, I have particularly used Laing's theories of persecution and engulfment to explore the schizophrenic behaviours of the main characters of these texts. Particularly, what emerges from this study is that when that which you identify with is torn from you, it can result in the kind of insanity the nameless narrator plunges into in *Harare North* as he experiences a splitting of self; a doubling of subjectivity. In addition, I have used the underpinnings of Laing's concept of ontological insecurity to explore the psychological impact of the lack of existential security on the characters. What has emerged is the inextricable link between "madness" and ontological insecurity. My discussion has exposed, for example, how the lack of ontological security causes Tambu to plummet into the depths of depression in *The Book of Not*.

Moreover, I have also explored feminist philosophies on the gender dynamics at play within a patriarchal society. Specifically, I have delineated psychoanalytic feminism as being pertinent

in my stance as a female critic studying the challenging relationship between femininity and “madness” in some of the literary texts I have studied in this thesis. This has, in part, been necessitated by the pathologising of femininity, as is evident in the “wandering womb” conception of women. Kristevan abjection, for example, has aided me in my literary analysis of how Vera tackles the trope of “madness” in relation to the borderlines of the female body. What has materialised from this study is that her feminist discourse of the body is one of the routes through which the “madness” motif is explored within postcolonial Zimbabwean literature. Vera uses the female body to engage with the theme of “madness” in her protagonists’ struggle to achieve agency and subjectivity. In both *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning*, she has fictionalised Veit-Wild’s (2006: 3) claim that “writing madness is, on a broader level, related to the paradigm of writing the body”. This study has demonstrated that Vera’s female protagonists’ subversive acts of infanticide, abortion and suicide are pregnant with meaning. I have shown that the method to the “madness” that these women employ in their rejection of motherhood ultimately represents a struggle against colonial and patriarchal repression. When operating from a silenced position, having being denied voice and choices, women sometimes respond from “the only realm that gives them power, the giving and taking of life” (Harvey 2007:12). My analysis of Vera’s *Without a Name*, for example, has demonstrated that Mazvita’s act of infanticide has served as a vehicle through which the marginalised female can speak. The trauma she experiences from the act “necessitates the mother’s speech act and results in the assertion of her own voice” (Harvey 2007:12). Mazvita’s mad act, then, provides an opportunity for her story to be told. Similarly, Phephelaphi’s abortion and suicide by setting herself alight are bodily acts strategically meant to speak her psychological trauma. They express her refusal to be defined by her sexuality, and she uses her body as a weapon in her struggle for self-definition. What Chapter Seven has also made evident is that from a feminist perspective, this feminine rage is viewed as a positive force meant to destabilise a symbolic order that perceives womanhood as being synonymous to motherhood. These acts are an enunciation of self that transgress societal expectations of their femaleness, their outlined identity. In defining a self that is divorced from a delineated domestic space, both Mazvita and Phephelaphi seek to contest “the phallogocentric ‘power relations’ that characterise contemporary African societies” (Chipara and Ncube 2012:8).

Vera’s protagonists’ struggle for mastery over their existential realities highlight that in the ever-changing landscape of post-independent Zimbabwe, as we fight to delineate a

postcolonial female identity, black women need to resist marginalisation in the public domain and restriction to the domestic sphere. Our search for autonomy and selfhood needs to move beyond our biology, to transcend our femaleness. No doubt, an obvious challenge in such a contemporary society is being able to reconcile the tensions that arise from pitting our individual aspirations against the cultural expectations of wifedom and motherhood, which, in itself, can be the subject of further study. These expectations need not, however, be the ontological basis for black womanhood.

Pertinently, this study has shown that given the colonial legacy that the nation has had to deal with, the whole question of identity is significant. Therefore, I have demonstrated that a common theme that threads through all the literary texts under scrutiny here is the question of a sense of existential self. In this study, therefore, I have interrogated the nature of subjectivity in selected postcolonial Zimbabwean literature in relation to “madness” and have shown how the authors’ representations of the phenomenon are intricately linked to the question of identity.

The outcome has illuminated that “madness” can either signify a grapple with identity, or struggle to redefine it. The interrogation of Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* in Chapter Six, for example, has shown that despite a subjective and satirical approach evident in her short stories, through them Gappah succeeds in portraying the fractured identities that derive from the socio-political and economic “madness” of the post-2000 era in Zimbabwe. Her disillusioned perspective reflects the marked disparities between the ruling elite and the majority of the people.

What I have also made apparent is that in *Chairman of Fools*, Chinodya highlights the loss of a sense of identity his protagonist experiences, yet *A Fine Madness* is all about the search for it. Gomo illustrates “madness” as a liberatory force that is essential in the re-construction of an authentic African identity. Furthermore, both Gappah’s *An Elegy for Easterly* and Chikwava’s *Harare North* expose the psychic dissociation that inevitably results from living in the Diaspora. The diasporic identities that they portray are ones that are marked by alienation and fragmentation.

Significantly, my analysis in Chapter Five has revealed how Chikwava points to the need to reformulate and negotiate identity within a foreign space, as an essentialist notion of identity

in such an environment is problematic. My literary analysis in this chapter has illuminated how the narrator's desperate attempt to wrap himself in his past and to hold onto his "original native" individuality hinders the re-configuration of identity required to ensure psychological adaptation to life in the Diaspora. This failure to come to grips with his new diasporic reality results in an insanity that manifests in a split identity that denotes a doubling and interchanging of self. Two questions come to my mind at this point. Given the fact that an essentialist conception of identity is problematic in light of the fast pace of globalisation, as Africans, are we not all heading towards a hybrid identity, what Kalua (2015:2) identifies as one which is "fluid and intermedial"? Will this hybridity reduce the trauma of dislocation of the kind that I have shown the narrator suffering from in *Harare North*? It would certainly be interesting to study how recent Zimbabwean literature portrays the reduced trauma of hybridity as a consequence of globalisation.

In Chapter Six, I disclosed how in *The Book of Not*, Tambu's alienation from her culture and her people engineers a fragmented identity that causes her depression. She continually attempts to redefine her existential reality, that is, both the internal and external forces that converge to shape her sense of identity. Yet she is constantly overpowered by a sense of a loss of identity and inability to control the external factors and events that negatively impact on her existence. The nature of Tambu's depression and nihilism in this narrative reiterates Huot's (2003:2) perception of "madness" as "a troubling presence that is ultimately a sign of an even more troubling absence: an irreducible and inaccessible otherness". Chapter Seven has demonstrated how Vera's female protagonists in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning* use "mad" subversive bodily acts to signify resistance to the borderlines of their identities. Their "madness" serves to deconstruct their externally imposed definitions of self. These women attempt to change the borderlines of their corporeality, to recreate their identities within the confined spaces they occupy.

All the authors that have been scrutinised here, then, emphasise the significance of identity to human existence. It is what makes us who we are. The search for identity makes us question our existential essence by raising Fanon's (1967a: 251) question which I mentioned in Chapter Six of this study and which I repeat here: "In reality, who am I"? If this identity is compromised in any way it can, no doubt, lead into one of the various kinds of "madness" that I have outlined in this thesis.

Particularly, my literary analysis in Chapter Four of this study has shown that as Gomo highlights in *A Fine Madness*, an Afrocentric perspective is a crucial weapon in the reconstruction of an African identity battered and denigrated by imperialism. It becomes essential in crafting a future on the continent that articulates African agency and rejects Eurocentrism. Africans who have been culturally uprooted and alienated need, therefore, to engage in what Cabral (1972:45) calls a “sociological battle” through the adoption of Afrocentrism. Afrocentric scholars believe that Africans were the instigators of civilization and that their intellectual pride should be acknowledged (Chukwuokolo 2009). , Afrocentricity, therefore, requires Africans to perceive themselves as subjects who are firmly grounded in their culture and who possess an African worldview of their experience (Mazama 2003). Consequently, I believe that Afrocentrism is pivotal to the self-liberation of the Africans, to the “*ufuru*” that Gomo evokes in his literature.

As a result, in Chapter Four I have argued that the colonial mirror in which the African stares at himself/herself reflects the image of the colonial gaze; a fragmented and objectified self. In the process of becoming and the achievement of self-identification, re-membering thus signifies the search for wholeness and healing of the African consciousness. I have shown how Gomo’s literary text suggests that this act of re-membering requires “a fine madness” in order for the African to eradicate the colonial image imposed by imperialism - to break the colonial mirror. This Afrocentric essentialism becomes a vital weapon in the fight to “let the consciousness of African empowerment rage across the planet to all the dispossessed and dislocated people of the world” (Gomo 2010:144).

To counteract the colonial legacy and the trauma of blackness, what has emerged from this study is the need to heed Fanon’s (1967a: 124) call for a “collective catharsis” of the black psyche so as to move beyond the wretchedness of imperial oppression. Therefore, in Chapter Five I have highlighted - as Dangarembga’s narrative attests - the necessity within postcolonial Africa for a black consciousness that enables the continent “to produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regards themselves as appendages to white society ... it will always be a lie to accept white values as necessarily the best” (Biko 1978: 362). This will allow for the development of positive and constructive energy in the reconstruction of the holistic modern African identity that Gomo alludes to in *A Fine Madness*. As has been made evident in Chapter Four, such an identity formation requires valuing all the aspects that make an African, that is, the linguistic, cultural and historical

elements. In the twenty-first century, in order to forge a meaningful future in Zimbabwe, the black people must therefore, as Gomo rightly suggests in *A Fine Madness*, “return to the source” as a starting point in this reformulation of identity. As we continue to reconstruct our subjectivity, however, it is pertinent to be conscious of the fact that “identity entails understanding culture as a mobile and fluid dynamic” (Kalua 2015).

I want to conclude this study by highlighting a possible area of further study on the “madness” phenomenon. As has been made palpable in my discussion, “madness” is intricately linked to the question of identity. Those individuals who suffer some form of fragmentation or rootlessness in their lives are subject to a “madness” of some kind. Zimbabwean society comprises of a significant number of “coloured” people who exist in a state of “in-betweenness” as they straddle the differing cultures of their origins<sup>236</sup>. Given the attempts that the coloured community has made to reify their status within the Zimbabwean nation (Nims 2013), it would be valuable to examine how this socio-cultural and historical fragmentation of being “not white enough, or not black enough” (Mardon 2014) is represented in postcolonial Zimbabwean literature, especially as regards the projection of this ontological insecurity on the coloured people’s psyche and on their sense of identity. In “Being Coloured in Zimbabwe: My story”, Amanda Mardon (2014), a journalist, writes about her experience as a person of mixed race. It is necessary to quote her at length as she reminisces:

I heard a joke passed once about why coloured people tend to have ‘short wires’; apparently, it’s because the white blood and black blood of our forefathers are fighting for free flow. Only after I had laughed did I realise the truth behind that statement.

Since creation, coloured people have always been ostracised by both blacks and whites because we are neither black enough nor white enough to fit in any group. All we’ve ever been looking for is recognition, a place to belong, to be accepted, to be included, to be called upon for the skills and talents that so many of us possess, for the history behind our being and our culture to be heard and listened to.

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<sup>236</sup>The coloured people of Zimbabwe are of mixed race origin and comprise approximately three per cent of the population (Nims 2013)

This powerful cry signifies the tensions and fragmentation of a “coloured” identity that possibly manifests itself in the “short wires” she describes, given the precarity of the existential reality of this race.

South African postcolonial literature reflects the existence of this group of people within the community, as well as the consequences of this sense of alienation that comes with the fragmented sense of identity felt. Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* (1974), Alex La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night* (1968) and *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* (1972) and Peter Abrahams’ *Tell Freedom* (1954) are some of the literary texts that deal with the “coloured” identity and that have enjoyed critical appreciation. In Zimbabwe, significant research has been conducted on the social and historical aspects of the “coloured community” (Seirles 1997; Muzondidya 2002; 2005; Nims 2013). Yet there is not much evidence of literary criticism that examines how Zimbabwean postcolonial fiction represents the psychological fragmentation, the “madness” that results from their precarious existence. Such an investigation would, I believe, provide the premise for a valuable research project.

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