

GENDER VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN'S AGENCY IN SELECTED  
LITERARY WORKS BY ZIMBABWEAN FEMALE WRITERS

by

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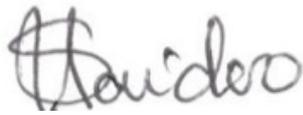
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## DECLARATION

I, Salachi Naidoo (Student Number 50888307), declare that "Gender violence and resistance: representations of women's agency in selected literary works by Zimbabwean female writers" is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Signature



Date 19 July 2016

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my children Lesley, Akiesha and Gloria and my father Raji Naidoo. I also dedicate this work to the memory of my departed mother Ellen Naidoo, nee Tiyani, who should have lived to see this day.

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to offer a critical analysis of representations of gender violence and resistance to such violence in selected novels by Zimbabwean women writers. A great deal of scholarship on Zimbabwean women writers focuses on well-known authors such as Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga. Even here, the critical emphasis tends to be on the representation of women's suffering under patriarchy and their status as victims. Although the exposure of gendered suffering is important, these studies often fail to take into consideration the female characters' agency and survival strategies, including how they go about rebuilding lives and identities in the aftermath of violence. This thesis argues that the fictional texts of other, lesser known Zimbabwean authors are similarly worthy of critical scrutiny, yielding as they can important insights into female characters' resistance to gender violence. The current study analyses Zimbabwean women writers' literary contributions to discourses on gender-based violence and explores how female characters have embraced the concept of agency to recreate their identities and to introduce a new gender ethos into the contexts of lives that are often shaped by severe restrictions and oppression. Violence is a phenomenon that is always shaped by specific cultural, ideological and socio-economic forces. As the study shows, characters' identities are constituted by the complex intersections of a number of markers of difference, including their gender, race and class. This study thus regards identity as intersectional and takes all these factors into consideration in its analysis of the representations of violence and resistance in the selected texts. The study also aims to determine whether these literary representations offer any solutions to the difficulties of characters affected by or living with violence. The works critiqued are Lillian Masitera's *The Trail* (2000), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Virginia Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010) and Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010).

## **KEY TERMS**

African feminism, Agency, African womanism, Gender, Patriarchy, Post-colonial, Feminism, Resistance, Sexuality, Violence, Uncertainty

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to offer a critical analysis of representations of gender violence and resistance to such violence in selected novels written by Zimbabwean women writers post year 2000. It is hoped that, by the end of the study; the complexity of female characters' experiences of gender violence and their emergence as more than mere victims will be revealed. It is anticipated that a close reading of selected texts will demonstrate the manner in which violence and resistance are shaped by specific cultural contexts and ideological forces. Although gender violence is a global pandemic, my study is not a social study as it were, rather, it is a literary study based on literary representations. It is thus a text based study. To that end, I use a postcolonial feminist reading of selected texts to investigate ways in which these texts portray postcolonial feminist struggles against gender-based violence. Further to this, the study draws on the works of selected postcolonial feminist theorists whose insights provide a basis for analysing the literary representations of gender violence, agency and resistance. The study explores ways in which the selected women writers represent gender violence, resistance and female characters' agency in selected literary texts. The focal texts of my study are novels written post year 2000 by less appreciated women writers who are, by and large, on the margins of what one would consider to be the Zimbabwean literary canon. My focal texts are Lillian Masitera's (*The Trail*, 2000), Valerie Tagwira's (*The Uncertainty of Hope*, 2006), Virginia Phiri's (*Highway Queen*, 2010) and Violet Masilo's (*The African Tea Cosy*, 2010). In the analysis of this thesis, I also deploy the concepts of domination, agency and resistance to discuss ways in which these texts challenge the traditional view of women's abject facility, silence and helplessness through an analysis of relevant secondary sources to support my arguments about gender violence, agency and resistance<sup>1</sup>. This thesis exposes the ways in which the selected texts confirm, contest or offer new insights into assumptions about gender violence, resistance and agency.

What this study refers to as a Zimbabwean woman writer is a woman or female writer of Zimbabwean origin and or citizenry who writes from within or outside Zimbabwe. It is for this reason that I include, in my analysis, Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Scott 1990 in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press discusses the use of agency and resistance as means of defining space.

(2006), although the author wrote this novel whilst living in the United Kingdom. A politics of location is however useful in my discussion as it impacts on how writers present their concerns. As will be discussed in chapter 5 of this study and which deals with Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), location matters when an African woman decides to speak out. A similar notion of location will also be discussed in chapter 4 which deals with Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010), as the author reveals that she writes under a pseudonym. She states that she uses a pseudonym out of fear and uncertainty of how the novel will be received by society.

I have chosen the focal texts of this study because they offer interesting representations of the complex ways in which female characters feature as both victims and agents in fictional situations where gender violence is prevalent. The texts I have chosen for this study offer representations of female characters, that may confirm or differ from the portrayal of women found in the fiction and poetry of women writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga, Yvonne Vera and Freedom Nyamubaya, who have all gained entry into the largely male Zimbabwean literary canon. This is not to suggest that these renowned writers are patriotic writers nor that they subscribe to the patriotic narrative of the nation. The women writers in this study, on the other hand, situated as they are out of the mainstream of the Zimbabwean literary canon, portray female characters as both victims and agents of gender violence. The literary productions of these writers, with the exception of Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, have not received much critical attention in post-2000 literary studies, either inside or outside Zimbabwe<sup>2</sup>.

My study focuses on such writing in order to analyse images of women in texts by women writers who have been consigned to near obscurity. This marginality can be partially explained by the fact that the texts deal with the unspoken subject of gender-based

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<sup>2</sup> Most scholarly interest has been focused on the likes of Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera. See critical interest in the work of the late Dambudzo Marechera (Pucherová, Dobrota Alžbeta, ed. *Moving Spirit: The Legacy of Dambudzo Marechera in the 21st Century*. Vol. 4. LIT Verlag Münster, 2012. This collection details the concerns of the male African writer. Helen Cousins & Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo *Emerging Perspectives on Yvonne Vera*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2012. All these are specifically focused on the concerns of the era(s) of these writers. Kizito Z. Muchemwa and Robert Muponde eds. *Manning the Nation: Father figures in Zimbabwean literature*. Harare: Weaver Press, 2007 by its very title excludes most women writers who are not directly interested in the subject of masculinity.

violence. Many Zimbabwean authors and critics who subscribe to the patriotic narrative of the nation that glorifies both the past and the present, gloss over this topic (of gender violence) because it makes them uncomfortable<sup>3</sup>. For historian Terrence Ranger, “patriotic history emphasises the division of the nation not only into races but also into patriots and sell-outs among its African population” (2005, 2)<sup>4</sup>. What Ranger alludes to here is the issue of conformity, where one needs to conform to the norm and to strive always to uphold the prevailing status quo in order to avoid being othered or viewed as the enemy. In Ranger’s terms, patriotic history excludes races considered to be non-indigenous, and it also excludes women. It is important here to mention patriotic history for its exclusionary tendencies. Patriotic history is narrow, partisan, ethno-nationalist and patriarchal. If citizenship is participatory in imagining the nation, then in the ZANU PF version of the nation, political parties that have no liberation war credentials, marginalised ethnicities (all non-Shona groups), settlers, women and totem-less blacks from neighbouring countries are excluded from imagining the postcolonial nation of Zimbabwe. This version of patriotic history views women not as makers of history but as being made by history. They are consequently excluded from national discourses of heroism associated with the anti-colonial heroic struggles of male liberators. This places the writing of the novels in this study within the context of unpatriotic writing or writing that does not seek to glorify either the past or present society. Ranger’s words above are also important as they locate the selected texts of this study in resonance with Valerie Tagwira's view that " good fiction is not didactic nor does it provide any one particular point of view" ( Bertha Shoko 2007). This is to say that literature need not be prescriptive or categorically aligned.

I should mention here, that there are other literary works written post year 2000 that I could have used in this study including, but not limited to, Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), Petina Gappah's *The Book of*

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<sup>3</sup> Authors have discussed the notion of patriotic narratives are those that uphold the patriarchal status quo and subscribe to patriarchal structures of inequality. Among these authors are Terrance Ranger 2004 Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30(2): 215–234, and Ranka Primorac 2007 The Poetics of state terror in twenty-first century Zimbabwe. *Interventions* 9(3): 434–450.

<sup>4</sup> See also Terrence Ranger 2004 Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: the struggle over the past in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30(2): 215–234 for a similar explanation of nationalist discourse in Zimbabwe.

*Memory* (2011), and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). These novels offer valuable insights into the subject of agency and gender violence and would have made an interesting analysis. Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) is a very powerful and explicit text in its descriptions of gender violence and in detailing the feelings and responses of women to gender violence. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006) is a sequel to her much acclaimed *Nervous Conditions* (1988). The story of *The Book of Not* is told by Tambudzai as she attends a convent boarding school in Rhodesia. Tambudzai's confusion and identity crisis is illuminated in this narrative as she is so desperate to identify with her white school friends that she volunteers to contribute to the white peoples fight against African's by knitting jerseys for the white soldiers. Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* (2011) tells the story of Memory, an albino woman who is on death row in Zimbabwe's Maximum Prison, Chikurubi, for the murder of her adoptive white father, Lloyd. Through writing her memories of what happened, it is revealed to the reader that she is in fact innocent but is incarcerated for her lack of voice. She also attributes her incarceration to her condition of being an albino and suggests that her condition made it easy for people to misunderstand her. NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) tells the story of Darling and her friends Stina, Chipso, Godknows, Sbhoo and Bastard who dream of escaping to other places such as Dubai and America; and later as a teenager in America, now realising that America is not as glorious as she and her friends thought.

Despite the relevance of these novels to my study, particularly their reading as postcolonial feminist novels, I do not include them in my analysis for a number of reasons. For Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, although these particular novels are new, as novelists, they are celebrated and are pretty much members of the older literary canon of well-known Zimbabwean writers. The works of these two novelists have received a great deal of critical analysis and attention from scholars. I therefore leave these novelists out of my study because they do not fit into the category of lesser known female literary writers in Zimbabwe, on whose works my study focuses. Petina Gappah, however new on the literary scene, has made a storming entrance into the literary canon and has become well-known. Gappah's and NoViolet Bulawayo's novels could also have been very relevant to my analysis however, my study was not intended to cover every recent novel that speaks about Gender violence. As mentioned earlier, my study deals with a selection of novels and is acutely aware of the existence of other novels published within the same period, post 2000 that are relevant to the subject of gender violence.

The most threatening presence in contemporary Zimbabwean society, as shown in the texts examined in this study, is that of gender violence. The excesses of gender violence have been a worrying issue in Zimbabwe and in 2006 the Zimbabwean government formulated the Domestic Violence Act of 14/2006. However, the Act wrongly presumes that all gender violence is domestic. Although women experience most gender-based violence within the domestic arena, they also experience it outside this domain. Moreover, men also find themselves on the receiving end of violence, even outside the domestic space. This reflects a shortcoming in the scope and effectiveness of the Act. Violence may be construed as entailing “acts of physical coercion or their threat” (Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson and Jennifer Marchbank 2000, 2). Although scholars like Jacobs et al. (2000) loosely associate the term with physical abuse (assault) and sexual harassment of women, the impact of gender-based violence on various facets of life cannot be ignored. The term gender-based violence clearly alludes to the hostility meted out to an individual by virtue of one’s being biologically male or female.

In order to understand the existence of violence in gendered relationships, it is necessary to understand its nature. Violence “extends from individual relationships to the arrangement of power and authority in organisations and institutions” (Laura L. O’Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman 1997, xii). This description of violence locates the experience of violence in both private and public spheres, paving the way for an analysis of gender violence that identifies women both as victims and perpetrators of violence. O’Toole and Schiffman further describe violence as being the extreme application of social control. This description of the nature of violence is helpful in my study’s analysis of the spheres in which violence is experienced and the ways in which the genders respond to violence. In keeping with O’Toole and Schiffman’s (1997) argument, Women and Population Division, Sustainable Development Department and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) assert that

violence can be considered as any attempt to control, manipulate or demean another individual using physical, emotional or sexual tactics (Women and Population Division et al. 1999, 20).

Women and Population Division and Food and Agriculture Organisation (1999), in much the same way as O'Toole and Schiffman (1997) highlight the pressing concern of social control. For the purposes of this study, however, I align myself with those scholars who focus on violence as "a gendered phenomenon within the context of patriarchal social relations" (Jacobs et al. 2000, 2) and who believe that violence is sexualised and should be analysed as gendered even when no sexual act is involved. Violence is a phenomenon that is shaped by specific cultural, ideological and socio-economic forces. In addition, characters' identities are constituted by the complex intersections of a number of markers of difference, including their gender, race and class. This study thus regards identity as being intersectional and takes all these factors into consideration when investigating the representations of violence and resistance in the selected texts. Part of the aim of this study is to determine whether these literary representations offer any solutions or constructive strategies to those characters affected by or living with violence.

When people are subjected to violence it is often assumed that they are passive recipients of that violence, unless they resist violently or in a visible manner that shows that they are aware of and reject this violence. This study contends with Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner's view that "resistance does not have to be seen by others to count as resistance ... [it] can be conscious or unconscious" (2004, 538). This assertion critiques the view that resistance is behaviour that challenges, in an unambiguous manner, that which is considered normal or normative. The critique also suggests that resistance does not have to be obvious or observed by others and that it may be either deliberate or unintended. Crucially, and for the purposes of this study, resistance may be passive and involve inaction and silence. The Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter argues in a similar vein that "resistance is not always visible" (2009, 2). Also important to the study is Stephanie Patterson's contribution to resistance discourses. She believes that in the case of women, resistance is "often conceptualised as an exit from the abusive relationship" (Patterson 2010, 1). This conceptualisation, however, obscures the experiences and resistance strategies of women who are unwilling or unable to leave violent relationships. While this notion of passive resistance is particularly important to the analysis of the ways in which women characters in the selected novels resist violence. Patterson further

contends that “resistance can be violent, non-violent, active or passive” (2010, 2). It is important to note that not all resistance is effective, but that this should not disqualify such acts from being regarded as forms of resistance. For the purposes of this study, therefore, resistance is viewed as any response by women characters constituting an attempt to deal with violence. I am also cognisant of the contention expressed by Deborah A. Leresque, Wayne F. Velicer, Patricia H. Castle and Neil R. Green that resistance “may also come from the perpetrator” (Leresque et al. 2008, 159); by extension, resistance does not necessarily come only from the victim. Resistance to violence, whether visible or not, is what defines the agency of an individual to avert that violence, where agency is generally regarded as the ability to act.

I contend that the list of characteristics that define third world women cannot be said to accurately describe the experience of women characters in Zimbabwean literary texts written after 2000. Zimbabwean women, considering the historical fact of high levels of education in the country, cannot all be described as ignorant. The *Trail* (2000), *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and *The African Tea Cosy* (2010) feature relatively well educated and articulate female characters. A new generation of women is emerging and they cannot be contained in third world notions of feminism. They, together with some women who belong to the old order are struggling against tradition. What has to be acknowledged is the family orientation of most of the major characters. For African women, traditional western feminism alone cannot bring true liberation. In the same vein, Patricia H. Collins argues that African women experience “intersecting oppressions” (2000, 9). These are oppressions and experiences in the three-fold domestic space of African women as wives, mothers and social products. I concur with Collin’s delineation of the domestic space of African women but wish to add the spaces of women as daughters, aunties, nieces and honorary men when need be.

Although there is a body of research that focuses on different representations of gender violence in Zimbabwean literature, not enough attention has been paid to texts that simultaneously represent gender violence, resistance and agency in female-authored Zimbabwean literature in English. Few scholars have comprehensively examined the diversity of women’s experiences of gender violence in Zimbabwean literature. Violence emerges in both specific non-specific cultural, traditional and domestic spaces and

analyses of such violence must take cognisance of these particular contexts. My study expands the scope of analysing gender relations by exploring violent relationships between men and women and between women and other women, in the light of O'Toole and Schiffman's argument that gender violence is

any interpersonal, organisational or politically oriented violation perpetrated against people due to their social identity or location in the hierarchy of male dominated social systems such as family or government (O'Toole and Schiffman 1997, xiii).

Violence can thus be experienced at an individual or a group level and can be perpetrated by an individual or group. It can be manifested physically, emotionally, psychologically, economically or sexually. However, it is important to appreciate that most violence which may be considered sexual may also be experienced physically and emotionally, which also means psychologically. This study is particularly interested in the representations by female Zimbabwean writers of the various responses to different types of gender-based violence.

Gender violence, as an area of concern in postcolonial feminist discourses, develops from the notion of 'gender'. The concept of gender rose to prominence in Zimbabwe in the 1970s as researchers sought a way to "conceptualize the social construction of masculinity and femininity" (Jane Flax 1989, 66). The need to understand social constructions of masculinity and femininity shows the already growing realisation in postcolonial feminism that biological make-up is not the only determining factor of gender. Flax adds that attention was diverted from the biological female-male dichotomy to the social relations between and among men and women, to what was termed gender analysis. This diversion enabled an examination of the multiple layers of social relations and identities of men and women, individually and collectively. Just as with the dates of its origin, the definitions of gender have also remained varied. However, despite varied definitions, gender functions "not only as a set of social relations but as a tool of analysis" (Flax 1989, 67). Gender is thus an analytical variable used to understand social structures. Flax explains that gender is a social construction and that the gendering process is based partly on biological factors and partly on arbitrary and cultural traits. In disputing the biological determination of gender and in acknowledgement of the fluidity of gender identities, Judith Butler concurs

with Flax and asserts that “the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining” (Butler 1993, 31). What Butler argues here is that the embodying of norms is the process through which gender is practised, although the process is not all encompassing. This means that despite the embodying of norms, such as in gendered behaviours, individuals may go against the norm. Hence, as is seen in the analyses in this study, women can take on roles that are traditionally assumed to be for men, such as providing for the family. In the African social fibre, women often take on the responsibilities of a father in instances that call for honorary manhood. This study views gender as a

complex system of personal and social relations through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated status, power and material resources within society (Eudine Barriteau 1998, 188).

Gender, for Barriteau, is thus a social construct in which men and women find themselves being assigned roles (in society) according to biological determinism, so that power and status in society are predicated on this approach to gender identity. For Barriteau, gender comprises three main concepts: the construction of relations of gender and gender systems, the methodologies of gender and the distinguishing features of gender systems. Women are thus “socially constructed beings subject to asymmetrical gender relations... [and] an unequal gender relation is a relation of domination” (ibid, 189). Thus, gender relates “dialectically with social, cultural and political forces” (Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2009, 368). My thesis responds to Barriteau’s call for a wider view of gender beyond biological differences, to include political relations between the state and women and men. The call to focus on the material relations of gender is also considered in the study. My thesis also subscribes to Toril Moi’s view that

there are situations in which we choose to be freely recognized as sexed or raced bodies, where that recognition is exactly what we need and want. Identity politics starts with such identity-affirming situations, but unfortunately goes on to base a general politics on them, thus forgetting that there are other situations in which we do not want to be identified by our sexed and raced bodies, situations in which we wish

that body to be no more than the insignificant background to our main activity. (Moi 1999: 203).

Moi alludes to the fluidity of identity and its mutation to meet specific needs in specific circumstances. In view of this, my study further views gender as a social construct that is largely manifested through culture and language.

The manifestations of gender in the societies depicted in the texts of this study may be viewed through domination, mostly on the part of boys and men. Michael Kimmel's suggestion that manhood and masculinity be defined in terms of a "drive for power, for domination, (and) control" (2006, 6), attests to this view. The notion of domination in the enactment of gender entails practices and discourses that become primarily different modes of violence. The most commonly understood type of violence is physical violence and it is based on patriarchal and normative conceptions of women as physically weak. It is this perceived physical weakness that leads men as lovers, spouses and strangers to batter women. Gender-based violence is the most traumatic form of violence. It is often, but not entirely, associated with men punishing women for their failure to fulfil certain expectations. It is used as a threat to make women do what they do not want to do. In some cases it assumes the nature of a pathological condition on the part of men, as we see in the characters of Gari in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and Steve in *The African Tea Cosy*.

Whilst on the subject of gender, it is imperative for this study, although focusing on feminist theories, to pay some attention to masculinities, given their relativity and importance to such an analysis. This is also important for an understanding of the comprehension and articulation of femininities and masculinities as gender constructs. Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde, contributors to *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*, the first critical anthology to deal with Zimbabwean masculinities, rightly point out, and I concur, that

Zimbabwean scholarship and research on gender studies is currently skewed in favour of one sex and one gender. To discuss one gender usually implies an adversarial existence of underprivileged gender and a definition though negatives of the privileged one (2007, xv)

Muchemwa and Muponde highlight an important point which I make in my study, that is, that a great deal of Zimbabwean scholarship is separatist in its treatment of gender issues, including gender violence and the genders' responses to it. In my view, this is the result of an over reliance by such studies on western feminisms. Muchemwa and Muponde's timely reminder is relevant to my argument. Muchemwa and Muponde's observation also points to the juxtaposition of femininities to masculinities. Gender is thus relational and should be acknowledged as such.

Masculinities are diverse, although some masculinities are more dominant than others. Raewyn Connell identifies two types of male relations in the construction of masculinities, "hegemony, domination/subordination and complicity on the one hand, marginalisation/authorization on the other" (2005, 81). For Connell terms such as hegemonic masculinity or marginalised masculinity are not fixed character types but rather conformations of practice. From Connell's argument, four categories of masculinities can be discerned; dominant, complicit, subservient and oppositional. Of these categories, dominant or hegemonic masculinities have been the most typified of men in literary representations and studies, particularly of African men and African societies. Tim Carriga, Bob Connell and John Lee in their article; "Towards a new sociology of masculinity", make an interesting development in masculinity studies through their call for the exploration "of what forms of masculinity are socially dominant or hegemonic" (1985, 552). In their study, they identify hegemonic masculinity as a dominant masculinity in society hence the need for this masculinity to be explored. Further to debates on masculinities, Mike Donaldson describes hegemonic masculinity as "exclusive, anxiety provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent" (1993, 645). In their representations of characters with hegemonic masculinities, the selected texts of this study show the excessiveness of this category of masculinity and will often try to offer an alternative.

It is important to acknowledge here that just as femininities are not always female, masculinities too do not always reside in male bodies. In similar light, Robert Morell argues that "masculinity is a collective gender identity and not a natural attribute (1998, 607). In arguing that masculinity is a collective gender Morell suggests that it is associated with a group of beings and a group way of behaviour that becomes an identity. In stating

that masculinity is not a natural attribute he shows that masculinity is a social construction and is thus fluid. Muchemwa and Muponde also add to this debate by stating that “masculinities inhabit, and indeed, proliferate in other genders and sexes as well. They are not a monopoly of one biological sex or social construct” (2007, xvi). In contextualising this view of the fluidity of masculinities and how the female gender can also exude masculinities, Chikwenje Ogunyemi, in an interview with Susan Arndt alludes to the ‘he-woman’ whom she describes as a woman “identified with the male world” (Arndt 2000,718). She goes on to state that this he-woman is “basically a strong woman (who) exhibits masculine characteristics” (Ibid, 718). In the same vein, postcolonial feminism does not advance a confrontational approach to gender relations as it considers femininities and masculinities as mutually implicated in the construction of gender identities.

This recognition of mutual construction and the related projection of gender, freedom and empowerment do not obscure the agency of women in contesting their oppression by hegemonic masculinities, especially as they use the instruments of gender based violence. For the purpose of this study, I am aligned with Antony J. Lemelle who defines masculinity, quite simply, as “socially constructed characteristics that society expects for the male sex” (2010, 3). Using this basic definition of masculinity, it is necessary to note that masculinity is different to femininity- social expectations of female behaviour, and is defined in contrast to it. This spells out the need to pay attention to both masculinity and femininity, in order to have a nuanced appreciation of their relativity. The selected texts of my study demonstrate the pervasiveness of multiple masculinities in both men and women. There are social norms of behaviour that are often associated or assumed to be expected of a certain gender and which society may or may not appreciate seeing in another gender<sup>5</sup>. Examples are shown of women characters who exhibit certain masculinities and men characters too who are considered feminine.

Women’s contestation of their disempowerment and oppression is the primary focus of the texts discussed in this study. These feminist struggles are portrayed in the context of collaboration and solidarity with less hegemonic masculinities. Just as men in patriarchal

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<sup>5</sup> Further reference to women with masculinities is made in Amadiume Ifi 1987. *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in African society*. London: Zed books.

societies determine instruments that create gender inequality and suffering of women, these writers suggest that men can play a positive role in the emancipation of women. This less confrontational view of gender relations and struggles is illustrated in *The African Tea Cosy* (2010) and, in part, in the emergence of new men in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). This is realised through men who defy the norms of traditional patriarchy and recognise and advance the development of women's rights and freedoms. The emergence of new masculinities does not entail the total dismantling of traditional patriarchy, however; instead, it signals a way of rethinking gender in Zimbabwean culture. These new men embark on ameliorated projects not only to improve the condition of women but also to make amends for the sins committed by their gender. The introduction of new masculinities in these texts reveals how these writers subscribe to postcolonial feminism, especially postcolonial feminist strands of African feminism and African womanism upon which this study is based.

The chapters in this thesis in dealing with femininities and masculinities also interrogate female and male sexualities and seek to establish the extent to which fictional narratives re-inscribe or dispute "colonial" and "anthropological" views of African sexuality (Elaine Salo, Pumla Gqola and Jessica Horn 2006, 1). Imperial ideologies have often worked hand in glove with traditional patriarchy to determine the sphere of women as domestic and to determine what constitutes good women and bad women, thereby prescribing the ways in which sexualities should be performed<sup>6</sup>. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy assert that there were

complex collaborations between colonial administrators and male elders as they attempted to assert and maintain patriarchal authority over women and younger men through the construction and reinforcement of "customary law" and "traditional authority" (Hodgson and McCurdy 1996, 2).

These complex collaborations suggest the complicity of black men in the oppression of black women and other black men by colonial administrators. The same complicity

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<sup>6</sup> See Gaidzanwa 1993, 43, in *Citizenship, Nationality, Gender and Class in Southern Africa*, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 18(1): 39–59 and Waller 2006, 78, in *Rebellious Youth in Colonial Africa*, *The Journal of African History* 47(1): 77–92, who have produced, in my view, significant scholarship on how imperial ideologies have worked with patriarchy to domesticate women.

suffices in the authorisation of young men to maintain patriarchal authority and pass it down from generation to generation, thereby maintaining the status quo. In colonial Zimbabwe one of these collaborations is illustrated in philanthropic projects designed to improve the lives of African women while in fact perpetuating the imperial agenda, couching it in the language of philanthropy and Christianity<sup>7</sup>. These colonial efforts to domesticate the African woman in terms of Eurocentric concepts spilled over into postcolonial Zimbabwe. Lillian Masitera's *The Trail* (2000) highlights the agency of African womanists in releasing young women from their sustained patriarchal domination which is reinforced by colonial administrators and Christianity.

Zimbabwe's literary canon has grown immensely, no doubt, with invaluable contribution from Zimbabwean female authors, although the literary canon is still largely dominated by men<sup>8</sup>. Before Zimbabwe's independence, Zimbabwe's literature was dominated by men with the exception of Doris Lessing who made an entry into the canon but as a white woman novelist. The first black Zimbabwean novelist to write in English is Tsitsi Dangarembga with her debut *Nervous Conditions* which was written much later in 1988. There were however earlier entries than hers in poetry and short stories with the likes of Barbara Makhalisa's short story collection *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984) which was the first short story collection by a woman writer. Kristina Rungano's *A Storm is Brewing* (1984) was the first poetry collection by a female poet. Other legendary names in the history of black female Zimbabwean authorship include the late freedom fighter and poet, Freedom Nyamubaya, in her poetry collection *On the Road Again* (1986). This same period in the development of Zimbabwean female authorship also saw the establishment of Zimbabwe Women Writers (ZWW) in 1990 with a mandate to promote women's literature in Zimbabwe by promoting existing and upcoming female writers. Other writers include

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<sup>7</sup> Amy Kaler 1999, 270, in *Visions of Domesticity in the African Women's Homecraft Movement in Rhodesia*. *Social Science History* 23(3): 269–309 and Carolyn Martin Shaw 2008, 253, in *Sticks and Stones: Black and White Women in the Homecraft Movement in Colonial Zimbabwe*, in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1(2):253–278, discuss the “Homecraft Movement in Rhodesia” and attest to the existence of settler interventions in determinations of the domesticity and sexuality of African women that were reminiscent of the colonial exotification of Africa as savage and therefore in need of the civilising, Christianising and the taming hand of the white coloniser.

<sup>8</sup> Rino Zhuwara and Musaemura Zimunya (1987) provide a list, *Zimbabwean Literature in English, 1966-85: A Bibliography* in *Research in African Literatures: Special Issue on the Concept of National Literature*, Vol. 18 (3) pp 340-342.

Nosipo Maraire *Zenzele: A letter for My Daughter* (1996), Vivienne Ndlovu *For Want of a Totem* (1997) and Lillian Masitera *Now I Can Play* (1999).

Zimbabwe's literary canon has also enjoyed a vast contribution of writing by non-black; mostly White and Asian, men and women writers, in both pre and post independence Zimbabwe. I will focus on the contributions of non-black women writers for purposes of this study, which is particularly interested in novels by women writers. Doris Lessing is probably the most acclaimed white non-black female author of Zimbabwean and other literature. Her novels include *The Grass is Singing* (1950) which is set in Southern Rhodesia during the 1940's, where she was then living. The novel deals with the politics between whites and blacks in that country and shows the development of an intimate relationship between a black man Moses and a white woman, Mary Turner. Lessing's other novels include a sequence of five novels collectively called *Children of Violence* (1952–69), *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Good Terrorist* (1985), and five novels collectively known as *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979–1983).

There is a flourishing of non-black women writing on Zimbabwe's literary arena after the year 2000. Some of the white female Zimbabwean writing that has emerged after year 2000 includes works by Alexandra Fuller who, in my view, is the second internationally recognised white Zimbabwean novelists after Doris Lessing. Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Lets Go To The Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2001), is a memoir of Fuller's life with her family in Southern Africa. Her second novel *Scribbling The Cat* (2004) is a tale of war's repercussions. Fuller's third novel, *The Legend of Colton. H. Byrant* (2008), narrates the tragically short life of Wyoming Roughneck who fell to his death at age 25 in February 2006 on an oil rig. Her *Cocktail Hour Under The Tree of Forgetfulness* (2011) is a memoir about her mother. Fuller's third Memoir and most recent publication *Leaving before the Rains Come* (2015) is a story about the fall of her marriage. Lauren Liebenberg is yet another white female novelist who emerged in the same period under review. Her novel, *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam* (2008), draws upon Liebenberg's childhood in Rhodesia during Zimbabwe's liberation war. Despite the varying settings, Liebenberg's novel is very similar to Byrony Rheam's *This September Sun* (2009) which also contributes to female authored non-black writing in Zimbabwe. Its focus like Liebenberg's book is on white childhood in Africa. Rheam narrates the story of Ellie a

young white girl in independent Zimbabwe who in her teenage years grows fonder of and closer to her grandmother who encourages her to go and continue her education in England. Ellie's family life is woven into larger national narratives including Zimbabwe's infamous land invasions and the suffering that whites endured in this period. One of Rheam's aims in the novel is to show that despite being white she is still Zimbabwean and has nowhere else to go. Scholars such as Augustine Tirivangana have received the novel with much scepticism and have described it as a "gross misrepresentation of the postcolonial Zimbabwe" (2014, 8). Tirivangana's attitude towards Rheam's book is reflective of the apprehension that a number of scholars in Zimbabwe have over white Zimbabwean writing.

Other female authored non-black Zimbabwean writing includes Fay Chung's autobiography *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2006). In this book, Chung is interested to show the contribution made by the Asian community to Zimbabwe's liberation war and ultimate independence. She is also conscious to show the challenges she encountered in Zimbabwe's journey to independence as a member of a minority Asian race and as a woman. In this autobiography, Chung also reflects on the on-going crisis in Zimbabwe. Her book may be read as a patriotic text in so far as she tries to conform to Zimbabwe's ruling government, and tries so hard to secure space for the Asian in postcolonial Zimbabwe, by registering her support for Mugabe's 'third chimurenga' and its focus on the land reform. Also published in 2006 is Wendy Kann's *Casting With a Fragile Thread: A Story of Sisters and Africa*. This is a memoir of a woman whose sister's tragic death prompts her to take on a journey into her turbulent African past, in what is now Zimbabwe. The story in Kann's novel is very similar to Fuller's *Don't Lets Go To The Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2001), in recounting white childhood in colonial Zimbabwe. I could have analysed any one of these novels by white writers published within the scope of my study, which is post year 2000, but felt that my theoretical framework may not have offered much to the analysis of these texts given the exclusionary tendencies of postcolonial feminism strands of African feminism and African womanism, based on race. An investigation into the ability or possibility of postcolonial feminism to speak for the challenges of non-black indigenous women in Africa is a fertile area that I would recommend to other researchers.

The vast developments on Zimbabwe's literary scene have brought an equally vast body of critical work on both black and non-black Zimbabwean writing with scholars trying to theorise and contextualise these categories of Zimbabwean writing. There is, undeniably, "a vast wealth of local literature to read now than there was before independence when Zimbabwean literature was launched in 1956" (Beaven Tapureta 2015, 10). This is evidenced by the numerous literary works that have been authored by Zimbabweans of whatever race. The concerns of Zimbabwe's literary writers have developed over the years, from the traditional "historicised fiction mainly done by writers who became prominent in the black nationalist movements from the early 1950's" (Ibid). Hence the timely reminder by Robert Muponde and Ranca Primorac in their ground breaking book *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* that literary texts "imagine multiple versions of Zimbabwe, and it is only a multiplicity of approaches and opinions than can do this variety true justice" (2005, xv). This assertion by Muponde and Primorac sets the stage for the acceptance of non-black writing as being Zimbabwean<sup>9</sup>. Critical works on white Zimbabwean writing however seem to be biased more towards male non-black Zimbabwean writing than female. Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey Davis's collection of essays *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays of Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona* (2008) is a collection of essays on 'Rhodesian' and 'Zimbabwean' literature in different languages and forms. In this collection, the essay that is of interest to my study, in terms of non-black Zimbabwean writing is John McAllister's "Knowing Native, Going Native: Travel writing, cognitive borderlines and the sense of belonging in Doris Lessing's *African Laughter* and Dan Jacobson's *The Electronic Elephant*" (2008). In this essay, McAllister acknowledges Lessing's concern with alienation and white settler identity crisis, although she has a deconstructive approach to traditional imperial texts that undermine Africans wholesale.

Another critical scholar, Cuthbert Tagwirei, provides what, in my view, is a solid analysis of non-black writing in Zimbabwe in his doctoral thesis titled "Should I stay or Should I go? Zimbabwe's white writing, 1980-2011 (2011)". Although his study provides analysis of only two female white Zimbabwean writers, Alexandra Fuller and Byrony Rheam he

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<sup>9</sup> There are other scholars who argue that white writing can ever be Zimbabwean and that it remains Rhodesian or colonial such as Javangwe 2011. In his "Contesting narratives: constructions of the self and the nation in Zimbabwean political autobiography". UNISA.

does make the important observation that "the present usage of "white writing Zimbabwe" or "Zimbabwe's white writing" amounts to a recognition of the politics surrounding nationhood and citizenship" (2011, 20). Although I agree with Tagwira in this observation, I however add that white and other non-black women's writing in Zimbabwe furthers a feminist agenda just like black women's writing, even within the narrative space that Tagwirei observes as being centred on nationhood and citizenship. Other scholars who have critiqued non-black Zimbabwean writing such as Tasiyana Javangwe in his doctoral thesis "Contesting narratives: constructions of the self and the nation in Zimbabwean political autobiography" (2011), although confined to autobiographical texts, also provides a framework for the understanding of non-black writing in Zimbabwe.

The emergence of women writers on Zimbabwe's literary arena has made its mark on the canon as it is understood in the present day, particularly for Black Zimbabwean Writing, which George P. Kahari describes as

remarkably diverse...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 (1990, 2) .

I concur with Kahari's observation of the nature of Black Zimbabwean writing and assert too that the entry of Zimbabwe's women writers has added to this diversity by widening the concerns of the postcolonial text in post-independence Zimbabwe. Morala Ogundipe-Leslie in commenting on the responsibility of the African woman writer suggests that her role is: "first to tell about being a woman; secondly to describe reality from a woman's point of view, a woman's perspective" (1994, 5). Ogundipe-leslie outlines the role of the African woman writer as critical to the voicing of women. Through writing, women show their potential for subversion though what Moreblessing B. Chitauru, Liz Gunner and Caleb Dube term women's power to "...revision; through their expressive art..." (1994, 118). Writing is a means of expressive art. It is a means though which women can recast their own representations and offer alternative narratives; a means of distilling their own brew.

The inspiration to write, for women writers in Zimbabwe to, in my view, is heralded in Ogunديه-leslie's assertion above. It is further fortified by legendary Zimbabwean female feminist novelist Yvonne Vera in her preface to *Opening Spaces* thus; "a woman writer must have an imagination that is plain stubborn, that can invent new gods and banish ineffectual ones" (1999, 1). Vera here sets the tone of women's writing in Zimbabwe and pre-emptly the tone of writing realised in the selected texts of this study. Vera, in support of Zimbabwean female authorship adds that

if speaking is still difficult to negotiate, then writing has created a free space for most women- much freer than speech...the text is granted its intimacy, its creation of a world, its proposals, its individual characters, its suspension of belief. Writing offers a moment of intervention (1999, 3).

Vera in her assertion defines the power of writing and the autonomy it accords for female expression even in oppressive patriarchal situations. What she advocates here is the voicing of women and their agency in the fight against patriarchal domination. Vera's impetus for black female writing resonates well with Cameroonian scholar Juliana Makuchi Nfah- Abbenyi's view of African women writers that they

have not just openly lamented, questioned, and criticized the neglect of their work; they have also attacked this neglect through their ongoing exercise of the act of writing. They have slowly but surely used their writings as weapons to invade the battlefields that had hitherto been occupied and dominated by male writers, making tangible gains along the way. These women writers have beaten and are still beating their drums and are letting their war-cries be heard side by side with those of their counterparts at home and abroad (1997,148).

The war-cries that Nfah-Abbenyi refers to in the citation above are the concerns that shape African women's agency in the various spaces of their private and public lives. She emphasises that writing has enabled women to express themselves and attack their neglect by patriarchal discourses. In referring to Post-Colonial and African American Women's Writing, Gina Wisker, like Vera and Nfah- Abbenyi, makes the important point that, African women authors

enable revisionist subversions of women's roles which are represented in conventional fictions as unproblematic, dramatising conflicts and illustrating how women

simultaneously fulfil, question and move beyond their roles” (2000, 134).

From the citation, the very act of writing should be viewed as a subversion; a contestation. However, the notion of writing, though liberating for women, certainly comes with a rider. Nomboniso Gasa speaks on the persecution that women encounter for expressing themselves and asserts that “a woman writer also needs a thick skin, for she does not know when and how it may crack, and if it does she had better have some sisters around to wipe the blood” (2007, ix). Here Gasa fortifies Vera, Nfah- Abbenyi and Wisker’s views of women’s writing. They concur that women are not free to express themselves and that the role expected of the African female literary writer is to speak for and on behalf of other African women, who for various reasons, are unable to speak for themselves. Gasa’s in the citation also calls for sisterhood and expresses the need for women to support each other.

Critics have produced important scholarship on Zimbabwean fiction by female authors following the proliferation of black Zimbabwean female authored literary texts<sup>10</sup>. Sociologist Rudo B. Gaidzanwa’s (1985) ground breaking book, *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* was the first to investigate the portrayal of women in Zimbabwean literature. Gaidzanwa’s book is valuable in its analysis and in bringing to the fore the need for gender analyses. The study captures, quite well, the negative images that dominated literary representations in mostly male authored novels of the 70’s and 80’s period. Predominantly then, images of women were quite negative, derogatory and lacking of the agency that is reflected in later literary and critical works. A possible reason for the images presented in this book may well be the focus during that period on historicised fiction which was aimed at contesting colonial narratives. The presentations may also have been influenced by the lack, in this period, of many women writers who could have offered alternative representations. In the early 1990’s, German literary critic, Flora Veit-Wild (1992) published the book, *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of*

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<sup>10</sup> For further reading s Rino Zhuwarara 2001. *An introduction to Zimbabwean literature in English*. College Press, who outlines the critical concerns of Zimbabwean literature, more particularly the emergence of the female writer. See also Eva Hunter 2000. Zimbabwean Nationalism and Motherhood in Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*. *African Studies* 59 (2):229-243, Maurice Taonezvi Vambe 2003. HIV/AIDS, African Sexuality and the problem of representation in Zimbabwean Literature, Jessica Murray 2010. The ‘recidivist tongue’: embracing an embodied language of trauma. *Social Dynamics* 36(3):488-503 and Oliver Nyambi 2014. Cultured to fail? Representations of gender-entangled urban women in two short stories by Valerie Tagwira. *SAGE Open* 4(3):1-9

*Zimbabwean Literature*. This book is quite similar in outlook to Gaidzanwa's *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* given the sociological thrust of both books. Veit-Wild's book examines the ways in which the prevailing social order and how a writer's personal background influences the concerns of his or her writing. This book offers valuable insights into the inspirations of fictional writing although it is limiting in terms of the analysis of present day literary representations. Given the late entry of female Zimbabwean writers on the literary scene, the book offers an analysis of one female author- Tsitsi Dangarembga. Veit-Wild's book has been received with mixed reactions by other critics. While Thomas O'Toole argues that Veit-Wild "offers a clear, lucid, and logical socio-historical analysis of the processes and forces shaping Zimbabwean literature from its inception through the late 1980's" (1994, 102), critics such as Pauline Dodgson (1993) and Preben Kaarsholm (1994), On the other hand, agree un-categorically that Vet-Wild makes too many generalisations about, and is rather limited in both her analysis and understanding of, Zimbabwean politics and social issues. Despite the criticism, however, my study is cognisant of the valuable contributions made by Veit-Wild.

Zimbabwean academic, Rino Zhuwarara, developing upon Gaidzanwa's (1985) and Veit-Wild's (1992) works, published *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* (2001). Zhuwarara's book places more emphasis on Zimbabwean literature written in the English language thereby laying the foundation for other studies which focus of Zimbabwean literature in English, such as this thesis. Zhuwarara has this to say about his book:

The writer would be quite satisfied if the critical survey enables general readers of Zimbabwean fiction, especially those who study it at secondary school, college and university levels to interpret the works on the basis of a sound grasp of the texts themselves; 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).

Zhuwarara provides a timely reminder that there are several dimensions to life; historical, cultural, social and psychological and that these dimensions influence literary expression. I concur with Zhuwarara's observation that society is rapidly changing but wish to add that this rapid change is far too often portrayed, in literary expressions, as leading to a social milieu in which the genders are under pressure to constantly negotiate and or sustain

gendered social identities. Zhuwarara's book, however, focuses on mostly male and well known female writers, perhaps due to the paucity of female authorship in the period that he carried out his study. He, however does not fully explore the postcolonial feminist concerns of Zimbabwean women writers, even within the context of violence that he suggests provides the groundwork of Zimbabwean literary expression. Although most of the works analysed in Zhuwarara's book are published much earlier than the texts under study in my thesis, his analysis provides a significant framework within which to study Zimbabwean literature in English.

The few years following the publication of Zhuwarara's *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature in English* (2001) saw the publication of Maurice Vambe's *Oral Story-telling and the Zimbabwean Novel in English* (2004). This book makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the use by novelists of oral story-telling as an effective means of allowing characters, especially female characters, to narrate their experiences<sup>11</sup>. Vambe's book is critical in its revision of earlier critical books on Zimbabwean literature, thereby providing more insights. However, as Anna Chitando rightly observes, "Vambe's study does not stress how storytelling accords space to women to be subversive" (2011, 30). This is a gap that this study fills by showing how story-telling is used as a space for subversion. Vambe also makes valuable contribution for this thesis in his other more recent critical works on Zimbabwean literature. One such example is his *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe* (2008). The book has, however, attracted some negativity from critics such as Oska Wermter SJ who argues that some of the essays in the book are "merely speculative" (2009, 24) as there are episodes of unsubstantiated claims in the essays. Despite its criticism, the book provides valuable insights for my analyses of Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2009) which I treat as a reportage of the said 'Operation Murambatsvina', a blotched government initiated 'clean-up campaign' of May 2007.

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<sup>11</sup> More reference on Maurice Vambe's views on orality may be sought from his book *Orality and Cultural Identities in Zimbabwe* (2001) published by Mambo Press Gweru. Other sources on orality and the Zimbabwean novel include George Kahari's *The Rise of the Shona Novel* (1990) published by Mambo Press in Gweru and Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu's M. Phil Thesis "The Influence of folktales and other factors on the early narratives in Ndebele literature" (1994) Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Zimbabwe.

Another critical text on Zimbabwean literature is Zifikile Mguni, Munashe Furusa and Ruby Magosvongwe's *African Womanhood in Zimbabwean Literature: New Critical Perspectives on Women's Literature in African Languages* (2006). Although this book focuses mainly on women's literature written in African languages, it offers important discussion points for my study, particularly for my analysis of the permutations of African womanhood in Zimbabwean literature, in relation to women's agency and resistance to gender violence. In this volume, Munashe Furusa suggests that a number of Zimbabwean women writers are apprehensive in their portrayal of gender relations. He posits that representations by many Zimbabwean women writers of "relationships between Zimbabwean women and men paint a picture of a culture that unleashes a large-scale, barbaric, and indiscriminate abuse of women" (Furusa 2006, 18). However, the portrayals of gender relations in the selected texts of my thesis challenge Furusa's observation as they, on the contrary, and to a large extent, are not overly apprehensive in their portrayals of men.

Some of the critical works on Zimbabwean literature, produced later than Mguni et al (2006), have tended to focus on literary representations of Zimbabwe's unstable political arena in relation to the enactment of masculinities and femininities within political discourse<sup>12</sup>. Despite numerous critical works on Zimbabwean literature, a great deal of Zimbabwe's scholarship focuses on better known authors such as Yvonne Vera, Tsitsi Dangarembga and poet Freedom Nyamubaya. Even here, the critical emphasis tends to be on representations of women's suffering under patriarchy and their status as victims. Although the exposure of gendered suffering is important, these studies often fail to take into consideration the female characters' agency and survival strategies, including how they go about rebuilding their lives and identities in the aftermath of violence. In this thesis, I argue that the fictional texts of other, lesser known Zimbabwean authors are equally worthy of critical attention and scrutiny, particularly because they also offer important insights into female characters' resistance to gender violence. Just as Kizito Z.

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of these include Robert Muponde and Mandivavarira Maodzwa-Taruvunga edited the volume, *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera* (2003) published by James Currey in London, Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac edited volume, *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (2005) published by Weaver Press in Harare, Ranka Primorac's *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* (2006) published by Tauris Academic Studies in London, and *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona*, edited by Mbongeni Z. Malaba and Geoffrey V. Davis (2007) published by Rodopi in Amsterdam and New York .

Muchemwa argues, “Zimbabwean fiction [...] embodies a convergence of history, memory and imaginative acts in search of individual and group identities” (2005, 195), newer and lesser known Zimbabwean women writers, like their predecessors similarly offer convergences of history, memory and imagination. Muchemwa adds to his assertion that “this convergence of history, memory, and writing often deconstructs and contests archival practices which seek to capture and freeze the past through officially sanctioned discourse” (Ibid, 195). The unfreezing or liberating power of Zimbabwean fiction is what I read in the texts selected for this study, as women writers deconstruct and contest traditional and patriarchal narratives and practices that deliberately or otherwise do not investigate the past.

My study thus contests female identities and discourses from both traditional and contemporary patriarchal cultures that reinforce the marginality of women and that authorise misogyny and violence against women. Michael Bourdillon argues that

it is a common misconception that women had little or no status in traditional African societies. There are many reasons given for (t)his view: women are said to be bought and sold in marriage like chattels; at the death of a husband, his widows are inherited with his estate; since women could not represent themselves in traditional courts but had to be represented by a senior male relative, it is said that legally they were minors all their lives; wives are said to be completely subject to their husbands who have the right to beat them within limits; women do most of the work in the fields and in the home while the men spend much of their time sitting in idle chatter (1976, 50).

Bourdillon suggests that it is a misconception to believe that women had little or no status in traditional African societies. I concur, with Bourdillon that there are misconceptions about female subjectivity and marginalisation. In line with Bourdillon’s suggestion, the notion of female subjectivity needs to be re-thought. Also in concurrence with Bourdillon’s contestation of female marginality, I critique Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s conceptualisation of the subalternity of the colonised woman when she questions “with what voice consciousness can the subaltern speak?” (1988, 80) and ultimately asserts that “the subaltern cannot speak” (ibid, 104). Spivak’s focus on lack as the defining feature of female marginality, though drawing attention to the most heinous forms of female oppression, emphasises the impossibility of women moving out of their entrapment.

Lack of voice, agency and visibility is an affirmation and reinforcement of patriarchal scripts of womanhood. The nexus of violence in its different forms contributes significantly to women's invisibility, voiceless-ness and lack of agency. I argue, however, that despite patriarchal cultures that seek to dis-empower them, women disrupt narratives of male domination and violence by creating new perceptions in what Vera (1999) describes as being plain stubborn and creating new gods. The focus on women's responses to gender violence places my study in the framework of Zimbabwean gender studies and critical Zimbabwean feminist scholarship that centres on the work of scholars such as Patricia McFadden and Rudo Barbara Gaidzanwa<sup>13</sup>. McFadden states that she positions:

women's resistance agency for rights and entitlements, and their engagements with the state, at the centre of this notion, because they are at the cutting edge for the emergence of a different politics on the continent, which can lead to all citizens living the wholesome lives promised by the extraordinary moment of change that independence provided (2005, 2).

From McFadden's observation, women's agency attests to their state of postcoloniality which entails the contestation and rejection of colonial patriarchal structures that denied citizenship to black women. I argue, in keeping with McFadden's concept of becoming postcolonial, that there are cultures of colonial patriarchy that persist in the Zimbabwean postcolony. The texts under study are evidence of women's struggles to become fully postcolonial after independence. The term postcolonial, here, suggests a state of not being oppressed by the state or even by fellow black men who assume a colonialist status. As evidenced in the texts, political independence does not herald a new dawn of legal and

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<sup>13</sup> Patricia McFadden is, in the view of this researcher, amongst the pioneer scholars of critical thought and gender debates in Zimbabwe. Among her most influential works are her 1992 *Sex, sexuality and the problems of AIDS in Africa*, in *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and theoretical issues*. Harare: Sapes Books, and her 2005 *Becoming postcolonial: African women changing the meaning of citizenship in Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 6(1): 1–18. Reference can also be made to Rudo Barbara Gaidzanwa's *Images of women in Zimbabwean Literature*. Harare: College press as well as her other critical works including her 2003 paper, *Gender and Canon Formation: Women, Men and Literary Art in Africa. Mans. Accra, Ghana* and her 2011. *African feminism. BUWA – A Journal of African Women's Experiences*. Available: <http://www.osisa.org/buwa/regional/african-feminism> [2015, March]. See also Tomupeishe Maphosa and Isabella Matambanadzo 2011. *Feminists (Re) Building Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Feminist Forum*. Harare: Zimbabwe Feminist Forum and Cassandra Rachel Veney and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza eds. 2001. *Women in African Studies Scholarly Publishing*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

cultural freedom for women. On the contrary, in the postcolony, the black woman is seen as continuing to suffer from various forms of violence based on her being a woman.

Some of the critical works that have sought to offer gendered analyses of Zimbabwean literature in English, particularly in the past decade, have focused on issues of gender in terms of women and the condition of womanhood<sup>14</sup>. Earlier studies, alluded to above, have attempted more directly to expose the challenges encountered by women rather than the resistance strategies female characters employ when they are confronted with violence. Recently, more research has been directed at HIV/AIDS and postcoloniality, and not as much work has homed in on women's agency and resistance to other forms of gender-based violence. Scholars who have moved away from an approach to gender that equates femininity with victimhood and suffering have offered some discussion of masculinities in the African context, as discussed earlier in this chapter. They have also used their research into masculinities to attempt to explain some of the social anomalies that have bedevilled Zimbabwean society. Muchemwa and Muponde's *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society* (2007) is one such example of research into masculinities.

Elleke Boehmer, in her article entitled "Tropes of yearning and dissent: the troping of desire in Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga" (2003), discusses the works of two prominent Zimbabwean women writers. She explores "the question of same-sex sexuality" (2003, 135), or gay relationships. In doing so, she castigates African societies for their lack of tolerance and acceptance of same-sex sexuality. She critiques Vera and Dangarembga because "neither has, admittedly, explicitly addressed gay sexuality in her work" (ibid, 138). For her, the two authors gloss over gay relationships without fully exploring them. Boehmer portrays the lack of social acceptance of same-sex sexuality as a form of oppression by African societies, writers included. It is my contention that although Boehmer's research addresses important concerns of marginalised and dissident sexualities, my study on the other hand focuses on a wider continuum of women's agency and resistance to gender violence, although within apparently dissident sexualities.

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<sup>14</sup> See Maurice T. Vambe 2003, in *The Journal of Contemporary Studies* 21(3):473–488 who discusses HIV and AIDS in the context of African sexuality and the problem of representation in Zimbabwean literature.

Boehmer's observations in this paper are important to my analysis of homosexuality in Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010), particularly in terms of literary representations of the lack of social acceptance of homosexuality.

Equally important to this study, and in a similar vein to Boehmer's work, is Katrin Berndt's *Female identity in contemporary Zimbabwean fiction* (2005), which focuses on female identity in what, at the time, was contemporary Zimbabwean fiction. Berndt explains her choice of female characters in detail, as follows:

The female protagonists and their bodies serve as interstices of Zimbabwe's postcolonial discourse. Through the female characters, issues such as the relevance of precolonial values, postcolonial developments, and the psychological impact of colonialism are negotiated. Public and private discourses are inscribed into the bodies of female characters (2005, 8).

Berndt's emphasis on the use of female bodies as sites, through which wider society is given meaning, is an important platform upon which my study develops, in particular the inscription of public and private discourses into the bodies of female characters. Berndt's study is important as it sets in motion the impetus for the study of newer writers and their articulation of the postcolonial condition of women in Zimbabwean literature. Her focus on identity negotiation does not really delve into the responses of women to gender violence, despite its presence in the texts she investigates. As my study focuses on newer writers, however, it ascertains whether women characters in these newer texts offer new or alternative responses to gender-based violence. Another scholar who discusses female bodies, like Berndt, is Grace Musila who in her article, "Embodying experience and agency in Yvonne Vera's *Without a name* and *Butterfly burning*", links "women's experiences of oppression, conceptualizations of resistance, and enactments of agency" (2007, 50). She identifies pertinent points about women's responses and how they articulate a radical re-conceptualisation of agency and resistance. My study departs from Musila's by analysing literary works written decades after those she discusses. In particular, my study analyses the ways in which women writers, in their creative works

post-2000, articulate women's agency and responses to gender-based violence in order to demonstrate that their responses are not always violent, explicit or obvious in themselves.

Maurice T. Vambe's study of the depiction of black women in popular songs and poems about AIDS in post-independence Zimbabwe focuses on the "negative images of black women" (2007, 224) in songs and literary works. In his study, Vambe argues that black women are not in a position to negotiate safe sex and are thus vulnerable to infections from their husbands or partners. In my study I do not dispute women's vulnerability; however, I posit that women characters in contemporary Zimbabwean literature are in a position to negotiate safe sex, despite the difficulties that they encounter in doing so as well as the challenges that this poses for the African family. My analysis of Onai's resistance to engaging in unprotected sex with her philandering husband, Gari, and her success in evading HIV/AIDS in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2009) shows the possibility of black women negotiating safe sex, contrary to Vambe's observations. Although Onai's marriage is broken in the process of negotiating safe sex, her life is saved. Vambe's suggestion, in this same article, that all women are innocent victims is also a problematic representation that denies the complexity of women's experiences and agency.

Jessica Murray's study on complicity in sustaining violence is anchored in trauma narratives in the works of writers who are better known than those in this study. In her discussion of complicity, she shows that authors "call their readers to account for their complicity in the creation of an environment where women are vulnerable to abuse" (2009, 10). I concur with Murray's observation that writers want to encourage societies to acknowledge their involvement in women's oppression and suffering. Murray contrasts older writers, particularly Yvonne Vera, with newer writers, specifically Pettina Gappah, but focuses on the texts as "historical narratives" (Murray 2011, 154). The agency she identifies in these texts is that of female characters critiquing history and nationalism beyond the straightforward associations of women with land and motherhood. Further to the postcolonial text's concerned with history and re-placing women in historical narratives, my study also focuses on the responses of female characters to gender violence in the postcolony and beyond reconstructions of history.

Anna Chitando in her thesis, “Narrating gender and danger in selected Zimbabwean women’s writings on HIV/AIDS” (2011), in its focus on women and their survival in the face of HIV/AIDS, discusses the brutal reality of violence against women. However, like many other critics, she also tends to treat women as passive recipients of violence. She fails to acknowledge the salient forms of resistance exercised by women characters in response to violence. Chitando further limits her scope by focusing on women’s responses to HIV, which is only one form of gender violence. Similarly, Tasiyana D. Javangwe in his thesis, “Contesting narratives: constructions of the self and the nation in Zimbabwean political auto/biography” (2011) chooses to view gender-based violence through the same limited lens as Chitando and many of the other scholars who view women as simplistically “vulnerable” (2011, 271), innocent victims who always bow to their circumstances. Hence, as much as their contributions are helpful to the assessment of gender violence in the Zimbabwean context, these scholars fail to address the less spectacular but no less important ways in which women resist gender-based violence and seek to reclaim their agency. These scholars fail to move beyond the reiteration of the discourse of victimhood, while my study explores the less obvious forms of violence and women’s complex responses to the culture of gender violence depicted in the selected texts.

Despite significant critical studies on Zimbabwean women’s writing, the extent of the problem of gender-based violence in literary representations means that there is scope for more critical works that focus on how women suffer and respond to various forms of violence. As a feminist researcher I became concerned about the lack of nuanced explorations of the myriad ways in which women exercise their agency and resist violence. Whereas scholars have mostly focused on positioning women in national discourses<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>15</sup> Refer to Angela P. Cheater, The role and position of women in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe. *ZAMBEZIA: The Journal of the University of Zimbabwe* 1986 13 (1): 65–80, which locates the positioning of women in precolonial, colonial and post-independence Zimbabwe, to Zhuwarara, Men and women in colonial contexts: A discourse on gender and liberation in Chenjerai Hove’s NOMA award-winning novel, *Bones*. *ZAMBEZIA: the Journal of the University of Zimbabwe* 1994 21(1):1–22 that focuses on men and women in colonial contexts in the liberation struggle in Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones*. Elleke Boehmer, in *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. New York: Manchester University Press 2005, also weaves stories of women in narratives of the postcolonial nation, Jaspal K. Singh in *Representation and resistance in South Asian and African women’s texts at home and in the Diaspora*, Calgary: University of Calgary press 2008, using a radical feminist lens is also concerned with the location of women in discourses, and Majahana J. Lunga in Yvonne Vera’s narrative craft. *IMBIZO: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* 2010 1 (2): pp. 75–82 in discussing Yvonne Vera’s narrative craft also interrogates her inclusion of women in national discourses.

recent research seems to have shifted to an exposition of women's survival strategies, strength of will and engagement with the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS in their lives and the treatment of this as a form of gender violence<sup>16</sup>. My study contributes to this growing branch of research and opens up further avenues for critical discussion. I support Andrea Cornwall who observes that "the woman-as-victim narrative situates African women as powerless, inviting intervention on their behalf" (2005, 1). As such, my work is different from those scholars who focus on women's survival and resilience in that, instead of focusing narrowly on HIV/AIDS, it looks at the representations of the larger continuum of women's agency and resistance. These include women's management of and resistance to various other forms of violence; physical, emotional and psychological.

In emphasising women's collaboration with new men, the writers, as I have pointed out above, embrace and recognise that, for the African woman, "along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy" (Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi 1985, 64). This description of the agency of African women sums up, succinctly, the postcolonial feminist premise upon which the selected novels are founded. The word "agent" is used here to show that female characters are not merely victims of violence; they may be perpetrators, moderators and survivors too. Agency, implies autonomy in self construction and representation. Rudo Gaidzanwa contextualises agency by stating that 'the kinds of calculations and choices a woman creates are the mark of liberation and freedom' (1985, 13). For Gaidzanwa, agency is the ability to act. Amartya Sen adds to Gaidzanwa's view of agency and defines it as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (1985, 203). In this sense, agency points to the freedom and ability to make choices as well as the potential effectiveness of those choices. In the literary works of the selected Zimbabwean women writers of my study, the

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to works by Salachi Naidoo in HIV/AIDS and contemporary African society: re-contextualising womanhood. *IMBIZO: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* 2010 1 (2): 59–74, who argues that women have had to redefine womanhood in view of the scourge of HIV/AIDS; Hazel T. Ngoshi and Sindiso Zhou in Speaking positions: Zimbabwean women's writing in English and the disease, pain and trauma paradigm. *IMBIZO: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* 2010 1 (2): 44–58; and Anna Chitando in Strategies for surviving HIV and AIDS: an analysis of Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a woman's soul*. *IMBIZO: International Journal of African Literary and Comparative Studies* 2011b 2 (1): 71–89 that celebrates the ability of women to survive HIV/AIDS amidst unequal gender relations.

authors seek to represent female characters' life experiences. Their representations demonstrate that their characters' lives have been profoundly shaped by gender-based violence. As is shown in this study, women are both vulnerable and resistant agents. In their texts, the Zimbabwean women writers that I examine, depict violent scenarios in various contexts of women's lives, but their representations also suggest the possibility of a more gender equitable world where women are no longer victims of gender-based violence.

Agency may also be flawed in its enactment. Violet Masilo's female characters in *The African Tea Cosy*, for instance, decide to take a collective stance against gender violence when they team up to kill an abusive male character, and later decide to go on a holiday to dispose of his body by feeding him to the crocodiles. This gruesome act can be regarded as an example of what Nthabiseng Motsemme defines as "flawed agency" (2007, 80). She proposes this term to suggest that victims can take advantage of an uncomfortable situation to make the best of their circumstances. She clarifies the concept of flawed agency as

a philosophy of survival which can be summarized as a way of "getting by", "making ends meet". Although the term means doing anything that will bring in money, in the townships it is mainly used to describe "illegal"/non-conventional ways to make ends meet (Motsemme 2007, 80).

The term is often used to describe a situation in which an individual or group does something that is morally wrong in order to achieve something contextually positive. The representations of prostitutes and prostitution in Virginia Phiri's *High Way Queen* (2010) attest to this notion of flawed agency, as prostitution is presented as a means of getting by. This perspective of agency is useful in the texts that I examine as it allows for an exploration of the complexities that emerge when female characters attempt to resist gender violence in patriarchal contexts. Agency is thus the way in which the female characters reject the notion as essence, instead presenting it as always in process and as a performance<sup>17</sup>. The texts in this study lend themselves to agency and the vocalising of

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<sup>17</sup> Agency is one of the key pillars of theories of subjectivity, along with visibility and vocality, although autonomy is not absolute. The modern Cartesian model of subjectivity views the subject as self and independent of context/environment, but some theorists view subjectivity as relational. The self and the other, the self and the world are viewed by these theorists as mutually constitutive, thus questioning the

female characters. Although most post-2000 critical studies of Zimbabwean literature focus on established women writers and consign to literary oblivion new women writers in Africa and other formerly colonised parts of the world, such writers produce formidable gender representations that offer alternative views of women's agency in their own survival. They achieve this without falling into mainstream Western feminism which tends to homogenise the female experience when in actual fact the experiences of women vary globally.

The analysis of the texts studied in this thesis can be considered to be partially an exhaustive or definitive treatment of the subject of gender violence in Zimbabwean literature. It is clear, as indicated in these texts, that women of the under-class bear the brunt of different forms of gender violence. This appears to be so because, barring the exceptions noted in *The Trail* and *The Uncertainty of Hope*, limited efforts have been made to deal with female marginality and gender violence as experienced by the Zimbabwean middle and upper classes across the racial divide<sup>18</sup>. Questions of intersectionality and sisterly solidarity can only be addressed when the complexity of gender and violence have been fully explored. There are many taboo subjects such as homoeroticism, transgression and queer identities that arise when dealing with the complicated questions of gender, sexuality and violence. These have only been hinted at in the literature and not fully explored. These too offer fertile ground for further investigation and critical analysis.

While the study analyses each text in its own right, significant themes and points of commonality are illuminated and highlighted across the chapters. I analyse the specific authors' representations of female characters' agency and their resistance to gender-based violence. The thesis focuses on selected literary texts written in English by Zimbabwean women writers post year 2000. This thesis is made up of an introduction, five chapters and

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whole approach to an autonomous subject. I make reference here to Nick Mansfield 2000. *Subjectivity; theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*. New South Wales: Allen and Unwin and Donald E. Hall 2004. *Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> Some of the texts that deal with both the elite and marginalised classes are John Eppel's 2009 *Absent: The English Teacher*. Harare: Weaver Press and Petina Gappah's 2009 *An Elegy for Easterly*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

a conclusion. The introduction clarifies the background to the study, elucidates the aim of the study, explains the justification, and outlines the literature review. Chapter one outlines post-colonial feminism, which forms the theoretical underpinning and framework of this study. Ground-breaking postcolonial feminist concepts articulated by theorists such as Mohanty in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (1988), Spivak's *Can the subaltern speak?* (1988) and Trinh T. Minh-Ha's *Difference: A special Third World women issue* (1987) are discussed and engaged in the chapter, thus paving the way for the textual analysis in subsequent chapters. These are shaped by the tenets of postcolonial feminism. Other feminisms, which this study reads as branches of postcolonial feminism, such as African feminism and African womanism are also outlined. The chapter provides a discussion of these theories in relation to the way in which they relate to postcolonial feminism, thereby informing the literary analysis of the various forms of gender-based violence encountered in the novels under study. Throughout the study, postcolonial feminism is used as a lens for analysing the chosen texts.

In Chapter two the manifestations of physical violence in Lillian Masitera's *The Trail* (2000) are discussed, as well as the female characters' responses to violence. Reference is made to Masitera's other literary work, *Start With Me* (2011), in order to capture the writer's broader conceptualisation of physical abuse as a clear, though often opaque, form of gender violence. In this chapter, I offer brief comparisons between Masitera's representations of physical violence and resistance and those of this study's selected Zimbabwean women writing in English. In this way, I locate Masitera's work within the larger body and context of Zimbabwean women's writing about gender violence, agency and resistance. Although I retain postcolonial feminism as the theoretical framework for this study, I also engage several tenets of radical feminism, particularly in the shaping of the novel as a resistance narrative.

Chapter three is a re-think of sexual violence in the context of prostitution and transactional sex. The chapter presents an examination of Virginia Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010). It focuses on representations of sexual violence and women's responses or resistance strategies in violent situations, where violence emanates from individuals, law enforcement agents or other institutions. These representations are read through African

feminist and African womanist lenses of postcolonial feminism. I make reference to Sylvia Tamale's *African Sexualities: A Reader* (2011) for theoretical insights into commercial sex work in an African context. In addition, comparisons are drawn between Phiri's representations of sexual violence, prostitution and transactional sex and those of other women writers such as Violet Masilo in *The African Tea Cosy* (2010) and Valerie Tagwira in *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006).

In Chapter four the representations of intimate partner violence within the perceived sanctified space of marriage in Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010) is discussed. Through a postcolonial feminist reading of the novel, I offer a discussion of the nature of this violence and the resistance strategies that characters employ. New mutations of the concept of marriage in the Zimbabwean postcolony presented by Masilo enable a critique of assumptions about the sanctity of marriage and an exploration of individual characters' vulnerabilities and reactions to violence in intimate spaces is presented. The chapter also offers new interpretations and representations of female identities in the ever changing society of the urban postcolony. Dissident sexualities are discussed amidst normative constructions of acceptable behaviour.

Chapter five contains a discussion of representations of women's agency in the context of emotional and psychological violence in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). I discuss the complex portrayal of victimhood and agency, with particular reference to postcolonial feminist inclinations in representations in the novel. I also analyse postcolonial feminist sisterhood and the emergence of new women beyond traditional gender scripts, a notion expressed by Erving Goffman in 1959 and later developed by James C. Scott (1990). Using a postcolonial feminist framework, I shed light on the multifaceted nature of victimhood and women's agency in the face of neo-colonial adversities that expose female characters to different forms of violence. Thereafter the conclusion will follow, where the analyses in the preceding chapters are synthesised by drawing together the major themes that have emerged in the preceding chapters. The conclusion also offers recommendations for future avenues of research in the area of gender violence.

## CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, I make use of postcolonial feminism as the overarching theoretical framework for examining the chosen texts. This version of feminism is underpinned by many of the theoretical practices and assumptions found in postcolonial theory such as; contestation, writing back, re-writing, writing off, re-constituting or re-negotiating the canon and the marginalised other. This is a key practice of postcolonial feminism as it re-works the co-ordinates of colonial and nationalist canons since these are shaped by patriarchal interests that seek to write out, distort and repress the experiences of women. In this regard, postcolonial feminism interrogates both the colonial and postcolonial text to expose strategies of domination, omission and distortion in the male authored text. Postcolonial feminism seeks to address the interests of marginalised third world women who are either colonised or purportedly free from colonialism. They represent the subaltern as woman that Gayatri Charkravorty Spivak speaks of in her seminal essay “Can the subaltern speak” (1988). The subalternity of woman has ethnic, racial and class inflections that question the universality of women’s experiences. My thesis contributes to the postcolonial feminist thrust to localise and de-centre feminism by making literary texts by Zimbabwean women writers the focus of my study. I adopt those aspects of postcolonial theory and feminism that contest the construction and circulation of images of the colonised woman in the imperial library as invisible, silent and passive. In formerly colonised countries the invisibility, muteness and lack of agency of woman does not disappear with independence. Old and new structures of domination and silencing of women appear in the postcolony and this explains the relevance of examining ways in which the woman authored text re-writes and re-replaces the male authored text in the persistently patriarchal Zimbabwean literary canon. A postcolonial feminist critique allows me to analyse ways in which the focal texts of my thesis portray fictional characters as they re-constitute and negotiate new discourses of female subjectivity.

As a means of bringing postcolonial feminism into the context of this study, it is imperative for this thesis to provide some history of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism is a resultant theory of the influences of both postcolonialism (or postcolonial studies) and (western) feminism. It should be noted that my study does not provide a full account of the histories of postcolonialism, postcoloniality, postcolonial theory or western

feminism, but rather provides a summation of these in so far as they influence postcolonial feminism. What is apparent in the initial stages of postcolonial theory and what also pervades postcolonial feminism is the centrality of the European/imperial text in its politics and strategies of silencing, dominating and erasing the non-European text. Benita Parry argues that postcolonial theory facilitates “an understanding of colonialism and its legacies different from the narratives handed down either by colonialism or by anti-colonialist movements, and thus throwing the claims of both official and dissident historiographies into disarray” (2004, 67). Parry's argument here points to the contestation that characterises postcolonial discourses. Parry's emphasis lies on contesting official and dissident historiographies. In the same light, the origins of postcolonialism are believed to lie in “the historical resistance to colonial occupation and imperial control, the success of which then enabled a radical challenge to the political and conceptual structures of the systems on which such domination had been based” (Robert J. C. Young 2001, 60). This history of resistance attests to the contestation that characterises postcolonial discourses. In view of its contestant nature, postcolonialism has been described as a “disciplinary project devoted to the task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Leela Gandhi 1998, 4). This project is set to re-dress the past and institute a break from oppression in the postcolony.

The break from oppression is initiated by a questioning of the imperial rhetoric that inferiorises and denigrates the colonised. The imperial library is filled with texts that are marked by a negative misrepresentation of the colonised. This misrepresentation comes in various forms. Characters representing the colonised are turned into grotesque, exotic, infantile and voiceless figures. *Heart of Darkness* (1899), set in the Congo, by Joseph Conrad is an example of the European misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the colonised African. An earlier example is Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mine* (1885), set in Southern Africa, and Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1935) with a Kenyan setting as a later example. Although African examples are cited the colonial experience is not unique to Africa but is an experience shared by all formerly colonised countries referred to as the Third World (Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania). Imperial narratives about other parts of the world include George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934) and Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would be King* (1888). The Asian world, as shown by the Asian

contributors of this subject, as shall be seen in this chapter<sup>19</sup>, has made significant contributions to postcolonial studies.

The geography of colonialism accounts for location-specific articulation of postcolonial theory. Location determines how various theorists speak from their geographical specificity although their ideas in the main acquire generalisations across the formerly colonised world. Postcolonial literary theory began to make significant inroads into literary studies and the humanities in the 1970's as is aptly captured in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's book *The Empire writes back: The theory and practice of postcolonial literatures* (2003)<sup>20</sup>. In their book Ashcroft et al re-emphasise Ghandi's (1998) observation of postcolonial theory as a contestation process of "re-placing language", "re-placing the text" and "re-placing the theory" (2003, 2) of the imperial centre. In response to imperial narratives, postcolonial theory offers fertile ground for re-configuring both colonial and postcolonial space and subjectivity. In the post-independence era, postcolonial theory argues for "a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty" (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri 2000, 138). Hardt and Negri bring to the fore important points in postcolonial studies; of difference, fluidity and hybridity; all three of which also pervade postcolonial feminist thought and articulation. Hardt and Negri indicate the new thrust of postcolonial theory after the formal collapse of empire in its contestation of emergent grand narratives and essentialism.

Achille Mbembe, a key theorist of the African postcolony, argues that the postcolonial subject is urged to "have a marked ability to manage not just a single identity, but several – flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary" (2001, 104). Mbembe places this

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<sup>19</sup> The Asian world, mostly, through Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) also contributes immensely to the genre of postcolonialism or contestant writing. Orientalism is concerned with representation of oriental peoples cultures in imperial narratives.

<sup>20</sup> These writers borrow the motif of writing back from Salman Rushdie's newspaper article "The Empire writes back with a vengeance" *The Times* 1982, 3–8 in which he writes on decolonising the English language.

argument within the context of the postcolony being made up of several public spaces. This assertion by Mbembe attests to an important nexus of postcolonial discourse which is that of the identity of the postcolonial subject. Identity here may be understood in various forms including race, gender and political identities. The negotiation of identities paves way for a drive towards empowering the postcolonial subject to speak for him or herself and not be defined by the coloniser. Mbembe further argues that “conflict arises from the fact that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, and that it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images, and markers current in the postcolony” (2001, 108). I want to adopt Mbembe’s articulation of postcolonial theory to re-think feminist theory as it relates to the analysis of African cultural and artistic productions. Mbembe’s concept of a “chaotically pluralistic” postcolony allows me to deploy feminist theory that allows for a more nuanced analysis of feminist identities in the focal texts of my thesis.

While adopting the pluralism and complexity of the postcolony, I also acknowledge the salience of Kwame Anthony Appiah's critique of the entire postcolonial project that “postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western- trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (1991, 348). The elitism and association with foreign interests stated here is also found in some kinds of feminist thinking in Africa. Postcolonial African feminism is often out of reach of the ordinary, illiterate, uneducated rural African woman whom it purports to represent. As a socio-political critique it may not adequately address the everyday problems of the ordinary postcolonial woman. Though this is often the case it remains relevant in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. This is so because representation in literature takes different forms from representation in government and politics. However, an engagement of these theories remains imperative as they have arguably made their mark on literary engagements of postcoloniality.

Having considered postcolonial theory and its contribution to postcolonial feminism it is necessary to consider the role of feminism in influencing postcolonial feminist studies. Articulations of both postcolonialism and western feminism have brought about

postcolonial feminism. This emerges as women attempt to articulate their role and place in the postcolony. Amina Mama views postcolonial feminism as a development upon and cultural departure from western feminism. Mama's probing questions on what roles women played in the anti-imperialist struggle and how this "affected their position in postcolonial states" (2001, 258) signal the initial concerns of women in defining their African womanhoods within the postcolony. Postcolonial feminists are concerned with women, their space and representation in male narratives. The realisation by African women, of the need for agency is also born out of broader western feminist articulations.

Western feminist Simone de Beauvoir, in her ground-breaking text *The Second Sex*, challenges the view that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him" (de Beauvoir 1962, xvi) as being the root of the problem of women's identity. I concur with de Beauvoir in disputing this view because it suggests that women's identities are only relational to men. This power to define woman is the source of patriarchal prescriptions that limit women. The politics of prescription and description explain Chandra Talpade Mohanty's observation, that "men and women are already constituted as sexual-political subjects prior to their entry into the arena of social relations" (Mohanty 1998, 68). Sexual-political subjects of whatever gender do not display a monolithic identity. Thus it is problematic to have a single definition of feminism. Shushila Singh argues that feminism originates from and holds the perception that "there is something wrong with societies' treatment of women. It attempts to analyse the reasons for and dimensions of women's oppression, and to achieve women's liberation" (1997, 23). Thus the starting point in all feminist thought is women's subjectivity. Chris Beasley also observes, that a common feature of all existing feminisms is "the consideration of women as the subject: women are at the centre of analysis" (1999, 18-19). In view of this central subjectivity of women, he adopts a definition of feminism as "a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex" (Ibid, 27). Bell Hooks shares similar sentiments as Beasley and adds that "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression." (2000, viii). Hooks further clarifies that feminism is not just about angry women who want to be like men. Rather she states that sexism is the problem.

Feminism is the women's movement which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continues to campaign for complete political, social and economic equality between women and men. Feminist thinkers see their work as attending to the significance of sexual perspectives in modes of thought and offering a challenge to masculine bias. A feminist, by extension, is "someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require radical change... in the social, economic and political order" (Beasley 1999, 27-28). This definition suggests a feminist to be anyone male or female who is concerned about the discrimination, who believes that women suffer and who calls for socio-economic and political changes to alleviate women's suffering. Beasley (1999) notes that the concept of womanhood is placed at the centre of feminism and although feminists do not agree on what womanhood is, most definitions of feminism are founded upon the ground breaking works by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill.

Western feminism has itself developed over the years and has seen the emergence of different forms of feminism that address specific needs of women in the western world. The history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three waves<sup>21</sup>. Each wave deals with different aspects of the same feminist issues. The first wave comprises women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, promoting women's right to vote. The second wave is associated with the ideas and actions of the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s. The second wave campaigns for legal and social equality for women. The third wave is a continuation of, and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990's<sup>22</sup>. Through these waves variants of feminist thought have developed amongst them; from Liberal, Radical, Marxist/ Socialist, Lacanian, French, Post-Structuralist and cultural (black or womanist) feminists. Evans (1995), Singh (1997) and Beasley (1997) concur that liberal feminism was the first strand of feminism to develop. They also agree that the term refers to the tradition finding classic expression in John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Woman*. Liberal feminism views women's liberation as their freedom to determine their own social

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<sup>21</sup> Humm, Maggie. 1995. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, p. 251 and Walker, Rebecca (January–February 1992). "Becoming the Third Wave". *Ms.*: 39–41

<sup>22</sup> Krollokke, Charlotte; Sorensen, Anne Scott (2005). "Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls". *Gender Communication Theories and Analyses: From Silence to Performance*. Sage. p. 24.

role and to compete with men on terms that are as equal as possible. As Freedman (2001) rightly points out, the focus on the public sphere and legal and political struggles for the rights of individuals to compete in the public market place forms the basis for liberal feminism. He also gives the example of liberal feminists such as Naomi Wolf who wanted access to opportunities associated with men hence the accusations of penile envy by anti-feminist critiques who also point out that liberal feminism in the broadest sense suggests a mere redistribution of benefits and opportunity without offering a challenge to the order.

Developments in feminist theory after liberal feminism led to other feminisms such as radical feminism. Beasley (1999) outlines radical feminism as being focused on sexual oppression and the rejection of the liberal feminist claim that the basis for women's oppression is their lack of political and civil rights. For radical feminists, the root of women's oppression is both structural and biological. Radical feminism gives voice to womanhood and women's oppression as women; hence its relevance to my study, although Western in its wider outlook. Radical feminists argue that:

Men have certain fixed ideologies concerning the nature of "woman". That woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, and is limited in capacities for work – even that "woman" is masochistic by nature (Sushila Singh 1997, 66).

In arguing that there are fixed ideologies about women, radical feminists seek to challenge deeply rooted assumptions about femininity and masculinity at individual and collective levels. In addition, Beasley contends that radical feminism views the state as patriarchal and that it is critical of all government intervention, "perceiving the state itself as being intrinsically patriarchal [it] tends to focus on politics of the 'private', in particular sexuality, motherhood and bodies" (Beasley 1999, 57). Thus it values and celebrates women's bodies and contends, as does postcolonial feminism, that women should gain control of their bodies. A major concern of postcolonial feminism, the voicing of women as a means for radical resistance may arguably be discerned from radical feminism (which) works within "female/male dichotomies" (Ruth Meena 1992, 43). These are contrasts or separations between women and men. This brand of feminism in particular is engaged in

my analysis of Masitera's *The Trail* in an effort to understand the attack her characters seem to launch on authorities and all behaviour that is considered the norm. The notion of sexual liberty born out of radical feminism is discussed throughout this thesis. In this thesis, other brands of feminism, however essential to the development of postcolonial feminism will not be discussed in much detail.

Postcolonial theory and practice, as writing back, assumes that the discourse and text of the colonised is suppressed. The colonised are presented as passive consumers of imperial knowledge and aesthetics. Postcolonial theory develops from political and economic theory; it is about writing back to the empire. The practice of writing back as a way of answering back has an element of effrontery that reminds the silenced that the silenced have a voice. Thus, the main focus of postcolonial theory is to enforce "a radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorised by colonialism and western domination" (Gyan Prakash 1992, 8). What Prakash does in this assertion is to confirm the nature of postcolonial theory as contestation. As I acknowledge Prakash's view that the postcolonial critique is premised on opposition to, displacement of and writing back to discourses of the empire, I also argue that it is articulated in different locations and times and that it has been extended to theorising about what comes after the colony. The multiplicity of locations in the experience of colonialism and its aftermath are foregrounded in Homi Bhabha's concept of "location" in postcolonial theory (Bhabha 1994, 107). Although drawing on the archive of Western feminism and sharing many theoretical aspects with it, postcolonial feminism differs in its focus on writing back and creating space for difference based on the location and unique experiences of the colonised and formerly colonised woman. Historical context is important in thinking about women and of how specific constraints and opportunities of their time shape their identities.

Deriving from tenets of a number of western feminist stand points, has developed alternative feminisms to cater for the needs of women in other parts of the world, hence the development of postcolonial feminism which comes in with its own intricacies. Rajeswani Sunder Rajan and You-me Park argue that "postcolonial feminism cannot be regarded as simply a subset of postcolonial studies, or alternatively as another variety of feminism.

Rather it is an intervention that is changing the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies" (2005, 53). This description shows postcolonial feminism's departure from both postcolonial studies and western feminism. Ray Kumar Mishra asserts of postcolonial feminism that it "wishes to bring to light the typicality of problems of women of the third world nations" (2013, 129) in so doing postcolonial feminism critiques the homogenising tendencies of western feminism. The thrust of postcolonial feminism is that it rejects outright the myth of global feminism or sisterhood, which assumes that women's problems and experiences are the same the world over.

Postcolonial feminism is alert to cultural differences among women. It redefines feminism in the context of the fact that so-called "Third World" women are colonised in multiple ways, among them, through colonialism and patriarchy. Another important thrust of postcolonial feminism is that it is a heterogeneous and flexible theoretical framework in that it is able to address issues that are unique to women in a "Third World" context such as Zimbabwe. Thus in many ways, postcolonial feminism is political in nature in that it addresses the various concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Ultimately, it is about the need to have different feminisms that address the needs of different women. In further describing its variability as opposed to the later two fields of study, Rajan and Park (2005) emphasise postcolonial feminism's concern with issues such as neo-colonialism, race and class in different contexts of women's lives.

The politics of writing back to the imperial centre are complex as they involve diverse groups who are often overlooked in the agendas of nations, regions, continents and the amorphous category of the third world. In strengthening the concerns of postcolonial feminism, Dineo Pumla Gqola asserts that while the postcolonial feminist/womanist project is concerned with subverting colonial and patriarchal systems, "its focus is on opening the terrain of black women's representation and theorisation to new signification" (2001, 15). Gqola's assertion of the main role of postcolonial feminism as opening the terrain of black women's representation and theorisation is in concurrence with it being a politics of writing. Ritu Tyagi adds about the nature of postcolonial feminism that it, as is typical of African feminism and African womanism, concentrates on the "construction of

gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers" (2014, 45). It is primarily concerned with the representation of formerly women.

One of principal thinkers of postcolonial feminism is Chandra Talpade Mohanty who suggests that Third world scholars were able to use the notion of "writing back" to develop postcolonial feminism, a theory that would address particular concerns of women in various contexts in the developing world. In "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty (1988) outlines the nucleus of postcolonial feminism as seeking to challenge

western feminist political practices, and limit the possibility of coalitions among (usually white) western feminists and working class and feminist women of colour around the world. These limitations are evident in the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently all women are expected to organise (Mohanty 1988, 62).

Mohanty attends to the problem of over-simplifying the formerly colonised world that is often collapsed into the category of the third world as she appeals for historicity and specificity to accommodate the diverse experiences of formerly colonised women. It is thus clear that postcolonial feminism is critical of the universalising of women's experiences and seeks rather to account for the varied experiences of non-Western women. Referring to Third Worldism, Mohanty says, "what I wish to analyse here specifically is the production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts" (1988, 61). Mohanty's essay develops a trenchant critique of the totalising tendencies of Western feminism to make women's problems appear universal, and its discursive colonisation of third world women. Mohanty's assertion makes it clear that the vicissitudes of women's experiences make it necessary to think beyond Western feminism if a proper understanding of the challenges facing third world women is to be achieved.

In the same light as Mohanty's (1988) challenge of the oversimplification of the formerly

colonised women by western feminism, Musa W. Dube states that “postcolonial African women together with their men are facing a higher enemy flying high above them; the former colonizers who now wear the gowns of neo-colonialism and globalisation” (1999, 213). This calls to mind the specificities of the experience of formerly colonised women, thereby departing from the concerns of western feminism which are ignorant of the challenges of the neo-colony. This assertion reveals the central concern of postcolonial feminism which is for the harmonising of the genders. Musa W. Dube asserts of postcolonial feminism that it “situates most African women in a position of juggling with several issues- while seeking the balance becomes a necessary strategy of survival and resistance” (1999, 215). I concur with Dube’s assertion here and thus point out that the agency of African women is more elucidated by postcolonial feminism than by western feminism.

A critical source in defining the central problematic in postcolonial feminism is postcolonial feminist scholar Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). In this essay Spivak analyses the Western imperialist over-determination of the subaltern woman, such that her very ability to speak and to be heard beyond Eurocentric epistemic limitations comes into question. The prescriptive tendency of Western feminisms is clearly documented by this postcolonial feminist scholar when she argues that “belief in the plausibility of global alliance in politics is prevalent among women of dominant social groups interested in ‘international feminism’” (Spivak 1988, 84). Spivak suggests here that dominant social groups project the interests of the Western movement onto the struggles of the silenced, third world woman. Spivak’s main argument in warning us against “romanticizing and homogenizing the subaltern subject” (ibid, 84) is based on the premise that the experiences of marginalised women in different historical and geographical locations are not necessarily the same. She warns against the tendency by outsiders (from the West) to romanticise what is often the dire experience of colonised and formerly colonised women as subaltern subjects. In the same light, Ogundipe-Leslie interrogates the question of African women's voicelessness thus: "are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them. In the sites and forms in which these voices are uttered?... we must look for African women's voices in women spaces and modes such as in ceremonies and work songs" (1994,11). In this assertion, Ogundipe-Leslie suggests that African women are not voiceless but that scholars seem to look for

these voices in the wrong spaces.

In this study I take two historical figures in nineteenth century colonial Southern Africa, Nongqawuse of South Africa, and Nehanda of Zimbabwe as symbols of resistance and black feminism in this region. These two historical figures challenge androcentric views of history and anti-colonial struggles that prevailed during their time and feminise the decolonising project in Southern Africa during the nineteenth century. In the official historiography of Zimbabwe, the nationalist struggle that is conceived as masculine is ironically inspired by the figure of Nehanda, the woman spirit medium associated with the First Chimurenga War. This location of Zimbabwean feminism within the history of Nehanda questions the status of female subalternity as articulated by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I focus on the following quotation from Spivak's conception of the colonised woman as subaltern:

As object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (Spivak 1988, 82-83).

Spivak's focus is on the objectification of the woman as a colonised mute subject. She develops the Hegelian philosophy of race and history. Particularly pertinent here is Hegel's idea of Africa:

what we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the condition of mere nature and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World History (George W. F. Hegel 2004, 99).

This alleged lack of history has to be understood in the context of colonial historiography that makes the colonised an object of history made by the coloniser and denies historical agency to the colonised. This lack of history and agency is more acute in the colonised woman who, according to Spivak, is "doubly in shadow" (1988, 84). The colonised woman is in this condition because of the complicity of colonialism and traditional patriarchy. Paul Gillen and Devleena Gosh describe this complicity as "the double eliding of native women by colonisation and patriarchy" (2007, 185), which is a double jeopardy. They

dispute the construction of the subaltern, especially the female subaltern, as mute and without agency and argue that

Spivak's insistence on the muteness of the female subaltern totally discounts the possibility of small, local and contingent insurgencies by means of which women create agency in their own domestic and private spheres. Rather, an emphasis on the networks and relationships that subaltern women use to negotiate the complexities and nuances of their lives may be a more enabling paradigm that recognises that not all action or empowerment takes place within clearly accessible or visible spaces" (Gillen and Gosh 2007, 185).

In pointing out that not all action or empowerment takes place within clearly accessible or visible spaces, Gillen and Gosh provide theoretical lenses that acknowledge that insurgency does not always have to be spectacular. In a similar way, James C. Scott in *Domination and the arts of resistance and hidden transcripts* (1990) uses a lens that allows me here to question Spivak's conception of a mute colonised woman. I explore the covert and no less powerful strategies of women in the focal texts of this thesis to question the idea of the muteness and lack of agency of women. In his adaptation of Erving Goffman's (1956) deployment of the related concepts of dramaturgy and role performance to conceptualise social scripts, Scott contrasts what he calls public transcripts and hidden transcripts. The public transcripts are the social scripts that those who dominate expect from the dominated.

In performing these socially constructed roles, the dominated do not reveal what they think or feel about their domination. It is only in the hidden transcripts where they use a variety of arts such as dissimulation that they reveal their authentic reactions to domination. These are the small acts of resistance that are identified by Gillen and Gosh (2007). It has to be noted, however, that in a number of cases resistance involves a combination of both hidden and public transcripts. As noted above, with reference to the precursors of Southern African feminism, women can become active agents of public history, moving away from the space of domesticity to influence the direction of the history of a nation. In texts such as *The African Tea Cosy* and *The Trail*, however, hidden transcripts are replaced by more obvious forms of resistance. This open rebellion on the part of women characters locates them within the tradition of female rebel icons like Nehanda, who in Zimbabwean feminist

discourse, is considered the precursor of Zimbabwean women revolutionaries.

Allied to resistance is the notion of difference in postcolonial feminism. This theme pervades postcolonial feminist thought as it facilitates the dividing line between Western and African women's experiences. Trinh T. Minha's "Difference: A special third world women's issue" engages the notion of difference as it relates to postcolonial feminist studies. For Minha, "difference is division" (1987, 7). Minha's takes this as a starting point in her theorisation of "difference" which is important in this study in so far as difference is used both to objectify and to dehumanise third world women and women of colour. This understanding also exposes the need to reconceptualise difference as a source of insight into liberating multicultural feminist avenues. That is to say that postcolonial feminism is particularly concerned with the struggles of women in the postcolony. The postcolonial feminist struggle thus goes beyond simple male-female differences. Some scholars have departed from this central "women of colour" and postcolonial feminist theorising of cultural difference as a source of liberating meaning-making<sup>23</sup>. They have identified contradictions, generated in both western and non-western contexts, in the traditional violence(s) against women and have warned of the need to mind these contradictions in non-reductive feminist meaning-making. In order to illustrate this point of difference Mohanty notes that, unlike the Western woman, "the average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender, as she is sexually constrained and her being third world (in the sense of her being ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (Mohanty 1991, 56). This observation, despite its unfortunate Third Worldism, captures the sexual constraints that limit the lives of many women characters in the texts that I examine in this thesis. Postcolonial feminist criticism thus "challenges assumptions which are made about women in both literature and society" (Shital V. Gunjante 2012, 284). Gunjante's explanation affirms the concerns of postcolonial feminism in according women the voice to challenge the limiting conventions that have been created for them by society. Postcolonial feminism is inherently concerned with race and the continued suffering of women in the neo-colonial state or postcolony. An

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<sup>23</sup> For other examples of women calling for the recognition of the different meanings of feminisms in non-Western cultures see Bell Hooks 1986 in *Sisterhood: Political solidarity between women*, *Feminist Review*, *Socialist Feminism: Out of The Blue* 23:125–138 and Gloria Anzaldua 2002 in *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers* in Moraga, C. and Anzaldua, G. Ed. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Watertown: Mass.

important aspect of postcolonial feminism is its concern with the re-telling of history and the placement of women in national narratives. As such, postcolonial feminism allows for an exploration of the histories and struggles of postcolonial women against colonialism, racism, sexism and various forms of subordination and exploitation. These struggles go beyond the male-female binary. In other words, men are not the only source of women's oppression.

The state of gender relations in the West is essentially different from that in Africa, specifically as a result of different cultural and traditional structures in society that define male-female relationships beyond the gender binary. This difference partly accounts for the rise of alternative African feminisms that cater for various concerns that Western feminism ignores or takes for granted. The ability of Zimbabwean, and African, female novelists to tell their own nuanced stories and to offer their own representations while writing for a global audience fulfils Mohanty's hope for "expansive and inclusive visions of feminism [and the] need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them" (Mohanty 2003, 2). Mohanty here makes a call for the acknowledgement of diversity and for feminisms that are sensitive to the diversity of experiences of ordinary women in the postcolony. Mohanty, in this regard, suggests that "historicizing and locating political agency is a necessary alternative to the 'universality' of gendered oppression and struggles" (Mohanty 1995, 69). She thus points out how third world women tend to be depicted as victims of male control and of traditional cultures. In such characterisations little attention is paid to various forms of women's resistance and their reclamation of voice and agency. Mohanty argues that third world women, like Western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents. Mohanty rejects universal sisterhood, however, by stressing the importance of "political location" (Mohanty 1995, 77). For Mohanty, the unity of women is best understood "not as given... [it] has to be worked for, struggled toward – in history" (ibid, 77). In her view, sisterhood is not biological or universal; it is acquired through historical experience and relatedness. Hence there is an unavoidable reference to the togetherness of women in the postcolony and a suggestion that whenever women unite to prosper, that prosperity is usually for the common good.

An apt summation of the role of postcolonial feminists is that they "reject the claims to

universality made on behalf of colonial western literature and seek to show its limitations to outlook, especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference” (Peter Barry 2010, 192). Barry re-asserts here that postcolonial feminism denounces outright the notion of universality of women's suffering. In its various strands and articulations, it stresses the issues of the invisibility, silence and lack of agency of women that are experienced differently. Postcolonial feminism is a version of feminism that addresses the concerns of third world women. This version has its own strands, including African feminism and African womanism, upon which this study is premised. In my thesis, in line with Mohanty’s rejection of the simplistic third world label, postcolonial feminism is historically situated and it is this historical situated-ness that underpins my argument. A particular southern African experience of colonialism has given rise to different shapes of feminist thinking. I argue for the historical specificity of Zimbabwean womanhood. Contrary to both colonial and postcolonial images of women as silent, passive and invisible, I argue, using illustrations from Zimbabwean history that colonised women have been active shapers of national history. This argument allows me to critique what Mohanty describes as “the implicit assumption of ‘the west’ (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and practice”. In my analysis of black feminism, aware as I am of the dangers of universalising African womanism, as black scholars in the diaspora have done, I locate the origin of current black feminist struggles in southern Africa in the history of the subcontinent. My study uses this theoretical framework because it addresses the problem of women in the third world directly; I am dealing with women in the third world whose experiences are different.

A key thread in this study is the realisation that African women have more excruciating problems than simply being women. Within the context of postcolonial feminist thought there are other theories such as African feminism and African womanism which largely inform this thesis. The main connections between these theories lie in geo-political location and shared experience as well as the need for voice and agency. Feminism has not been accepted wholesale in Africa. Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell argue that "in the late 1980's and 1990's a number of African women scholars based mostly in Nigeria mounted a concerted critique of western feminism" (2005,4) as well as other feminisms. Filomina Steady proposes an “African Brand of Feminism” based on the tradition of autonomy in the performance of sex roles, underscoring several points of

departure from Western feminist theories (1981; 28). By advocating an African brand of feminism, Steady also presents a separation from western and other feminisms. On the other hand, Rudo B. Gaidzanwa notes that “criticisms of feminism in Africa were undertaken by Marxist and other organisations and movements, which labelled feminism ‘diversionary, un-African and Western-inspired’” (2011, 7–8). By being western inspired, western feminism is oblivious of African needs. The contention over the use of the term ‘feminism’ suggests that feminism is considered a foreign importation that has no relevance to the African situation. Ogundipe-Leslie’s (1994) shares the same perception with Davies and Graves in asserting that “most important challenge to the African woman is her own self-perception” in the expression of her feminism (1986, 7) and I concur. It is important to state here that articulations of African feminism are not homogeneously accepted even among African women. Steady’s assertion that “true feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant... from an actual experience of oppression, a lack of the social prescribed means of ensuring one’s wellbeing, and a true lack of access to resources for survival” (1981, 35–36) is one such example of a problematic articulation. Steady’s position here may exclude other African women for whom male protection is not necessarily viewed as oppression.

African feminism owes its origin to different Western feminisms as it has largely been influenced by African Women’s resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture. The differences between Western and African conceptions of womanhood are many. Gwendolyn Mikell, rather like Davies and Greaves (1986), believes that African feminism is firmly grounded in African women’s resistance to Western feminisms and is “distinctly heterosexual, prenatal and concerned with many bread, butter, culture and power issues” (Mikell 1997, 4). Heterosexuality relates to the protection of the marriage institution and the preservation of male-female relationships. The African feminist, is distinctively heterosexual and pro-natal. The scope of African feminism as a strand of postcolonial feminist theory and as a broad group to which African womanism belongs is wider in scope than western feminism and is cognisant of the intricate womanhood of the African woman. The African Feminist Forum in the Preamble to the *Charter of feminist principle for African feminists* outline their identity as African Feminists thus:

We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognise that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with “ifs”, “buts” or “however”. We are Feminists. Full stop (2003, 4).

The quotation alludes to the power of naming one's self and specifies that the processes of naming and working for women's rights are political. The quotation also comes in to advise of the multiplicity of women's and thus feminist identities. In a similar vein, in interview with Eline Salo, Mama draws an important link of African women to women else and attempts to console African women who reject the term feminism when she states that feminism (any feminism) “signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression - internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical” (2001, 59). In building upon feminism and its new found meaning in Africa, Gaidzanwa asserts that African feminism reacts to the “devaluation and misrepresentations of various African cultures and traditions by colonialists” (2011, 6). She adds that African feminism is “focused on recapturing and re-valorising African traditions and cultures by writing about famous and powerful African women” (Ibid). However, despite African women's appreciation for the western feminist agenda, developments in the postcolony reveal that although African women in postcolony need the liberation promised by western feminism their socio-cultural and historical specificities require them to develop their own frameworks of agency that accommodate intricate issues of their being African and female.

Davies and Greaves, in their introduction to *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, observe that African feminism

recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and

European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African people...[it] recognizes that certain inequities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others [...] (Davies and Greaves 1986, 8–10).

This quotation confirms that African feminism is not aggressive towards men but seeks to unify black men and women towards a common struggle. Ouzgane and Morell concur on African feminism's concern with harmonising gender relations and argue that most African feminisms share a common critique that

western feminism is predicated on an oppositional gender binarism that translates into theories that emphasise struggle and disharmony between men and women; overemphasises sexuality (and sexual orientation) and has ignored the history of African women, which speaks of agency and achievement (2005, 5).

Further to their assertion above, Davies and Greaves argue that African feminists acknowledge that oppression does exist for both black men and women but that there are forms of oppression that apply only to women also that men should recognise these and help women to overcome them. Obioma Nnaemeka concurs too that "African feminism rejects the exclusion of men" (1998, 8). For African feminists, colonialism reinforced existing forms of oppression and introduced further forms. In addition to the usual racial imbalance, gender imbalances have arisen from unequal gender relations, as have various forms of violence against women, both physical and psychological, as is borne out in the texts discussed in this study.

The inseparability of men and women in the African social fibre is a critical concern of African feminism. Filomina Chioma Steady explains the interdependence of women and men thus:

For women, the male is not “the other” but part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in

itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Sexual differences and similarities, as well as sex roles, enhance sexual autonomy and cooperation between women and men, rather than promoting polarization and fragmentation (Steady 1987, 8).

Steady's observations are that men and women are complementary halves whose existence is reliant on each other. She emphasises the point that men and women in African societies need each other in order to be complete. The inclusion of men is important for the success of the African feminist project. Thus for African feminists, men and women are complementary halves whose unions are necessary for the subsistence of humanity, for the production of children and for the survival and continued preservation of the marriage institution, which is crucial to African life and meaning-making. The many bread and butter issues are those of childbirth and motherhood, which though important among African women, are often taken for granted by Western women.

Pinkie Mekgwe's paper, *Theorizing African Feminism(s): the 'Colonial' Question*, provides a further important aspect about feminism in Africa. The paper describes African feminism as being fluid because it is

propelled towards being anti-Western feminism. This is manifested in an approach that while it seeks difference from the West, is anti-'difference'; while anti-gender-separatism and pro-male, yet seeks female agency and autonomy (2008, 12).

Fluidity allows for difference, which is a major concern for Africans. Mekgwe (2008) adds further that issues such as racial difference, power dimensions between the west and 'others', as well as the redefining of feminism to ensure its relevance to the African context remain critical to the theorizing of African feminism. Mekgwe (2008), in relation to Steady's assertion above, suggests that African feminist literature is focused on the liberation of all African people. The observations above are useful in the analysis in this thesis insofar as they highlight the intricacies of African womanhood which are very different to the circumstances of Western women. It must be pointed out that Steady's assertion, though important to this study, does not seem to take into account other issues of inequality, such as class. There is no single definition of African feminism. Hence, there

are African feminisms in a pluralistic sense. African feminism means different things to different women at different times and in different situations.

A further concrete reality of African feminism is the respect accorded to women as mothers and the respect derived from self-reliance. African feminism does, however, question enforced motherhood and the favouring of sons. Whereas motherhood is held in high esteem, it is not regarded as the highest achievement in a woman's life. Rather, motherhood should be something a woman takes on after obtaining an education and entering into a profession. Motherhood is closely related to marriage but not to the extent of displacing barren, single, widowed and unmarried women; such women are still African and share the experience of domination and oppression. As to the favour shown to sons, the main argument is that all children and genders should be treated as equal. As emerges in the analysis of the texts in this study, girl children are portrayed as being as important as boy children. In an attempt to emphasise this importance, girl children are in some instances portrayed as being more responsible than boys and are a source of great pride to their mothers. Although emphasising the important role of women as mothers, African feminism is careful not to exclude barren and unmarried women by reducing the biological nature of motherhood and placing more emphasis on its social nature. It achieves this by borrowing from African tradition and culture which accords different women the identity of mother. In Zimbabwe, as in many other African countries, for example, one's mother's niece (her brother's daughter), aunt (her mother's younger or older sister) all share the identity of one's mother. As to the intricacies of African womanhood, there is the belief among African feminists that

women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of interiorization of ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her own reaction to active problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear, depending on complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed. (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10)

This suggests that there is an element of defeatism in women that African feminists strive to redress. This defeatism is believed to be a result of patriarchal beliefs instilled in women

by society. However, defeatism is not to be read at surface level. As is seen in the texts in this study, women may appear to be despondent and docile when in fact they are not. That women submit themselves as sacrificial lambs, most often for the sake of their children, should not be read as foolishness or a lack of agency; resistance is not always active or visible, one should also bear in mind the use of hidden and public transcripts, as outlined in Chapter one of this thesis.

Despite inroads made in contextualising the term 'feminism' in Africa, some theorists have chosen to abandon the term 'feminist' altogether. Although pursuing an African feminist agenda, some African scholars have instead chosen labels that are more culture specific. "African womanism", a theory coined by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985, 711), is one such example used in this study. By virtue of its proponents, geographical location and historical experience, it is a postcolonial feminist theory. Essentially, African womanism is part of African feminism. Ogunyemi, however, prefers to use the term womanist rather than feminist for the simple reason of disassociating it from Western feminists who choose to be unmindful of the more intricate issues of African womanhood. Ogunyemi's vision of African womanism is clearly articulated when she says:

Since feminism and African-American womanism overlook African peculiarities, there is need to have an African womanism. It is necessary to reiterate that the womanist praxis in Africa has never totally identified with all the original Walkerian precepts. An important point of departure is the African obsession to have children (Arndt 2000, 711).

This implies that African womanists are forgiving of women who yearn for children and motherhood. It is necessary to note that Ogunyemi chooses to preface her womanism with the term "African" to differentiate it from the African-American version of "womanism" as propounded by Alice Walker. This version was a rejection of feminism that was considered "elitist and unaccommodating of black women's experiences" (Walker 1983, xi). The limitations of Western feminism are once again denounced in womanist thought for their failure to address the problems of women of colour. Williams observes that

“womanism [...] assumes that it can talk both effectively and productively about men” Williams (1990, 70, in this regard, womanism purports to provide a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking men. Some of the tenets of womanism are used in my analysis of Virginia Phiri’s representation of prostitution as a mutually beneficial transaction necessary to both men and women. The brother and sister relationship in Masitera's *Start With Me* is also reflective of Alice Walker's womanist vision.

There is a view in womanist thought, as Judith Evans (1995) observes, that feminism does not automatically reside in female bodies and that sexism does not necessarily reside in male ones either. While black men cannot have women’s experiences, they can support them by advocating anti-racist and anti-sexist philosophies. An essential point of departure from Walker’s womanism is Ogunyemi’s concept of African womanism is the issue of homosexuality. Whereas Walker’s (1983) womanism argues that a woman can love another woman, Ogunyemi’s African womanism rejects homosexuality. A further point of departure is the autonomy Ogunyemi claims when she argues that she arrived at the term African womanism “independently of Walker’s Womanism” (Ogunyemi 1985, 72). Ogunyemi makes it clear that she was in no way influenced by Alice Walker.

It is for its accommodation and acceptance of the specific experiences of the black African woman that this study employs Ogunyemi’s (1985) African womanism in its analysis. For Ogunyemi:

African womanism acknowledges and holds as important marriage, motherhood and family relationships. More importantly, an African womanist will recognise that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy (Ogunyemi 1985, 64).

Ogunyemi’s description of the expectations of African womanism are clearly distinct from the African-American womanist who is oblivious to African culture and its excesses. Ogunyemi, in differentiating African women from African American women states in an interview with Susan Ardnt that " we cannot take the African American situation and its

own peculiarities and impose it on Africa, particularly as Africa is so big and culturally diverse (2000, 714). Ogunyemi highlights the centrality of motherhood, marriage and family in the lives of African women. African womanism also underscores at the outset a preservation of communal association without denying individual growth. However, Ogunyemi clarifies that "the first thing is not to be financially dependent on any man...be self sufficient" (2000, 718). In as much as Ogunyemi strives for the preservation of communal association, she still advocates women's liberation and freedom. Ogunyemi's conceptualisation of this theory guides my analysis of the black African woman's consciousness and agency in dealing with gender violence. Arndt observes that the core of Ogunyemi's definition of African womanism above is the "conviction that the gender question can be dealt with only in the context of other issues that are relevant for African women" (2000, 712). The resistance strategies used by the women characters in the texts in this study are informed by this same consciousness<sup>24</sup>.

Although we meet women portrayed as prostitute wives and mothers, we also discover the African womanist consciousness of the precariousness of such activities in the context of being African, married and mothers. African womanism does not ignore the oppression of women but rather explores it within the context of their African-ness. Masitera's literary articulation of womanism, as shown in the literary analysis, coincides with Ogunyemi's definition that it is:

Black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand (Ogunyemi 1986, 65).

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<sup>24</sup> There are other, similar expressions of womanism. One such example is Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism* 1997. *Africana womanism* was designed for all black women but still fails to recognise the difference between the black woman in Africa and the black woman of the diaspora. *Africana womanism*, like other womanisms, does not take into account the specific experiences of the black African women as African womanism does. There are other alternative concepts of feminism such as Morala Ogundipe-Leslie's 1994 *Stiwanism*, Catherine Acholunu's 1991 and 1995 *Motherism and the Womanism* of Mary Kolawole 1997. The main thrust of these alternatives is that they are different from both Western feminisms and African American womanism.

This quotation attests to the less confrontational approach of womanism on the African continent; its location of feminism in the context of masculinity and childhood; its emphasis on sisterly solidarity; and its relational focus that betokens its humane (African decorum/*ubuntu*) bias. Radical Western feminism emphasises difference and foregrounds oppositionality. Working from an African womanist imagination Masitera portrays gender connections in which women characters do not define themselves in isolation from men and which stresses the importance of motherhood is emphasised. Although this relational aspect is emphasised Masitera's novels do not mask the existence of violence in gender relations in which more often than not women are at the receiving end of male authored violence. Despite this difference from the Western feminist theorists it can be noted that the peculiarities of African feminism are often nests of gender violence. Women characters, with the exception of a few adolescents, rarely exhibit the radicalism of certain Western feminisms. This lends a particular variety to their female victimhood as abused spouses, mothers and lovers.

In the politics of gender, the greatest determinant of asymmetries of power is violence. Hannah Arendt, in her seminal text *On Violence*, focuses on the "question of violence in the political realm" (Arendt 1970, 34). Shaped by the experience of the German holocaust and reading violence against the background of Cold War rivalries and the associated arms race, Arendt does not theorise on violence in the private sphere. Frantz Fanon, in his essay on violence, *The wretched of the earth*, claims that "violence is in the atmosphere, that it here and there bursts out, and here and there sweeps away the colonial regime" (Fanon 2007, 69)<sup>25</sup>. Although not celebrating without qualification the use of violence as an instrument of political liberation of the oppressed, Fanon restricts the use of violence and its results to the public sphere. Despite this emphasis on the public sphere, in Africa particularly, domestic violence is endemic. Further to the domestic sphere, violence is also found in patriarchal societies that practise active gender and sexuality policing. This type of violence is imposed to destroy the agency of the marginalised other, to objectify the victim of violence, to repress the vocal and to obscure the visibility of the other. To

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<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon 2007 in his essay "Concerning Violence" *The wretched of the earth*. London: Grove Press, argues that decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. And that decolonisation is replacing of a certain species of men with another. Fanon's basic argument is that violence is a necessary evil for fighting oppression, on route to a better life. He regards violence as the highest form of political domination.

emphasise these aspects of victimhood is to obscure the true dynamics of gender relations; this is reflected in the focal texts of my thesis.

No theorising on feminism, be it Western or African, can adequately explain the condition and consequences of gender inequality if the question of violence is not addressed. Adrienne Rich, writing on motherhood, cuts across the boundaries of Western and African womanism by focusing on the female body as a site of gender domination and freedom. Motherhood, as celebrated in African womanism, is criticised by Rich. In arguing for a feminism of transformation that she views as greater and more revolutionary than the Marxist vision of a proletariat struggle that would bring about the establishment of a classless society and remove all inequality, she locates the revolution in the re-thinking of the female body and motherhood:

The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers. *The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life.* We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, to console, and alter human existence – a new relationship to the universe. *Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings, thinking itself will be transformed* (Adrienne Rich 1986, 285, my emphasis).

The image of the female body as “both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life” suggests, in language resonant with imperialist images of penetration of foreign lands, a discourse of the patriarchal colonisation of the female body, violence and a woman’s loss of her procreative freedom<sup>26</sup>. The call for every woman to be “the presiding genius of her own body” is a call to women to reject this colonisation and the violence with which it is associated. This colonisation trope is articulated by Bell Hooks in her chapter entitled The Imperialism of Patriarch in

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<sup>26</sup> See Annie McClintock 2013 for more discussion on imperialist images in *Imperial leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the colonial Contest*. London: Routledge.

*Ain't I a Woman* (1981, 87–117) in which, although acknowledging the enduring power of the history of slavery and racism in the US, she does not absolve black patriarchy from the culture of violence against women. In Rich's (1986) theorising, motherhood that is not controlled by women can be the source of entrapment and can lead to different forms of violence; in the texts analysed here it becomes the source of victimhood. For instance, in *Highway Queen* in a reversal of roles occasioned by Zimbabwe's economic crisis, the main character, her nurturing instinct expressed in her desire to be the breadwinner, embraces prostitution. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai is trapped in a loveless marriage because of the culture of defending motherhood against all odds instilled in her by her mother. Characters in the texts discussed in this thesis re-think motherhood outside the traditional frames that view it in the context of marriage and fatherhood.

In placing the emphasis on motherhood, womanism, particularly in its African American variety as articulated by Bell Hooks, is not blind to the existence of sexism and violence and their potential to forestall the revolutionary thinking and praxis signalled in Rich's text cited above. Hooks' assertion that "sexism has diminished the power of all black liberation struggles – reformist or revolutionary" (1990, 16) alludes to the violence of sexism that is often concealed in black masculinist discourses of cultural and national freedoms. This concealment is not confined to the US but is also endemic to the African continent. Pumla Dineo Gqola, writing on the pervasive nature of violence in South Africa, observes, "Gender based violence is very ordinary: it is everywhere, commonplace, made to seem normal" (2007, 118). This normalisation of gender-based violence is part of a patriarchal society's strategy of concealment. Gqola associates the violent South African masculinities with the country's colonial past and its liberation struggle. The provenance of contemporary South African violent masculinities and women's victimisation is not very different from that of Zimbabwean masculinities with which they share similar trajectories. Scholarship on violence in Africa focuses on the public sphere and unfortunately adopts and reinforces the Western angle of writing about Africa as it explores the more dramatic forms of political violence across the continent<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Maurice Taonezvi Vambe and Abede Zegeye's editorial to *African Identities*' special issue on Emerging Perspective on Genocide and Violence in Africa 2010 (4) exposing silence on violence against women; this has come to include abduction, sexual slavery, trafficking of women, spousal and partner violence.

Contrary to the emphasis placed by Spivak on the powerlessness of the colonised woman, I want to employ here James C. Scott's concept of social and political dramaturgy, in which public and hidden transcripts operate. I use Scott's concept of resistance to rescue women from theoretical mediations that construct them as abject victims of male initiated violence. These public transcripts reflect discourses and performance of domination as the

dominant elites attempt to portray social action in the public transcript as, metaphorically, a parade, thus denying, by omission, the possibility of autonomous social action by subordinates (Scott 1990, 42).

The hidden transcripts are covert discourses and actions. These are the same actions that incite Scott's description of "the dissembling of the weak in the face of power" (1990, 1) in his argument that any subordinated groups are not all entirely passive recipients of their subordination. In her analysis of violence and desire in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, Sophia Kostelac examines what she describes as "normative attitudes concerning women's passivity and sexual availability" (Kostelac 2010, 75) and how Vera implicates these in "a catastrophic national violence" (ibid, 75). Although not focusing specifically on this aspect of violence, the women characters in the texts under study contest their presumed passivity and availability as they exercise a politics of resistance; at times they openly rebel as they refuse to conform to traditional gender roles and cultural and male prescriptions of sexuality. In both covert and overt language and actions, they reclaim the agency denied them by their male counterparts.

Agency is critical in considerations of postcolonial feminism as it is connected to the question of freedom. Meili Steele posits a position on agency that seeks "to show how stories of agency can work with stories of determination" (Steele 1997, 108), thereby disputing claims of unbounded self-fashioning. In arguing for the complexity of agency Nancy Fraser suggests that

either we limn the structural constraints of gender so well

that we deny women any agency or we portray women's agency so glowingly that the power of subordination evaporates (Fraser 1992, 177).

This quotation captures the conflict between freedom and determination in feminist theory and fiction by women writers. Fraser articulates the tension in conceptions of subjectivity as either constraint or autonomy and she is one of those theorists who acknowledges the interplay of self and the social environment that allows the depiction of agency in literature as negotiation and contestation. This suggests that women's agency should not be read as a prescript. The diversity of experience, location and situation has a major role to play in the enactment of agency. In disputing the simplification of agency, Margaret Archer writes of the distinction between unbounded self-construction and determination by society, theorising a middle ground between agency and determination that accounts for the interplay of conflicting forces while asserting what she calls “the re-enchantment of humanity” (Archer 2003, 36). This middle ground can then be paraphrased as the ability to initiate action and to respond actively to external actions that impinge on the self. This response, the hallmark of the subject, reflects the power of both self and society in the making of the female subject.

The preceding discussion on the modulations of postcolonial feminism that have emerged from Western feminism demonstrates that African women have awoken to the need to speak for themselves. African scholars and novelists generally agree that although the feminist agenda has universal tenets, theories that are sensitive to and cognisant of the African-ness of Africans, which is not homogenous, are required. The common trait of all emergent African feminisms is that Africa has unique problems and that these problems cannot be solved by culture or Western ideologies. For the same reasons, African feminisms reject African-American womanism because it too does not recognise the distinct experiences and challenges of African women living in Africa. Postcolonial feminism and the strands subsumed by it (African feminism and African womanism) emerges as most relevant to the analysis of the texts in this study. In the following chapters I apply the theoretical tenets of postcolonial feminism to a reading of these texts.

## **CHAPTER TWO: AMBIGUOUS FORMS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN LILLIAN MASITERA'S *THE TRAIL***

This chapter interrogates physical violence as presented in Lillian Masitera's *The Trail* (2000). In this chapter I examine the agency of women characters in the novel through postcolonial feminist lenses. The chapter makes particular use of African womanism and, to some extent, radical feminism. The major standpoint of African womanism that is of particular importance to the analysis in this chapter is that of unity among black women and between black women and black men in their resistance to oppression. The main form of gender-based violence is arguably physical violence. This chapter does not dispute this fact but rather exposes the complexities and ambiguous forms of the physical violence that the women characters in Masitera's *The Trail* suffer. In this chapter I use Scott's (1990) concept of domination and different forms of resistance to strengthen the argument of ambiguity and to demonstrate that not all resistance is active or immediately visible in this text. This is also necessary if one is to liberate women from theoretical mediations that construct them as abject victims of male initiated violence. Scott's acceptance of difference and diversity is in harmony with postcolonial feminism, which underpins this study. The discussion in this chapter reveals that there is more to physical violence than the mere assault of a woman by a man. Comparison is drawn between *The Trail* (2000) and Lillian Masitera's later novel, *Start with Me* (2011), as this later novel addresses similar concerns as *The Trail*, particularly the survival of female characters under rigid patriarchal domination. I also compare Masitera's presentation of physical violence to that of other female Zimbabwean writers such as Tagwira (2006), Westerhoff (2005) and Dangarembga (1985).

*The Trail* (2000) tells the story of a young protagonist, Lindiwe, a teenage girl who is in search of an individual identity, an identity that is not imposed or predetermined. Very little is said about Lindiwe's life save for the fact that her parents are late, she is the youngest of three siblings, and has been raised by her older sister and bother-in-law, both of whom are nameless. Lindiwe also has a brother, Nyasha, who has returned from the war and is still trying to find his footing in society. The novel is centred on Lindiwe and her development through family and school. The development of Lindiwe's character is mostly seen at St. Charity's School, which is a mission school for girls. It is at the school

that Lindiwe embarks on a journey of identity mediation. Considerable attention is also paid to the girls at the mission school especially Lindiwe's friend Lucy. By juxtaposing Lindiwe with her friend Lucy, Masitera questions the conditioning of women but, more than this, she is intent on showing the individuality of perception among girls of the same age. Despite being given responsibility over other girls as a prefect, Lindiwe questions the overarching authority of the mission school's administration and is critical of the education she receives. The German nuns who are responsible for Lindiwe and the other girls at the mission school are to be seen as representing white colonialist ideology. Their role is to be objects of ridicule and to have their supposed efficacy diminished. The school's oppressive education and management system is rejected. Lindiwe views all authority as oppressive and psychologically and physically violent, hence it must be resisted. There is a preoccupation with death that Masitera uses deliberately or otherwise to question the metaphorical killing of individual growth and intellectual development in the women characters of her novel.

Lillian Masitera's novel *The Trail* is set in a newly independent Zimbabwe where there is an air of disappointment among many Zimbabweans. The education system is still largely colonial and controlled by missionaries. There is disgruntlement among freedom fighters and the general public with the fact that Zimbabwe's independence has not brought the glory that many had anticipated. The novel captures Nyasha's disappointment as a freedom fighter as we are told that "now he guards those who were born to rule the country; nowhere near the greatness he dreamt of when he deserted school" (p. 9) to join the liberation struggle. The novel genders this grand narrative of betrayal in the neo or post-colony and shows the life of a young girl – Lindiwe – as she tries to define her own place in an oppressed world. Her agency is shaped by her sister's declaration that "you will become what God has put you on this earth to become; not what another human being thinks he can make of you" (p. 9). This lays a solid foundation for her later rejection of the school's authority and its attempts to limit girls' aspirations.

To a great extent, Masitera's text can be situated within Ogunyemi's "African womanist" (1985, 711) vision of men and women working out their problems, and ultimately standing together in the postcolony, beyond Walker's "womanism" (1983, xii). Reflective of

Ogunyemi's vision, Masitera's characters are conscious of their African-ness and the peculiarities of that African-ness that make them distinct. There are forces at play that are bigger than the male/female binary. Ogunyemi prefers to use the term womanist rather than feminist, simply to disassociate her thinking from Western feminists who choose to be unmindful of the intricate issues of African womanhood. It is important to note that Ogunyemi chooses to prefix her womanism with the term "African" in order to differentiate it from the African-American version of womanism as propounded by Walker (1983). For Ogunyemi, her coinage of the term African womanism is totally independent of Walker's womanism<sup>28</sup>. It is for its accommodation and acceptance of the specific experiences of the black African woman that this chapter employs Ogunyemi's (1985) African womanism in its analysis.

Masitera's womanist representations coincide with Ogunyemi's (1985) argument that African womanism is accommodative and favours harmony between black men and black women. Rather than simply exposing oppression, the African womanist novel offers solutions that appear to be practical for the African woman. Although we meet up with women in precarious situations, portrayed as prostitutes, wives and mothers, these women are aware of the precariousness of their condition in the context of being African, married and mothers. This consciousness is reflective of African womanist thought as it does not ignore the oppression of women; but rather, explores oppression in the context of specific African experiences. In the presentation of her characters, Masitera's novel advocates togetherness, despite the individuality of these characters, as we see reflected in Lindiwe and Lucy, and the revised masculinity that we find in Nyasha.

In *The Trail*, the German nuns are representative of white colonialist ideology. They are ridiculed and the oppressive education and management system they represent is rejected. In so doing, the writer makes the main thrust of the novel clear: to ensure that black women are united. The togetherness of women in Masitera's novels, even in the celebration of difference, is reflective of Hooks' affirmation that

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<sup>28</sup> Other similar coinages as stated in chapter two of this study are Hudson-Weems African Womanism 1998, Morala Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism 1994, Catherine Acholunu's Motherism 1991 and Mary Kolawole's Womanism 1997.

Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity [...] to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression [...] (1986, 127).

Hooks' sentiments are particularly evocative of the postcolonial feminist concern with unity among black women. These sentiments are also reflected in the agency of the girls at the mission school. These girls are all black, first and foremost and they come from different backgrounds, with some more well off than others. Sara Mills argues strongly against the notion that "third world women are all the same [...] that they share some sort of essence" (1998, 104). This assertion points to a postcolonial feminist rejection of the homogeneity of women. The differences between the girls are, however, overshadowed by their shared blackness and hence do not stand in the way of the girls' fight for equality and an end to the oppression that they suffer from nuns and the school's administration. There are no boys at the school and therefore no boy/girl disputes to fuel the girls' animosity with authority. The girls are united and share the same interests and beliefs. They unanimously wish to end the injustices of the school system. Hooks' affirmation is also clearly reflected in Masitera's other work *Start with Me* (2011). The novel juxtaposes two sisters, Rudo and Edna, who have no need to eradicate their differences in order to experience solidarity. They reconcile and support each other despite their differences. On the other hand, the relationships that these sisters have with their husbands are very different. In essence, they do not share a common oppression. Although Rudo and Edna have differences of opinion, they are united in their differences by their race and kinship and they help each other to fight the oppression that the other suffers. Even when Edna's marriage ends after Farai abandons her, the sisters remain united.

In *The Trail*, there is a clear declaration of an African womanist standpoint when the girls agree that "women should not fight; at least not one another!" (p.67). Their togetherness is clearly articulated. One characteristic of these girls stands out: they do not need anti-male sentiments to bind them together. Their sisterhood confirms Mohanty's belief that "the unity of women is best understood not as given [...] it is one that has to be worked for"

(1995, 77). Similarly, in *Start With Me*, Rudo and Edna's sisterhood is not just natural. It is born out of a conscious effort by both of them to unite and support each other. Their sisterhood goes beyond them being mere biological siblings. Edna remains supportive of Rudo's marriage even after the collapse of her own. Furthermore, Edna's richest experience is that of motherhood and marriage in the most extreme conditions. Both Rudo and Edna have been victims of culture and tradition, particularly the expectation that a woman should marry and have children at an early age. This significance of culture in Masitera's novel coincides with African feminist philosophy, which is "distinctly heterosexual, prenatal and concerned with many bread, butter, culture and power issues" (Ogunyemi 1997, 4). The concern with culture also means a rejection of oppressive cultures and traditions that permit the oppression of women. Edna is presented as a victim of cultural obligation, she obliges to conform to an accepted tradition in African culture that a woman should marry young but by upholding this tradition, she suffers badly for it. Rudo, on the other hand, resists this tradition, suffers rejection by both society and family, but turns out the happier and more successful of the two sisters. On one level, this may show the oppressive nature of patriarchy; as, the appreciation a woman receives is at the mercy of patriarchy. On another level, this reading shows that Masitera's novel holds central the importance of motherhood for an African woman. Through Rudo's delayed marriage and pregnancy the novel demonstrates that however delayed or deferred marriage may be for the purposes of empowerment and development, ultimately, a woman must, after all else, get married and bear children. This presentation underscores Ogunyemi's (1985) realisation of the African womanist mission of preserving communal association without denying individual growth. As such, the presentation captures the central conundrum of African feminisms, African womanism included, in perpetuating, within limit and without prejudice to individual growth, marriage and childbirth as signifiers of womanhood and the perpetuation of heteronormativity in sexual relationships.

In *The Trail*, Nyasha's support of the girls' actions, although almost drowned by the outburst from Bibi's uncle that his niece "must obey authority, so [...] forward with the nuns" (p.81), furthers an African womanist agenda which recognises union between black men, black women and black children (Ogunyemi (1986). This common struggle alludes to men supporting women in the struggle against oppression. In *The Trail*, Nyasha does not claim authority over Lindiwe and the girls' challenges; rather, he supports them in their

fight against domination and exploitation. Masitera's African womanist agenda of unifying black men and women in the fight against gender violence is typified through a "rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman the sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being" (Chukwuma 1994, ix). Illustrating Chukwuma's contention, the women characters in *The Trail* reject inferiority and strive for recognition. The girls refuse to be treated as subhuman beings. Rather, they insist that they be treated as complete individuals. They reject oppressive conditioning.

While most scholars associate the term gender-based violence with physical abuse (assault) and sexual harassment of women<sup>29</sup>, UNICEF (n.d) views gender-based violence as all harm that results from gender inequality and is perpetrated against on a person against that person's will and has a negative impact on the persons physical and psychological health, development and identity. Masitera's novel is black-centred and aims to help black people to harmonise their own relations and to fight gender violence themselves. In contrast to UNICEF's definition above, the physical violence in *The Trail* is more complex and goes beyond the conventional man-hits-woman narrative in female authored novels such as Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), where Onai is regularly physically assaulted by her husband, Gari. Although such violence may be implied in the parallel and meta-narrative of *The Trail* (2000), the violence that the schoolgirls suffer is mostly perpetrated by the nuns, who are themselves women. The girls at Saint Charity High School view the authority of nuns as complicity in the physical violence that the girls suffer as a result of their femaleness. The girls regard the nuns' treatment of them as physical violence, inflicted on them because the nuns want to force them into conformity against their will. The notion of a meta-narrative will be discussed later in this chapter.

In its representation of gender violence and women's agency, Masitera's *The Trail* conforms, in part, to various feminist theories but, as outlined earlier in this chapter, the chapter focuses on the resonance of Masitera's representations with tenets of African womanism and some tenets of radical feminism. Radical feminism is concerned mainly

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<sup>29</sup> See West 1999, Jacobs et al. 2000 and Gqola's 2007 definitions provided in chapter one of this study.

with “sexual politics” (Singh 2007, 407), it is also concerned with the emancipation and voicing of women. In this novel, the radical feminist standpoint of “resistance” and “assertiveness” (Ibid, 300), is revealed when Lindiwe convinces herself that it was no mistake that she was sent to a girls school where there were no boys to lead a strike. The strike may be viewed as “explicit resistance” (Patterson’s 2010, 1). Lindiwe and the other girls take a rebellious stance by going on strike and forcing the authorities to bow to their needs. This is radical as it is considered behaviour unbecoming of young girls. Lindiwe’s realisation that there are no boys to lead the strike suggests that Lindiwe is aware of female conditioning and what it demands of her as a girl. Masitera achieves a subversion of the norm by satirising the claim to authority over Zimbabwean culture expressed by the German nun, Sister Superior, when the nun says

on behalf of my fellow sisters, I guarantee you that we always make it our duty to transmit and foster in these ladies the norms and values of the Zimbabwean society [...]. Here, in Zimbabwe, we have found harmony between our obligation to our creator and the society’s expectations. Your sisters and daughters acquire recognition through marriage, or since the advent of Christianity, as nuns (p 81).

Through this satire of religion and its structured use in the school system, Masitera questions the use of religion as a contrivance for the oppression of women, and its use to perpetuate gender violence. The role of the missionaries and the education curricula they provided for Africans is “to promote colonial interests” (Rungano, J. Zvobgo 1980, 36). Even in the postcolony of Masitera’s novel, these colonial interests are upheld, but now to the advantage of a system of patriarchy that has taken over the role of oppression from the coloniser. Maitera’s representation here epitomises Ezra Chitando’s observation regarding the representation of missionaries in Zimbabwean literature that “the coalescence of traditional and Christian patriarchy is attacked, with female characters asserting their right of self-determination” (2001, 82). Echoing Chitando’s observation, Sister Superior’s dictum above describes female conditioning that confines female identities to two oppressive spaces; marriage and the church. Submission is what is expected of these girls. In an effort to thwart this expectation, the girls set out to lead the strike, something which in other circumstances would have been expected of boys. The conscious effort to overturn the norm reflects the feminist flame that has been ignited in these girls.

Chitando (2001) observes that most women authored post-independence Zimbabwean literature questions womanly virtues promoted by Christianity during the colonial period, such as compliance, docility and self-sacrifice. Chitando's observation is enacted in *The Trail*. It is the prescriptive norms imposed by nuns, for instance, that culminate in a severe restriction of women's world outlook and their aspirations in life, especially the "whole idea of opposing male female natures and values" (Willis 1984, 91). It is this conditioning of womanhood that both African womanism and radical feminism speak out against and which Lindiwe is determined to avert. Just as radical feminism advocates an entire "removal of sex roles" (Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone. 1973, vii), Lindiwe and the other girls refute Sister Superior's claims that women cannot have a meaningful existence outside marriage and that becoming a nun is the only other alternative. This rejection of conditioning by the girls is suggestive of a removal of sex roles. The main thrust of Koedts et al.'s argument which is reflected here is the attainment of equality premised on girls and women's, ability to perform any social role. The nun's dictum preconditions women's destiny, hence its rejection by Lindiwe.

The girls' boarding school experience that is evoked in *The Trail* is based on reactions to settler and missionary projects that are designed to make girls become docile, Christianised, disciplined and domesticated females who are ready for marriage. The adolescent rebellions in this text, particularly in the context of the mission boarding school run by German nuns, reflects the African girls consciousness of their need for emancipation, room for individual growth and right to make decisions about their own womanhood. The nuns represent Eurocentric concepts of femininity, albeit with a religious orientation, and also reinforce colonial notions of African womanhood. The dissidence of the black girls under the nuns' care is read here in the context of the nuns' failure to understand Africa and its women. In their rebelliousness, these girls signal the emergence of new femininities that elude the radar of normative regimes. Their dissidence brings out the sense of crisis that Richard Waller captures in his analysis of youthful rebellion in Africa related to "the meanings of maturity in a changing world where models of responsible male and female adulthood, gendered expectations and future prospects were all in flux" (Waller 2006,77). It is the temporal setting of *The Trail*, the background to which is the end of the Liberation War and the first decade of independence, that conjures up this sense of flux.

*The Trail* reveals the race and class concerns of African womanism in the girls' refusal to acknowledge the nuns as fellow women. They believe that

nuns are not women [...] nuns are not wives because they are married to a man in their imagination [...] we are their imagined daughters. It doesn't work. They are different to my mum, they can't feel for me like my real mother does (p.67).

The girls' attitude to the nuns who they see as 'non-women' because they are not wives is a critical point in my analysis of the girls' rebellion. In the eyes of the school girls, the nuns stand for men, based on their choice to avoid procreation. A particular version of Christianity that has produced a non-procreative womanhood of the nuns running the convent high school for girls is rejected. This rejection of a universalised female identity by the girls enacts Spivak's warning about "romanticising and homogenizing the subaltern subject" (1988, 84). The girls' reaction shows that the subaltern cannot be fully represented by people who are foreign to their circumstances. The women parents and guardians at the Parents Teacher's Association (PTA), such as Matilda's sister, support the need to loosen the iron grip that the mission administration has on the girls in order to expose their conditioning. She believes that Matilda's involvement in the strike "must have been in earnest" (p.81). The actions of the girls, as well as their nerve in going through with the strike, reflects the womanist growing inside each one of them as they develop their sense of worth. The girls' rejection is of both conditioning and men, considering that non-procreative women, like the nuns, are regarded as men.

The nuns in *The Trail* are rendered masculine by the attitude of the girls towards childless and unmarried women. The masculinity that the nuns assume in the eyes of the girls confirms Morrell's description of masculinity as a "collective identity and not a natural attribute. It is socially constructed and fluid" (1998, 607). I agree with Morrell that masculinities are fluid because they are found not only in men. The girls at Saint Charity's High School may be read as having masculinities of their own, in their bid to challenge an entire system to achieve change. The masculinity that the girls assume through challenging the system, may be read in the context of Lemelle's assertion of masculinity as being

"constructed characteristics that society expects for the male sex" (2010, 3). This is not to suggest in any way that women are incapable of taking a principled stand against what is perceived to be unjust or that they must always be seen to be invoking elements of the masculine when they do so. The ability of the girls to transcend social expectations of what constitutes feminine or masculine behaviour places them strongly in the context of African feminist struggles for the emancipation of women from behaviour that is regarded as normative.

In as much as *The Trail* is radically feminist, it can also be read through postcolonial feminist lenses, as Masitera makes sure to illuminate the racial line between the girls and the nuns. The nuns are German and still employ the colonial contrivance of using religion to silence resilience. The novel, in illuminating the racial lines concurs with Mills (1998) observation that postcolonial feminists are not oblivious of the class differences between women as a result of race, among other factors. The girl's rejection of the nuns also resonates with Shital V. Gunjante's argument that postcolonial feminism is inherently concerned with "race and the continued suffering of women" in the postcolony (2012, 284). This continued suffering is seen through the missionary education system in an independent Zimbabwe. The realisation of class differences as well as the racial divide is achieved in *The Trail* through the rebellion of the girls against the nuns, who are German and white, and arguably better placed because of their race. *The Trail*, as a postcolonial feminist text ultimately seeks to eradicate stereotypes of black girls and women as subordinate.

In *The Trail*, Masitera makes a bold attempt to use a child's voice and a child-centred narrative to invoke the innocence of women's agency. The child narrator in literary works is often associated with innocence and free will<sup>30</sup>. Masitera's use of the child narrator,

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<sup>30</sup> The innocence of the child narrator and childhood has been the subject of scrutiny and debate. Whereas Jenny Kitzinger 1990 in "Who are you kidding? Children, power, and the struggle against sexual abuse." *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* p 165, Jacqueline Rose 1984 in *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press and Greta Olson, in *Reconsidering unreliability: Fallible and untrustworthy narrators. Narrative* 11.1 2003 pp 93–109 have disputed the notions of the childhood innocence of the child narrator, David Archard 1993 in *Children, Rights and Childhood*. London: Routledge, Sue Scott, Stevi Jackson and Kathryn Backett-Milburn 1998 in *Swings and roundabouts: risk anxiety and the*

through Lindiwe, conforms to Dieter Riemenschneider's view regarding the use of the child narrator that it "reflects the writer's concern with the problem of growing up in the widest sense of the word" (1989, 403). The exploratory nature of the child narrator allows Masitera to question everything from the view of a child. The child's world view presents different levels of reality beneath which "one becomes aware of symbolic dimensions" (Ibid, 404). There is the reality of being a young African girl living in a gender repressed environment as well as the reality of being a child who is answerable to someone else at any given time. Lindiwe's questioning of the world as she progresses into adulthood is also aptly summed by Riemenschneider's observation that

for a child to realise that life is conflict means that he or she arrived at an intermediate stage, a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Nowhere, it seems to many writers of postcolonial fiction, does the conflict between two generations, between two different cultures and value systems, become more apparent and perhaps more painful than this phase (Ibid, 404).

It is quite strategic to the novel's postcolonial feminist cause that it should use this transitional stage in Lindiwe's life as a window through which to find alternative perspectives and perceptions of the world. This is achieved through the presentation of a young African girl learning in a missionary school whose curriculum is still repressive and meant to sustain the patriarchal system. In using this narrative technique, Masitera elicits the sympathies of her readers. The use of Lindiwe to present a child's view is deliberate and, arguably, carefully calculated. In using the child narrator Masitera's novel remains deconstructive of the ideals of standard behaviour expected by society.

The thrust of Masitera's writing reflects Cornwall's assertion that "the woman as victim narrative situates women as powerless, inviting intervention on their behalf" (2005, 1). In presenting women as agents rather than as victims, *The Trail* furthers women's empowerment agenda. The women characters in Masitera's novels are proactive in their agency for improved living conditions and they resistant gender violence. The characters are not powerless and do invite anyone to intervene on their behalf. The suspension of Lindiwe and the other girls from Saint Charity's Girls High School following their

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everyday worlds of children. *Sociology* 32(4) 689–705 and Russell A Hunt and Douglas Vipond 1986 in Evaluations in literary reading. *Text* 6(1) 53–71 have strongly supported the sincerity of the child.

rebellion is indeed a form of physical violence. The suspension is a punishment meted out to the person of each and every one of the suspended girls. It is physical in as far as the suspension means the physical removal of the girls from the school. The physical violence of the suspension is no lighter than the punishment dealt to Lindiwe for reading an “unholy” book (p.28), when she is ordered to clean the graveyard. Cleaning is a physical form of punishment. This is to be read as physical violence as it entails physical harm and coercion against Lindiwe’s will. Where Lindiwe feels that physical punishment is extreme, she takes it to be violent. The punishment to clean up the graveyard is a clear case of an imprisonment of the mind<sup>31</sup>. The fact that Lindiwe has to spend a day working amongst the dead as punishment is metaphorical of the killing of the intellectual growth of young women. This resonates with O’Toole and Schiffman, who view violence as “extending from individual relationships to the arrangement of power and authority in organisations and institutions” (1997, xii). The nuns’ psychological control of the girls’ minds is institutionally imposed on their bodies through physical punishment. The graveyard, a site for punishment makes a bold statement about the attitude of the nuns towards the girls as well as their hold over the girls. They have as much authority to cripple personal growth as they have to safeguard patriarchy. The girls are limited in their outlook. The nuns decide what is good or not good for the girls to know about. The nuns use several tactics to keep the girls in line. The manipulative use of religion reigns supreme among the tactics.

In *Start with Me*, Edna is driven to prostitution by her poor economic standing as well as by her husband’s failure to perform his role as provider for the family. The failure by men to provide financially for their wives and children constitutes a failure on their part to fulfil gender roles. It is also a sign of men’s economic violence inflicted on their families through “forced dependency, or neglect of a wife’s material needs” (Mary J. Osrin 2003, 156). In the same light as what Osrin suggests, Edna blames Farai for her prostitution which she suggests is resultant of him neglecting her material needs. This is seen when she

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to Bill Popoola 1979 in *The Imprisoned Minds: The Real Reason Why Africa Will Never Develop*. Sierra Leone: African Connection Publishers, Ngugi waThiongo 1986 in *Decolonizing the mind; the politics of language in African Literature*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House and Jane Hiddleton 2010 in *Imprisonment, freedom and literary opacity in the work of Nawal El Saadawi and Assia Djebar. Feminist Theory* 11 (2) pp 171–187. They discuss the notion of the imprisonment of the mind as psychological imprisonment. They also discuss the tactics used to ensure this imprisonment in both the colony and the postcolony.

laments her “slaving as though her children did not have a father [...] why was she so unlucky?” (p.2). Edna realises her failure and is obstinate in her agency to ensure that her daughter lives a better life and marries only when she is ready. Even as she resolves to give her child a better life, she does not erase marriage from the matrix of fulfilment. In the full consciousness of her African-ness, her bitterness over her own marriage does not alter the way she values the importance of marriage as an African woman. Economic violence manifests physically, as Edna now has to allow other men to devour her body in exchange for money.

The translation of economic abuse into a physical manifestation qualifies the novel as a radical feminist text in so far as it inadvertently questions that which is considered the norm, such as prostitution being founded on mere satisfaction and delinquency. Edna’s indulgence in prostitution may be viewed as physical violence on Edna’s body. Edna endures prostitution because of her economic deprivation. There is no enjoyment in it but a monetary business transaction in which she provides sexual services to men in exchange for money. We are told that “she needed the money desperately for school uniform for the boys and Jestina’s Girl Guides kit” (p.2). The fact that she indulges in prostitution for the good of her children shows agency in her own and her children’s survival. For Edna, prostitution is a means of agency and survival. In the following chapters, the failure of men to fend for their families as the cause of the subsequent prostitution of their wives is discussed in more detail as the thesis discusses the literary representation of prostitute wives and mothers.

In questioning deeply rooted assumptions about femininity and masculinity at individual and collective levels, the female characters in *The Trail* novel try to assert their autonomy. The girl characters seek to establish voice as they contest the assumptions about womanhood. Lindiwe resolutely refuses to be suppressed by authority. Her resistance to authority is seen even in her silent refusal to conform. As has been argued, resistance is any action that rejects any form of oppression by confronting the principles that support it. Lindiwe resists authority and believes that authority is not necessarily equal to God. We are told that she “resented superiors who acted like shareholders with God, condemning anybody else who questioned their stance” (p31). Lindiwe’s feminist convictions about

being female are firmly moulded and she ultimately refuses any form of control that is masked by authority. She also resents the physical violence that she believes is the weapon of authority. The fact of this assertion shows her resilience and individual agency.

In *Start with Me*, Edna's decision to soldier on and make the best of her lot illustrates that she is not a passive victim. Her resistance to violence is subtle and salient. She makes her opinion known to her husband, albeit politely, thus she is not voiceless. The fact of her speaking out is a form of resistance given that resistance can be "violent or non-violent, passive or active and may or may not be effective" (Patterson 2010, 1). Whereas her husband has decided to keep the children out of school until he and not Edna can raise the school fees, Edna silently resolves to keep her daughter in school at whatever cost; "Jestina, her only daughter, must live a better life" (p.17). As the novel unfolds, women's perceptions about their conditioning and susceptibility to gender-based violence are transformed. Although grandmother Rinashe had been a passive victim of gender violence in her time, by the end of the novel she makes a stand to protect her granddaughter from making the same mistake of being submissive and passive; she supports her and provides everything that she had not provided for her own daughters. She acknowledges that as a mother she should have given better guidance, especially to Edna. The solidarity of women, which reflects womanist thought, is revealed by Rudo's decision to reconcile with her sister on discovering that she too will soon become a mother. This is also exemplified when Edna's children decide that "the next person who would give their mother adequate care was her mother, grandmother Rinashe" (p.95). That the novel ends with grandmother Rinashe sharing her life experiences with her daughter and promising to save her granddaughter from the mistakes she made with her own and her daughters' lives, resonates with the tenets of womanhood neatly summed up in Mohanty's call for the earned "unity of women" (Mohanty 1995, 77), which speaks to the togetherness of black women for a common good<sup>32</sup>. The consciousness of the need for women's liberation within the framework of the African social structure that supports marriage and mutual unions of

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<sup>32</sup> More on womanhood can be found in the groundbreaking text by Winnifred Harper Cooley 1904 *The new womanhood*. London, Broadway Publishing Company. In this text, scholars such as Jennifer Bailey Woodard and Teresa Mastin in Black womanhood: Essence and its treatment of stereotypical images of Black women. *Journal of Black Studies* 36 (2) 2005 pp 264–281 developed the term black womanhood. For them the black woman is characterised by strength, determination, accomplishment and the ability to balance a personal life with professional obligations. These are the same attributes that shape postcolonial feminism, including African womanism and African feminism.

support between men and women is evident in both *The Trail* and in *Start with me*. By the end of *Start with Me* the only men remaining are Jason and Siphon, the two men who have more affirmative masculinities. They also have a more positive perception of women and are sensitive and cautious enough not to expose women to violence. The characters of Farai and Munya, who epitomise violent masculinities, are removed from the narrative. Masculinities are constantly in mediation. As Masitera in her representations seems to suggest, masculinities are inherently linked to the perpetration of violence against women. The representations also reiterate the assertion that “If masculinities are socially constructed then there must be conditions under which masculinities can change” (Michael Moller, 2007, 264). In resonance with this assertion, Jason and Siphon are presented as the new models of the manhood and masculinity that Masitera advocates in order to achieve a better society that is against gender violence. Jason and Siphon’s masculinities echo Moller’s view that masculinities can change and be less damaging. These men are to be celebrated and are meant to foster in the reader the need to adopt masculinities that are less rigid. The nature of gender relations in *Start with Me* coincides with Ogunyemi’s (1985) definition of womanhood, as already outlined. Hence the exit of the hegemonic masculine found in the character of Farai and the celebration of better, more accommodative masculinities as reflected in the characters of Jason and Siphon. The departure of Farai from his home when he realises his failure as a man is a typically feminist representation of men as people who shy away from responsibility and this is satirised through the juxtaposition with Jason and Siphon.

In *The Trail*, the story of Lindiwe’s life and development unfolds as a meta-narrative with other minor narratives combining to create the feminist ideology of the text. A meta-narrative is a

comprehensive narrative about linking narratives of historical meaning which offers a society legitimisation through the expected completeness of a master idea that is yet to be realised (Childers and Hentzi 1995, 186).

The story of Lindiwe’s life can be read as a meta-narrative in as far as the conditioning of women is a grand narrative in African literary and social spheres. It may also be viewed as such because the story of Lindiwe’s life is woven into a known grand narrative of oppressive missionary education in Zimbabwe and Africa: the story of missionary

education and its function as well as the story of gender relations. It is a story of young women in the making. Other stories build into this making. All these stories combine to form the narrative of a new woman under construction. Lindiwe recalls events in her Aunt Lucille's life, which build on her own experiences. Lindiwe's agency in finding an escape from all forms of gender violence is strengthened by her aunt's resilience. The way in which Lucille battered her husband for failing to acknowledge her role in the bearing of their children perhaps reflects the author's envisioning of a world where women cease to be on the receiving end of assault and battery. In order to make the woman's voice heard, the husband's response to the beating is not mentioned at all. If anything, the scene of the beating is presented in such a humorous manner that the reader does not sympathise with the man.

Much to Lindiwe's disgruntlement, Lucy fails to share her view of the correctness of her radical and liberal aunt. Even at this tender age, Lucy is aware of how a woman should behave. She says, "It's against the laws of nature for a woman to do the things your aunt did" (p.34). It is these perceived "laws of nature" that radical feminists are concerned to engage with. Lindiwe disagrees with these "laws of nature", saying:

it amounts to saying the laws of nature, because they are manmade, are best translated by fathers, brothers, husbands, men. This reasoning persuades girls and women to think that they are inferior and less intelligent by birth, as females (p.35).

The ideal traits in a woman, from Lindiwe's feminist perspective, are "to be straightforward, without crawling at someone's feet [...] outspoken" (p.42). Lindiwe clearly rejects prescriptive ideologies about how men and women should behave. Similarly, in *Start with Me*, Edna's endurance of physical violence through illness is also reflective of her agency. The fact that her agency is exercised more for the lives of her children than for herself does not make Edna a passive victim of physical violence. Her infidelity in the course of commercialising her body escapes the attention of her husband. She has control over her body and since there is no coercion, it becomes difficult for the reader to view prostitution as exploitation. Her only comment would be that it is the economic situation that has turned her into a prostitute. On the other hand, the way in

which Edna prostitutes herself in order to provide for the family, which Farai has failed to provide for, may be viewed as “flawed agency” (Motsemme 2007, 80). Flawed agency is witnessed when one perpetuates a bad deed in order to achieve a positive result. Edna's active, purposeful and conscious participation in commercial and non-commercial sex shows that she is not a passive victim.

In *The Trail*, the idea of marriage is handled rather indifferently. The novel begins with a description of Lindiwe's family. The structure of the family is reflective of most present day extended African families where the grown-up brother or sister takes guardianship over the younger siblings. It has been argued that the reason for the proliferation of extended families of siblings looking after each other has largely been the death of parents from HIV/AIDS<sup>33</sup>. However, no account has been given of the cause of Lindiwe's mother's death and there is no mention of her father who is also presumed dead. Lindiwe is entrusted to her sister and her sister's husband, both of whom are nameless characters. The only available detail about Lindiwe's married sister is that she is “an accomplished seamstress” (p.8). This presentation presents her a highly domesticated woman, who by patriarchal standards, is accomplished. She has fitted in well into the space created for her by society, in the home. The presentation of Lindiwe's sister lends her to “the good wife” in Proverbs 31 verses 10–31 of *The Holy Bible*, (King James Version), who uses her hands dutifully and provides for her family. Masitera, however, deliberately leaves this couple nameless and does not show any interaction between the two<sup>34</sup>. In neglecting to name some of her characters, Masitera is able to discard them or simply to make them unimportant. Masitera presents Lindiwe's sister as an uninteresting woman who gives Lindiwe very little to emulate and does not provide much of a role model. Her sister's

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph Crumbley and Robert L. Little. *Relatives raising children: An overview of kinship care*. Child Welfare League of America, 440 First Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085, 1997 and Geoff Foster and John Williamson 2000. A review of current literature on the impact of HIV/AIDS on children in sub-Saharan Africa have attributed the rise in sibling-headed families to the death of parents from HIV and Aids.

<sup>34</sup> The use and value of names and their absence has been discussed by many scholars, among them D.S. Izevbaye 1981 in Naming and the character of African fiction. *Research in African Literature's* 12 (2) pp 162–184., Susan Z. Andrade 1990 in Rewriting history, motherhood, and rebellion: Naming an African women's literary tradition. *Research in African Literatures* 91–110, Charles Pfukwa 2003 in Onomastic innovation in Zimbabwean noms de guerre. *Language Matters: Studies in The Languages of Africa* 34 (1) pp 13–23 and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. 2006 in the *Postcolonial Studies Reader* 2nd edition, New York, Routledge. These scholars discuss the power of language in naming in identity mediation.

domestication encourages Lindiwe to aim higher in her life. The presentation of this couple is useful in the articulation of Masitera's view that marriage should not be all-defining for a woman.

The next example of marriage is that of Lucille in *The Trail*, nicknamed Mbuya Mukende, and her husband, who again is not named. Mbuya is a Shona word for aunt or grandmother depending on the relation. In this case it means aunt. Mukende is a shortened form of the Shona word "handikendenge" (p.31), which means "I don't care". Her nickname is reflective of her character. The presentation of Lucille's marriage, in which she is the perpetrator of physical violence, is Masitera's way of trying to empower women. Although Lindiwe believes that "there was something comical about the couple" (p.33), the couple's marriage is turbulent and violent. Unlike the physical violence in Rumbi and Horst's marriage in Westerhoff's (2005) *Unlucky in love* or Onai and Gari's marriage in Tagwira's (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope*, where the woman is the victim of physical violence, in Lucille's marriage she is the perpetrator. Lindiwe describes how she saw Lucille "dragging her wobbly husband and prop him up to the Msasa tree in front of their bedroom" (p.32). Lindiwe defends her Aunt Lucille's abusiveness because she "and her children toiled in the fields all year round while her husband traced beer outlets" (p.32). This assault is not the only incident of physical violence. Lucille's husband is seen many weeks later with "a swollen, sagging jaw" (p.33). It is assumed that he has received another beating from his wife. When he is asked about his jaw, he explains that it is "domestic issues [...] things that happen only to adults" (p.33). This response is meant to show that physical violence can also happen to men. Men like Lucille's husband are unable to admit openly that they are beaten by their wives. Gender conditioning in African culture makes disclosure difficult, especially the disclosure of HIV infection or disclosure by men that they are beaten by their wives.

There is a sharp contrast, in *Start with Me*, between Edna and Rudo's lifestyles. Edna drops out of school to get married, with her father's blessing, because it is honourable to marry off one's daughter while she is still a virgin. Rudo, on the other hand, chooses school but with very little glory as a result of her "failure as a woman"; she takes too long to get married and even longer to have children. The two sisters are at loggerheads over a

variance in perception. Edna realises her mistakes, however late, but has to make do with her miserable situation. The author seems to attribute the disagreement to choices made by the two earlier in life. Rudo's life is better as a result of her education although money is the least of it in society's idea of a successful woman. A woman's success is measured in reproductive terms. This biological conditioning of womanhood is what Masitera as a radical feminist novelist fights against. As an African womanist, a radical one at that, Masitera seeks to erase the notion that marriage is the defining factor in a woman's life, and to redefine the functions and relations of men and women in marriage. Her character Rudo is bitter about the domesticated perception that society has of women. In Rudo, Masitera presents a liberated woman whose partner Jason is "flexible" with her. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Jason is referred to as Rudo's partner while Farai is referred to as Edna's husband, although both couples are married. On the other hand, in *Start with Me*, Farai's departure brings Edna closer to her children, who are determined to make their lives better without their father. Siphon offers to do menial jobs to help his mother to raise his school fees for the next term. Masitera, however, exposes the complexities of the womanist vision by contrasting Edna's two sons. Whereas Siphon is prepared to work hard to help his mother, Munya robs her and in doing so has "driven a dagger into her heart" (p.95). One of the complexities of the womanist vision, as Masitera shows the reader, is that society is far from being enlightened; individuality means that all humans do not think alike. Masitera's characters are lifelike and she tries to create a nuanced representation of gender interactions while promoting her preferred relationships.

Unlike most Zimbabwean feminist novelists, the likes of Yvonne Vera and Tsitsi Dangarembga, Masitera, in questioning the place of marriage in a woman's life, does not reject marriage altogether. Rather, she advocates that it should not be placed high in the hierarchy of self-actualisation. Edna's regret over her early marriage in *Start with Me* is clear testimony of Masitera's position regarding marriage. Clearly, in her representations of marriage she subscribes to the African feminist view that "neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement" (Steady 1987, 8). In Masitera's representation, marriage is not imprisonment per se and should not be viewed as such. Rather, it is an eventuality that completes the process of womanhood. In her novel, marriage and childbearing are axiomatic of the fullness of a woman's life but should not be the first thing that she achieves. Rudo at first appears content with her

delayed and childless marriage yet she falls pregnant by the end of the novel. Her pregnancy is what paves the way for her reconciliation with her younger sister Edna, who had beaten her to marriage and childbearing in the first place. In as much as marriage and childbearing are important in the life of the African woman, they should not be given priority above individual growth and actualisation, but Masitera acknowledges the concrete reality of African feminism that praises the respect accorded to women as mothers and the respect derived from self-reliance.

Masitera's juxtaposition of Edna and Rudo's marriages illustrates the author's ideology regarding the place of marriage on a woman's priority list. This choice affects one's health, which is physical. Edna develops high blood pressure, severe headaches and ulcers (p.64). On visiting the clinic, the doctor suggests that her condition can be managed by avoiding stressful situations or eating healthy food. As a result of the economic and emotional violence in Edna's life at the hands of her husband, she is unable to avoid stressful situations or to follow a healthy diet. Furthermore, the economic and emotional limitations she encounters induce illness. This illness is experienced as physical violence on the body of the woman. Edna and Farai's relationship has never been easy. From the outset, the marriage has been built on lies and deception. Farai recalls how he managed to trap Edna into marriage by deceiving her with lies and a false identity as a business owner. Although Farai admits to his friends that he has "found a woman of character" (p.40), he encourages his friends to be part of his deception because they "should not be lighting up smokes in her presence" (p.14). The deception "produced a perfect marriage partner for Edna, except the product was fake" (p.14). Edna, in her anxiety to get married, "thought she had struck solid gold" (p.14). Her entrapment in marriage is based on her need for financial assurance and her desire to be "well looked after" (p.14). In this representation, Masitera shows how the respect accorded to women as mothers and the respect derived from self-reliance may be futile if a woman rushes into marriage before first acquiring an education and establishing herself financially. Again, Masitera indicates that marriage and childbearing are important but should not incarcerate the woman; nor should they take precedence over self-actualisation.

The way in which Farai traps Edna into marriage is precisely the way that barely educated and unemployed Munya impregnates Fiona. Munya is thankful that Fiona's two children are her own burden, but he needs to appear concerned about the third pregnancy in order to profit from Fiona's diploma. "She was desperate to get a man to marry and Munya knew he could be that man if he organised himself" (p.99). Fiona, with her almost certain economic emancipation, realises that she can survive without Munya. She confides in Jason that she "will not tolerate any more interruptions from (her) studies [...] [she] promised [herself] to get the diploma first" (p.99). This decision reflects the rearranging of priorities in a woman's life. Munya is manipulative in his relationship with Fiona. His impregnation of her to ensnare her is tantamount to physical violence; in a sense, Munya's use of Fiona's body for his own selfish gains can also be read as sexual violence<sup>35</sup>. By placing her education first, the author leads the reader to anticipate that Fiona will protect herself from gender violence and dependence on men. In this regard, Masitera echoes other feminist novelists, such as Dangarembga (1988) in *Nervous Conditions*; education is seen as the first step to a woman's emancipation. Yet education without resilience will not bring about change to the conditions of women's lives. Dangarembga shows the complexity of the success of education through juxtaposing the characters of Maiguru and Lucia, where Maiguru, educated as she is, fails to break out of her abusive marriage to Babamukuru; on the other hand, Lucia aspires to attain an education in order to live a better life. Resilience here draws the dividing line between mere education and education for survival.

The physical violence in Masitera's *The Trail* is not conventionally presented. It is demonstrated in the chapter that stress and illness manifest physically in the female body and are a form of physical violence when caused, above all, by a member of the opposite sex. The chapter includes a discussion of a further ambiguous form of physical violence, that of economic deprivation; this leads to prostitution and other unorthodox ways of earning money and surviving. Physical punishment when undeserved and meted out for gendered reasons also manifests as physical violence. Pregnancy is physical and, when a man impregnates a woman for reasons of control and material benefit this too is a physical form of gender violence. This applies also to marriage for purposes of entrapment.

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<sup>35</sup> The notion of sexual violence will be addressed in chapter three of this thesis.

Ultimately, the women characters in Masitera's works are exposed to various forms of physical violence but are largely resilient. They resist the violence in ways that are not obvious to the perpetrator of the violence. Masitera tries to give hope to her female readership by showing that men are themselves human and their violence and control can be defeated or evaded.

The women characters manage eventually to carve their own spaces, however difficult this is, amidst the restrictive patriarchal dominance in their lives. The women in both *The Trail* and *Start With Me* strive to strike a balance between being independent and being "true" African women, in the sense of them conforming to societal expectations of women as a gendered category. They eventually settle for being both, but on their own terms. The deeply rooted nature of gender ideologies is exposed and engaged with, and women's complicity in gender violence is redressed. In *The Trail*, the authority of the nuns is revised to allow the girls some space. The girls agree to stick together and challenge abusive women, instead of being helpless spectators of their own suffering. Both these novels end with the women characters being united; in *Start with Me*, mother, daughter and granddaughter are joined in solidarity to prevent the next generation of women from enduring the same suffering they endured. This reflects the collective agency of women in releasing themselves from the scourge of gender violence and oppression.

### **CHAPTER THREE: HOUSE, HAREM AND HIGHWAY AMID PRECARIOUS WOMEN: RETHINKING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND COMMERCIAL SEX WORK IN VIRGINIA PHIRI'S *HIGHWAY QUEEN* (2010)**

This chapter is largely informed by African womanism as a strand of African feminism and postcolonial feminism by extension. A key thread to this study is the realisation that African women's problems exceed those of simply being a woman. The scope of African womanism and African feminism, is wider and more cognisant of the intricacies of African womanhood. One of these intricacies is the interdependence of the genders, as "neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself" (Steady 1987, 8). A reading of *Highway Queen* through the lens of African womanism suggests that African womanism, like African feminism, is not apprehensive of African men "but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalised oppression of all African people" (Davies and Greaves 1986, 8). Although marred by violence, the novel tries to show the humanity of prostitutes and the possibility of achieving cooperation between the sexes in helping each other to survive.

*Highway Queen* is a novel written by a Zimbabwean woman novelist, Virginia Phiri. The novel's main focus is on women who engage in commercial sex work for survival. As these women set about doing their "work", they do so in the face of risks and several forms of violence, of which sexual violence ranks high. The novel exposes the untold story of prostitute wives and mothers in African societies. It provides an introspective look into the nature of prostitution and exposes the precariousness of the lives, as well as the psychology, of mothers and wives who indulge in prostitution as a means of survival. The protagonist of the novel, Sophie, is a married woman who is also a mother and a prostitute. The author of the novel is at pains to expose the reasons why Sophie lives as she does. The author also tries to offer explanations for the choices that female characters make in becoming prostitutes. We are told that prior to selling sex, Sophie had "tried all sorts of odd jobs" (p. 10) but with no success. This narration presents prostitution as an entrapment and an activity that one is forced into by circumstances. Joyce, Selina, Kate, Pepe, Sue, Ice, Cindy and several other prostitutes, young and old, of different backgrounds and marital statuses, are presented in the same way.

In this chapter the representations of sexual violence suffered by women in various spaces is discussed. Using an African womanist reading, I investigate women's engagement with and resistance to sexual violence as an enduring risk of commercial sex work. I establish the factors that make women vulnerable, what forces them to yield to prostitution and how they become victims of sexual violence. This chapter is crucial to the thesis as it tackles the intricate space of flawed agencies and the unimaginable indulgence in “sex-selling” by married women. It forms the basis of the discussions in the subsequent chapters. Comparisons are made between *Highway Queen* and selected female authored Zimbabwean novels on prostitution in general and prostitute wives and mothers in particular. The purpose of these comparisons is to bring into light the ways in which women writers represent commercial sex work in their novels. Comparisons will thus be made with Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Lillian Masitera's *Start with Me* (2011), and Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* (2005).

In an interview, Phiri states that

the whole business of sex work has so much stigma that it is taboo for people to openly talk about it yet this profession has helped desperate women fend for their immediate and extended families (Ishraga M. *Hamid* 2013, 22).

Phiri upholds this assertion through her characterisation of a desperate Sophie whose prostitution helps her to care for both her immediate and extended family. In yet another interview Phiri observes that

*Highway Queen* was inspired by seeing many ordinary women struggling to fend for their families and failing to get payment in formal employment. As a result these women end up selling their bodies in order to earn money despite dangers such as STIs including HIV and at times violence. The whole book is generally about day to day hardships and joys of the ordinary people but with emphasis on economic hardships, lack of decent accommodation, crime and other facets of life (Tinashe Mushakavanhu 2014).

Phiri's postcolonial feminist inclinations are clear in these remarks. She is concerned with the continued suffering and perseverance of the black woman in the postcolony and in the aftermath of violence. She articulates her concerns about ordinary women struggling to fend for their families without payment from formal employment. This recognition of women's failure to secure formal employment alludes to unequal opportunities for men and women and reflects the African feminist argument that "certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies and that colonialism reinforced them and introduced others" (Davies and Greaves 1986, 10). There is a conscious suggestion in the novel that corresponds to Davies and Greaves' assertion that the everyday hardships of the ordinary people have been inherited as a colonial legacy of suffering. In the interview with *Frauensolidarität*, Phiri observes that "the most important reason why I write about sex workers is that they are unsung heroines whose stories have not been told due to shame and stigma" (*Frauensolidarität* 2013, 22). She adds that "it is poverty that drives these women to work in this field" (ibid.). *Highway Queen* exposes the institutionalised violence suffered by the black woman in a system that has failed to incorporate her as an equal participant. I refer here to institutionalised violence because the violence is manifested from the level of governments failing to recover from colonial domination, and cascading down to society and ultimately women who now have to fend for themselves by whatever means they can. Phiri, in a number of interviews, has indicated her passion for writing about sex workers, defending her writing by saying that she does not encourage prostitution but writes about it to let readers know what goes on<sup>36</sup>.

The plot of the novel, *Highway Queen*, begins with a jobless Sophie lamenting her loss of security. She bemoans the loss of hope that her husband's unemployment has brought to the whole family. Sophie's characterisation establishes her position as an African womanist, and the novel, by extension, as an African womanist text. The novel's first African womanist insinuation is Sophie's realisation that although her husband, Steve, can no longer provide for the family, this is not his fault and she has to understand this. In an attempt to bring out the humanity of man and his victimisation to the same forces that

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<sup>36</sup> There are several audio files on Virginia Phiri's interviews that shed more light on passionate writing and representations of commercial sex work and bring out the humanity of the sex worker. See the following sites for Internet Audio Archive files [https://archive.org/details/aporee\\_19794\\_22989](https://archive.org/details/aporee_19794_22989) and [https://archive.org/details/Voices\\_from\\_Harare\\_782](https://archive.org/details/Voices_from_Harare_782) (accessed 07/07/2015).

oppress women, Sophie blames the economy and poor government policies for emasculating her husband. In addition, Sophie also reflects on how Steve was “a respectable man” (p.7) when he was still employed and the breadwinner. Steve’s retrenchment is clearly related to the family’s loss of status and cultural capital. A rapid descent into poverty is all a part of this process, along with the resulting sexual violence inflicted on Sophie. Here the novel exposes the African womanist and African feminist concern with the need to understand construction of black men’s masculinities, particularly suppressed masculinities. Steve was considered a respectable man based on his financial stability and his ability to provide adequately for his family.

Steve’s dilemma at the loss of his respectability and his subsequent resorting to alcohol is what Giddens (2001) refers to as masculinity in crisis. This is the failure of men to relate meaningfully to life, in relation to changing times and societal expectations. On the other hand, inadequate government economic policies and management give rise to the poverty of Steve’s family and many others. The first violation of Sophie’s life is her husband’s incapacitation as the family’s main provider. What is made clear at the beginning of the novel is the cascading of government’s mistreatment of men to the poverty and suffering of women and children. This suffering exposes women, especially, to untold suffering. Steve is only respectable when he is financially stable. If masculinities, as presented by Phiri, are mediated on the grounds of financial strength in an economy that one has no control over, then African masculinities will remain fluid and in constant mediation. The truck drivers in the novel are superior masculinities. I refer to them as such because they have access to financial and material resources that they use to manipulate and abuse the wives of men whose masculinities are less secure..

The poverty experienced by Sophie and Steve’s family resonates with the argument that poverty is culturally bound and can be divided into two groups: “absolute poverty”, which is when the basic conditions that must be met in order to sustain a physically healthy existence such as food, shelter and clothing are not met, and “relative poverty”, which relates to a deficiency in the overall standard of living that prevails in a society (Anthony Giddens 2001, 480). African feminism’s concern with sexual violence is useful in the analysis of gender violence in *Highway Queen*. Sexual violence underpins the plot of this

novel and shapes the novel's characterisation. In the conception of black characters Phiri is attentive to what Thiam describes as their "a threefold oppression: sexism, racism, class division" (1986, 118). Women characters in Phiri's novel are presented not only as battered beings but also as individuals whose precarious lives are determined by their race, class and gender. Poverty exposes women to specific forms of sexual exploitation and violence. Although Phiri does not dwell unambiguously on racism, her concerns with it are implied in her contrasting of the lives of her white characters to those of her black ones. The concern with the connection between race and gender in relation to poverty is exemplified through the differences between black people and white people; Mrs Kennedy lives a better life than Sophie and all the black women in *Highway Queen*. The setting of the novel in post-independence Zimbabwe does not change the racial imbalances of society. The next sign of a drop in Sophie's overall standard of living, after Steve's retrenchment, is her engagement in prostitution. The practice is prostitution, as presented in Phiri's *Highway Queen*, is still largely unacceptable in contemporary Zimbabwean society. Nonetheless, the novel does show that prostitution is much easier to stomach than other deviant sexualities such as homosexuality, which will be discussed later in Chapter five of this thesis.

The sexual violence that is inherent in the sex trade is presented as being institutionalised. The common thread among the prostitutes in the novel is that they are forced by a diversity of circumstances into prostitution. Although we meet up with precarious women presented as prostitute wives and mothers, we also discover the African womanist consciousness of the precariousness of such activities in the context of being African, married and mothers. The most explicit representation of these women is that, despite their precariousness, they are African and fully aware of their African-ness and society's expectations of an African woman's sexuality. As illustrated in the novel, there are many reasons for women from diverse backgrounds opting to sell sex; the desire to be oppressed by men is not one of these reasons. More light will be shed in this chapter on some of these reasons, including the economic crisis, poor government planning and policies and the way in which these factors have incapacitated men and prevented them from providing for their families.

Scholars have proposed various definitions for the concepts of prostitution and commercial sex work. There is general consensus that prostitution is “the granting of sexual favours for monetary gain” (Giddens 2009, 596). This form of exchange in Africa is mostly grounded in poverty. Thus, Donald, L. Donham argues that Western views of prostitution or commercial sex work are difficult to comprehend in an African socio-cultural context (1998). There are a number of reasons for this. One reason that this study points out is that some women characters, are in commercial sex relationships with their own husbands. Sex is a currency for survival and women trade it with their husbands in exchange for their’s and their children’s survival. Sophie, for example remains in her marriage more for social acceptance than for love. The notion of wives commercialising sex with their husbands is discussed at greater length in Chapter five, where the character Onai endures untold suffering and abuse in exchange for shelter for herself and her children. In fact, not all prostitutes in *Highway Queen* choose deliberately to sell sex; most are left with no other option. Prostitution is rampant among people from poor backgrounds who are affected by poverty, as this novel illustrates. There is a clear link between women's economic survival strategies and their continued and increasing exposure to poverty. This is epitomised in *Highway Queen* where, as a result of this exposure, women play a key role in driving the sex trade. Women’s prostitution, when read in this novel, through an African feminist lens, can be viewed as heroic in so far as the prostitutes are able to achieve respect as mothers, and respect derived from self-reliance. Prostitution provides the only means for material survival in a suppressed economy. For the female characters, sex is a valuable commodity that they possess. They understand the need to be resourceful with sex if they are to make a living.

The nature of prostitution is such that it is a trade. It involves the exchange of both tangible and intangible goods. For Hunter, there is a close association between sex and gifts resulting in transactional sex, thus making transactional sex similar to or synonymous with prostitution (2002). In a research on what Hunter terms “the materiality of everyday sex” in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and more broadly in sub-Saharan Africa, Hunter seeks to move beyond conventional ways of reading prostitution by setting prostitution and transactional sex side by side and making comparisons:

transactional sex has a number of similarities to prostitution. In both cases, non-marital sexual relationships,

often with multiple partners, are underscored by the giving of gifts or cash. Transactional sex, however, differs in important ways: participants are constructed as “girlfriends” and “boyfriends” and not “prostitutes” and “clients”, and the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment (Hunter 2002, 100).

In transactional sex, participants are constructed as girlfriends and boyfriends (what Zimbabweans have come to call “small houses”), not as prostitutes and clients. The transactional sex that dominates the novel *Highway Queen* is also a feature of other female-authored Zimbabwean texts such as Lutanga Shaba's (2006) *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, where Beater trades sex for job security. Gifts are not really a predetermined payment, Masitera's *Start With Me* (2011) where Edna travels long distances to sell sex in order to raise school fees for her children and Masilo's *African Tea Cosy* (2010) where Joy has sex with Solomon in exchange for money. The line between transactional sex and prostitution is blurred, especially when gifts come from different people and when the boyfriends or girlfriends are many as we see in *African Tea Cosy*. For Phiri, all transactional sex is commercial and necessary, thus she presents prostitution as innocent and situational. In its representations, the novel confirms the notion that the privileged economic position of men is the primary basis for the sale of sex, however defined (Hunter 2002). However, the novel attempts to absolve men of their presumed unfair advantage over women by outlining their involvement in the trade. They help women to survive by buying sex, the commodity that women sell. In this chapter, the terms “prostitute” and “commercial sex worker”, and “prostitution” and “commercial sex work” are used interchangeably to refer to the practice of trading sex. A distinction between transactional sex and prostitution, however obscure, is helpful in reading sexualities and sexual relations that occur in the texts under study, especially in *Highway Queen*.

The questions of authority and; who makes the sex trade possible are open to debate. In addressing these questions, Tamale suggests that, “sexuality and gender go hand in hand, both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies” (Tamale 2011, 11). Tamale's argument is that, even though women are said to drive the sex trade, it is really men or clients who enable this trade. The presentation of sex transactions in *Highway Queen* confirms

Tamale's suggestion. Whereas Sophie and the other prostitutes make themselves available for commercial sex, they remain at the mercy of men to enable the transaction. Prostitutes need men to pay for sex. In the same light, Tamale captures the complexity of sexuality when she says that, "sexuality touches a wide range of other issues including pressure, the human body, dress, self-esteem, gender identity, power and violence" (Tamale 2011, 12). The presentation of prostitutes in *High Way Queen* is in resonance with what Tamale suggests in this quotation. Tamale suggests that the client exercises power over the prostitute because it is the client who decides on whether or not to have sex with the commercial sex worker.

The prostitutes in *High Way Queen* have multiple and fractured identities that are in constant mediation. The decency of prostitution that Phiri advocates is to be understood within the framework of viewing prostitution as work. This view, though questionable in Marxist feminist terms<sup>37</sup>, legitimizes women's engagement in it for the good of the family. Marxists view all wage earning as oppression and for them "workers are inevitably enslaved under a system of production where, deprived of knowledge and skill, they are reduced practically to nothing" (Simone Weil 1955, 161). Likewise, Marxist feminists' view, all labour is oppression. For them, prostitution is thus a form of oppression in which workers (prostitutes) reinforce and perpetuate an exploitative capitalistic scheme. Although there may be some truth in such thinking, the attack on work is what has weakened Marxist thought over the years. Although agreeably conservative, postcolonial feminism, unlike Marxist feminism, recognizes the dignity of labour in the sacrifices made by women for their survival more than it laments their engagement in it. The agency of women in prostituting themselves also resonates with Hunter's (2002) views that women approach trade relations in order to access power and resources in ways that can either challenge or reproduce patriarchal structures. This is to suggest that women do not necessarily enter into prostitution as mere victims but rather as co-conspirators. Prostitution is similarly represented in the other texts discussed in this study. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, as in *Highway Queen*, gender roles and sexualities are under siege as

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<sup>37</sup> Marxist feminism arises out of the doctrines of Karl Marx, whose theory is centred less on the material aspects of life than on the more broadly defined social ones. Marxist feminists base their arguments of moral right and wrong on the corruption of wage labour that is in itself an expression of class distinction. Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1955, pp. 61–62.

a cause and result of the proliferation of prostitution. Sophie in *Highway Queen* becomes the breadwinner and survives by being an informal trader and a prostitute during times of economic crisis when her husband is without a job. In the “House, Harem and Highway” texts that deal with women, commercial sex work and the precariousness of these women, the question of agency is presented with a certain ambiguity. Prostitution is depicted in contradictory ways as both empowering and demeaning. In the texts under study, prostitution and transactional sex test the theories and beliefs regarding human agency or the lack of it.

Although transactional sex is a “distinct and internally coherent African system of sexuality” (Caldwell et al. 1989, 187), its occurrence is largely attributable to material gender inequities between men and women in contemporary African societies. Hunter argues on this same subject that “materialist accounts show how Christianity, colonialism, urbanisation and migration have reshaped masculinities and sexual practices in fundamental ways in Southern Africa” (Hunter 2002, 105). Material deprivation precipitated Zimbabwe’s plunge into a post-2000 political and economic crisis<sup>38</sup>. This crisis accounts for the dystopian forms of urbanisation that have created degraded spaces of domesticity that have become unhomely as a result of the unavailability of basic commodities and the most restricted living spaces in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This scarcity of material things brings in its wake the psychological traumas that characters undergo. Prostitution, in this novel, is caused by this deprivation thus conforming to those theories of prostitution that do not romanticise it. Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn argue that “in any society a higher proportion of poor women prostitute themselves” (2000, 206), as we see in the texts in this study. This view of prostitution also explains the absence in this text of women from economically privileged classes who participate in prostitution. This absence is a particular concern of third world women and one that postcolonial feminism seeks to address.

Prostitution and transactional sex appear to be the curse of the poor, regardless of their level of education. In their research on women and the sexual scripts of poor women,

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<sup>38</sup> See Oliver Nyambi 2014 in The ‘new’ woman: Changing Zimbabwean female identities in Valerie Tagwira’s novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*, *English Academy Review: Southern African Journal of English Studies*, 31 (1) pp 38–50. He discusses literary representations of the post-2000 political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe.

Maheshvari Naidu and Kholekile Hazel Ngqila observe that

social realities are thus very different from that of other (African) women who are financially self-reliant and often therefore sexually empowered to enact less repressive sexual scripts with their sexual partners (Naidu and Ngqila 2013, 69).

This quotation alludes to differences even among women of seemingly similar backgrounds. It also acknowledges that women are differently empowered to negotiate sexual practices in their lives. Naidu and Ngqila's observation relates to African feminism, particularly in recognising sexual matters as being among the social realities of an African woman's life. In *Highway Queen*, Sofia drifts into transactional sex because her husband can no longer perform his role as a breadwinner, just as we see with Edna in *Start With Me* (2011). It becomes very difficult to ignore the element of exploitation and the violence that is often associated with such sexual practices. There are many answers to the question in the title of Christine Overall's article on prostitution, "What's wrong with Prostitution: Evaluating Sex Work" (1992). It is still incumbent upon scholars to examine and dispel the myths associated with prostitution and transactional sex and to unravel the complexities and diversities of this social terrain. It is important to acknowledge that further to the social stigma that is associated with prostitution, the risk factors of violence, disease and prostitution are also related to the question of sexualities.

I read *Highway Queen*, in part, as transformational literature, in as far as it proffers a transformed world, albeit from an African womanist approach. In transformative literature, men are sharply criticised. This type of literature also features and castigates women who reproduce gender relations that discriminate against other women "through centuries of interiorization of ideologies of patriarchy" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10). In this sense, transformative literature shares common ground with postcolonial feminism. Transformational literature also ensures that men, in the course of the plot, experience radical changes in attitude. In *Highway Queen*, this radical change in thinking is revealed through Steve's renewed love for Sophie after his injury as well as by his acceptance that she should work for the family. Earlier in the novel, Steve is presented as the family's provider, but with little affection for his wife. This attitude is changed in the course of the plot. As is the norm with transformative texts, male characters who embody behaviour that

is criticised and must be overcome are contrasted with one or more positive counterparts. Steve's character is contrasted with Andy who is more supportive of Sophie. The castigating of Steve's mistreatment of Sophie is reflective of African womanism, which "wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand" (Ogunyemi 1986, 65). Save for a few exceptions, men in the novel have a more respectful attitude towards women. But even as the novel is transformative, it is also, radically, African feminist in its portrayal of a number of male characters and shows that "men as a social group inevitably and in principle discriminate against and mistreat women" (Arndt 2002, 340). This radical African feminist view of men as an advantaged group is epitomised in the less preferable masculinities such as those of Peter, Solomon and Dhuri. Despite cameos of radical African feminist thought in Phiri's novel, however, it is largely a transformative African womanist text.

Within the context of postcolonial feminist, and more particularly, transformational African womanist literature, this chapter focuses on female voices of discontent and highlights differences in women's experiences. The complexities of a prostitute's life are reflected in novel's subheadings, which inform this study: "Wake-Up Call", "Sink or Swim", "Tough Going", "Hopeful" And "Greatest Disappointment". These subheadings are descriptive of the development and or degeneration of the female characters' agency for survival. The "Wake-Up call" comes with the realisation there are problems that need to be solved and that sex is a commodity that can be sold in order to solve these problems. "Sink Or Swim" is the choice of agency. It is the choice that one has to make whether or not to make use of available resources in order to survive, and often, sex is that available resource. "Tough Going", is an exposition of the dangers that come with the sex trade. Chief among these dangers are humiliation, rape and disease. "Hopeful" shows that one's life can actually be turned around positively in as much as the monetary gain of prostitution can lead to an "Escape From Poverty". "The Greatest Disappointment" suggests that however lucrative and seemingly promising prostitution may be, it is not an effecting way of escaping poverty. These subheadings provide the signposts of postcolonial feminist articulation that acknowledges women's suffering but also illuminates and celebrates their survival amidst difficult living conditions.

One striking aspect of Phiri's *Highway Queen* is that it narrates the prostitute lives of several women characters. Women, in this novel, are not a uniform group, rather, they have inconsistent subjectivities. This realisation of inconsistent subjectivities is important to this study as it contains the complexity of women faced with myriad responsibilities and challenges. The main protagonist of the novel, Sophie, who epitomises the experiences of many prostitutes in Zimbabwean society, embodies multiple and contradictory identities. The representation of Sophie's character affirms the view of the prostitutes' struggle as "a two-fold one" (Homaifar 2008, 175). It is two-fold by virtue of her gender and African-ness. Furthermore, she has the contrasting identities of mother, wife and prostitute. However, through her agency in the survival of her family, she guards all these identities and protects them from exposure to the eyes of society. The notion of having an identity is problematic for precarious African women like Sophie. Consequently, the social processes through which identity is given, claimed or negotiated also deepen the dilemma of the African woman for whom identity is relational. By being circumspect and finding a means of "practising" discreetly, Sophie "strives to escape the aesthetic, ideological, and material determinations that are usually associated with the subject of prostitution" (Lionnet 1995, 61) and by extension, she protects all her identities. In its rigorous attempt to distance itself from the material realities that it represents, the novel creates a world marred by pain but one that is negotiated for survival. The prostitute-mothers and wives in *Highway Queen* are determined to provide the best for their children. One of the aims of this chapter is to investigate how Phiri exposes the difficulties encountered by prostitutes in their agency, particularly their management of sexual violence.

Phiri exposes many risks of the sex trade, all of which manifest as sexual violence. Rape is one such risk; it is persistent in the sense that no matter how careful a sex worker may be there is always the lingering and unavoidable risk of being raped. If rape is to be understood as forced sexual intercourse, this is something a sex worker will inevitably face, with no sure protection. In trying to understand the rapist's mentality, as illustrated in *Highway Queen*, Phiri suggests that rapists always try to defend themselves by blaming the victim. Peter terrorises and rapes prostitutes because he believes that they have infected him with HIV; they therefore deserve to be hurt. Peter's characterisation echoes the radical and African feminist view that men "inevitably and in principle, discriminate against and mistreat women" (Arndt 2002, 34). In questioning the mistreatment of women, and

particularly of prostitutes as a social group, the novel's narration forces the reader to note the irony in Peter's blaming of prostitutes for his HIV infection when he has no proof of this. In holding the prostitutes accountable for his condition, Peter suggests that he is an innocent victim of his own actions which he is unwilling to be accountable for. Phiri satirises Peter's stance by depicting him as a callous man who has slept with many prostitutes, a number of whom he rapes and refuses to use condoms with. If anything, he may have been the source of many women's infections.

Scholars have long interpreted rape as an act of power and authority (Tamale 2011). Discussions of men's power and physical strength as compared to that of women have formed the bedrock of some radical feminist thought. McFadden asserts that

sex is a weapon that men use against women – and rape is the most blatant expression of that violence [...] raping not only confirms that the male is in control, it also satisfies the desire to dominate (McFadden 1992, 184).

For this reason, feminists believe that prostitution oppresses women, leaving them with few choices when transacting sex. Therefore, demographic issues that affect gender relations also influence people's sexual lives. In the act of overpowering Sophie, her attackers make explicit her biological weakness as a woman. *Highway Queen* presents some men as bullies who deliberately take advantage of weak women. However, in contrasting these men with others who are less oppressive, the novel makes an escape from Furusa's (2006) suggestion that Zimbabwean women writers are apprehensive in their representations of gender relations.

Violence comes, not only, in the physical act of rape, but is also registered in the wilful spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. With power comes the authority to control and alter the lives of those who are subordinate to others. In *Highway Queen* the deliberate spread of HIV is presented as one of the most gruesome forms of power and a candid expression of sexual violence. Sophie says:

I still had problems to convince customers to use condoms. I felt guilty of spreading the AIDS virus but there was no way I would have told men that I was HIV positive. The

least I did was to offer them condoms, which they refused (p.99).

Sophie's precarious position and desperation to earn money lead her to violate her clients sexually by knowingly infecting them with HIV. One is left thinking that these men may deserve the short change, through infection, in as much as Sophie herself may have been intentionally infected by any one of her careless clients or abusers. Sophie's clients are not her only victims; her husband, however philandering, is a potential victim. There is no evidence in the text to suggest that Sophie may have been infected by her husband. Although it is said that he has always been unfaithful, the couple has always agreed to use protection. The real fear of HIV infection in Sophie's life arises when she becomes a sex worker.

By having unprotected sex with her husband whilst fully aware of the risk of HIV infection after her experiences with Samson and Dhuri, Sophie is herself a perpetrator of sexual violence. It is ironic that she fails to convince a stranger to use a condom when she has ensured consistent condom use with her husband "because he was never faithful and he never objected..." (p.19). Sophie's failure to disclose her HIV status to either her husband or her clients serves as a castigation of a society whose perceptions of HIV are yet to be transformed. The result of non-disclosure is persistent violence through the wilful spread of HIV to unsuspecting clients and spouses. On another level, the deliberate spread of HIV by the women characters in the novel may be read as a hidden transcript of their resistance agenda, in Scott's (1990) terms. I read this deliberate infection of men by women as a covert, but no less powerful, resistance strategy used by these women. In this case, I refer to women's resistance to oppression by men through prostitution. This covert resistance occurs in the apparent acceptance of abuse that masks the destruction of the abuser in the process. A similar representation of women knowingly and wilfully spreading HIV is reflected in Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, in the character of Gloria, a prostitute who consciously decides to infect her neighbour's husband, Gari, in order to make sure that he remains tied to her. This intentional spread of HIV depicted in these novels resonates with Jane Bennett's assertion that "both women and men are vulnerable to the way dominant norms of gender relations within the contexts are working" (Bennett

2008, 94). Bennett here illuminates the potential and actual victimhood of both men and women to and from each other. The abuse of men, however, is not pronounced in such a way as to elicit the sympathy of the reader. Even more importantly, this hidden power of women to manipulate society challenges Spivak's (1988) belief in the mute, inactive subaltern female subject.

The role of Sophie and the other prostitutes in *Highway Queen* is to show the agency of an individual in using tactical opposition to counteract victimisation. These women epitomise Scott's hidden transcripts in the art of resistance (1990). These women, like Edna in *Start with Me*, use and are used by society. They are exceptional in their awareness of the precariousness of their position in the hidden transcripts of their resistance. That these women are able to use society, more effectively than they are used themselves, indicates that the weak can sometimes manipulate society to their own advantage. The term "hidden transcripts" is further articulated as deriving from the strength of the weak and marginalised individuals in society (Homaifar, 2008). The term is often associated with disability studies and is useful to this study in terms of transforming disability into ability. This is realised through women whose survival, although disabled by the economy, is inevitably enabled through prostitution, as we see in these novels. Prostitutes are regarded as the weakest group of people in society and

the prostitutes' struggle is a two-fold one. She has no space of her own to resist poverty and exploitation. To survive, she uses a shared space – her body – to take advantage of a system that promises financial gain in exchange for sexual favours (Homaifar 2008, 175).

This is an apt description of the prostitutes in *Highway Queen*, whose struggle is indeed two-fold. They use their bodies to take advantage of a corrupt system that promises them no survival. Radical feminists agree that prostitution oppresses women (Jacquelyn Monroe 2005). Even if both men and women play a part in the practice of prostitution, the extent of physical, emotional and psychological sacrifice of prostitutes in *Highway Queen* attests to Monroe's assertion. Although the prostitute makes a living through selling sex, she remains largely oppressed. There are some differences in Phiri and Tagwira's representations of prostitution. In Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, a clear line is drawn

between the prostitute and the wife. However despite the distinction, both novels confirm the view that

Postcolonial literature often embraces the prostitute as an integral part of village life, yet she is invariably represented as an outcast and tragic figure, worshipped and highly desired by men and taunted and despised by other women (Kamala Kempadoo 2001, 41).

Kempadoo's observation is pertinent to the characterisation of prostitutes in the texts in this study as prostitutes are generally depicted as coming from a poor background and despised by society. Tagwira and Phiri, however, differ in that, for Tagwira, the prostitute is a single woman while the wife is innocent and always makes an innocent living, even when the man fails to provide for the family. For Phiri, on the other hand, any woman can be a prostitute; single, married, divorced or single. Furthermore, Phiri's prostitutes, such as Sophie, are given a human face and invite the sympathy of readers as they are left with no other option. Whereas *High Way Queen* is at pains to explain that Sophie has tried everything else but failed, Gloria, the prostitute in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, is portrayed as completely evil. Sophie is discreet about her sex selling business and is careful not to disturb neither her clients nor her own marriage. On the hand, Gloria is determined to destroy marriages and practices her sex selling publicly in the society she lives in. If anything, society is warned in, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, to be wary of such women who knowingly and wilfully destroy people's marriages for their own selfish ends. Despite these differences, both novels define prostitution as a form of survival, while rape and HIV remain unavoidable dangers facing commercial sex workers. A common thread in these representations is the postcolonial feminists aim to speak about prostitution or sex work beyond historically shaped victimisations, while at the same time discussing sexual agency, needs and desires.

Men in positions of power demand sex as a currency for transactions and when women resist, they are violated by men. An African womanist reading of *Highway Queen* reveals this biological oppression of women by men but also acknowledges the interplay of government policies in this oppression. Dhuri, the driver who hordes food, takes advantage of Sophie's situation to coerce her into having sex with him to settle the debt for the rice and fish he sells her. The cruelty with which he threatens to throw her out without either

the goods or the money forces her into a precariously submissive position where she has to trade sex for survival. A similar representation is found in Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. The Councillor, who is deliberately left without a name, perhaps to signify men in positions of power, pressurises Beater into having sex with him as she is desperate to secure her own and her daughter's employment. Linga, Beater's daughter, is also forced by the same man to have a sex with him to save her job and her mother's. The climax of the Councillor's sexual violence towards mother and child is his infection of the two with HIV and the same sexually transmitted disease. Empowered by her education and awareness, Linga is determined to secure her life, hence, she endures coercive sex with the Councillor but insists on condom use. Beater, however, is not enlightened and is unable to get treatment, gets diseased and dies. Both Phiri and Shaba vary the representation of prostitutes in their novels. Unlike Tagwira, for whom a prostitute is a precarious single woman, for Phiri and Shaba even mothers and wives can be precarious, despite the respect they are given by society. A distinction is made between single mothers who have never been married and those who become single after the death of a spouse or after divorce. For Shaba and Phiri, although mothers and wives may prostitute themselves out of situational need, they are not labelled as devious or immoral as are the single women in Tagwira's representation. Precarious does not always mean devious.

*Highway Queen* reveals the humanity of the prostitute by allowing the reader to witness the prostitute's introspection and emotional turmoil. The author takes the reader through the mind and psychology of the prostitute. Sophie's emotional response to being taken advantage of is clearly articulated when she says: "I was very angry with myself for what I was about to do was a shameful thing [...] felt rotten and dirty about what we had done" (p.19). The description of her feelings and emotions in the extract draws on imagery of death and contamination. Sophie's feelings about transacting sex for merchandise relates well with Mary Douglas' description of dirt as "matter out of place" (2002, 36). The notion of matter out of place alludes to disorder and a disruption of social order. Sophie's situation read in the wider context of social disorder is further aptly described by Douglas view that "where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter" (Ibid, 36). Dirt then is a fitting description of the practice of trading sex, particularly for a married woman whose moral standing is always under scrutiny by society. The female body, in this case, Sophie's body, as a constrained

system, thus becomes a site for the proliferation of dirt<sup>39</sup>. The bodies of the women in Phiri's novel, as typified by Sophie, are what have been described as "site(s) of rebellion" (Saliba 1995, 133). The fact that the women in *Highway Queen* share their bodies, which are in fact not their own, suggests that women's bodies are sites for contesting inscription, control and identity. The view of women's bodies as sites of rebellion that gives rise to the need for agency, however flawed, is clearly articulated in Spivak's dictum that the subjugated woman must negotiate with the structures of enabling violence that produced her (1992). In this negotiation, the site of Sophie's body is shared and battered by her husband, herself and her clients. Ultimately, as an African woman, Sophie's body is not her own. Phiri's novel depicts "urban life and prostitution as twin sites of conflict, marginality and danger" (Lionnet 1995, 52) in its efforts to show the limited space for survival that is allowed to Sophie as she tries to make ends meet for her family. Hungwe introduces an interesting binary view of women by showing the distinction between respectable and disreputable women as society's way of ensuring that women "do not present a united front" (2006, 45). This notion of being respectable or disreputable is what guides Sophie in keeping her prostitution a secret from her immediate community. Even in her prostitution, Sophie remembers to always wear her headscarf. This is a symbol of a respectable woman in her community.

In presenting her women as active agents in the sex trade, *Highway Queen* challenges the view that "sex work and ideas about women in the trade are tragic and threatening" (Treena Orchard, Farr Sara, Susan Macphail, Cass Wender, and Dawn Young, 2013, 191). Rather, she shows that, "[b]odies and sexuality are not only sites of other's inscribed meaning, but also sources of African women's agency" (Desiree Lewis 2011, 207). The prostitutes in the novel are agents of survival. Women in the sex trade have a multiplicity of identities and most of these are relational (Singer 2006). Sophie's multiple identities do not tie her down but instead offer her choices she can adopt when convenient. In her encounter with Stan, the golfer, she introduces herself as "Sophie" while she insists on being called Mrs Mumba by the truck drivers. Sophie is in control of her identities;

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<sup>39</sup> A number of scholars have discussed the issue of the body and contamination. Examples are Ashleigh Harris 2008. Discourses of dirt and disease in operation murambatsvina in Maurice T. Vambe ed. *The Hidden dimensions of operation murambatsvina*. Harare: Weaver Press and Susan Santog 1989. *Illness as metaphor and AIDS and its metaphors*. London: Penguin.

however, although her relational identity as a wife gives her some respectability it fails to protect her from the dangers of the sex trade. Likewise, Deliwe, in Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, decides that she will leave a mark on humanity through the work of her body and the survival it gives her. Her body becomes a source of survival that humanity will be left to remember even after she has gone.

Phiri does not deviate much from Gaidzanwa's images of women as mothers, wives, divorcees and widows, single, jilted and prostitutes (1985). Inadvertently, Phiri fails to uphold the preferred relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law that she attempts to present through Sophie and her mother in law. To some extent, she confirms traditional stereotypes of the unsavoury nature of this relationship. Steve suffers a broken leg and is incapacitated. Sophie's mother-in-law accuses her of not caring for her husband. The dramatic change in Sophie's marriage after her husband is retrenched and fails to provide for his family reveals a battlefield for control and mastery rather than a partnership. While he is employed and providing for his family he is in full control of his family and his wife. Although, unbeknown to him, he shares Sophie's body with other men, she remains accountable to him and strives to complement his role in all her transactions. Steve clearly views his marriage to Sophie as a contest while for Sophie it is a partnership. She has to help fend for the family; as a working wife and breadwinner, she achieves agency.

The description of Sophie relates her to the average woman, who in Mohanty's terms "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being third world (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.)" (1991,56). This quotation captures the constraints that limit Sophie's life. She is aware of the impure nature of her acts. She is also aware that death is looming on her life path. She lives a truncated life as a third world woman who is black, poor and diseased. The imagery of death also serves to show the hopelessness of the bad health that prostitutes have to endure as a consequence of commercial sex work. This explication of emotions explains the humanity of the prostitute maimed by her precarious position. What it also shows is the extent of men's oppression of women, as sexual violence comes not only in the form of rape but also in the form of

coercion, blackmail and other types of exploitation. Clearly, Dhuri does not rape Sophie; she gives in, however unwillingly, because she needs food. When Dhuri bullies Sophie by refusing to honour his side of the bargain, Sophie's agency and agony fuels her fight for her earnings. She has paid more than money for the merchandise.

As a result of society's proscription of married women's behaviour, Sophie's husband, Steve, her family and neighbours would never imagine that Sophie could sell sex. The revelation of the existence of prostitute wives speaks to the African womanist agenda to reject stereotypes and prescriptive norms. In the depiction of her characters, Phiri rejects Magaisa's view of Zimbabwean society that women find security in marriage thus women who are "unmarried, divorced, and widowed with no source of income are literally pushed to the margins of society where they resort to the sale of sexual services for their economic survival" (2001, 121). Phiri's characterisation contests Magaisa's suggestion that marriage provides security for women, that all single women are deviant and that all married women are faithful. It can be argued that it is the absence of security in marriage that drives married women to prostitution. As revealed in *High Way Queen*, Sophie is a clear example of an unfaithful wife who does not get the security that Magaisa suggests from her marriage. The unimaginable nature of sex selling is what prompts Sophie to always be discreet. Sophie puts distance between herself and home in order to sell sex. When she realises that sex workers are beginning to operate closer to her home she resolves never to join them; she would rather go to the border town where she can hide her trade. Some unnamed parents in the novel are seen accepting goods brought by their daughters, oblivious to where they got these when they are unemployed. This laxity and commodification of girl children constitutes sexual violence in the sense that these parents benefit from their children's prostitution and exploitation. The complicity of parents, especially mothers, in the proliferation of child prostitution is one aspect that postcolonial African feminist and African womanist novels, like *Highway Queen*, have exposed. Older prostitutes like Sophie are aware of the risks associated with prostitution and work with law enforcement agents to keep young girls off the street.

That it takes another man, Samson, to convince Dhuri to "honour" his side of the bargain points to the transformative, albeit African womanist nature of *Highway Queen* as it seeks

to “negotiate with the patriarchal society to gain new scope for women” (Arndt 2002, 33). As the novel tries to legitimise prostitution as a survival strategy, it also prompts its male readership through this characterisation to be respectful of women and assist them in their need for survival. The novel tactfully engages men by allowing the two male characters; Samson and Dhuri, to iron out men’s mistreatment of women. This tactful engagement may be read through African womanist lenses as an attempt to actively involve black men in changing men’s attitudes and treatment of black women in the postcolony. Through naivety and desperation, she is tricked by Samson into a precarious sleeping arrangement and subsequently raped. After the rape, Samson offers her fifty rand which she snatches bitterly. Sophie is later raped and robbed by a man who is subsequently identified as Peter who is on a revenge mission for his HIV infection, which he believes he acquired from prostitutes. While this novel reveals that rape is the most common form of sexual violence, there are other, subtler forms of violence such as coercion and manipulation that emerge. Both Dhuri and Samson are coercive and use Sophie under the guise of helping her. Julius, Mrs Kennedy’s gardener, also tries to take advantage of her but she escapes. He even sets the dogs on her. Danny takes advantage of her by forcing her to have sex with him before he will help her. All these men are presented as being deceptive and repressive. In terms of African womanist advocacy, however, feelings of togetherness between black women and black men are revealed, albeit ambiguously, through the ousting of Andy by other men. Andy is the only male character who helps Sophie to find goods for resale without expecting to have sex with her, however he is falsely accused of stealing from the drivers and fired from the truck station. Sophie is also banned from entering the station. Superior masculinities, represented by the truck drivers, make conscious efforts to keep women in a vulnerable position so as to ensure their continued suffering.

Throughout the period that Sophie works as a prostitute, she feels guilty about having to fend for her family in such a debased manner. Even after the ordeal with Dhuri and the ensuing fight that exposes Sophie’s sex, she still introduces herself as Mrs Mumba, subscribing to her relational identity. This reflects her consciousness of her African-ness. Her desperation casts her into precarious situations where men are sure to take advantage of her. Sophie’s reactions to problems, just as African feminists point out, “are often self-defeating and self-crippling” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10). Yet for Sophie the country’s economic crisis does not allow her to make ends meet any other way. This representation

of Sophie's consciousness emphasises Ogunyemi's African womanist observation that the African woman "will recognise that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy" (1985, 64). This is true of Sophie; despite taking charge of her own sexuality in such a way that she is able to earn a living from it, Sophie must still make other decisions for her family. She reminds herself of the need for dignity when she says "I had sold myself", but she insists that she "didn't want to slide into being a whore" (p. 73). Although she intends to make an end to her prostitution if she can find a better way to earn money, Sophie's prostitution becomes habitual. She is aware that selling sex is risky and hopes that she will soon be able to stop but no matter how many times she promises herself that she will not sell sex again, she finds herself selling herself again and again. Sophie is determined to make a living and fend for her family in the only possible way, even after testing HIV positive, we see her determination when we are told that she continues to "patrol the highway [...] armed with a few packets of condoms, determined to use them" (p.98). Prostitution is a lucrative business. She earns enough money for school fees and for her mother-in-law's medication, in just two weeks, hence her motivation to continue working. That Sophie should prostitute herself in order to provide for her mother-in-laws medication, presents a troubled image of the need for survival and a wife's dire need to provide for the family. Sophie is aware of the demands that the extended African family makes on a woman whose husband is unable to enact the provider role, thus she goes to the extremes of selling sex to meet those demands. She refers to her prostitution as "work" in order to lend her activities some dignity. But this is futile as she discovers that sex work is an occupation in which the rights of the worker are not respected.

Sophie's need for a place from which to operate suggests that Zimbabwean law shuns prostitution even though it remains rife in an underground form (Magaisa 2001). The use of derogatory names for people who sell sex also reflects this. Words such as bitch and whore are common on the streets described in the novel. Even when Sophie finally admits to herself that she is a sex worker, she refuses to be called one by others and is driven to physical fights with men who use this label. Conscious of society's views on prostitutes, Sophie consciously keeps her activities a secret. In Sophie's community, prostitution is unspeakable and one should be silent about it. Despite the booming business that prostitution is, it is still socially and morally unacceptable in the Zimbabwean society of

Phiri's novel. Here there are similarities between Edna in *Start with Me* and Sophie; this discretion centres on the relational identities of African women. The fact that prostitutes are discreet about their selling of sex does not silence sex as a subject in *Highway Queen*. Despite Magaisa's (2001) contention that people in Zimbabwe do not openly discuss sexual issues, the characters in *Highway Queen* do so with candid openness, although only when amongst their friends. Sophie and Ice share experiences and, from their discussions, poverty is what has led them both into prostitution. Cindy is also driven to prostitution by poverty (p.180) because her husband has abandoned her. The novel's insistence on difference in understanding the varying circumstances of the prostitutes reflects Minha's theorisation that "difference is division" (1987, 7). Even among postcolonial women, difference exists and the appreciation of difference in establishing a shared sisterhood is a cornerstone of postcolonial feminist thought. In this novel, prostitution, transcends mere deviance and stands out as rebellion against conventional customs and obligations constraining Zimbabwean women as they negotiate the poverty in their lives. The novel challenges Edlund and Korn's assertion that "a woman cannot be both a prostitute and a wife" (2002, 182) through the presentation of Sophie, a wife, mother and prostitute who even in her prostitution remembers her African-ness as symbolised by her headscarf. Phiri further debunks Edlund and Korn's claim that "marriage can be an important source of income for women" (ibid, 182). Poverty even among married women in the novel is the main reason for prostitution among poor women and poverty can give rise to insecurity in the life of a married woman, the ultimate result of which may be prostitution, as reflected in this text.

The way in which Phiri maintains and discusses the structure of the African family may render her novel an African feminist script. Sophie lives with her mother-in-law, albeit in an urban setting. The nature and significance of the African family, including the extended family, is a "concrete reality" (Steady 1987, 8) in the life of the African woman. That Sophie is able to maintain the extended family structure in the city makes her a true African woman. The novel questions African masculinities through Steve who is not resilient even though he is given opportunities to make something of himself. Instead, he allows frustration to get the better of him. In her African-ness and the socialisation of what is expected of a wife, Sophie makes excuses for her husband's failures. She says: "his drinking was a clear indication of frustration. If a man failed to provide for his family, he

became ashamed” (p.10). Despite her husband’s failures, which she is fully aware of, she continues to behave respectfully towards him. Before turning to prostitution, Sophie had “also tried all sorts of odd jobs” (p.10) but they did not pay well. She tries to earn a decent living by hawking vegetables but her stall is raided by the municipal police and she loses all her merchandise, is arrested and has to pay a fine. Judging from all her failed attempts at earning a decent living, it is the poor economic system of the Zimbabwean government that drives her into prostitution, thus Phiri presents a Marxist feminist articulation of this woman, the worker who is sabotaged by the system.

The immediate and extended African family epitomised by Steve and Sophie’s family, is maintained throughout the novel, however troubled it may be. Even the children are put to work, helping the family by babysitting. Mothers-in-law, contrary to traditional representations of poor relationships with their daughters-in-law (Gaidzanwa 1985), are seen to lend a hand. Upon losing their home after failing to pay the mortgage, Sophie’s family becomes destitute. This displacement mirrors one postcolonial feminist concern, the continued suffering of women in the postcolony (Gunjane 2012). Rural-urban migrations affect many African families; the extended family system is damaged and people are torn from their rural homes. As the novel presents it, the city has fragmented Sophie’s family over generations. Sophie’s mother-in-law and father-in-law have lived in a municipal house all their working lives but when the family is expelled from city life by the economy, there is no home to go to.

The city brings with it, a cultural explosion which often works negatively against women characters. An offshoot of this explosion is the use of alcohol and narcotic substances. The use of these is particularly effective tool that men use to manipulate women and subject them to sexual violence. Jolanda Sallmann suggests that substance use “has been identified as both a reason women begin prostituting and a means of coping with the conditions encountered in prostitution” (2010, 115-116). Sallman here suggests a connection between women’s prostitution -and substance abuse. Reflective of Sallman’s suggestion, there is a general belief even among the women characters in *High Way Queen* that

women who behave in “unfeminine” ways such as being sexually aggressive or reckless, going to bars alone or getting drunk, may be seen as more responsible for victimisation or even as deserving victims (Weiss 2010, 288).

As this *High Way Queen* reveals, prostitutes are often drugged and raped in their drunken state. In addition, they blame themselves for violence experienced under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Sophie is coerced by Stan into drinking cider, which he loosely and deceptively describes as “juice from fermented apples” (p. 72). She discovers on waking up that he has had sex with her and she yet has no memory at all of what transpired or whether he used a condom. On realising that alcohol may have knocked her out, she blames herself for getting drunk and believes she is responsible for what transpired. Tito also offers Sophie alcohol to make her feel free.

In Zimbabwean literature prostitution is depicted as providing women with a better life, for a while at least. In Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*, Zandile, and to some extent Deliwe, support themselves and their dependents by prostitution. This is also reflected in some male-authored Zimbabwean texts such as Phillip Chidavaenzi's *The Haunted Trail*, where Aunt Lizzie, Sheila and Jackie appear to make a living from prostitution. Despite the coercion and manipulation that is widespread in the text, prostitution is presented as a just transaction between men and women with both playing their parts. The women have the commodity that men desire and the men have the money that the women need. Hence, the transaction is presented as a mutually beneficial and normal barter, a “win-win” situation. Herein lies the difference between trading sex that is fully consensual and trading sex that is coerced. The novel draws to the attention of the reader the need to see the more optimistic side of a fair sex trade. The money that Sophie earns from prostitution gives her “security and hope” (p. 89), the same security and hope that she loses when her husband is retrenched. Although Sophie in *Highway Queen* acknowledges that there is a great deal of “violence” (p. 88) involved in the trade, prostitution makes her better than other people. As a fully established prostitute, she decides to find her own accommodation in the border town. She refers to this accommodation as “space” because she is tired of using cars, dark alleys and woods for conducting her business. Ironically, even when she is a full time

prostitute she still insists that “the fact that Steve was never faithful also worried [her]” (p. 92) when she herself has become the greatest risk of infection in her family. The irony of Sophie’s statement signals the problem of most supposedly transformative African feminist texts such as *Highway Queen*, which is that rather than a transformation, they seem to advocate a mere reversal of roles. Despite the improvement that prostitution brings in her life, the precarious nature of Sophie’s existence persists. The underlying risks of the sex trade, arrest, illness, disease and death, underpin the instability of the prostitute’s life.

The sexual violence in Phiri’s *Highway Queen* is exposed in a variety of ways. This chapter has revealed the more covert forms of this sexual violence. Among these are rape, coercion, manipulation, name calling, refusal by clients to pay for services rendered, the wilful spread of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, the use of abusive substances to disempower the victim and the tendency by parents to benefit from the prostitution of their daughters. The women characters are acutely aware of their precarious position. They use and are used by society. They defend their agency by prostituting themselves amidst risks that they are aware of, including that of inescapable patriarchal domination. Women in novels such as *Highway Queen* are crafty in their mediation and management of multiple identities. The multiple identities of the main character as mother, wife and prostitute brings out a new complexity in postcolonial Zimbabwean womanhood during times of economic and political crisis. Women pay a high price in becoming *homo economicus* and prostitution, which allows the acquisition of this identity, questions the idea of an unproblematic identity<sup>40</sup>. It also questions the new parameters of re-thinking the African womanist identity and agenda. There are constraints to female agency that is associated with prostitution. However reformist and transformative potential this womanist vision offered in Virginia Phiri’s novel is there are worrying questions about woman sacrificing dignity, self-respect and authentic agency in the pursuit of motherhood and matrimony. A positive gloss to what happens in the novel would focus on how society itself, in its

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<sup>40</sup> See Henrich, J., Boyd, R., Bowles, S., Camerer, C., Fehr, E., Gintis, H., & McElreath, R. 2001. In search of homo economicus: behavioral experiments in 15 small-scale societies. *American Economic Review*, 73-78. They explain the notion of homo economicus in the context of one attempt to be financially and economically sound.

conservative agenda, ironically prostitutes its own women as it re-enforces traditional gender roles and identities.

The agency of these women characters is largely collective as their prostitution is situational. They are forced into prostitution by their situations. The study reveals that there is no clear-cut distinction between commercial sex work and prostitution. I believe that Western concepts of prostitution are not adequate when analysing prostitution in Africa. The novel, *Highway Queen* can be read as an African womanist text that is both transformative and reformist. In trying to present a true to life representation of the prostitute from the point of view of the prostitute, Phiri is as unconventional as possible in the structure of her novel. Thus, she cuts across several norms of representation. The study's theoretical conception of the novel, however eclectic, is largely African feminist, in as far as I read the novel as ensuring and containing the African-ness of female characters as they go about mediating spaces and survival.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: READING EMERGENT AFRICAN SEXUALITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS IN VIOLET MASILO'S (2010) *THE AFRICAN TEA COSY***

This chapter is focused on Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010). The chapter illuminates familial and intimate partner violence in view of emerging African sexualities and relationships among the female characters in this novel. Consistent with the idea of women contesting their alleged lack of agency that informs my thesis, I argue that women characters in the novel mobilise different forms of resistance, both covert and overt, to challenge the culture and practices of violence against women. Postcolonial feminist theory in its African feminist and African womanist inflections is deployed to analyse how women fight back against the men who subject them to intimate partner violence. Thus in this chapter I also interrogate "the web of complicity, often institutional, that allowed the individual violent man to continue to act, undisturbed and unpunished" (Patrizia Romito 2008, 1). This chapter, like all the chapters of this thesis, takes an eclectic approach as it is informed by more than one strand of feminism. This approach is employed in an effort to unearth the myriad issues affecting literary representations of gender violence in Zimbabwean women authored novels. The chapter examines women's resistance to, and their role in, familial and intimate partner violence. In the postcolonial feminist analysis in this chapter, comparisons are made between Masilo's representation of intimate partner violence and representations by other Zimbabwean women novelists included in this study: Valerie Tagwira's (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Masitera's *Start with Me* (2011) and Virginia Phiri's (2010) *Highway Queen*.

*The African Tea Cosy* provides a candid exposition of the socio-cultural issues and inconsistencies imposed on, and used by, women in familial and intimate spaces in a contemporary Zimbabwe. The novel focuses on the lives of its four protagonists: Catherine, Joy, Anne and Heather. *The African Tea Cosy* offers insights into various experiences, responses and resistance strategies of women and girls to violence in the family and other intimate spaces. It exposes the physical, psychological, emotional and sexual violence that is meted out to women. To the credit of the novelist, in her intention to present women as heterogeneous entities in the social equation, she does not focus on a single protagonist but centres her narrative on the lives of four women who have experienced gender violence at various stages of their lives. The violence that they

experience, contributes largely to the new gender identities that they acquire by the end of the novel. The novel's concern with socio-cultural issues in diverse spaces renders it a postcolonial feminist text. In its voicing of the female subject, and in contrast to Spivak's view of the silenced subject (1988), the novel explores the already fractured ground of speaking the unspeakable. It explores emerging sexualities and relationships in contemporary Zimbabwean society as well as the violence embedded in these emergent sites.

The novel provides an exposition and criticism of stereotypes of the passivity of women through an investigation into the lives of women characters as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes. Although the novel's African womanist representation of supposedly "positive" images of women may actually be viewed as confirming negative stereotypes about women, it shocks the reader into an awareness of the reality of the violence that women and girls suffer at the hands of men and tradition. In her representation of female characters in *The African Tea Cosy*, Masilo responds to Ogundipe Leslie's challenge in *Re-creating ourselves: African women and critical transformation* (1994) that the African female author has two main responsibilities: to tell the story of being a woman first and second to describe the world from an African woman's perspective, instead of being shackled by her "own negative self-image" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10). *The African Tea Cosy* presents women who, just as the novel itself, intend to break the silence of private experiences and to speak the unspeakable.

It is important to mention here that *The African Tea Cosy* is written under a pseudonym, Violet Masilo. During the launch of her novel, the author says of her choice to use a pseudonym:

I have gone out of the box. I have done things deemed taboo in a woman's day to day life. Zimbabwean women are not yet free to express themselves about issues concerning them. Many of you know me with other names. I have many names (Tinashe Muchuri 2011).

The author's statement reveals a major challenge among, not only Zimbabwean female authors, but their African counterparts too, that they are not free to express themselves.

They fear intimidation and being labelled out-of-place. Voice and agency are considered taboo. Masilo's decision to use a pseudonym may be read in two ways; heroism or cowardice. Although Masilo realises the power and autonomy that writing accords for expression and subversion and makes use of it, she may be viewed as lacking "thick skin" (Wisker 2000, ix) hence, she cowers into using a pseudonym. On another level, despite her own heroism in speaking the unspeakable and committing to paper views that would otherwise have been left unsaid, she is still restricted by her African-ness, hence her reservations at using her real name to speak about the taboo subjects of intimate partner violence, in particular, sex and sexuality. Masilo's act of writing, even under a pseudonym, is to be read as subversion and resonates with Vera's view that "writing offers a moment of intervention" (1999, 3). In an interview with Beaven Tapureta, Masilo responds to the question of what makes an African story and in trying to defend the pessimism that often defines an African story, suggests of African experience that there is a

bitter-sweetness is our African experience and we are surviving it, sitting here and talking about it. We survive the experience to articulate the situation on behalf of those who do not have a voice... (2014, 12).

An important aspect for this thesis, that is brought out in Masilo's statement above, is the need for voice and agency. It also points to the critical role of authors and other privileged African women who have the opportunity, to voice concerns on behalf of fellow women who are unable to speak for themselves. Masilo, and indeed the other selected authors of this study, are successful in "letting their war cries be heard" (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997, 148). They achieve this by expressing their own and the concerns of fellow African women.

Although this chapter's examination of gender-based violence is grounded in the postcolonial feminist frameworks of African womanism and African feminism, I am cognisant of other theories that seek to explain gender violence. I am mindful that social and cultural theories attribute domestic violence to "social structures, such as patriarchy, and cultural values that legitimate male control and dominance over their domestic partners"; that family-based theories blame violent behaviours on "the structure of the

family and family interactions rather than on an individual within a family” and that individual-based theories attribute domestic violence to “psychological problems such as personality disorders, the batterer’s childhood experiences, or biological disposition” (Kerry Healey, Christine Smith and Chris O’Sullivan 1998, 15). The discussion of this chapter puts to the test the efficacy of the precepts of African feminism and African womanism in addressing issues of intimate partner violence in a Zimbabwean context, in light of these other thoughts on violence. I adopt the culture of violence theory as it provides more clarity on the nature of intimate partner violence and how it is sustained in societies. Cultural violence, here, is to be understood as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimise violence in its direct or structural form. Symbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim in the same way as direct violence or the violence built into a structure. Johan Galtung identifies two legitimating strategies used by hegemonic groups that perpetrate violence:

One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being “murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself, wrong”. Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent (Galtung, 1990, 293).

Cultural violence thus contextualises violence to give it situational meanings. In this case, I relate cultural violence, for instance, to the acceptance of wife beating as normal or acceptable, in societies. My analysis of *The African Tea Cosy* unravels the masculinist moral colours of intimate partner violence and deconstructs the opacity of the traditional culture of violence. Gwendolyn Mikell makes an important assertion that I link to the culture of violence: she states that, in Africa, female subordination takes intricate forms grounded in traditional African culture, particularly in the “corporate” and “dual-sex” patterns Africans have generated throughout their history (1997, 3). Mikell claims that these patterns have been exaggerated through contact with the West. *The African Tea Cosy* portrays violence against women in the context of new concatenations of this gender asymmetry and inequality following in the wake of colonialism and independence. I discuss the skewed moral complexion of the various acts of violence against women and their opacity, in the novel. Gender asymmetry and patriarchy are culturally legitimize

the violence that inhabit the fictional world depicted in Masitera's novel. This cultural authorisation of male violence against women is demonstrated in the abuse of partners. Abuse occurs in intimate relationships; inside and outside matrimony, whether these relationships are mutually negotiated or entered into through coercion. In this terrain of intimate partner violence there is a blurring of the love-lust distinction. In the analysis of the causes of domestic violence, I place more emphasis on structural than on biomedical factors that place responsibility for acts of violence at the door of the individual perpetrator as we see in Steve whose mind set is conditioned to plunder. This is consistent with the culture of violence lens that I adopt.

The characterisation straddles the binaries that separate the two theories of African feminism and African womanism. To a large extent,

unlike African feminism which focuses on gender empowerment, African womanism is concerned with the elevation of the African race, and community is the centre of consciousness for the African womanist (Yuleth Chigwedere 2010, 23).

Masilo's characterisation is reflective of Chigwedere's observation and exposes the novels interests in women's empowerment. The characterisation lends the novel to of both African feminist and African womanist agendas for the liberation of women; first and foremost, and for the good of community as a whole. Although the representations are meant to empower women, they also place the community at the centre of African women's consciousness as they negotiate their empowerment. In its adoption of an agenda of the liberation of African women, the novel identifies and contrasts different identities assumed by women in intimate spaces, such as; wives and lovers. As regards the representations of women as wives, the novel is sure to differentiate between official and non-official wives in their diversity. In doing so, the novel conforms to the observations of *Nga9mbika: studies of African women in African literature* (Davies and Graves 1986). In this influential book there is an exposition and condemnation of stereotypical representations of women so as to "correct the facile vision through which the African woman in literature has been seen" (Davies and Graves 1986, IX). The stereotypical images outlined by Davies and Graves and which are also confronted in Masilo's *The*

*African Tea Cosy* include images of women as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes. These representations are largely presented as negative. However, for Davies and Graves (1986), a positive image is one that searches for more accurate portrayals and even suggests the possibility of transcendence, as we see in *The African Tea Cosy*. The attempt to correct perceptions brings to the fore a key aspect of womanhood, that is the possibility of giving a truthful account of the meaning of womanhood and overcoming the limits of the individual self. It takes into account both positive and negative images of women.

In discussing the images of women as wives, mothers or even prostitutes, it is necessary to understand the intimate fabric that ties women to men. The characterisation of women as wives, mistresses, mothers or prostitutes in *The African Tea Cosy* implies their relational identities to men. It is often the case that love and sexuality form the ties that bind women to men, along with other aspects such as culture, security or simply survival. In light of this, it is interesting to note that "in much of Africa ideas about love and affective conditions of sexuality are often ignored" (Deevia Bhana 2013, 4). For this reason there is little scholarship on love in Africa and to understand sexuality it is necessary to consider affection; it is essential to link these so as to address sexual terror and despair among intimate partners. For Bhana, attention should be directed not only towards oppression and violence but also to ideas and practices of love and to affection and relations of power. This is important in understanding the African feminist assertion that

neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own (Steady 1987, 8).

This need for the other gender is what brings about women's differing relational identities to men. The presence of love, or the need of it, paves the way for power imbalances in intimate relationships. Furthermore, men's control of finances, disguised as the provider role, is what makes the imbalance possible. Thus, "money and love are not separable issues but rather entangled in feelings, desires and ideas of love" (Bhana 2013, 6). By accepting that love and money are inseparable, a new meaning is given to intimacy as it is experienced in *The African Tea Cosy*. There are new and emergent forms of love, tied to need and survival.

In discussing love in *The African Tea Cosy*, I also consider confluent love, which allows people to move freely in and out of relationships and which also explains “the rise of separation and divorce” (Giddens 2006, 372) in societies. Confluent love as it is presented in the novel challenges the marriage institution in traditional society, as this is understood by African womanism that “acknowledges and holds as important marriage, motherhood and family relationships” (Ogunyemi 1985, 64). For African womanists, these male female relationships are presumed to be conventional unions of marriage, which reveals an ignorance of emerging male female relations. As such, the ambiguities of love and its enactment show that love is a trope that forces people into relations of inequality. As such this study views “intimate relationships as sites of both love and power struggles” (Hirsch 2003, 8). It is these same sites that African women are expected by African feminists and postcolonial feminists to negotiate, striking a balance that conserves heterosexual relationships. The characters in the novel will do almost anything in the name of survival, masked as love, such as enduring abuse, either to protect or out of sympathy for the abuser. The confluence of love and money explains the apparent need that the genders have for each other. That “love can come from the heart, but can also be promoted by money” (Hunter 2010, 194), explains the novel’s exchange relationships and gift culture as well as the reasons for staying in violent and unhappy relationships. The same also relates to commercial sex work in Chapter two, where Edna, despite being married, takes up prostitution because her husband can no longer provide for the family. One can compare the intimacy or sustained relations in Chapter three with the clear-cut commodification or sale of sex without emotion as seen in this chapter. Despite emergent sexualities, and the confluence of love and money, marriage is a key cultural sphere in Masilo’s novel, with wifely duties and motherhood at one end of the spectrum and fatherhood and being a husband at the other. The centrality of motherhood for the African womanist and feminist texts remains unchanged.

In *The African Tea Cosy* there are what this study refers to as para-marital relationships. These relationships are mostly live-in relationships or steady love affairs between married men and women who are not their wives. In live-in relationships, such as Steve and Heather's, the couples actually live together and behave in the same way as married couples do, except that they are not married. Another presentation is made of a para-marital relationship which is in the form of a steady relationship as we see with Charles

and Anne and Catherine and Shingi. This is a relationship in which the man, usually someone else's husband, takes care of the woman's rent and other monetary needs and meets with her freely, when he is not with his wife. Both of these relationships are parallel, and in contrast, to legitimate marriage as it is known. A legitimate marriage in Zimbabwean society and as presented in the novel is understood to be a relationship in which the man pays a bride-price (or *lobola* as it is referred to in the novel) for the woman. After this the man is allowed to live with the woman and have children with her. Whether or not the two go a step further by solemnising their union in a court of law or church is immaterial to their marital status. This same type of marriage is often allowed to permeate between a man and another woman without the knowledge of his wife.

The para-marital relationships referred to here are arrangements entered into by a couple. These arrangements are shown, in *The African Tea Cosy*, to be fragile. They also permit as much, if not more, partner abuse. Whereas a legitimately married couple cannot simply divorce or separate without the interference of families, a live-in couple may do so at any time. Often these para-marriages lead to the birth of children and the relationships may gradually become known to the official marriage partners and some relatives. The basis of these para-marital relationships is usually satisfying sex for the man and survival for the woman as attested to by Steve and Heather, Catherine and Shingi and Charlie and Anne's relationships. Women, like Heather, Catherine and Anne, are dependent on men even if they are seemingly in control of their lot. After a long drink at the Tea Cosy (the name given to the bar in the novel) or a long night of partying, the women characters in the novel still hope to go back home to or with men. They yearn for an association with men in whatever form. By preventing Catherine from going to work and earning her own salary, Shingi shows the fear men have of women who work. Shingi's obsession with controlling Catherine reflects the first step in patriarchal control, which is to ensure women's continued financial dependence on men.

In trying to conserve the marriage institution that is held in high esteem by African womanists, the novel shows that para-marital relationships are weakly grounded and easy to fracture. It is also suggested that the absence of family blessing and solemnisation render para-marital unions uncertain. This is shown when Steve says to Heather:

I am not married to you, Heather. I have been with you for seven months and if I had an intention of marrying you, I would have done something about it by now; I have the money (p.69).

Steve's statement here reveals the power that he has over Heather in refusing to marry her. The statement also suggests that Steve is a coward who fears marriage and commitment. Steve is also presented as cruel, abusive and insensitive towards women. One explanation for this perception of characters such as Steve's is the relaxation of culture in the city to allow for live-in relationships between people who are not married. For men, as expressed in Steve's words above, marriage is more about affording the bride price (*lobola*) than the affection that comes with it. This attachment between money and marriage explains that women are regarded as property by men because they are purchased like all other belongings. The novel seems to question the fracturing of the marriage institution through the advent of para-marital arrangements. The African womanist inclination of the novel reveals a nostalgic fear of the total failure of the marriage institution. Read on another level, the advent of para-marriages is a sign of women's imperative to be liberal in unions with men, no matter what the context of those unions.

Psychological and emotional violence in legitimate marriages, such as those between Gari and Joy; and Shingi and Mildred, is rife but not as apparent as in live-in relationships. Live-in relationships are engraved with incidences of humiliating violence. The cyclical nature of violence is illuminated when Charles, a married man who secretly has an affair with Anne, his girlfriend, sneaks into bed as quietly as he can, so as to wake his wife. He takes it for granted that. "in a couple of days everything would be back to normal" (p.77) as he will be defensive and make his wife feel guilty. Charles's true character remains ambiguous. He is sweet and tender when he is with Anne but turns into a true abuser when he is with his wife. His words portray a cycle of violence that sustains dysfunctional marriages. Charles takes it for granted that his wife will not and cannot leave him. Instead, he will make her feel guilty by blaming her for his unfaithfulness. The presentation also shows that Charles is biologically and financially better placed than his wife.

When Steve physically assaults Heather, just before he is murdered, we are told that “he slapped her hard and grabbed her by the throat [...] punching her mercilessly and repeatedly with his left hand whilst keeping a firm grip on her throat” (p.71). The description of the violent attack is so vivid and marked with images of ferocious power and unbearable pain. It highlights men’s biological advantage, as well as their oppression and mistreatment of women. The novel offers some explanation for the hegemonic masculinity that is found in Steve. His violent upbringing is presented as being at the root of his violence towards Heather and all the women he has encountered in his life. He is physically, emotionally, sexually and psychologically violent towards Heather. We are told of how he “he bumps her on the forehead” (p.29) when she tries to be intimate with him. Further to physical violence, Steve violates Heather emotionally and psychologically, using harsh words that emphasise both her objectivity and unimportance. He declares to Heather, “I have kept you, I have fucked you and now...you can get the hell out of my house...” (p.69). This verbal assault and humiliation is devastating to Heather’s emotional and psychological well-being, as reflected in her dejection at hearing these words. This scene shows the extent of emotional and psychological violence in intimate relationships. Psychological violence is shown to be more devastating to women than physical violence.

Male definitions of a woman's worth are exposed in *The Africa Tea Cosy*. Judging from Steve's rejection of Heather above, as well as Malakwena's view of his wife, the novel suggests that a woman's ability to satisfy her husband's sexual needs defines her worth. Malakwena describes his wife as not unworthy of maintaining and being too old for experiments with "sexual gymnastics" (p.10). Malakwena's view of his wife makes a bold statement on the nature of husband-wife relationships and what shapes such a union. For Malakwena, marriage is first and foremost about sexual gratification. A wife's ability to please her husband, sexually, defines her worth. Mrs Malakwena is no longer capable of performing these “gymnastics” and is therefore not worth holding onto. This perspective explains Malakwena's lack of regard for his wife's feelings. She has become an inanimate artefact like all his other property. Mr and Mrs Malakwena's turbulent relationship, exposes the larger, almost unspeakable problems of sex and sexuality for African women, thereby encouraging readers to reflect more deeply on these. Malakwena in *The African Tea Cosy*, like Steve and Gari in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, fails to change or support his wife. The rigidity of these male characters seems to threaten the novel's success in

achieving harmonised gender relations, when they as men, fathers and husbands are presented with monstrous images.

Further to its analysis of masculinities, this study views polygamy and para-marital relationships as arising from men's excessive need to be in control, even when they are unable to fend properly for their women. Para-marital relationships and promiscuity are shrouded by the social acceptance of men marrying more than one wife. African culture allows this. Legal marriages in law courts do not protect women from their husbands marrying second wives or cohabiting with other women. Hence these male-female associations are rightly questioned when the four girls "ponder how deeply their hearts were tangled in this intimate agonising mess, they called relationships" (p.59). The girls are all in the age group of the late twenties to late thirties when they are expected by society to be married or at least in a stable relationship that will lead to marriage. The same representation of culture pressurising women into unsuitable relationships occurs in Westahoff's *Unlucky in Love* (2005), when Rumbi reveals that a woman is expected to marry by a certain age. Similarly, in Masitera's *Start with Me*, Edna is pushed into an early marriage as a result of cultural beliefs about the purity of young brides and the honour they bring to their fathers. Oppressive cultures, traditions and social expectations force women to endure abusive intimate associations and relationships. Despite all the bitterness and betrayal, the men and women characters of *The African Tea Cosy* cannot live independently of each other, as each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. There is a strong influence of African womanist philosophy here. The novel shows that even homosexuals need heterosexual relationships to appear normal, in society's view of sexual relationships; that they should exist between people of the opposite sex. Although Masilo focuses on violence against women in an African community albeit in an urban setting colonialism has nothing explicit to do the women's present suffering. The debauched ceremonial act of freedom through the killing of Steve, becomes only an ambiguous climax that produces no clear sense of release.

Steve and Heather share a live-in relationship that is born out of a night of club hopping, drinking and smoking dangerous substances. Their live-in relationship is centred on sex and the ability to please. Heather vents her frustration by having casual sex with other

men. After Steve violently rejects her sexual advances, she vents her frustration by having sex with Farai whom she has only just met (p.38). She is conscious of the risk of HIV but is overwhelmed by the urge. In contrast to the usual reticence with which sexual matters are treated, Heather confides in her friends that she has had sex with Steve's friend Farai, at Steve's apartment, as revenge to Steve for an argument they have had. This is an openness that is shocking even to her friends. She goes on to say: "I am not ashamed of enjoying my life or my sex" (p.56). Heather's sexual liberty is similar to Joy's, who is carefree and expresses her sexual desires openly when she says "if I finish here before Gari calls, I am going for a quickie with Solomon" (p.56), her ex-boyfriend. The liberty expressed by both characters runs contrary to the perceptions of African women's suppressed sexuality or Spivak's (1988) voicelessness. Heather's sexuality is not suppressed. When she wants sex she gets it from whomsoever she chooses. Heather's casual attitude towards sex questions beliefs that African women are passive in matters to do with sex and sexuality. She takes aggressive control of her sexuality and her body.

Themes of dominance and subordination of women in the family, as well as both overt and subtle ways of fighting subordination run through *The African Tea Cosy*. Power and authority in familial and conjugal relations are contested and both emerge as not being unidirectional. Characters in the novel value family in the construction of the self and this accentuates the African womanist focus of the novel. Masilo portrays strained, distorted and violent family relations in showing that the family is the "primary source of all experiences, both positive and negative" (Nnadozie F. Inyama 1998, 36). The power of the family in shaping individuals is undisputed in the novel as female characters' actions and dispositions point to the African womanist vision in which "the idea of 'family' retains an almost unparalleled ability to move people, both emotionally and politically" (Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon 2004, 135). In the same vein, in explaining the development of her characters, Masilo takes the time to provide some family background. As is realised through Catherine's life history, it is the dysfunctional family and abuse from within the family that drives her out of her parents' home and into the world of even more abusive men. This representation confirms the claim that

the family is a fluid construction with historical, social and economic determinants whose definition and practice

differs from one epoch to another or between cultures  
(Thabisani Ndlovu 2011, 8).

Indeed, the family in *The African Tea Cosy* is a turbulent battlefield of constant mediations, where gender violence and imbalances are rife. The novel addresses the role and importance of family in the development of the self first, and society second. That violence emanates from the home is a key concern of this study, particularly in understanding the development of women characters' perceptions of their worlds. Masilo's representation of children in the family is not necessarily one of innocence or submission. She shows that "African childhood is not always absolute submission to parental will or willingness to allow others to dispose of his or her life" (Okolie 1998, 34). Distorted and strained family relations ultimately produce angry, broody and disenchanting children and adults, as seen in the character of Catherine in *The African Tea Cosy*. One can also consider the childhood of both Steve and Farai in relation to how they turn out in life. The representation of their upbringing in relation to their adulthood reflects the cycle of violence theory that behaviours are learnt. Most of the characters in *The African Tea Cosy* have had troubled childhoods<sup>41</sup>.

During the climaxing night of Steve's attack of Heather, Catherine recollects her own mother's beatings at the hands of her father. This memory implies that violence is considered normal in this society and that children become socialised to it through the family. However, even for Catherine who grew up in a violent home, Steve's actions are worse than any she has ever seen. As she witnesses this horrifying attack, Catherine realises that the best way to survive violence is through the use of violence. Thus she smashes a bottle on the back of Steve's head. Another gruelling violent scene is presented here when, after the bottle attack, Steve turns on Catherine like an "enraged lion" and begins "to beat her, punching her in the face" (p.72). Numbed by abuse and violence, Catherine challenges Steve to "do what you want to do, I have been through worse" (p.72). Her words make it clear that violence has a way of hardening women, making them both

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<sup>41</sup> I read this in Edgar F. Nabutanyi's 2013 sense of an unstable childhood as emanating first and foremost from the family, in *Representations of troubled childhoods in selected post 1990 African fiction in English*. Stellenbosch University Department of English (UP).

porous and resistant to pain and suffering. This is in stark contrast to the usual women-as-victim narrative. Rather than just being a victim she challenges her abuser. This presents her as a woman who is prepared to deal with violence. Her challenge also reflects the radical African womanist in her. Although she is aware that Steve is biologically stronger, she believes that this is not reason enough for him to oppress her.

Transgressive behaviours by female characters are put under the spotlight to show society's perceptions of them. Gary, the American, observes of Catherine, Joy, Anne and Heather that "the four girls were intelligent with a quirky sense of humour and an openness that shocked him initially but that was truly quite refreshing" (p.55). He is shocked because he is socialised into regarding Zimbabwean women as restricted beings. He further describes Anne as "special. She was different if not eccentric, quiet and fiery, confident with timidity. She was also kind" (p.55). This description calls to mind issues of female conditioning and male perceptions of women. Perceptions have a great deal to do with socialisation. The American probably knows only what he has read or heard about these women, which is probably distorted. Other men, such as Charles and Steve, are not disturbed by such free and casual behaviour in women. Gender-biased perceptions restrict women's growth and opportunities, even where marriage is concerned. The novel presents the reader with women who display socially unconventional behaviour is an attempt to deconstruct stereotypes and force readers to acknowledge and accept that women are heterogeneous in their African-ness.

The treatment of Heather and Catherine foregrounds the subject of single city women and their vulnerability of gender violence. The negativity and promiscuity associated with such women has been discussed by several scholars<sup>42</sup>. Masilo's novel contests the view that

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<sup>42</sup> Scholars such as Vidrovitch 1997, Nnaemeka 1997, Dube 2006, Gaidzanwa 1985 and Cole and Thomas 2009 have discussed the subjectivity of single women living in the city and have agreed that they are labelled as promiscuous. Refer to Coquery C. Vidrovitch 1997 *African Women: A Modern History*. Oxford: Westview Press, Obioma Nnaemeka 1997 *Urban spaces, women's places. Polygamy as sign in Mariama Ba's novels*. Nnaemeka, O. ed., *The Politics of (M)Othering. Womanhood, identity and resistance in African literature*, New York: Routledge, Dube, B. 2006 (Dis)empowering women: The gaze in Barbara Makhalisa's work. Mguni, Z., Furusa, M. & Magosvongwe, R. eds. *African Womanhood in Zimbabwean Literature: New Critical Perspectives on Women's Literature in African Languages*. Harare: College Press, Rudo B. Gaidzanwa, 1985 *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*. Harare: College Press and Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas eds 2009. *Love in Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

there is a marked association between women's virtue and a rural, peasant lifestyle. Most of the ideal wives and mothers in Zimbabwean literature are rural women (Gaidzanwa's 1985, 67).

All the women characters in the novel are mostly single city women and amongst them are some who are respectably married. The novel exposes stereotypes about urban women. Among Shingi's reasons for not marrying Catherine are that she is "not wife material [...] she smoked which was a deadly sin against African mother-in-laws" (p.53). He remains with her more out of pity than of love. Shingi's reasons are satirised as being unimportant in contemporary society; they are also satirised to expose the still lingering presence of stereotypes and proscribed behaviours. As to the issue of women smoking, Joy wonders when conservative African men, in particular, and women that accept patriarchal dictates will ever "get over the fact that African women smoke, if they want to. Smoking has no bearing on either their morality or their personality"(p.57). Catherine's smoking overshadows everything that is good about her character. Her realisation of the futility of her affair with Shingi is, for Catherine, a serious form of emotional violence and she is visibly shattered. Here the author illustrates the fluidity of para-marital relationships and the fact that girlfriends are more vulnerable to violence than are wives.

Attendant on the subject of single city women is the notion of perilous substance use. Traditional gender role stereotypes in the novel reflect a double standard when it comes to alcohol consumption, particularly by single women in the city. The use of alcohol is linked to gender stigmatisation. The representations in the novel confirm that "drinking men tend to be viewed more positively than drinking women" (Antonia Abbey and Richard J. Harnish 1995, 298). This comparison illuminates the unequal treatment of women by society; these perceptions of gendered behaviours are what contribute to the abuse of women and the acceptance of such abuse as normal. A comparison of the male and female characters in *The African Tea Cosy* confirms the view that

for men heavy drinking serves to enhance their male status, it signifies "real manhood". For women, on the other hand, alcohol carries the taint of immorality and promiscuity (Sue Lees 2002, 145).

Lees' position explains why the apparent unruliness and unconventional outlook of the girls is misunderstood in the novel. Catherine is labelled a bad woman as a result of these stereotypes. The way in which the four main characters of the novel are viewed by society confirms that

women who behave in “unfeminine” ways such as being sexually aggressive or reckless, going to bars alone or getting drunk, may be seen as more responsible for victimisation or even as deserving victims (Karen G. Weiss 2010, 288).

Weiss confirms the negative perceptions of women who fail to conform to “feminine” ways. In my understanding, she pardons abusers because women bring the abuse on themselves. It is such perceptions that cause women to blame themselves for the abuse that happens when they are drunk. This is a clear case of “centuries of interiorization of ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10), where even women themselves accept violence as normal. We see the same representation of women's self-blame for abusive experiences after drinking alcohol in *Highway Queen*, when Sophie blames herself for having unprotected sex with a client in a drunken stupor. Despite the negativity associated with alcohol consumption, The Tea Cosy (the bar where the girls often meet) offers the four girls some temporary escape from their real lives. For a moment, they can “laugh, gossip, connive and relax” (p.59). The Tea Cosy is in fact a bar. This ironic naming shows the fallacy in the belief that alcohol can solve problems, but it does offer temporary escapism from the reality of being African, black and female. Perhaps the author tries to make women aware of the reality of the limitations of their African-ness, the restrictions of African womanhood in or outside marriage. Hence, *The African Tea Cosy* carries an African womanist agenda.

*The African Tea Cosy* novel exposes issues of class among women from somewhat similar backgrounds, in a bid to show the individuality of experience. Thus the novel reveals the complexity of the notion of a global sisterhood by showing that even in the postcolony, women are not a homogenous group. They must negotiate their sense of what it means to be independent while living in the city. Masilo focuses on four distinct women and channels personal and broader social issues through their circumstances and choices. In the

depiction of her characters Masilo refutes Gaidzanwa's (1985) comment that there is no distinction between lovers, mistresses, concubines and prostitutes. Although three of the protagonists are, to all intents and purposes, single and sexually liberated, it is clear that not all of them are prostitutes. The novel's characterisation shows a multiplicity of identities and roles among women. Joy moves from being a mistress to being a second wife cum prostitute to both her husband and Solomon. Despite living with Steve, Heather is still single as Steve makes it clear that she is not his wife. Catherine is single and Anne is a single mother. Masilo acknowledges the precarious position of single women in this society, where singleness makes them vulnerable to violent and devious men as well as to disease and illness. But the city does present these women with some freedom, however double-edged.

By contrasting official and non-official wives in their diversity, Masilo mirrors the aims of Rudo B. Gaidzanwa's *Images of women in Zimbabwean Literature* (1985) and Carol Boyce Davies and Anne Adam Graves' *Ngambika: studies of African women in African literature* (1986). In this influential text, there is both an exposition and a castigation of stereotypical representations of women. Davies and Graves' pretty much share the same aims as Gaidzanwa and explain that the aim of their book is "to correct the facile vision through which the African woman in literature has been seen" (1986, IX). The stereotypical images outlined in Gaidzanwa's and Davies and Graves' books, and which also occur in *The African Tea Cosy*, include women as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes; these are largely presented in a negative light. For Davies and Graves (1986), a positive image is one that searches for more accurate portrayals and even suggests the possibility of prevailing over present circumstances, as we see in Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy*. The quotation highlights a key aspect of womanhood, that of "truthful assessment with the possibility of transcendence". It takes into account both positive and negative images of women. Masilo achieves both an elucidation and a rebuke of stereotypes of the passivity of women through the introspection into the lives of women characters as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes. Masilo goes beyond Phiri's and Masitera's characterisations as she is coarser and blunter in her articulations, thereby shocking the reader into the reality of the violence that women and girls suffer at the hands of men and tradition.

The diversity of female characters and their experiences reflects their precarious state more than their steadiness. This characterisation can be read as a way in which the African womanist and African feminist agenda encourages women to enter into conventional relationships (that is, marriage) with men. Heather dreads going home to her live-in boyfriend, Steve, after a drink at the bar and says “I actually prefer sleeping alone these days but I can’t. One has to pay the piper”(p.66). She admits her engagement in transactional sex because she pays her rent through sex. In a way she also admits to being Steve's personal prostitute. She needs him for shelter and he needs her for sex. As implied through Heather’s character, women now enter into transactional relationships more as agents than as victims (Hunter 2010). Prostitution as it is presented in this novel is a defensive measure rather than an oppressive one, as it challenges the conditions that give rise to and reproduce the oppression of women. Masilo makes a departure from Masitera, Phiri and Tagwira in her perception of the precariousness of women. Although in all the novels discussed in this study there are prostitute mothers, their conditions differ. Prostitute wives in *Highway Queen* look forward to going back home and are always mindful of their duties. On the contrary, Masilo’s women are more daring and enlightened in their agency.

The novel’s rejection of oppressive traditional practices renders it to both African feminism and African womanism. The novel shows how oppressive traditional practices promote violence within the domestic space. The most striking representation of oppressive traditional practices is seen through Catherine’s father, Mr Malakwena, who is instructed by a witchdoctor to have ritual sex with his oldest daughter in order to “keep the business alive” (p. 11). Catherine resists the rape with the help of her mother and brothers. This is the incident that drives Catherine away from home. What Mr Malakwena attempts here is one of the worst heinous forms of familial violence. It is an unconventional act of sex that is committed out of apparent cultural obligation. The novel sheds light on the role played by witchdoctors and traditional practices in the perpetration of acts of violence against women. Mr Malakwena relies on witchdoctors for the success of his life and businesses. He frequently forces his family to use “medication” (p.14) from witchdoctors; yet, when they are forced to put this medicine in food, he never eats the food with them. This detail points to the ambiguity inherent in traditions and cultural practice and their convenience in the perpetration of violent acts. Patriarchy, as represented by Mr

Malakwena, has positioned itself to use culture and tradition to its advantage and resorts to these only when it is convenient to do so. The novel's concern with this expedient use of cultural practices to oppress women renders it an African womanist text as it is concerned with "culture and power issues" (Ogunyemi 1997, 4). Voicing outrage against these cultural and power issues furthers the African womanist agenda, which is to enlighten, mostly men, about these issues and in this way to bring about change in perceptions. One may question the double standards in men's selective or expedient use of tradition thus: if Malakwena can choose not to use the medicinal herbs meant for the family, why then does he choose to carry out a ritual rape? One may ask if his decision is based purely on obligation to culture and tradition or whether it is a display of the excessiveness of his masculinity and sexual prowess. One may also ask whether the rape is really meant to be committed in obedience of the witchdoctor's instruction or whether it is an outright attempt to practise witchcraft himself. This study suggests that there is a fine line between incest and witchcraft<sup>43</sup>.

The description of the scene of the attempted rape leaves the reader with some understanding of the performance of African sexualities and masculinities which mask themselves in a supposed obligation to tradition and culture. Even in the full view of his wife and sons, Mr Malakwena would still have gone ahead raped his daughter. After his wife challenges him to stop trying to rape their daughter, the vulgarity of the narration leaves one in doubt of Mr Malakwena's fatherhood and humanity. We are told that he asks his family where they

think that money comes from....as he spoke, he began to pull the foreskin of his amazingly erect penis [...] he continued to address the family in his naked and erect state (p.13).

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<sup>43</sup> See Isak Niehaus 1999 for an expansion on the view that literature highlights witchcraft as an alternative means of practising sexually-related behaviours including incest, in *Witchcraft, power and cultural politics: explaining the occult in the South African lowveld*. University of Witwatersrand, Department of English (UP).

The bestial manner in which Mr Malakwena manages to maintain his “offensive erection” (p.13) in the face of such shock reflects the excessive nature of patriarchy’s desire to dominate and conquer. It is also a satire of the men’s excessive desire to conquer as well as men’s convenient use of tradition as an excuse to oppress women. The novel takes a radical swipe in its feminist agenda to address Malakwena’s excessive and unfavourable masculinity. In the heat of the moment, Malakwena’s sons declare that “you have gone too far” (p.13), and they assault him. Malakwena’s assault and physical attack at the hands of his own sons may be read in a number of ways. The author may be trying to show that there is hope for women in that men of the younger generation can make a difference, change the treatment of women and participate in ending violence against women. The assault may be read as a statement against oppressive and abusive cultural practices that support gender violence. On the other hand, the assault may also be read as having a feminist agenda to destabilise the patriarch. By showing sons rebelling against their father in support of their mother and sister, the author shows that patriarchy is a construction that can be deconstructed if societies are enlightened of the need to break oppressive cultures and work in unity for the betterment of both sexes. Unlike Mr Malakwena, who views his wife and daughter as his possessions to do with as he pleases, his sons view them as human beings who should be respected. This echoes the call of African womanism for the wholeness of people and the unity of the genders. Through Mr Malakwena, society has been turned into a site where men no longer respect familial relationships. His assault by his own sons may also be metaphoric of the radical change that needs to be forced on societies to end gender violence.

Rape is depicted as the most violent form of men's oppression of women. It robs a woman of her agency and subjects her to probably one of the most traumatic experiences of her life. In his rigid masculinity, Steve is unwilling to give up the fight against women. Realising that Catherine will not be easily intimidated by a knife, he decides to rape her instead. There is a certain sadomasochistic eroticism in Steve’s actions as he is sexually aroused by the fear he instills in women. We see this in his insistence on raping Catherine despite Catherine and Heather's visible fear of him. Although she is prepared to take the physical assault, "the threat of rape quickly sobers Catherine up: rape and assault were two totally different ball games" (p.73). In the heat of the moment Heather is fuelled by anger to exercise agency in saving her friend. Thus she murders Steve to save Catherine. Thus

she stabs Steve forcefully between the shoulder blades. This radical feminist representation suggests that patriarchy can only be overcome when women unite. Sisterly solidarity, an important aspect of African womanism, creates opportunities for mobilisation of women in their fight against patriarchy. Individual battles, though important, do not achieve victory in the fight against the lack of female autonomy. In this novel the solidarity of Heather and Catherine allows them to defeat male power as represented by Steve. The two, through connivance, abetting of murder and silence turn criminality into source of empowerment and reject the societal label of women as lacking initiative to set themselves free in the face of egregious male physical and psychological violence. It takes two women to destroy one man. Instead of calling the police after the murder, the two girls call their friends instead. The togetherness of women presented in this novel leaves one questioning the safety of society at large if women were to sustain such a unified front when solving all their problems. The novel, although not advocating female empowerment, puts to the test the tenet of African womanism that teaches the harmonisation of gender relations.

*The African Tea Cosy* maintains culture and tradition as common sites for African feminist discussions. Supernatural beliefs are chief to an understanding of traditional practices. The engagement with the supernatural in the novel, however, takes on a new twist when Malakwena's witchdoctor orders him to rape his own daughter, and when Ma Sibanda, an elderly woman, encounters a vision of Steve's murder in a dream. She tells Joy that "I dreamt of you and another young girl today. You were both covered in blood. My child, what have you done?" (p.97). Ma Sibanda has great powers and knows things she has not been told; she knows about Joy's abortions, syphilis and infertility. She also predicts that the blood that covers Joy "also covers three other girls" (p.112). But Ma Sibanda decides to help the girls by protecting them from the wrath of the supernatural. She provides them with herbs that they use just before packing the body into the cooler box, ready for disposal.

Although angry with the girls, Ma Sibanda is relieved that "the bad spirit that had been overshadowing the girls' lives seemed to be releasing them" (p.114). This novel leads one to question the morality of the supernatural in pardoning murder. It could be argued that Steve's murder is pardoned even by the supernatural because the perpetrators of the crime

have suffered more than the victim and deserve to be exonerated. We are told that the spirit that possesses Ma Sibanda is male. In my view, this is a clear statement that a male spirit is prepared to protect women who have been violated by men. It is meant to show that the patriarch is destabilised even at a spiritual level. Patriarchy may be far from eradicated but it has been unsettled. After dumping Steve's body, the girls return to a frustrated Farai who slaps Heather in the face and demands to know the whereabouts of his cocaine. In revenge for this attack on Heather, Catherine sets the police on Farai and betrays his possession of cocaine. In addition to drug possession, the police suspect Farai of committing murder. Some forensic checks on the cooler box that the girls plant in Farai's car are required. Ten years later, the girls have successfully moved on, despite the odds. Farai, however, "is serving his fifteen-year drug possession sentence". The police question him daily about the red cooler box, which tested positive for human blood, in the hope of a confession to murder. Thus lying and scheming allows the girls to survive.

A feminist reading of *The African Tea Cosy* reveals that men are better placed than women, both biologically and financially. The novel takes a somewhat extremist view of men which, to some extent renders it to Furusa's (2006) argument that Zimbabwean women novelists are vicious in their representations of men. The extent to which the lives of the women characters are bruised and battered by men is quite shocking to the reader. However, despite the negativity, the novel manages to present a picture of the genders co-existing. When Anne remarks that "we should castrate them (men) or kill them, because they lie to us. That would put an end to it" (pp.57-58), she suggests that men are the cause of all women's suffering and should be eliminated. This radicalism is futile for African women who, unlike their Western counterparts, are economically, socially and psychologically unable to live without men. The women characters in *The African Tea Cosy* themselves realise the futility of trying to impose a drastic regime change on the patriarch. Joy, in response to Anne's suggestion, observes that men would rather become an endangered species than change their ways. Although these women could be defined as liberal and better placed than rural women, they too are aware that the war to amend the perceptions of patriarchy is far from over. The question arises of whether these women are defeatist or simply realistic. It would seem that, to a large extent, these women characters are aware of the intricacies of being black, African and women. As such, the rejection by the girls of Anne's suggestion of castration mirrors African womanist support for the

togetherness of men and women and an acknowledgement that men and women are incomplete without each other. It also spells out the importance of procreation in African society.

Despite the bruising and battering that the women characters suffer at the hands of men and despite their supposed worldliness and intelligence, they still yearn for associations with men. Despite the crudeness of the women and their non-conformity with traditional notions of African womanhood, they remain vulnerable to violence while their men remain in control. These girls, although seemingly intelligent and liberal, still find themselves in unequal and violent relationships and they remain in them because women in Shona culture are socialised to be taken care of by men – a father, husband, brother, uncle or boyfriend. Anne calls prostitutes “dartboards”; she says of them that they are “an example of the ongoing moral degradation of our society”. Her denouncement of other prostitutes is ironic but shows us that there are classes of prostitutes. This could render questionable whether Anne, Heather, Joy and Catherine are prostitutes, as they trade sex for upkeep. The use of the word 'dartboard' is metaphoric of both women's vulnerability to and endurance of gender violence. They remain at the mercy of men. Dartboard is also a fitting description of Sophie and the other prostitutes in *Highway Queen* who typify a dartboard upon which men strike at will and leisure, often to the pain and suffering of women.

*The African Tea Cosy's* engagement with African sexualities, renders it to a discussion of African masculinities as well. Steve is the most rigid representation of hegemonic masculinity. He is presented as a cruel, insensitive and monstrous sex maniac. His monstrosity and obsession with wild sex is revealed to have developed early in life as we are told of his insatiable desire for "kinky sex mostly in the form of bondage and rape scenarios" (p.105). If he is not having sex with a woman he is masturbating, watching pornographic movies or having sex with another man. Steve and Heather's live-in relationship is far from rosy as a result of his voracious sexual appetite. His sense of his masculinity is rigid and he is therefore offended when Heather challenges him:

not only had a woman challenged his ego and his territory,  
but [...] a woman he had spent the last half of the year

feeding and clothing. He wanted his privacy and personal space back (p.69).

This quotation explores the way that male conditioning gives men expectations of unchallenged authority in their relationships. For Steve, his provider role means that he has ownership of Heather. Heather has become a commodity at Steve's disposal and one that he is entitled to dispose of at his convenience.

Steve appears to have a more successful relationship with Farai (his sexual lover) than he does with Heather. Steve is violent and unfeeling towards Heather and yet is a perfect gentleman towards Farai. On the whole, the representations of gender and intimate relations in the novel reflect the view that Shona masculinity is placed in contraposition to femininity by giving an active and aggressive role to men and a passive, accommodating one to women (Hebert Chimhundu 1995). These unconventional sexual acts reveal men as performers and women as recipients. However, these representations suggest that man is the conqueror and woman the vanquished, hence the image of “man the virtuoso and woman the violin” (Alice Echol 1989, xiii) that African feminists try so hard to demystify. Steve and Heather, and Solomon and Joy's relationships typify this man the virtuoso and woman the violin arrangement. Masculinities in *The African Tea Cosy* are felt and experienced through “hardness, not just of the penis, but the body in general” (Judi Addleston, 1999, 338). Save for Charles, all other men, Malakwena, Steve, Farai and Gari, are characterised in accordance to Addleston's view. The effect of these masculinities is that they condition violence against women. That Charles's character does not conform to the idea of what Connell (2001) describes as “hegemonic masculinity” shows us nonetheless that men do not constitute a unified front when dealing with women.

In the novel, sex is a site for the performance or failure of manhood. Steve's penis is not as big as he imagines it to be, and as a result he indulges in violent sex acts in an attempt to affirm his prowess. Similarly, all the male characters in the novel who indulge in extramarital affairs are in search of satisfying sex and an enhanced assertion of their manhood. Urban masculinities in *The African Tea Cosy* are constructed around the sex act and a man's ability to satisfy more than one woman. This male promiscuity that is

buttressed by traditional patriarchy is a version of masculinity that is suggested in *The African Tea Cosy* and points to potency and power<sup>44</sup>. The male characters in the novel are obsessed with the desire to have sex. Thus, the study still questions whether Malakwena's attempt at ritual rape her is motivated purely by the instructions from his traditional healer or whether it is an expression of his phallicism.

*The African Tea Cosy* fractures virility as a defining factor of masculinities by rendering virility vulnerable to sickness and disease. As such, HIV assumes a predatory masculine complexion and is used as a tool of oppression. Solomon has been consumed by HIV/AIDS as a result of performing his masculinity through virility. He in turn becomes a predator. His deliberate infection of Joy, with the virus, is ample evidence of this. He admits to Joy that he has HIV and that he will spread it as much as he likes, he declares that he will not die alone. He comforts himself and says that "Joy was also not using a condom, when he caught her having sex with someone else many years back" (p.131). He also observes that "it was a business transaction" (p.131). He knows that he is HIV-positive but chooses not to tell Joy until he has had sex with her. Then he gives her a thick wad of money to ease his conscience. Earlier he asks Joy if her husband is taking good care of her; he knows that Joy is someone's second wife. Driven by his virility here contained in his insatiable sexual appetite and his desperate need to be a "big man", he callously and deliberately infects a group of people, both male and female. In fact, through Joy he delivers sickness and death not only to Joy but also to Gari, his wife and other girlfriends (p.75). This deliberate spread of HIV is an extreme form of violence that is both physical and psychological. It is the most vicious means of destroying a person's body and soul. The metaphoric use of HIV as a masculine tool of oppression is reflective of the novel's inherent radical feminist nature, showing that men are the greatest cause of women's suffering. To some extent, HIV is shown as coming from men and being passed on to women. The intentional spread of HIV has been discussed in previous chapters and is a thread that runs through the entire thesis.

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<sup>44</sup> The notion of phallicism as a misconception in the managing of masculinities is dealt with by scholars such as Anthony Clare, A. 2010 *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*. London: Vintage and Annie Potts 2000 *The Essence of the Hard On: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Cultural Construction of Erectile Dysfunction*. *Men and Masculinities* 3(1) pp 85–103.

Given the violence that has found a seemingly permanent space in the lives of the women characters in *The African Tea Cosy*, the women have had to negotiate new femininities. As their lives are almost always sustained by sex, sexuality is the first site through which new femininities have to be negotiated. Sexuality remains controversial in most African states such as Zimbabwe, where transgressive sexualities such as homosexuality are condemned. It is because of these transgressive sexualities that “both African men and women have been defined in terms of sexual excess, bestiality and bodily deviance” (Lewis 2011, 205). A reading of *The African Tea Cosy* confirms Lewis’ contention that

transgressive trends in the representation of African sexualities have [...] sought to extricate African sexuality from binaries that define heterosexuality as normatively African and homosexuality as deviant and Western” (Lewis 2011, 209).

The characters in this novel are African. Although Steve is first exposed to sodomy as a child living in Europe, his abuser is a Nigerian, an African like himself. Here the author suggests that homosexuality has always existed in African societies; it is not necessarily Western and is not un-African. It is and has been in existence amongst Africans, inside and outside Africa, acceptable or not.

Heather’s composure after Steve’s murder is astonishing. She has been hardened by her experience of violence. Although she is afraid of being haunted by Steve’s spirit she does not show it. When Catherine asks, “don’t you know that his spirit is going to haunt us forever? My grandmother told me that it happens when you kill someone” (p.78), Heather seems unperturbed. As if to challenge notions of femininity, Heather says “I can't cry [...] if we both sit and cry, who will do the thinking?” (p.79). The experience of violence defeminises Heather, to the extent that she is devoid of emotion in a situation in which she would ordinarily have shown remorse and fear. Heather goes out of her way to protect Catherine because she knows Catherine’s secret “about her father trying to rape her [...] so Heather felt it was her duty to protect her young friend from being raped by her lousy, perverted boyfriend” (p.79). Clearly Heather and Catherine share a certain sisterhood that has been acquired socially and transcends being “biological” siblings (Mohanty 1995, 77). The murder is committed in a spirit of sisterhood and Heather’s desperation to protect

Catherine. Her sense of morality is outweighed by her zealous sense of loyalty. Instead of calling the police, the four girls snuggle up together on the sofa and share a bottle of whisky. The depiction of the murder scene and Heather's response to it shows that the “struggle for the control of their bodies determines the ultimate act of resistance and survival” (Robert Muponde and Mandivavarira M. Taruvinga 2003, 12). In the same way, Steve’s murder is necessary to the survival of the girls. Whereas murder should be considered a crime by the individual against society and not just the victim, in *The African Tea Cosy*, it is viewed as a symptom of society’s crime against the female perpetrator of violence. The murder may be read as a radical feminist removal of the patriarch in order to liberate women.

The women characters of *The African Tea Cosy* are extremely calculating in their disposal of Steve’s body. Whether or not it is possible to violate a dead body remains an unanswered question. Anne suggests embalming Steve's body, after which she and her friends decide to go to work and pretend as if everything is normal. She also suggests “feeding the body to the crocodiles” (p.86). Anne goes on to organise the trip to Kariba and uses Charles’s car and houseboat to carry out the deed. The message from all these instances of cunning in *The African Tea Cosy*, which could be read as a crime novel, is that the combined efforts of women can become a stepping stone to the exposure of the mystery of patriarchy and can be damaging to male supremacy. The girls are taught how to preserve a body by the mortician Bill. After Joy has spent the night with the mortician in order to steal embalming substances from him, Gari enquires after her but the girls’ act convinces him. The girls use the stolen fluid to embalm Steve’s body. On their way to Kariba with the body hidden in a cooler box, the girls dupe some policemen at a roadblock by giving them beer and telling them sad stories, managing thus to pass through the roadblock without being searched. The girls’ agency in their own freedom is extreme. Just before dumping the body, Heather says “I am sorry I took his life but I will never miss him. He will haunt me for the rest of my life not because of what I did to him but because of what he did to me” (p.72). This loss of respect in a woman for the value of life is an unimagined coldness born out of traumatic experiences.

Sylvia Tamale's observations, about African sexualities, are valuable for my study. She

believes that prevailing research agendas and methods related to sexuality in Africa have "remained blind to its important pluralities" (Tamale 2011, 22) is pertinent to my study. Its pluralities refer to the other sexualities that would otherwise be labeled deviant. Non-clinical aspects of sexualities have not really been taken into account by researchers, who have continued to objectify Africans. The age-old legacies of medicalised and exoticised sexuality are far from being broken. The chapters in this thesis that deal with female and male sexualities seek to establish the extent to which fictional narratives re-inscribe or dispute colonial and anthropological views of African sexuality. I place emerging sexualities in the context of traditional and cultural practices that offer scripts for the performance of enforced sexualities. This is attested to today in the press, where stories of gender vigilantism are common throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Examples are the "matatu"/"kombi" touts in Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa who enforce dress codes, sexually molest women and rape them<sup>45</sup>. Gender vigilantes are males who behave as if they have been appointed to oversee the sexualities and the moral hygiene of women in the public sphere. Gender vigilantism or policing stands supreme among the concerns of postcolonial feminism, particularly where policing limits the freedom of women. This vigilantism comes from a cultural history of the prescription and supervision of female sexuality to which Naidu and Hazel Ngquila refer, as they explain occurrences of gender violence and limitations placed on the performance of female sexuality thus:

Notwithstanding the levels of agency increasingly exercised by women, subtly coerced performances within a context of "traditional" masculinised practices, such as unprotected sex constructed as (needing to be) pleasurable to the male partner, leave many African women vulnerable and compelled to confront a clutch of serious health concerns around sexually transmitted diseases (Naidu and Ngquila 2013, 61).

Apart from public displays of sexual violence and molestation associated with male gender vigilantism, Naidu and Ngquila focus on "subtly coerced performances" (2013, 61) that

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Moshenberg, My Dress MyChoice, 14 November, 2014 <http://africasaccount>. *New Zimbabwe*. "Grace blamed for Kombi rank short dress outrage". 6 January 2015 <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-19650-Grace+blamed+for+touts+short+dress+outrage/news.aspx>

occur in less public places and that find women the targets of male sexual violence. The quotation raises the notion that in their desire for sexual pleasure, men script women as passive objects who are there to provide pleasure. The question of mutually constituted pleasure is absent. In many situations of intimacy, including the domestic sphere, the emphasis is more on the portrayal of women as victims of violence, though this does not mean that their agency is completely obscured. The incessant struggles of women to resist this violence in texts such as *Highway Queen* and *The Uncertainty of Hope* attest to the pursuit of their agency, their desire to assert their humanity and their endeavours to redefine traditional notions of domesticity.

In defiance of normative notions of sexuality, in *The African Tea Cosy*, Masilo presents sexualities that usually remain unspoken and unwritten in Zimbabwean contemporary public discourses on sex. *The African Tea Cosy* in its expose of African sexualities, which are a key area of concern for African feminism, ventures into the uncomfortable zone of unconventional sex practices: sodomy, or anal sex, homosexuality and unusual sexual fantasies. Sodomy (or more precisely the act of anal sex) is presented as a deviant sexual practice. The novel suggests, however, that it is common among both heterosexual and homosexual couples. The nature of sodomy, as shown in the novel, is violent. Heather is unprepared for her first anal encounter and, is virtually raped. After Heather's gruelling experience of sodomy from Steve, She ironically, returns twenty-four hours later with all her belongings. Her return exposes a degree of masochism that postcolonial feminism is concerned to help women escape. The novel's description of the sodomy and Heather's unexpected reaction to it is meant to fuel an apprehension in readers for women who are masochistic in nature, even when they don't seem to realise it.

In the book *The Myth of Women's Masochism*, Paula, J. Caplan explains that the term masochism was coined by the sex expert Dr Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and is defined as "the wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force" (Caplan 2005, 19). She adds that "masochism is not part of a woman's normal development" (ibid, 75). Rather, it is a learned adaptation to an uncomfortable situation or circumstance and can happen for many reasons, most of which are for convenience and survival, as we see in Heather. Having endured such a gruelling sexual encounter, Heather unaccountably decides to move in

permanently with Steve. It seems that she enjoys pain and abuse, or perhaps she endures it in order to survive. This sado-masochistic behaviour on the part of women characters who presume to be free agents illustrates the problematic issues of sexual agency. A number of sexual encounters in the novel, especially in their casualness and their deviant experimentation, seem to question the possibility of freedom for women. Men remain the ones to benefit from asymmetrical and exploitative relationships. Ambiguity characterises the terrain of prostitution and casual sexual relationships in that what is often considered an index of freedom is also the site of un-freedom and exploitation.

In a country whose president is among the most homophobic in Africa<sup>46</sup>, Masilo dares to write on same sex relationships, lesbianism and homosexuality and queer sexualities. In so doing she breaks the silence on matters that are part of the emerging sexualities. The word “emerging” is used cautiously here since the writer portrays sexualities that are not quite new to African societies and that have been in existence beneath the official surface of respectability and gender normativity. Colonial and postcolonial repression accounts for their being under the radar of surveillance and their covert performance. Masilo also deals with sexual fantasies in the novel, some of which are of the sadomasochistic variety, accounting for the violence of the text. The novel dispels the myth that these sexualities are alien, brought into the country by foreigners, in particular imperialists. Homosexuality in Zimbabwean novels is still portrayed as socially unacceptable and perverse; homosexuals are “the most castigated of groups” (Shaw 2006, 273). This is reflected in *The African Tea Cosy*. Steve admits his childhood abuse at the hands of a Nigerian “uncle” to Farai. Farai also confides that he finds men far more attractive than women however, “the society he lived in frowned deeply on homosexual relationships” (p.155). The discussion between the two men makes it clear that they are aware of the unacceptability of their sexuality. The choice of names in the novel is suggestive of the high degree of immorality that prevails. The club that Farai and Steve used to operate is called Gomorrah. Masilo deploys biblical connotation here. In biblical terms, Gomorrah was a city destroyed for its sins, chief among which was homosexuality. Masilo uses this connotation to signal

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<sup>46</sup> Marc Epprecht 1998 in his ‘The ‘unsaying’ of indigenous homosexualities in Zimbabwe: mapping a blind spot in an African masculinity’. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24(4)pp 631–651 and in his 2014 Sexuality research as ‘dirty work’? An Africanist perspective. *Sexualities*, 17(5/6)pp 662–6682, articulate the unacceptability of homosexuality despite its inevitable existence.

the doom of homosexuality and pre-empting that it will never be accepted in Zimbabwe. Farai admits to Heather, in a frenzy of anger, that he has been having a homosexual relationship with Steve. He charges Heather to tell Steve that “I regret every time I sucked his dick and every time I bent over this sweet ass for him” (p.175). Despite their own moral shortcomings, the girls; Joy, Catherine, Anne and Heather are shocked to discover Farai and Steve’s gay relationship. Clearly, from their reaction, they regard homosexuality as the most deviant sexual behaviour, even less acceptable than prostitution. Their reaction also signals shock in realising that the hegemonic Steve could bend over and submit to another man.

The author’s hesitation in supporting homosexuality is seen in the way in which Steve and Farai’s gay relationship is neatly tucked away in between the lines of the narrative of the novel and revealed only in an outburst. This hesitation about homosexuality mirrors the “African womanist” rejection of homosexuality (Ogunyemi 1995). Homosexual practices are pronounced as illicit heterosexual affairs. Steve’s victimhood to sodomy, as a child at the hands of an “uncle” (p.106,) is also revealed with some reservation. Whereas Priscilla, Steve’s mother, describes it as child abuse, Steve relishes the memory of that experience and lives it out later in life with Farai, Heather and Jane (the little girl he sodomises as a child). This calls to mind the cycle of violence theory, described earlier. That both Steve and Farai indulge in heterosexual relationships invites the reader to re-examine cultural perceptions of sexuality, sex roles and the family in Zimbabwean society. Gay studies have been as controversial as gay sexuality among Africans. Epprecht (1998) exposes the denial of the existence of homoeroticism in contemporary African society. Such sexual orientation, however unspeakable, is named and therefore acknowledged. Homosexuality has "been in existence for much longer than many Zimbabweans are willing to admit" (Mabvurira and Matsika 2013, 2). The existence of the practice is barely hidden by society’s rejection of it<sup>47</sup>. In Zimbabwean society, gay relationships are viewed as transgressive sexualities (Shaw 2006). They are transgressive because they go against the norm. Epprecht (1998) cites examples of indigenous names given to homosexuals such as

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<sup>47</sup> See also Munamoto Chemhuru (2012) on the debate surrounding homosexuality in Zimbabwean society in Rethinking the legality of homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A philosophical perspective. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance* 3(3): 1–20.

*ngochani* and also comments on their existence in African oral traditions about cures and punishments.

Masilo questions heterosexual relationships. On one hand she seems to suggest that homosexual relationships are better and more peaceful, even if they are unaccepted by society. That Masilo should juxtapose Steve's relationships with Heather and Farai highlights the novel's radical feminist cadences, in particular its alignment with the view that heterosexuality is a "choice which draws women towards men" (Adrienne Rich 1980, 637). Rich suggests that there is no specifically unnatural feature of homosexuality. She suggests that homosexuality is a choice just like heterosexuality and that people should be able to choose quite freely between the two. From the description of Steve and Farai's relationship, Masilo believes that homosexuality does not point to any weakness in these characters' masculinity. Indeed, their virility in deriving satisfaction from both men and women shows excessiveness in the practise and the performance of their masculinity. Farai is not girlish in his behaviour nor is he effeminate. It is not until his outburst that the reader is made aware of his homosexuality. Steve remains "hard" and rigid till his death, with an insatiable appetite and maleness that could never lead one to imagine him giving sexual pleasure to another man. Thus the novel suggests that homosexual relationships are less turbulent and more emotive of true love than heterosexual relationships.

Despite *The African Tea Cosy's* exploration of unconventional sex practices, African womanhood remains its chief concern, it is in constant mediation and is ever fluid. Motherhood, which is central to African womanism, is not denied by women characters as they view it as a positive aspect of identity (Walker, 1995, 419). The ideal mother, as presented in the novel, is one who bears children and raises them well. She must be the proverbial wife referred to in Chapter one of this thesis. However, in this novel, the concept of motherhood had been altered in several ways. Anne does not live with her child, while Joy has had several abortions and can no longer have children. Priscilla renounces her son and advises his girlfriend to do the same. Mildred, Shingi's wife, may not be telling the truth when she claims that Shingi is responsible for her pregnancy because there is a suggestion that Desmond, who denies all responsibility, may in actual fact be the father of her child. Thus even Mildred the wife is not innocent. Joy is also an

unfaithful wife; although she is Gari's second wife, she beds the mortician in order to steal from him. Joy also goes to Solomon's hotel room with the intention of having sex with him. This challenges stereotypes that suggest, wrongly, that all married women epitomise morality. Although Joy wonders whether Solomon is worth risking her marriage for, she remembers the money that he can potentially provide. She goes to his room with the specific intention of having sex with him, although she is clearly more interested in money than in sex (p.65). Joy, like Mildred, is an unfaithful wife.

Chapter four has dealt with familial and intimate partner violence amidst emergent African sexualities and relationships in Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy*. Informed by the theories of African womanism and radical feminism, the chapter has examined women's resistance to and roles in familial and partner violence. In trying to understand the endless violence, I have also engaged with the culture of violence theory. In taking up Ogunديpe Leslie's challenge, as presented in *Recreating ourselves: African women and critical transformation*, to tell a woman's story from a woman's perspective, Masilo goes even further by breaking the already fractured ground of private experience and speaking the unspeakable. The discussion points of this chapter that illuminate Masilo's representation of gender violence in familial and intimate spaces are familial bonds and oppressive obligation, para-marital relationships and the permutations of violence, the role of tradition and culture in the practice of violence, freedom and sexual liberty in the city, emergent masculinities and femininities and women as agents of survival. The social conditions of Masilo's characters have been interrogated in light of the culture of violence theory and some tenets of African womanism and radical feminism. The discussion of familial bonds and oppressive obligation has revealed that African marriages have very little to do with love and more to do with sex and money. The chapter points out that there is little scholarship on love in Africa (Bhana 2013) and that in Africa, as depicted in *The African Tea Cosy*, money and love are inseparable.

All the male characters in this novel are financially well off and able to sustain more than one relationship. But by the end of the novel, the most rigid masculinities are either destroyed or damaged. Steve is dead while Farai is incarcerated. Although the four female

protagonists all appear to have moved on with their lives, they continue to negotiate their existence and still find pleasure in men. On the whole, familial and intimate spaces are the main sites through which gender violence is experienced and contested by women and girls. This chapter has shown the way in which the female characters in the novel *The African Tea Cosy* negotiate survival and coexistence with men in intimate spaces. In these negotiations the female characters remain acutely aware of the complexities of their African womanhood. Although the novel presents homosexual relationships as less turbulent than heterosexual relationships, the novel dismisses the practice of homosexuality by killing one homosexual partner and incarcerating the other. Emergent femininities are aggressive, calculating, strong-willed and have the agency to resist gender violence. They are also strengthened by the togetherness of women, but in their distinct groups. Married women (first) remain on their side of the fence while second wives and single women remain on theirs.

Issues of promiscuity and polygamy have been discussed amidst men's obsessive imperative to have sex with and be responsible for more than one woman. This was discussed together with the issue of para-marital relationships and the permutations of violence. This chapter has explained para-marital relationships as relationships of commitment that are parallel to marriage. Couples live together and behave as married couples but they are not married. The study asserts that these para-marital relationships are threatening to the marriage institution. However, these relationships are not spared the violence that characterises legitimate marriages. Heather and Steve's live-in relationship is presented as a typical example of the tragedy of para-marital relationships that do not translate into marriage. The forms of intimate partner violence that this chapter exposes are sodomy as a form of sexual violence, insults and humiliation as emotional and psychological violence, as well as physical assault and the wilful infection of another with HIV; this last is tantamount to the destruction of a another's body and soul. In the familial space, the main forms of gender violence have been revealed as verbal and physical assault, economic deprivation, the theft of childhood and oppressive cultural and traditional practices such as incest and ritual rape. The representations in the novel show that men are more powerful and have more resources than women and men use this unequal advantage to oppress women.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE DOMESTIC SPACE: A READING OF PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN VALERIE TAGWIRA'S (2006) *THE UNCERTAINTY OF HOPE*.**

This chapter explores the more silent and less perceptible forms of psychological violence suffered by women at the hands of men, the state and other women, as presented in Valerie Tagwira's (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Using postcolonial feminist and African womanist notions of female oppression as a point of reference, I examine how the multiple forces of both the domestic and the public spaces of a woman's life work together to form a formidable collective force that can cause her to suffer psychological violence. In this chapter I argue that there are forms of psychological violence that are ambiguous. Among the forms of psychological violence that are discussed are threats, demeaning and belittling, deprivation, coercion, fear and stress-induced illness. This chapter draws attention to the agency of the women characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope*; in particular, how they transcend their victimhood. Cross-references are made to Lillian Masitera's (2011) *Start with Me* and Virginia Phiri's (2010) *Highway Queen*.

*The Uncertainty of Hope* is set in modern day Zimbabwe. It narrates the various forms of violence that were experienced particularly by women during the Zimbabwean government's failed clean-up campaign, dubbed "Operation Murambatsvina". The novel centres on the life of the protagonist, Onai, and several other female characters, among them Katy, Faith and Ruva, whose livelihoods are mostly sustained by informal trading. The novel illustrates the twofold suffering of women in a postcolonial Zimbabwean setting; women are violated in both public and private spaces. *The Uncertainty of Hope* is a gendered narrative depicting an infamous historical event known to all Zimbabweans. The survival narrative of *The Uncertainty of Hope* can be read as a rejection of the "slipping into oblivion of unacknowledged, unspoken, and unwritten traumas of history" (Muchemwa 2005, 196). Anchored in postcolonial feminist thought, made clear in interviews with the author, the novel is a deliberate and passionate rewriting of history from the point of view of women. Echoing Muchemwa's articulations, the novel is indeed a rejection of the silencing of a history that lives in the memories and lives of Zimbabweans, especially women. That the government and the poor economy contribute to the suffering of women is a well documented point. *The Uncertainty of Hope* illustrates

the historical and cultural specificity of Zimbabwean women's struggles; the struggle outlined in the novel might not be easily appreciated by black women outside Zimbabwe or women outside Africa's southern region. The structure and expectations of marriage and the family in the Zimbabwean society of the novel are culturally specific. The rewriting of this piece of history by a woman and about women responds to Chandra T. Mohanty's suggestion that "historicizing and locating political agency is a necessary alternative to the universality of gendered oppression and struggles" (1995, 96). In this light, the plot of *The Uncertainty of Hope* is culturally and historically specific to Zimbabwe and some other parts of Africa; not all women in Africa will identify with it and not all women in Africa can claim sisterhood.

The author provides a gendered historicisation of a particular event. Tagwira says, in an interview with *Pambazuka News*, that her novel

is a novel set in contemporary Zimbabwe. It looks at poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and a host of other socioeconomic challenges of the day. It is also a story about surviving against the odds and, hopefully, gives an insight into the intricacies of contemporary Zimbabwe with respect to how people are trying to survive (2009 online).

The novel is thus a story of endurance. In resonance with postcolonial feminist concerns, Tagwira confirms her novel's interest in poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and a host of other socio-economic challenges of the day. She adds that the novel is "a story about surviving against odds" (ibid). This survival ethic has to be understood in the context of Operation Murambatsvina, the government programme of urban cleansing that demolished the so-called illegal structures at the peripheries of the city and inside the degraded high density suburbs housing a considerable percent of Zimbabwe's urban population. *The Uncertainty of Hope* makes a response to the displacement and precariousness precipitated by this urban cleansing campaign. Despite national discourses about the clean-up campaign, the novel attempts to re-live it. In another interview with Lizzy Attree, Tagwira makes an interesting submission<sup>48</sup>. When asked about her location

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<sup>48</sup> Other interviews that Valerie Tagwira has had on the novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, include an interview by Ambrose Musiyiwa available on <http://conversationswithwriters.blogspot.com/2007/05/interview-with->

at the time of writing her novel, she responds, " Maybe if I had been at home, I would've censored myself. You do sort of feel safe when you are writing from here" (Attree 2007). Tagwira speaks volubly in this interview about her trepidation on returning home to publicise her novel. Tagwira confirms Violet Masilo's submission in the previous chapter that women are not free to express themselves and that it is a taboo for a woman to speak out on certain subjects. Tagwira's submission here also calls to mind Vera's views about the limitations that women face when they write. Vera states " I know the risk a woman takes in the sheer effort of writing, placing herself beyond accepted margins, abandoning the securities of less daunting, much more approved paths" (1999, 3). Tagwira's account of this operation offers a counter discourse to the official narratives of the campaign that occlude the personal dimension of this urban crisis. She does this, by narrating operation murambatsvina from a gendered perspective.

Tagwira's novel is not wholly fictional, but rather a reportage<sup>49</sup>. I use the term reportage in this study to refer to a practice in which a writer manipulates facts and retells a true life story by making the work "read more like a novel than like a historical account" (Hollowell 1977, 63). This is exactly what we see in the novel as it re-imagines a lived experience. Furthermore, Tagwira admits in the interview that her feminist and social focus was shaped by the Zimbabwean crisis:

When I initially started thinking about writing, I had a desire to do something different, something creative, and because I'm something of a "mild feminist" at heart, I always knew that I would write something featuring strong female characters. Writing about contemporary Zimbabwe was a natural choice because I am very much attached to "home" and I travel back quite frequently. At each visit, it strikes me how the living standards are deteriorating, and at each visit, I never imagine that things can get any worse, but they do, and people still survive. I was particularly

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[valerie-tagwira-author.html](http://weaverpresszimbabwe.com/index.php/authors/interviews/227-interview-valerie-tagwira-by-ambrose-musiyiwa) or <http://weaverpresszimbabwe.com/index.php/authors/interviews/227-interview-valerie-tagwira-by-ambrose-musiyiwa>, Beaven Tapurata "students meet writers Chinodya and Tagwira available on <http://weaverpresszimbabwe.com/index.php/authors/interviews/897-interview-chinodya-and-tagwira> and Bertha Shoko available on <http://weaverpresszimbabwe.com/interviews/204-interview-valerie-tagwira-by-bertha-shoko-.html>

<sup>49</sup> Refer to Fetson A. Kalua 2007 who gives a broader outline of the notion of reportage and its origins as a genre, in *The collapse of certainty: Contextualising liminality in Botswana fiction and reportage*. UNISA, Department of English (UP).

concerned about how women deal with the challenges that are thrust upon them (*Pambazuka News* 2009).

The novel's African feminist locus is cemented in this interview. The agency of women to survive despite the odds is a key focus of the novel. Although Tagwira identifies herself as a mild feminist, the interview also reveals some of the pertinent concerns of postcolonial feminism. Tagwira notes that in writing the novel she also had a strong interest in socio-economic, developmental and health-related issues that affect women. In addition to presenting women as victims of male abuse, the novel reveals that there are other problems that affect women apart from the male-female binary of power imbalances. In acknowledging the vulnerability of men to institutionalised violence she adds that "women (and the girl-child) are worse off than their male counterparts" (*Pambazuka News* 2009). Both genders suffer but women suffer more thus the need for men to work with women for the betterment of society. Tagwira argues that "drastic changes have to take place in order for the lives of ordinary people to improve" (*Pambazuka News* 2009). From the representations in the novel, perhaps these drastic changes constitute the removal of hostile masculinities that exacerbate the conditions of women through gender violence. We see this in the death of Gari or, less explicitly, in the transition of Mawaya from a street vagrant to Onai's saviour. The protagonist, Onai, has a miserable existence and endures untold suffering as she negotiates her survival amidst violence in both the private and public spheres of her life. The narrative is complex and multi-faceted, however. Although the novel focuses on Onai, there are descriptions of the violent experiences of the other female characters in the novel: Katy, Faith, Melody, Ruva, Ma Musara, Sheila and Gloria among others.

The psychological violence in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is multifaceted and engages the reader. Onai's poverty and neglect, the chief contributors to the psychological violence she suffers, are vividly illustrated from the outset. The author uses evocative images such as the "rickety metal gate" (p.1) and the "threadbare blanket" (p.4). Through these, symptoms of Onai's victimhood are made subtly visible. The novel begins with Onai failing to fall asleep and worrying about her husband's whereabouts. Her stirring in bed in the dead of night reveals a troubled mind traumatised by the uncertainty of a precarious life. That the novel, soon after introducing the troubled Onai, plunges into a crime scene where Onai is robbed of her one valuable possession, a television set, alerts the reader to the

psychological plunder of the novel's protagonist and other female characters at the hands of the state, their husbands, and other men. This presentation of Onai's abject poverty and the manner in which she is both physically and psychologically plundered attests to the condition of women in the postcolony. The description of Onai's situation echoes Mohanty's assertion that "the average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender [...] and her being third world" (Mohanty 1991, 56). That Onai is oppressed as a woman is clearly illustrated; she is physically weaker than Gari and incapable of fighting back physically. Inevitably, as a third world woman she is poor, family-oriented, economically disempowered and unable to survive without help. Women's powerlessness at the hands of men is unveiled at the very start of this novel. Onai is at the mercy of her husband- Gari, the thieves and the municipal police.

Onai is conditioned by violence to live a life with double standards. Her thoughts reveal her African womanist agency. After she is robbed of her television set, feeling that her husband should have been there to protect the family, we are told that

she thought of uttering some belittling remarks about Gari, but again she restrained herself. She would never admit openly to her children that their father was a blatantly irresponsible man. What purpose would it serve, except to further erode the flimsy fabric of Gari's relationship with his children (p.4).

These thoughts reflect Onai's consciousness of both her predicament and her African-ness; the limitations that prevent her from reacting overtly to her domination. This consciousness is reflective of African womanist thought as it does not ignore the oppression of women but rather explores that oppression in the context of specific African experiences. This particular inner monologue echoes the very nature of African womanism in that it "holds as important marriage, motherhood and family relationships" (Chikwenje, O. Ogunyemi 1985, 64). In a similar vein, Filomina Chioma Steady explains the interdependence of women and men as

the male is not "the other" but part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a

complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Sexual differences and similarities, as well as sex roles, enhance sexual autonomy and cooperation between women and men, rather than promoting polarization and fragmentation (Steady 1987, 8).

Steady and Ogunyemi's comments on marriage and the inseparability of the genders in the African social fibre can thus explain why Onai would choose to preserve her family's relations rather than to expose Gari's weaknesses to the children. For Onai, the family, and her life more specifically, would be incomplete without her husband. However, the strained relationship between Gari and Onai suggests that there is still a great deal of effort required from men to promote cooperation rather than to encourage polarisation and fragmentation. That Onai should protect Gari even after he has not been fair to her shows even more clearly an enactment of African womanism: "it is accommodationist [...] it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children" (Chikwenje, O. Ogunyemi 1985, 65). Onai's denial of domestic violence despite all the obvious indicators speaks volumes about the psychological difficulties in which her circumstances have placed her. The uncertainty of Onai's hope of an escape from the domestic violence in her life is underlined when she wonders why people cannot understand her failure to disclose this violence. We are told that "she did not want to be coerced into revealing things which had the potential to destroy her marriage. She would not be able to bear the shame of being a divorced woman" (p.46). The preservation of her marriage takes priority. Onai's worldview is that "a woman's worth was relative to one man, her husband" (p.46). Onai is accommodating towards Gari and tries to uphold the unity of the family, while negotiating other avenues for survival.

*The Uncertainty of Hope* illustrates Mohanty's point that, despite the subordinating strategies of culture and politics, women contest their marginality (1991). They also have to navigate their survival amidst patriarchal systems in a Zimbabwe whose economy has taken a downturn. Onai's agency is blurred by the hopelessness of her situation yet she soldiers on without having to escape her local identity. If agency is to be understood as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (Amartya Sen 1985, 203), then it is fair to argue that Onai has a certain agency that, although affected by her condition, is not really erased. That she does

not speak out *per se* does not mean that she is a passive victim of violence. She expresses her agency though dialoguing with herself and resolving to deal with her problems in her own way. Although Onai places her family first, this is not to suggest that she is passive. The dialogue is reflective of James C. Scott's argument on hidden transcripts, which he describes as "the dissembling of the weak in the face of power" (1990, 1). Hidden transcripts are covert discourses and actions and, as Scott argues, Onai is not an entirely passive victim of her subordination. Onai's hidden transcripts, in her subordination, are contrasted with the emphasis placed by Spivak on the powerlessness of women, especially her argument that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1995, 29). Spivak's focus on lack as the defining feature of female marginality emphasises the impossibility of women escaping their entrapment. By contrast, Onai's conscious decision to live in a violent marriage refutes the notion of impossibility. Onai has options as to how she can behave and respond to situations in her life, and she makes her choices carefully.

There are ambiguous forms of psychological violence in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, such as stress-related illness. Onai's "head throbbing" (p.1) illness is related to the stress she suffers, caused by the family. It is also related to her lack of sleep and her anxiety about the family, her marriage and how difficult it has become to survive in a troubled economy. Physical as its symptoms may be, the illness is largely psychological in origin. We are faced with the same degree of psychological violence in Masitera's (2011) *Start with Me*, where Edna succumbs to a stress-related illness born of an unstable marriage. Onai's constant crying is a sign of emotional abuse, even though she feels obliged to appear happy. After the robbery, Onai assures her children that everything will be alright when she herself is the most devastated. The effect of this stress on Onai's psychological and physical health alludes to the extent of the condition of domesticity for the average third world woman. As a typically domesticated African woman, Onai is conditioned to repress her anxieties. In an echo of Onai's life, Tamale defines domesticity in the context of African feminism thus:

Domesticity as an ideology is historically and culturally constructed and is closely linked to patriarchy, gender/power relations and the artificial private/public distinction. The way patriarchy defines women is such that

their full and wholesome existence depends on getting married, producing children and caring for their family (Tamale 2004, 51).

Domesticity is associated with the house or home and public space distinction that determines visibility and assigns gender roles. Confined to reproduction, child-rearing and domestic chores, women in traditional settings dare not cross set boundaries. In most of the texts discussed here, however, women cross these boundaries and collapse the domestic-public space distinction. This crossing-over of women is marked by changing economic conditions that have given rise to a redefinition of women as economic beings who link the domestic and public spheres. All the focal texts of the thesis find female characters traversing several spaces in an incipient mobility that attests to the emergence of new female identities and sexualities. Onai overcomes many challenges in the spaces in her life. In addition, although domesticity, for many, may mean silence, this silence applies only to Onai's mouth and visible actions but not to her mind. Most of the turmoil of Onai's victimhood is engaged and negotiated in the mind. Thus in addition to physical battery, Onai is a victim of psychological violence.

The fateful desire for a married identity and for communal belonging obliges Onai to persevere in a dysfunctional marriage that is marred by violence and unhappiness. Onai believes that she has to sustain the marriage for the sake of her children, although she maintains the typical belief of the victim that the abuser will change and that he is abusive only because he cannot help his nature. Onai pities her abusive husband; even when she is in hospital and still in pain after he has assaulted her, Onai formulates some careful responses to avoid implicating Gari. She makes up a lie about how "she had accidentally hit her head against the bedroom door in the darkness, while looking for a light switch" (p.15). After a series of beatings, Onai is asked by Katy why she stays with Gari, her response is:

for the sake of my children, of course [...] Gari will change. He's just going through a difficult time at work [...] I know he will change as soon as things get better for him (p.6).

This statement exposes the extent of Onai's psychological ignominy. She has been exposed so to violence that she has become inured to it and believes that she must endure it. Her actions imply that men should be viewed as victims too; readers are led to believe that men are only violent when they too have been violated, and that they vent their frustrations on their wives, who are closest to them. In explaining that Gari is only violent because he is frustrated and in believing that he will change when things get better, Onai reflects this postcolonial feminist position of trying to understand why men behave as they do.

Despite Onai's resilience, her character fits Ogunjipe-Leslie's identification of the female character in African literature as "the figure of the 'sweet mother', the all accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice" (1987, 6). She is astonishingly porous to the violence she experiences. One can conclude that Onai is incapable of detaching herself from Gari because she no longer has a comprehensive sense of self to detach. The reason for her endurance – her children – makes a bold statement about the futility of women's relational identities. Onai's choice to persevere may be read in the context of the observation that

an African womanist will recognise that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy (Ogunyemi 1985, 64).

A reading of Onai's actions in view of Ogunyemi's assessment illustrates the black African woman's consciousness and agency in dealing with gender violence. Her life is not her own. There is more to consider before oneself. She considers her children and the social stature that her marriage provides. She also considers the comfortable accommodation that she and her children are privileged to live in on Gari's account. For Onai, living with Gari's abuse is a small fee to pay in exchange for all this.

The view of agency and determination culminating in "the re-enchantment of humanity" (Margret Archer 2003, 36) is powerfully illustrated in Valerie Tagwira's portrayal of the character of Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Onai's becoming a new female subject depends on the interplay of societal and cultural forces and her emerging sense of

autonomy. In this text, the author refuses to romanticise feminine agency in ways that do not recognise the severe impediments to self-actualisation that are associated with specific historical and societal contexts. The path of escape from egregious domestic violence, cultural conditioning and poverty during Zimbabwe's crisis is not an easy one for Onai or other women characters in the novel. The temptation to find easy options such as prostitution and corruption is too difficult for many to resist, yet Onai remains steadfast in her fidelity to a marriage code that has failed, only to be redeemed by the death of her husband, Gari, and the hospitality of a stranger, Mawaya. She consistently defines herself in relation to her children and thus her sense of self cannot be separated from her concept of motherhood.

Onai's traditional beliefs and current situation are incompatible. She tries to assume a distinct womanhood. In defining the concept of a distinct or new woman, Okereke Chukwumerije, Harriet Bulkeley, and Heike Schroeder argue that

the new woman within marriage or outside of it, should be assertive, economically independent and pre-disposed towards survival and self-realisation, even if her husband betrays their marriage (2000, 97).

Onai fails to measure up to the description of the new woman, however, because of the country's limiting economy. This explains her constant headaches, obvious loneliness and loss of hope. Onai's victimhood and defeatist world view reveal her imprisonment by a culture and traditional beliefs that oblige women to accept abuse as normal. Despite the violence she suffers, she still believes that Gari will change. She also believes that remaining in an abusive marriage is the best thing to do.

The futility of Onai's faith and hope for change puts to the test the view of transformative literature expressed in the previous chapters, where society is believed to be capable of change. It also challenges reformist literature where the unpleasant character is expected to make a dramatic change for the better. The novel largely fails to conform to the conventions of either type of literature. Although Onai interprets Gari's powerlessness and his weakness on his deathbed to mean remorse, Gari in fact dies before he apologises or

reforms. Onai's failed belief that Gari will change also challenges the togetherness of the genders that both postcolonial feminism and African womanism advocate. This representation compels the reader to question the possibility of the genders working together in unity when the immoral male character dies before any togetherness is achieved. The complexity of this togetherness as advocated by African womanists and postcolonial feminists is exposed in a similar manner in *The African Tea Cosy* when Steve is killed for failing to treat women fairly.

The complicity of women in the psychological violence meted out to other women is a key issue that is brought to light in this novel. Ma Musara's attitude to Onai's marriage is an example of how women may be complicit in the oppression of other women. In a way, Tagwira offers an explanation for Onai's reflection of Ogundipe-Leslie's identification of the African female character: "she reacts with fear depending on complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self-assertive actions are needed" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10). The novel exposes Onai's subservience as rooted in her mother's participation in her oppression. The influence of the mother figure on her children exacerbates Onai's situation as she views her mother as the epitome of successful womanhood, having braved an abusive marriage to Onai's father. Onai finds solace in knowing that her mother understands her situation. In declaring to Onai that "a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side" (p.7), Ma Musara cements her daughter's incarceration in a doomed marriage. She also explicitly locks her daughter into a web of violence which she herself thinks is normal. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Ma Musara clearly enacts the way in which women are "shackled by their own negative self-image" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 10). She obliges Onai to endure violence because of the interiorisation of ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. She normalises gender violence and expects Onai to endure this because she did. As a result, Onai's reaction to her abuse is self-defeating and self-crippling. She allows herself to be abused and consoles herself by convincing herself that it is the norm and the right thing to do.

A further example of the complicity of women in the psychological violence perpetrated against other women is shown through Katy's treatment by her female in-laws. Katy's marriage is described as successful, despite the limitations of her maternal productivity.

However, her female in-laws are chief agents in trying to fuel disharmony in Katy's marriage because of her delayed pregnancy, the birth of a single child only and her failure to bear a son. In the process, they attack her verbally, violating her psychologically. Despite "the importance of motherhood" (Arndt 2000, 711) and fertility in the African society, the nature of the two is over-dramatised. The word "barren" assumes a new meaning in the novel. Rather than referring to the failure to conceive and bear living children, it takes on the meaning of a failure to bear sons. Katy is emotionally broken when her fertile adolescent sister-in-law tells her about their mother-in-law's disappointment in Katy's "barrenness". She tells Katy that her

mother-in-law thinks maybe you're a man. She said how can a real woman have such a husky voice? Or such a straight, board-like body? No breasts, and no hips to speak of (p.29).

This explanation of Katy's supposed barrenness mirrors traditional perceptions, expectations and interpretations of African beauty and womanhood. The satirising of this redefinition of the word barren speaks to "the favouring of sons" (Davies and Greaves 1986, 10) that African feminists seek to redress. Faith is presented as a girl child of hope who has managed to earn a university degree and has turned out better than many male children in her community.

Katy maintains her equanimity but this outward show masks the feelings of rage and humiliation she experiences internally. The ignominious behaviour of her husband and the public humiliation makes her feel betrayed by the man she has trusted as upright and faithful. Her agency in her survival, like Onai's, obliges her to persevere. The presentation of the two women characters lends them to Dube's (1999) positioning of the postcolonial woman as juggling with several issues while trying to maintain a balance as a survival strategy. She is aware of what society expects of African women and we are told that there are times when Katy "envied Onai with her three children" (p.31). This envy exemplifies Brenda Cooper's observation that "in Africa the mothering and nurturing of children is glorified and re-affirmed as the primary defining characteristic of women" (1992, 77). This over-importance becomes a problem for African feminism when it incapacitates women,

limiting them to childbearing and enforcing the favouring of boy children. The rules for success in traditional motherhood have shifted, thus ensuring women's suffering, even at the hands of other women. In the novel, fertility is not just about bearing children, but about bearing sons; even though Katy has given birth to Faith she is still considered barren because Faith is a girl.

Motherhood links texts like *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) that address a female sense of self-fashioning with those texts such as *Highway Queen* (2010), which places motherhood in less conventional arrangements linking the house, harem and the highway. In such texts characters may read certain situations as offering opportunities for self-construction and autonomy when external forces in fact assert their power in the making of the individual. In the case of the house, the harem and the highway it is possible for female characters to misread situations as opportunities when they are offering instead entrapment or self-fashioning. Contrary to the belief in uninhibited freedom to self-construct that is held by adolescent women characters in *The Trail* (2000), many character portrayals in the selected texts reveal micro-mechanisms through which conservative society constrains females. In the three sites of the house, the harem and the highway explored in Chapter three, women find themselves in precarious situations; but they also find the potential to self-create and achieve agency. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, there are indications of harem domestic arrangements. Gari although not explicitly polygamous runs a harem-like domestic set up in which Onai is in the dark about the sexual relation her husband has with his female lodger. The female mobilities that connect these sites problematise the questions of agency and passivity as the women characters move through complicated processes of domination and resistance. The house as a space of domesticity is a not entirely innocent site of marital bliss and untroubled sexualities.

After Gari's death, Onai is evicted from her home by Toro. She turns to Chipu, Gari's sister, hoping for support from her as a fellow woman. But Chipu is disdainful and cruel. She chooses to believe the stories she has heard and thus turns her back on Onai. She says:

You must have done something to make my brother throw you out. Frankly speaking I am not surprised. Things get round, you know. I heard that my brother vomited blood

before he died. I also heard something about the second wife he had decided to take because he was not happy with you. His death was very convenient for you, wasn't it (p. 255).

Chipo's attack on Onai is a psychological blow. It does not offer any solutions to Onai's problems. The attack also challenges the sisterhood that is expected from women. If anything, it cements the stereotype of unsavoury relations by marriage in its view of women's complicity in the suffering of other women. In a way, this presentation, rather than simply confirming stereotypes, is intended to make female readership aware of the need for women to support each other in the fight against oppressive patriarchal tendencies. The advice that Onai receives from her mother, Ma Musara, does not help her either. Ma Musara advises Onai not to challenge her husband's people, even after Toro has taken Gari's bank card and chased Onai away with her children. She teaches Onai that a woman must be submissive and accept any form of ill-treatment because she believes that men should never be challenged. From an African feminist reading, while Ma Musara believes that she is helping Onai, she is in fact assisting in the oppression of her own daughter by the patriarchal system.

Women's participation in the oppression of other women is explored in some detail. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, in addition to Onai's mother there are women who are incapable of engaging in solidarity with other women and who in turn work with the patriarchal logic to mock and make other women suffer. Melody is unaffected by the fact that she is having an affair with a married man; in fact, for her it is a matter of survival. Melody tries to blame Chanda's wife for leaving her husband unattended while she was in the United Kingdom. Melody also claims that she would have considered prostitution if it were not for Chanda. Either way, Melody's survival is dependent on men. She says "yes, blame the economy for forcing me into a corner" (p.80). The fact that she is forced into a transactional relationship with Chanda reflects the extent of the psychological violence she has suffered; she does not enter the relationship freely but says she is forced into it: "this is what I have to do not what I want" (p. 80). Melody suggests that she has been left with no other choice than to sell her body in order to survive. However, the author does not present Melody as a passive victim in any way. In fact, this points to her agency. Having weighed her options;

prostitution or one man, even if he is married, she makes a choice she believes is best for her. Links may be drawn between Melody and the women in *Highway Queen* and *Start with Me* who venture into prostitution. They also suffer the psychological trauma of having to give their bodies to men with whom they share no intimacy.

The violence in Onai's life has become a culture as well as a permanent feature. Onai's acceptance of violence is what aggravates her situation. She believes that if her mother had left her father, she and her siblings might have ended up living on the streets, reduced to a life of begging and crime. In the same manner, she stays and feels extremely proud that she is able to do for her children what her mother did for her. For her

This was the essence of a true African woman [...] perseverance in the face of hardship, especially for the children. One always stayed for them (p.7).

This conditioning is born out of traditional stereotypes about the alchemy of marriage. The stereotype leads women like Onai to believe that they can never have a meaningful or respectable existence outside marriage. Here Tagwira's novel echoes the sentiments raised in Lillian Masitera's (2000) *The Trail*, where religion is used to condition women into believing that a woman can only have one of two options in life, getting married or becoming a nun. On the other hand, Onai's decision to continue living with Gari may be viewed as passive resistance; she appears passive yet she has a calculated reason for staying. She remains in the marriage for the simple purpose of ensuring that she and her children have a roof over their heads. Onai's strategy may be read as a clear exemplification of the ability of weak and marginalised individuals to manipulate society (Homaifar 2008); Onai uses Gari to provide her with accommodation.

Countless examples of psychological violence occur in the novel. Onai is traumatised when she realises that Gari has sexual relationships with other women, but she is too frightened to ask him about this. This hesitation is a clear indication of the psychological violence perpetrated on the fearful. Gari forces Onai into conformity by fuelling her fears. Onai is devastated when she discovers that Gari is having an affair with Gloria, "the most infamous of prostitutes" (p.125). For Onai, it is acceptable if Gari assaults her but not if he

has an affair with a prostitute. When Onai discovers the affair she feels “hurt and shame threatened to suffocate her” (p.126). Onai’s resentment of Gloria is largely aroused because Gloria is a prostitute and carries the risk of sickness and disease. Although apparently passive, Onai is enlightened and aware that death through HIV and AIDS is a danger of prostitution. This vivid description of her emotions shows the effect of psychological violence on her soul. More psychological trauma is inflicted when Gari brings Gloria home without warning and announces that he will be taking her as a second wife. Onai reacts by assaulting Gloria, and is beaten up in return by Gari. Onai’s resistance to Gloria’s becoming the second wife in her home reveals her agency in ensuring her good health and long life. This validates Onai’s earlier insistence on Gari using a condom.

A subtle form of psychological violence presented in the novel is the use of threats to enforce conformity. Onai is consistently threatened by Gari to ensure that she stays the line and does not question him. When Onai asks Gari how much he earns she is “threatened with immediate divorce” (p.33). A threat is meant to instil fear. Gari takes advantage of Onai’s financial limitations and knows that she needs to live in his house. His emotional violence is deliberately sustained. Within the context of an economic depression and exorbitant rentals, Gari is fully aware that Onai cannot move out of his house. The state’s clean-up operation that sees the demolition of shacks and unauthorised structures also limits Onai’s options and makes it impossible for her to consider moving (Ngoshi and Zhou 2010). Onai’s predicament mirrors Nancy Fraser’s (1992) observation that the abused woman is aware that if she leaves her partner, she and her children may live in poverty thereafter. Onai’s disillusionment is even more traumatic as she fails to imagine herself ever escaping from “Mbare” while married to Gari. “Mbare” is an urban residential area in Zimbabwe which, in the novel, symbolises hopelessness and an end to life.

Government initiatives like Operation Murambatsvina demonstrate its crude power over the life and death of its citizens. Such acts in the postcolony demonstrate the continued suffering of the marginalised and disadvantaged in Zimbabwe. The novel shows that although both men and women are affected by the institutionalised violence of the state, masked as a clean-up campaign, women suffer most, being as they are perennial dependants on their husbands and always at the mercy of municipal police, politicians and

government, all of whom are presented as male. That men and women have an unequal platform for survival is yet another postcolonial feminist concern that the novel exposes.

Some names of major characters in these novels suggest sub-themes of feminist struggles and the variety of positions taken by these characters. Indigenous names are used by authors to capture specific aspects of a woman's identity in relation to her place in the patriarchal scheme of things. These names carry meaning for African readers who understand the particular language. Scholars discuss the power of language in naming and identity mediation<sup>50</sup>. Masitera, for example, deliberately leaves some of her characters nameless in order to discard them or simply to make them unimportant, while she craftily names the rest to reflect their characterisation. The naming of characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is also deliberate. The name "Onai" means look or see in the Shona language and, as the character epitomises, the name is intended to call upon female readers in a similar predicament to open their eyes and see the need for agency. Demeaning and offensive name calling is a regular form of psychological violence that Onai suffers in both her private and her public life. Gari accuses Onai of giving his television set to her boyfriends and shouts "you whore! *Uri hure!*" (p.9). As if the word "whore" is not insulting enough, he repeats it in the vernacular, Shona. In this language, the word "*hure*" is culturally loaded and more demeaning than the English equivalent.

Humiliation as presented in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is a form of psychological violence. Such humiliation is achieved through words in the language through which culture is transmitted<sup>51</sup>, and Onai in her African-ness is acutely aware of the cultural meaning of the word "*hure*". The use of the word in English and Shona shows the intention behind Gari's attack. He means to hurt Onai and he succeeds. The violence in Onai's domestic life appears cyclical. We are told that "she knew the routine well enough" (p.9). This is the routine she has become accustomed to, yet she always has hope that it will change. Name-

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<sup>50</sup> The use and value of names and their absence has been discussed by many scholars, among them Izevbaye 1981, Andrade 1990, Pfukwa 2003 wa Thiongo 2004 and Ashcroft et al. 2006. Refer to footnote 20 for information on these scholars.

<sup>51</sup> See Ngugi wa Thiongo 1986 for the use of language as a transmitter of culture in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.

calling affects the mind and the soul. It has an impact on the way in which one views oneself and the world around one. Identity issues come into play. All this derogatory name-calling confuses Onai's sense of self and adds to her sense of inadequacy.

The psychological violence in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is one of the reasons for the destabilisation of the family as an institution. It is shown to particularly affect women and children. Ruva's growing resentment of her father is testament to this. The resentment is born out of her father's constant ill-treatment of her mother. Ruva, Onai's eldest daughter, is also psychologically affected by the realisation that her father has failed to protect the family from burglars. Her statement to her mother that "it's three o'clock [...] he should have been here to protect us" (p.4) registers her disappointment. Ruva is damaged further when she sees her mother lying on the floor with blood-stained tears streaming from her eyes after a horrible beating from Ruva's father. At the tender age of sixteen, Ruva is aware of her family's financial situation. After her mother is battered by her father, Ruva realises that her mother should be taken to hospital but she also knows that "her mother [does] not have the cash" (p.11). The child Ruva has been exposed to violence for so much of her young life that she knows what to do when her mother is assaulted. She has suffered a troubled childhood which is in itself a form of psychological violence. We are told that:

anger and despair burned inside her, as they always did after the fights. Anger with her father for his violence, her mother for allowing the situation to continue, and despair because there was absolutely nothing she could do about it except sprint up the street to Maiguru's house after each fight, shrouded by darkness, hounded by imaginary shadows and fearing for her own safety (p.11).

Anger and despair are feelings that resonate with psychological violence. The realisation that she cannot do anything about it shows the "uncertainty of hope" that shadows her psychological well-being. It is equally ironic that Ruva's mother Onai believes that she must remain in her marriage for the sake of her children, while the same children are angry with her for not leaving the marriage. This questioning of the importance of marriage makes clear the need for complementarity in marriage.

Onai's victimisation is traumatic even to her own neighbours as is evident in their dismay when the subject of her situation arises. The trauma experienced by Katy and Faith as a result of witnessing the violence in Onai's life as well as their endless support and understanding of her situation mirrors the type togetherness among women that postcolonial feminism advocates. This togetherness allows the deep commitment to "sisterhood" that postcolonial feminism calls for (Mohanty 1995, 77). The violence in Onai's marriage has become a source of psychological violence for both Katy and John, as well as a cause of disharmony in their own marriage. They blame Onai for continuing to live with an abuser and too often disturbing their nights when she is assaulted. Onai's hopelessness of ever living a better life also affects Katy psychologically. When she says "what do you think this is doing to me" (p.83) it is clear that she is traumatised and fears that Gari will kill Onai. Faith, Katy's daughter, is psychologically debased by Onai's situation, particularly because, as a child, she is prevented by her culture from offering an opinion and she cannot engage Onai directly on the matter. Faith's emotions are illustrated when we are told that "talking about Mainini Onai dampened the general mood and caused the conversation to falter. Faith found herself close to angry tears (p.26)". Just like Ruva and Onai, Faith also feels anger and distress at the violence she sees being meted out to Onai. Even at her tender age her sense of sisterhood and communal oneness is deeply ingrained.

The state, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, is portrayed as male and insensitive to the plight of women and the ordinary citizen. State officials extort, harass and explicitly solicit sexual favours from women who seek the help of the state. This is shown in Onai's predicament at the hands of Boora, the Councillor who tries to take advantage of her situation to extort sex. Boora coerces Onai and expects sexual favours in exchange for helping her get onto the housing list. In fact, he sexually harasses Onai by reaching for her waist and attempting to kiss her against her will. Onai reacts to this harassment by striking him and storming out of his office. In exposing the corrupt government officials, the author reflects the postcolonial feminist unease over the replacement of colonial power and authority by the black man.

Having endured extreme violence from Gari and Toro, with whom she has familial relations, Onai takes a stand and refuses to allow any other man to take advantage of her. Her autonomy and self-respect are under strain as she meets corrupt male officials who want to exploit her desperate need for accommodation. Even after Gari's death, Onai still considers herself married. For her, being a widow is an extension of her marital status and she needs to remain "a respectable woman". Onai's violent reaction to this harassment mirrors the representation in *The African Tea Cosy* of violence being the best way to counter violence. Arndt asserts that "inevitably and in principle, men discriminate against and mistreat women" (Arndt 2002, 34). In both domestic and public spaces Onai is a living example of this discrimination and ill-treatment. The plot of *The Uncertainty of Hope* suggests that, on their own, women cannot fully liberate themselves. It is no coincidence therefore, that towards the end of the novel, Onai experiences a breakthrough in her quest for a better life in the form of a man, Tapiwa Jongwe, who has been hiding his true identity and calling himself Mawaya, the beggar and madman. In exposing unequal gender relations as the chief reason for gender violence, the novel remains acutely postcolonial by maintaining the position that men and women of colour should support each other. More importantly, the novel maintains the position that men are better placed in society and should help women to live better lives.

*The Uncertainty of Hope* presents an exposition of how masculinities are involved in inflicting mental trauma on women. Gari epitomises Mike Donaldson's definition of the hegemonic masculine, who is "exclusive, anxiety provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent" (1993, 645). Gari is portrayed with a monstrosity that is difficult to comprehend. The novel attempts to make a distinction between the characters of Gari, and John who is initially presented initially caring. Onai seems to envy her friend, Kathy for having a caring and sensitive husband and Kathy also believes that her husband is above reproach. This facade of a good husband and a good man is disturbed as the plot of the novel unfolds to reveal John as human trafficker and a criminal who becomes a fugitive from the law. There are explicit constructions of bad men and bad husbands. Tapiwa Jongwe and (Faith's husband)—establish meaningful relationship with women. They are the new men who do not subscribe to the traditional patriarchal ethic and work with women to further female freedom. This is consistent with the African womanist approach in which gender relations are not confrontational. The women too, in their

different pairs – Kathy and Onai, Melody and Faith – demonstrate the importance of sisterly solidarity and John and seems to suggest that John's is the better character in his treatment of and support for women.

More than her husband's violence, Onai's financial neglect and her own financial limitations contribute considerably to her psychological trauma. This is indicated in the panic she experiences when faced with the idea of meeting her family's financial needs. Even as she recovers in hospital after one of Gari's regular beatings, Onai is troubled by how she will make ends meet. Gari neglects his family and fails in his role as provider and head of the family. This means that he deprives his family of their basic human needs (Maslow 1943), food being chief among these. Although shelter is provided, it is only temporary and insecure as it does not belong to Gari. In his usual mood of irresponsibility Gari claims that "his financial responsibilities did not go beyond securing the council rates" (p. 33). Ironically, the house belongs to his parents so he really has no rental to speak of. We are also told that his salary as a section manager at the Cola drinks plant is withheld to prevent his reckless beer drinking. Financial neglect and deprivation are a subtle form of psychological violence. Such behaviour incapacitates one's ability to survive. That Gari is the family head and is on an unequal financial footing with Onai further illuminates the postcolonial concern with how unequal gender relations contribute to women's suffering in the postcolony.

Gari's deliberate deprivation of Onai reflects the imbalances between men and women which privilege men and subdue women. In her book *Understanding wife assault*, Deborah Sinclair (1989) argues that power imbalances underlie all abuse. In a similar way, the inequalities in Onai's marriage are sustained from its inception. Onai considers her role in the family as a complementary and not a competitive one. This is so because she is conditioned to be taken care of and always to have a man as head of the family, although she is the more responsible partner. The imperative to obtain an education for her own empowerment, as illustrated by the other, more successful women in the novel (Faith and Christine), is missing in Onai. Even if this impetus were present, the economy would limit the possibility of her empowerment. Furthermore, because of her maternal obligations, her children's education takes priority. The representation of the role of education in society as

a whole is reflective of the postcolonial feminist understanding that access to education is imperative for women's empowerment.

HIV is presented as one debilitating factor that causes psychological rather than physical harm to Onai. As a result of Gari's philandering, the fear of HIV is uppermost in Onai's mind. This fear is what contributes to the breakdown of her marriage and finally deprives both Onai and her husband of their conjugal rights. In fear of being infected with HIV, Onai denies herself and Gari the sexual satisfaction of a married couple. Sexual deprivation causes psychological trauma in both Gari and Onai. Gari's failure in his African-ness to accept condom use in his marriage is what causes the breakdown of his marriage. In defiance of subservient notions of female sexuality, Onai, like women in *The Trail* and *The Highway Queen*, resists the masculinist notions of sexual pleasure.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, although initially portrayed as the most docile of female characters, Onai devises ways of avoiding unprotected sex with Gari, her drunken womanising husband. She struggles to protect not only her reproductive rights but also her right to have protected sex in a time of HIV/AIDS. This stalemate affects Onai and Gari's mental well-being. We are told that Onai "was consumed by a burning desire to stay alive for her children and stay alive she would" (p.69). Hence, "[s]he crept into bed as soundlessly as possible and lay as far as one could from her husband" (p. 97). Such reluctance to sleep with one's own husband is a sign of extreme abuse. Critical considerations in the light of the couple's dilemma concern the loss of affection in their marriage if sex is critical to marriage and if sex is what consummates marriage<sup>52</sup>. Onai feels "so alone lying next to her husband" (p. 148) and wonders what a woman is supposed to do with a philandering husband when the risk of HIV infection is so real. Onai's insistence on condom use shows her African feminist agency in her own survival and she does survive as a result of this action. Although a wife is expected to be sexually passive, Onai takes control of her sexuality and avoids almost certain infection. This dilemma caused by the question of condom use in the family challenges the marriage institution and

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<sup>52</sup> Scholars such as David Schnarch 1997 Sex, intimacy and the internet, *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy* 22 (1) pp 15–20 and Robert H. Laurer and Jeanette C. Laurer 2004 *Marriage and family: The quest for intimacy*. London, McGraw-Hill have discussed, in some detail, the place of sex in marriage as well as the different interpretations of condom use in marriage.

puts to the test Coward's (2007) argument for the liberating power that condoms have for women. For Onai, condoms may have freed her from HIV infection but they have also destroyed her already dysfunctional marriage.

The economic crisis represents a psychological attack on men by casting their masculinities into a question. Scholars have discussed the vulnerability of African masculinities in changing economic and social times and many concur that African masculinities are in crisis<sup>53</sup>. As a postcolonial feminist writer, Tagwira attempts to show that men are victims, too. The presentation of Hondo's alleged suicide after the demolition of his house shows how men are affected by the economic downturn. *The Uncertainty of Hope* suggests the vulnerability of men to psychological violence inflicted by the state, the same state from which they are unable to protect their families. The postcolonial feminist novel makes the reader fully aware of the victimisation of men but shows, too, that men tend to channel their anger into their treatment of women, who consequently bear the double burden of being female and subordinate. This novel is an attempt to harmonise gender relations by proposing that men ought also to be understood as victims of violence. The disillusionment that arises from this violence is exemplified through the troubled Gari for whom "the whole thing was an outright threat to his manhood. What would happen if he stopped earning a regular salary?" (p. 37). Gari is concerned about his role as provider. Unlike John, however, Gari allows the role to slip through his fingers in his pursuit of personal gratification. Hondo's suicide may be read as men's failure to adapt, and as an erasure of hostile masculinities and those that are unable or unwilling to change. Hondo's failure to adapt is what leads to his death. On another level, his suicide can be viewed as a migration and an escape; speeches at his funeral imply that he has gone to a better, more peaceful place.

After Gari's passing, Onai becomes the responsibility of Toro, Gari's brother. When she tries to explain that she can manage on her own, she is evicted from her home, together with her children. When we are told that; "she shrank backwards when he raised his hand

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<sup>53</sup> Lahoucine Ouzgane and Robert Morrell, eds. 2005 *African masculinities: men in Africa from the late nineteenth century to the present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, and Kizito Muchemwa and Robert Muponde eds. 2007 *Manning the nation: father figures in Zimbabwean literature and society*. Harare: Weaver Press have discussed the notion of masculinities in crisis within African societies.

as if to strike her” (p. 246), it is because Toro has threatened to strike her. Men seem to believe that the only way to manage a woman is through instilling fear in them and behaving in an overbearing manner. Toro, it transpires, is worse than Gari. His wife Shungu is unmoved and cannot wait to move to the city. While Gari at least tolerated Onai, Toro gets rid of her as soon as she questions him. African feminists and postcolonial feminists are particularly interested in denouncing oppressive cultures. In this novel the issue of wife inheritance is exposed, as is economic violence that is virtually psychological. Just as Osrin argues that “economic violence can be defined as property grabbing by male relatives of a deceased man, forced dependency, or neglect of a wife’s material needs” (Osrin 2003, 156), in her postcolonial and African feminist awareness, Onai resists her inheritance by Toro. The result is her eviction. One positive result of her expulsion, however, is that it opens new avenues for her to develop her life. That Mawaya, the madman turned sane is the one to offer her salvation without coercion serves to show the possibility of some good being realised in men. It sheds light on the possibility of respectful interactions between men and women. The presentation, too, of Mawaya, apparently insane and later sane, as the only one to rescue Onai underscores the author’s views on the necessity of radical change in the demystification of gender violence.

This chapter has exposed the salient but sometimes imperceptible forms of psychological violence suffered by women at the hands of men, the state and other women, as represented in Valerie Tagwira’s (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope*. The manner in which multiple forces in both the domestic and the public space of a woman’s life work together to create a formidable collective force is examined, and how these bring about psychological violence. The institutional and state controlled imbalances between the genders are the chief agents through which gender violence is perpetrated. As is revealed in this chapter, there are forms of violence that are clearly psychological. Among these are threats, humiliation, belittlement, deprivation, coercion, fear and stress-induced illness. This chapter has demonstrated the agency of the women characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* as well as the means through which they transcend victimisation. Cross-references were made to Lillian Masitera’s (2011) *Start with Me* and Virginia Phiri’s (2010) *Highway Queen*, in which female characters endure similar forms of violence.

Aspects of postcolonial feminism have been engaged with in order to offer an understanding of the novel's representations. What emerges from the analysis is the female characters' awareness of their African-ness as they go about their agency, survival and negotiation with psychological violence. That a woman should be married and bear children is presented as an unchallenged fact in the life of a woman. Thus there is a juxtaposition of a functional marriage (Katy and John's) and a dysfunctional one (Onai and Gari's) in the novel. Even young girls at university are depicted as yearning for marriage so as to become complete human beings. Despite Onai's horrific experience of marriage, not all marriages and relationships are unsuccessful. The representation of marriage emphasises the postcolonial feminists' high regard for marriage and a conscious upholding of all African-ness for the benefit of the woman.

The African feminist preoccupation with the oppression of women by other women is exposed in a satire of unsavoury female relations. This is reflected in the way that Katy is regarded as barren even though she has had a child. The favouring of boy children is challenged through the presentation of Faith, a girl child who is successful and goes to university. The novel's allegiance to African womanism, together with postcolonial feminism, is also fore-grounded. Although the killing of Gari is an extreme act, women who engage in immoral activities suffer disease and death. The novel craftily harmonises most gender relations through Mawaya's rescue of Onai, even though he is not related to her.

## CONCLUSION

The literary text is one such medium that captures the uniqueness of an individual female character's experience and that of the fictional world in which her author places her. Even in the context of the Zimbabwean literary canon, the complexity of women's experiences is evident through the different representations made in texts written by different women writers. The texts analysed in this study, Lillian Masitera's *The Trail* (2000), Virginia Phiri's *Highway Queen* (2010), Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), attest to the complexity of female experience and the need to resist generalisations in literary representations. Although gender-based violence and female marginality exist throughout the world, the representations made in these texts show that the specificities of history and culture account largely for the differences. My analyses also show that writing and thinking about third world women, although establishing common ground and possible areas of solidarity amongst women based on shared experience, tends to expose further differences between and amongst them. My analysis of the texts by Lillian Masitera, Virginia Phiri, Violet Masilo and Valerie Tagwira has demonstrated the dynamics of how violence and resistance are shaped by specific cultural contexts and ideological forces. The texts I have analysed deal with dissident femininities that seek self-definition beyond the limitations of an unreformed patriarchy. The complexity of female characters' experiences of gender violence has been exposed and it has been shown that women characters are agents more than they are victims

Chapter one of this thesis has provided an outline of postcolonial feminism as it informs this study. The outline has also provided some history of the development of postcolonial feminism from western feminism and postcolonialism. The chapter has also given the context within which all other African feminisms are viewed as versions of postcolonial feminisms. The thesis in its postcolonial outlook is largely informed by the critical standpoints presented in African feminism and African womanism. Chapter two of this study has provided an analysis of the physical violence in Lillian Masitera's *The Trail*. The discussion of this chapter was guided mainly by African feminism as a strand of postcolonial feminism and it dealt with female characters who manage to carve their own spaces amidst the physical violence and restrictive patriarchal dominance in their lives.

Through radical mass action and the support of men like Nyasha and enlightened mothers and sisters, Lindiwe and the other girls at St Charity's High School are able to influence the school authorities to revise the curriculum and rules. The girls strike a balance between being independent and being "true" African women, on their own terms. The deep-rootedness of gender ideologies is exposed and engaged with, and women's complicity in gender violence is partially redressed as older women are seen to support younger girls in their quest for fulfilment. The girls develop a sisterhood and, through the strike, support each other and stand up to abuse, instead of being helpless spectators of their own suffering. This representation of sisterhood reflects the collective agency of women in releasing themselves from the plague of gender violence and oppression. Education in *The Trail* is elevated as being key to women's emancipation. It is seen to open new avenues of perception and survival. In keeping with African feminist advocacy of self-fulfilment, education is given a high priority in a woman's life, ahead of marriage and childbearing. Nevertheless, in pursuance of a typically African feminist agenda, the novel makes it clear that after attaining a good education, a woman should marry and have children if she is to be complete. The gender question is delicately handled, as the novel presents girls at school with no boys to lead or influence them. This representation of girls as equally rebellious and insightful as boys, debunks the myth of the superiority of sons. If anything, girl children are shown to be better organised and able to achieve better results than boys.

The focus of Chapter three has been on precarious women in *Highway Queen*. Subtle forms of sexual violence were revealed, including rape, coercion, manipulation, name calling, the refusal by clients to pay for services rendered, the wilful spread of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, use of addictive substances to dis-empower the victim and the tendency among parents to benefit from the prostitution of their young daughters. In its depiction of women the novel reflects Rudo Gaidzanwa's images of women as mothers, wives, divorcees, widows, single, jilted and prostitutes (Gaidzanwa 1985). The author goes a step further, however, by analysing the humanity of the prostitute as well as the complexities of the practice of prostitution for the African woman who is also mother and wife. The female body is a celebrated site of rebellion and survival. The bodies of the female characters in *Highway Queen* are given meaning by society in as much as they are also sources of women's agency. They are acutely aware of their precarious situations. They use but are also used by society. The women maintain their agency by prostituting

themselves despite the known risks, particularly within the culture of patriarchal domination. The study suggests that Western concepts of prostitution are not applicable when analysing prostitution in Africa. The novel cuts across several norms of representation. It is read largely as an African feminist text, in that it ensures and contains the African-ness of its characters as they mediate spaces for their own survival.

In Chapter four I present an exposition and criticism of stereotypes of the passivity of women through introspection into the lives of women characters as mothers, wives, mistresses and prostitutes, hoping in this way to provide a nuanced representation that would be more or less true to life. In contrast to Phiri's representation of prostitute wives and mothers driven by poverty and a loss of options, Masilo's characters are not entirely innocent. Masilo's African womanist use of supposedly "positive" images of women could in fact be constructed otherwise. Masilo goes beyond Phiri and Masitera's characterisations as she is more overt in her articulations, shocking the reader into the reality of the violence that women and girls suffer at the hands of men and tradition. Masilo, in her representation of female characters, takes up Ogunidipe Leslie's challenge posed in *Recreating ourselves: African women and critical transformation*. The novel satisfies Ogunidipe-Leslie's (1994) stipulation that African women writers tell the story of being a woman and describe the world from an African woman's perspective. Indeed Masilo, although presenting the reader with really unconventional female characters, maintains the African-ness of these characters. By African-ness I refer to the characters awareness of the African identity instilled in them by their societies as well as the limitations or otherwise imposed on them by virtue of their race. This is seen through the invoking of the supernatural world to pardon the girls for killing the patriarch (Steve). Through her representations, Masilo is also sure not to romanticise the conditions of women in the postcolony. Concrete realities of the life of an African woman are revealed though with a bias, in my view; the author wishes to force her readers to reflect on the conditioning of behaviour. This is suggested, for example, when Catherine is labelled unmarried because she smokes cigarettes and consumes alcohol. Unlike Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, which focuses on the dilemma of the wife, or Phiri's novel that is focused on the commercial sex worker, Masilo transgresses the norm to consider the humanity and condition of the girlfriend and second wife in her portrayal of Joy, Heather

and Catherine. She presents these women as equals amongst others, who need not be viewed as others, especially by married, widowed or divorced women.

In considering the conditions that lead to gender violence, my study contends that little attention is given to questions of affection. As such, the analysis of emergent sexualities in *The African Tea Cosy* draws the reader's attention to ideas of love. The text complicates the love-power connection. The clash between love and culture or tradition furthers the ambiguity of marriage as an institution in the contemporary Zimbabwean society depicted in the novels. This ambiguity also drives a shaft between the practise of sex in intimacy and sex for ritual or punishment purposes. The description of Mr Malakwena's attempted rape of his daughter leaves the reader with many questions about the performance of African sexualities and masculinities under the obligations of tradition and culture. That Malakwena should be assaulted by his sons is a rejection of rigid African masculinities and sexualities that are violently enacted. Through characters like Malakwena, society has been turned into a site where men no longer respect familial relationships. Attention is also drawn to the binary between intimacy and sustained relations. Marriage is key cultural area in Masilo's novel, along with wifely duty and motherhood, at one extreme and fatherhood and being a husband at the other. The "centrality of motherhood" (Ogunyemi 1985, 64) in African womanist/feminist texts remains unchanged.

Masilo challenges Gaidzanwa's view of the precariousness of single city women and the promiscuity associated with them (1985). The female characters in *The African Tea Cosy* are either promiscuous or adventurous but certainly not submissive or docile. The agency of the different female characters is made unambiguous to the reader. It exposes issues of class among women. Transgressive behaviours of female characters are put under the spotlight to expose society's perceptions of them and in a bid to show the individuality of experience. Sexual liberty is presented as transgressive in the novel, since it resists the norm of faithfulness and sexual passivity. The deliberate infection of men with HIV by women and vice versa is an offshoot of this sexual freedom and confluence of sexualities. Rape is also presented as transgression, as is homosexuality. The representations in the novel conform to the view that Shona masculinity is placed in contraposition to femininity by giving an active and aggressive role to men and a passive accommodating one to

women (Chimhundu 1995). Although sex is a site for the performance or failure of manhood, the practice of homosexuality is presented as an excessive sexuality that also points to men's attempts to domesticate other men in the cultivation of super-masculinities. The qualification of masculinities according to virility is taken to extremes. Although the novel presents homosexual relationships as less turbulent than heterosexual ones, the novel rejects the practice by killing one homosexual partner and incarcerating the other. On the other hand, emergent femininities are aggressive, calculating, strong-willed with the agency to resist gender violence and to survive.

In Chapter five, gender violence is explored in both the domestic and the public sphere. In the post-2000 Zimbabwean informal economy that has emerged as the means of survival for many characters, especially women, the state is portrayed as male and insensitive to the plight of women and the ordinary citizen. State officials, who are mainly male, extort, harass and explicitly solicit sexual favours from women who seek the help of the state. This is shown in the novels of this study in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, particularly through Onai's predicament at the hands of the nameless councillor who tries to take advantage of her situation to extort sex. In *Highway Queen*, Sophie is harassed by state officials and has her wares taken away. In exposing corrupt government officials, the authors reflect the postcolonial feminist unease over the replacement of colonial power and authority by the black man. Such replacement implies the continued suffering of the black woman in the postcolony at the hands of fellow blacks. In an emblematic African feminist act, Onai snubs the councillor and refuses to be taken advantage of. Although this courage means that she forfeits the house she desperately needs, it foregrounds the agency required by African feminists in women's resistance to oppression.

In addition to the extreme forms of domestic violence that the female characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* suffer, the state is presented as a rogue contributor to an already difficult female existence. Operation Murambatsvina, or the clean-up campaign, as depicted in the novel, reveals the dangers of a patriarchal state. Tagwira's novel offers interesting explorations into how sisterhood and women's solidarity offer security to women in a world of mutually reinforcing domestic and public patriarchal practices. Women's sisterhood and solidarity enable characters like Onai and Katy to stay alive.

Their ability to survive is complemented by the work of men like Tapiwa Jongwe who do not enter into exploitative relationships with women. Tapiwa Jongwe's act of contrition can be read as furthering the postcolonial feminist agenda where the importance of women is acknowledged. In contrast to old women such as Onai's mother, who are prisoners of their cultural past, the new women in the novel question and reject the imprisoning and violent aspect of the traditional institution of marriage.

Each of the novels discussed in this study embraces the importance of location in understanding women's suffering in the postcolony. The responses of these women to the gender constructions of violence give a special meaning to agency, sexuality, female rights and freedoms, not as they are understood in the West but within a particular African context, thus critiquing what Chandra T. Mohanty says about the third world woman being "a singular monolithic subject" (Mohanty 1988, 61). A distinctively non-Western kind of feminism is expressed in these Zimbabwean texts, one that is conscious of the peculiarities of Africa womanhood and one that observes as central; the need for harmony between African men and African women and marriage and childbearing although forgiving and accommodating of widowed, divorced, single and barren women. The embracing of a non western feminism is evidenced in the representations of the selected texts of this study. Thus, the feminist agendas and pursuits of these texts are not inconsistent with motherhood and the need for family.

Although marriage and motherhood place constraints on the freedom of women, they also push women to seek new ways of experiencing and thinking about these institutions as necessary facts of existence. The centrality of marriage and family explains why Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope* is reluctant to fully espouse the kind of agency that would jeopardise her marriage and the little security that it offers to her children, despite the trauma that she suffers as a result of domestic violence. This also explains why Sophie in *Highway Queen* resolves to remain in a dysfunctional marriage with a man who is now disabled and assume the provider role that is traditionally meant to be her husband's. In their cultural and historical contexts, the texts in this study reflect the tentativeness of their explorations of female identities. This is achieved through the presentation of different

female characters with different experiences who respond differently to different circumstances.

The texts in this study portray the importance of sisterly solidarity in women's struggles in both the domestic and the public spheres of women's lives. This is illustrated in the many paired relationships in *The Trail* (Lindiwe and Lucy), *The African Tea Cosy* (Catherine, Heather, Joy and Anne), *Highway Queen* (Sophie, Joyce, Selina and Kate) and the *The Uncertainty of Hope* (Onai and Katy, Faith and Melody). Apart from sisterly solidarity, the texts also show women escaping their victimisation with the help of men who do not subscribe to traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity. We find examples of this new type of man in *The Trail* (Nyasha), *The African Tea Cosy* (Charles), *Highway Queen* (Andy) and *The Uncertainty of Hope* (Tapiwa Jongwe-Mawaya). This acknowledgement of alternative masculinities shows a departure by the novelists from mainstream feminist notions of difference and confrontation as articulated in western feminist theory and western feminist literary texts.

In the selected texts in this study, although it is clear that men are largely the perpetrators of gender violence and the main creators of gender discord in both public and domestic spaces, it is just as clear that there are some men who practise a version of masculinity that is sympathetic to the concerns of women. With a typically African womanist disposition, these new men provide hope for a radical reconsideration of African masculinities and the concerted reconstruction of Zimbabwean masculinities and femininities. This has been shown for instance in *Highway Queen*, when Andy assists Sophie to find goods for resale, by so doing he helps her to make an honest living and to fend for her family. In *The Trail*, Nyasha is determined to provide his sister with a good education, to empower her and make her a better person. Although the title of Valerie Tagwira's novel *The Uncertainty of Hope* seems to downplay the waning of a culture of gender violence and the tyranny of traditional patriarchy, indeed its plot offers an astonishing narrative of hope, escape from danger and improved gender relations. Thereby, the narrative departs from and develops beyond the usual scenarios of sexual predation and partner battering. At the close of the novel, although Onai, in an emblematic African womanist manner, escapes the multiple tyrannies of poverty, traditional patriarchy and the urban slum, her story is an isolated one.

I believe this is deliberate on the part of the novelist who may have intended to magnify the success of the plot through isolation. The narrative of hope is offered here as solace to the generality of women who are trapped in the cycle of despair across class and educational divides. It points to the possibility of a reconstruction of feminist politics and practice in Zimbabwe, not only in the context of female solidarity but also of improved inter-gender relations where women and men work and live together in harmony.

In what I perceive as an escape from elitist gender politics and struggles, the texts discussed in this study tackle subjects that are considered taboo in a strongly patriarchal post-2000 Zimbabwean society. They deal with postcolonial feminist concerns, and particularly an African feminist concern with providing a positive representation of the lives of stigmatised women: prostitutes, unmarried mothers and single women who are generally regarded as rebellious women in society. The novelists in this study are careful to present the female body as a site of and resource for survival. Hence, they deal with the female characters' use of their bodies to survive. Virginia Phiri in *Highway Queen* presents women who lead precarious lives in uncertain times. Her novel is a celebration, exploration and de-stigmatisation of the prostitute. It dispels many popular myths regarding prostitution, in particular that it is born out of outright deviance. It also exposes the violence that women encounter within the trade. The prostitutes in *Highway Queen* and *The Uncertainty of Hope* and the girlfriends in *The Uncertainty of Hope* attest to the problems that are experienced by the underclass in the post-2000 Zimbabwean postcolony; the need to survive in an unequal and unforgiving society is so compelling that prostitution has become a lucrative, though socially unacceptable, profession. Although Yvonne Vera deals with single women struggling to make a living in the city, she does not specifically deal with the stark poverty of the underclass as it is depicted in these marginalised texts.

A critical African feminist concern that resonates through all four novels discussed in this study is that of the empowerment of women and the part that education plays in their socialisation and conditioning. In a strange deployment of spatial politics and power, girls in *The Trail* suffer from the complicit actions of their parents, the colonial order and Christian missionaries. The text is about the neo-colonial school system as it violently uproots black girls from indigenous space and immerses them in alien spaces where their

sense of African womanhood is erased. The making of a domesticated, Christianised and Europeanised womanhood is rejected by these female adolescents. The kind of education offered by the German nuns is thus a type of violence that smothers the indigenous identities and sexualities of African girls. Although this negative aspect of neo-colonialist education is foregrounded, the text reflects the inconsistency of Western education as this the author also suggests that it is a tool for the liberation for women. Education is also lauded in *The African Tea Cosy*, through the contrasting of the novel's four protagonists, Anne, Heather, Catherine and Joy. Anne, the best educated of the four, is less reliant on men, less vulnerable to gender violence and better able to take care of herself. Anne is able to take care of herself as she is gainfully employed in a conventional organisation. I use the word conventional to differentiate between her work and sex work. This belief in the efficacy of Western education is, however, questioned in *The Uncertainty of Hope* where Melody, a university student, tests this redemptive aspect of education, getting everything she needs from generous men.

This thesis opens up opportunities for further research into literary representations of gender violence from different perspective such as though white and non-black female writing in Zimbabwe. Further research may also be carried out in terms of identity mediation of whites and other non-black Zimbabwean writing, where representations are made of white women who are virtually indigenous Zimbabweans who face gender violence at various levels. Another possible area for research is to analyse postcoloniality of the white authored post-independence Zimbabwe. Perhaps African feminists in their feminist articulations could re-think the racial concerns in dealing with women of western origin and other white or non-black women's challenges in the postcolony.

I conclude the thesis by observing that when writing about the work of living writers, some in the early phases of their writing career, it is not only difficult to map the trajectory of their work but also ill-advised to offer definitive conclusions regarding their aesthetic achievement. The novelists discussed in this study, Lillian Masitera, Virginia Phiri, Violet Masilo and Valerie Tagwira, have all made their mark on Zimbabwe's literary canon. By taking the brave step to write about women, these authors have focused on the contestation that forms the main focus of postcolonial feminist theory, that is to enforce a what Prakash

(1992) describes a re-formulation of perceptions about women, by others (men, governments, societies and the West). In other words, through the act of writing, the authors are able to 'distil their own brew' by telling a story of their own, they offer alternative social identities to those imposed on black women. The very nature of writing is a contestation of known discourse(s). Writing back is what shapes postcolonial feminism, whose tenets these novelists have enacted. As exemplified in this study, the politics of writing back to the imperial centre is a complex one that involves diverse groups, including women as mothers, wives, prostitutes, girlfriends, single, jilted or divorced, who are usually missing from the agendas of nations, regions, continents and that amorphous category, the third world. The imperial centre, that the women writers are writing back to is, in this context, that of men as cultural colonialists.

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