

**SHIFTING IDENTITIES: REPRESENTATIONS OF SHONA WOMEN
IN SELECTED ZIMBABWEAN FICTION**

By

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Declaration

I, Josephine Muganiwa student number 5764-6619 declare that “Shifting Identities: Representations of Shona Women in selected Zimbabwean Fiction” is my own work and that all the 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.....30/01/2019

Dedication

To my son
Emmanuel Tinotenda Muganiwa
And my father
Philemon Hohloka Sithole
My best cheer-leaders promoted to glory!
To the Almighty who saw me through it all!

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Abstract

This thesis uses a postcolonial framework to analyse the construction and representation of identities of Shona women in selected black and white Zimbabwean-authored fiction in English published between 1890 and 2015. The study traces meanings associated with Shona women's identities as ascribed by dominant powers in every epoch to create narratives that reflect the power dynamics. The thesis argues that identities are complex, characterized by various intersections such as race, gender, class and ethnicity. Shona women have to negotiate their identities in various circumstances resulting in shifting multiple identities. The thesis focuses on how such identities are represented in the selected texts. Findings reveal that the colonial project sought to write the Shona women out of existence, and when they appeared negative images of dirt, slothfulness and immorality were ascribed to them. These images continued after independence to justify male dominance of women. However, the lived experience of women shows they have agency and tend to shift identities in relation to specific circumstances. Shona women's identities are dynamic and multifarious as they aim at relevance in their socio-economic and political circumstances. Representations of Shona women's identities are therefore influenced by the aim of the one representing them. All representations are therefore arbitrary and must be interrogated in order to deconstruct meaning and understand the power dynamics at play. The works analysed are Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950), Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993), Cythia Marangwanda's *Shards* (2014), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* (2010), Eric Harrison's *Jambanja* (2006), Dangarembwa's *The Book of Not* (2006), Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009).

Key Terms

- Postcolonialism,
- Representation,
- Identity,
- Shona women,
- Hybridity,
- Multiculturalism
- Construction of identity,
- Patriarchy,
- Spirit possession,
- Sexuality
- Feminism
- Stereotypes

Chapter One: Rethinking Representations of Shona Women's Identities

1.1 Background

In 1973, Michael Gelfand wrote a book titled, *The Genuine Shona: Survival Values of an African Culture*. In writing this book, Gelfand was responding to pernicious stereotypes that Rhodesian colonialism used to describe African men and women. These stereotypes that Gelfand sought to subvert ranged from depictions of African people as non-human, savages and assumptions that Africans were a people without history. In addition, in the Western imaginary, "Africans were characterised as unintelligent and instinctual creatures and they were also thought to possess a great deal of physical and sexual prowess" (Beoku-Betts, 2005: 20). If in colonial writings, Africans did exist in a space of non-being, the same Africans could also be represented as noble savages. Such characterisations needed to be questioned because the consequence of not doing so, is to cement a view that Africans are slightly more than wild animals. This depiction influenced colonial policies in which Africans were exploited and dealt with the way one would deal with dangerous wild animals.

However, in attempting to correct the images of African people that had been authorised by colonialism and also by African patriarchy, critics tend to oversimplify. For example, Gelfand ended up creating a more harmful idea that there are some Shona people who could be described as "genuine". This belief that belies the thesis of his book forces one to raise the question as to what constitutes "genuine" Shona identities. One is also bound to ask whether or not there are Shona people who are "fake" or "ungenuine". It is true that Gelfand (1973: 45) states that the

Shona do not call themselves Shona. They are called the Shona because they speak one or other of the dialects of what linguists call Shona cluster of Bantu languages. These groups include the Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, Korekore and Ndau people.

This correct understanding shows that nobody is born a Shona person. It is through cultural socialisation that one can become Shona. However, in Gelfand's work, this view of identities as socially constituted is contradicted by a residual essentialisation that carries the sense in his mind that implies that Shona is *a* biological identity. This ambiguity in Gelfand's description of the Shona people, therefore, needs to be interrogated because it also attempts to fix the identities of Shona people, and in its undecidedness, ends up claiming unique cultural traits for

Shona people. These misrepresentations hurt African people in general and African women in particular. This is so because in colonial scholarship, embedded western attitudes towards African women were similarly negative in nature.

Beoku-Betts observes that “stereotyped as the weaker sex, women as passive, unintelligent, limited in interests and understanding, and as such they were seen fit only for the subservient domestic roles of wives and mothers” (2005: 24). Furthermore, writing about African women, Winwoode Reade said “women of Africa are very inferior beings, their virtue vis their affection and their industry are those of well-trained domestic animals” (1987: 426). In Rhodesia, Micheal Bourdillon’s (1976) ethnographic studies focused on the roles and positions of Shona women and their identities in the Shona society. He states that he hoped his study would help the whites in Rhodesia understand their black compatriots while acknowledging that the study has loopholes. In his studies of the Shona people, Bourdillon says;

I have been surprised at how often the Shona themselves are unaware of differences between people from different localities. Since there is a basic cultural and linguistic similarity between all Shona, people from one part of Shona country find themselves readily able to fit into communities elsewhere, often without noticing significant differences in custom and social organisation. And here, perhaps, lies a second fault of this book: often I have had to generalise to the extent of obscuring local variations and characteristics, and often I have described one community in detail, perhaps falsely giving the impression that my description applies to all Shona everywhere. When traditional local variations are reinforced by different reactions to the various changes brought about by nearly a century of white settlement, generalisations about the Shona people as a whole must be taken with caution. (Bourdillon 1976:10)

In Bourdillon’s patronising views, “the Shona themselves are unaware of differences” in “custom and social organisation” and the “local variations and characteristics” amongst themselves. The discourse that describes one social group as lacking self-knowledge is colonialist; it implies that those who think they know what Shona people do not know about themselves can assist the Shona people to know themselves. The authority with which colonialist scholars claim to know the native is a form of silencing the voice of the native.

Edward Said wrote that for colonialism and dominant cultures of empire the act of knowing the natives is based on “making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (1978: 3). In this view language is used by colonial masters as an implement of restructuring, and dominating the natives through ascribing identities that have nothing to do with the lived identities of Africans. In Rhodesia, the concept of Shona

women as subordinate to their men on one hand, and as inferiors of Europeans is a reworking of the images of Shona women as occupying a thin line between human and animal. Shona women have been represented as a sub-human species given to idleness, and when portrayed through the imagery of animality, Shona women are depicted as controlled by an unbridled desire for sexual licence.

Elizabeth Schmidt (1992), who has traced the deliberate re-construction of traditional identities of Shona women, shows the negative influence of perceptions of Shona women in the colonial era. Despite the fact that the constructions of Shona womanhood are as much invented and fictional, Shona women continue to be ascribed negative identities. In the colonial period, representing Shona women through negative imagery was meant to enable both the colonial and indigenous patriarchy to subordinate women. According to Shorey and Wickelgren (2009), the Judeo-Christian institution brought to the colonies “imposed a conviction of male supremacy and superiority on women who sought empowerment from oppression and spoke of these women as witches or sexual consorts of the devil”. These stereotypes of women continue to be used to understand female agency in history books, art, social life and fiction. The identities that Shona women are forced to conform to relate to the Victorian model in which women’s were confined to the home and private space. In addition, the vocabulary through which Shona women came to be known by colonial administrators was that they were victims of their men, ‘harlots’, immoral, and representing danger as opposed to rural purity. Furthermore, Shona women were ascribed identities that signified them as “dirty, dangerous, unnatural, sinful and threatening” (Breitinger, 1994:175).

The disregard of the humanity of the Shona women and the marker of their marginalisation in a colonial and Shona patriarchal society is further captured by Schimdt (1992). She writes that in the Rhodesian colonial context, a white man who raped a black woman could pay a fine and that a black man who raped a black woman could be jailed. In the above claim, there is differential allocation of violence performed by both white and the black men on the Shona woman. In addition, the punishment for Shona women whose behaviour was viewed as transgressive sought to undermine the dignity of Shona women. The lightness of the punishment for white and black men who desecrated the body of the Shona woman points to the politics of collusion by colonial masters and African men to control the sexuality of Shona women.

Fortunately, these views that represent women as congenital simpletons have now begun to be rejected by scholars who have researched on the status of African women in colonial and post colonial patriarchal societies. For example, Sudarkasa (1986) distinguishes women's status and roles, arguing that status refers to a particular position occupied by women, whereas role refers to ascribed behaviour appropriated to a given status. From this perspective, women's identities can exist outside and within the confines of domesticity. Women can be fighters as well as loyal to some patriarchal ideologies. There are also "female husbands" and "male daughters" (Amadiume, 1987). Furthermore, the concept of woman is complicated by new identities of "male lesbians", and of "men who seek men" in transactional homosexual relations that permit to reconfigure the notion of woman in ways that "challenges dominant cultural discourses about gender and sexualities" (Gaudio, 2005: 47). We need to be able to critically explain these representations when they creep into Zimbabwean literature in order to promote a culture of tolerance and enhance the notion of national inclusivity. This view is based on the idea that what defines identities within a nation is the heterogeneity of representing heterogeneous identities. In Rhodesia, now postcolonial Zimbabwe, while there might be common cultural beliefs of the Shona people as an ethnic group, there are different perceptions amongst Shona people of what it is to be a Shona woman. This means that what constitutes the "Shona-ness" of a Shona woman is a product of socialisation and the striated levels where this shifting concept is lived, experienced and performed is also a response to ideological pressures brought to bear on the women described as Shona.

Unfortunately, certain kinds of gender fixing are still evident in colonial literature and in African indigenous languages, and such images have persisted to date as labels for women acting outside the officially approved boundaries. Patricia McFadden (1999) argues that in real life the process of challenging African male's stereotypes of Shona women is not easy. It implies that the Shona women have to negotiate gender relations in Africa characterised by hostile forces in the postcolonial context. According to Mcfadden (2003), gender identities are largely influenced by dominant socio-political views which are patriarchal and heterosexual. Women operating outside these premises are labelled dangerous, prostitutes, witches, and sloathful. Shona women are also censured for occupying certain prohibited cultural spaces that are considered as male domains such theatre, politics, army, and professional arts. It is in this way that Shona women have invited and acquired the appellation of being viewed as loose and dangerous when ever they intended to reveal their multiple talents, qualities and identities (Chitauro et al, 1994).

This study critically interrogates the construction of identities of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction as authorised in colonial discourses and also as understood by African patriarchy. The debate on the representations of “Shona women”, which is the focus of this study, acknowledges that colonialism and globalisation affected Shona people in general, and Shona women in particular. Unfortunately, in Zimbabwean fiction by white and black authors in Zimbabwe, these images of Shona women as degenerate people persist. This study therefore, seeks to interrogate the motivations for representing Shona women in negative terms. In addition, the ambiguities underlining the shifting representations of what it is to be a woman in the first place, and a Shona woman in the second place have been underestimated in the criticism of Zimbabwe’s fiction in English. Thus, the main task of this study is to investigate the nature of the constructed identities of Shona women. Zimbabwean fiction in English is a cultural site where the identities of Shona women are stereotyped negatively. In the creative interstices of Zimbabwean fiction images of Shona women are also constantly revised. This study, seeks therefore, to investigate the different ways through which authors attempt to shift the ideological and discursive terms by which Shona women’s identities are being fictionally revised.

The study problematises the descriptor “Shona women” and then critically examines representations of Shona women to establish whether or not the identities of Shona women are only those of vulnerable beings or also of strong people who can challenge the existing stereotypes used to suppress the woman’s potential. The ideological thrust of this study is that Shona women are not a homogeneous social group. Shona women react differently to attempts at controlling them, physically or through the imposition of economic and cultural pressures. The study also argues that narratives that construct images of Shona women are diverse and the identities they ascribe to these Shona women have been challenged by Shona women themselves. In order to demonstrate these arguments, this study will critically analyse selected Zimbabwean fiction written by white and black authors. The novels that have been selected for this study are: *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), *The Grass is Singing* (1950), *Nehanda* (1994), *Shards* (2014), *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2008), *The Book of Not* (2006), *Jambanja* (2006), *The African Tea Cosy* (2010), *Running with Mother* (2012) and *Harare North* (2009).

1.2 Statement of Problem

Shona women are named through negative identities. Although Zimbabwean fiction in English has tended to challenge these identities, stereotypes of Shona women persist in some of the fiction written by white and black authors. There is no critical work that comprehensively analyses images of Shona women as depicted by white, black, male and female authors under one study. Rudo Gaidzanwa (1985) focuses on images of women created by black male authors in fiction in Zimbabwe. The critic's works suggest that for Shona women to write themselves could be a way of controlling cultural space where they could reconfigure their own identities the way women understood themselves. This assumption might be correct but not in all creative contexts; in fact such a view contains a residual essentialist idea which seems to imply that if Shona women wrote creative works of art, they would necessarily depict Shona women in a positive light. In addition, Gaidzanwa is correct to say that images are not immutable and that it is up to writers and people to contest the negative images and to redefine them in ways that they deem more realistic, constructive and liberating to the society in question. However, the critic does not discuss any Zimbabwean writer who she thinks might create positive images of Shona women. This gives the wrong impression that in Zimbabwe, there are no authors who have written fiction in ways that produced images that could empower Shona women to reclaim their suppressed identities. There is need to interrogate the consequences of representing Shona women through stereotypes. This can enable one to explain the biased social policies that attempt to naturalise certain roles for women. Beyond, critiquing the modalities through which dominant social groups construct and represent Shona women, this study is motivated by the desire to explore the subjectivities of these Shona women as represented by white and black male and female authors. Literature is a weapon for liberation.

Zimbabwean critics have also tended to analyse the role of Shona women using the cultural prism of nationalism, which also prescribes roles for women in order to silence these Shona women. There is need to adopt eclectic theories that have the capacity to reveal that Shona women can author counter narratives that reflect their multiple and independent identities. This study uses some versions of postcolonial theories to understand how ascribed identities can silence the voices of Shona women. Postcolonial theory might also assist in manifesting alternative cultural sites where positive identities that image Shona women as strong can be performed. This argument follows Lang's (2000:51) view that "by definition there must be a difference between a representation and its object unrepresented, with the former adding its own version to the 'original' it represents". This means there is no one version of any object

that is represented in fiction. To the extent that fiction uses images and metaphors that suggest meanings by association in specific contexts, the ethic of image and metaphor is to invite multiple interpretations. This study demonstrates this view that advances the argument that an individual character's identities are fluid and influenced by various contexts. A Shona woman can be a daughter, mother, wife, employee, employer, foreigner, leader, and each identity requires a different performance. This study also draws from Judith Butler's idea of acquiring new identities as "performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. [so that] in its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (1988: 520). This theory suggests that performance of these identities implies artifice, and improvising so that identities are neither neutral nor static.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this study is to critically interrogate the representations of the Shona woman in selected Zimbabwean fiction.

1.4 Research Questions of the Study

This study is based on four questions which are;

- What are the manifestations of the identities of "Shona-ness" ascribed to Shona women in selected Zimbabwean fiction by white and black authors?
- Which creative directions are the shifting identities of Shona women taking as depicted in Zimbabwean fiction?
- What are the ideological implications underlying the representations of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction?
- To what extent does form/genre influence the representations of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction?

1.5 Research Objectives

By the end of the study it is hoped that the

- Representations of identities of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction are critically analysed.
- Artistic and ideological directions that the shifting identities of Shona women's representations are taking are critiqued.
- Consequences of interpreting representations of Shona women are evaluated.

1.6 Justification and Scope of the Study

This study is premised on Musvoto's (2010) observation that identities are ever shifting, contestable, malleable, and subject to power dynamics. This is due to the fact that all narratives are constructions resulting from social and historical practice rather than naturalistic. The construction of identities is "made to mean something by the process of signification and representation" (Hall, 1984:9). Although Afrocentric scholars argue for a homogeneous African culture, reactions to various social and economic challenges by Shona women vary from one individual to the collective group due to different personalities and other markers of identity albeit within the same culture. Therefore, the experiences and identities of women cannot be universalised on the basis of sharing a cultural signifier such as "Shona". This study argues that identities are symbolical tropes through which individuals negotiate the dialogical meanings that constitute their multiple selves. Fictional works of art use images and metaphors to represent human identities. The materiality of metaphors is their capacity to suggest more than one meaning; metaphors can be re-signified to subvert negative images ascribed to people that dominant groups might consider weak.

The selected texts represent the construction of Shona women from the period of colonial conquest (1890) through to the post-2000 land reform. The study takes into cognisance Adichie's (2009) warning on the dangers of a single story. This speaks to the danger of accepting stereotypes that are gradually built by consistent images that focus on one aspect of a people while denying other forms of representations.

Cynthia Marangwanda, the author of *Shards*, comments that she was motivated to write her story because she failed to see her middle-class experiences in the existing texts that either spoke of rural or ghetto experiences. This study then includes texts across the social classes. Existing studies on Zimbabwean literature in English focus on women in general (Berndt, 2005), or discuss specific aspects of women's perdition under men or human agency through their uncontrollable imagination. Chitando (2012) focuses on the depiction of women in relation to HIV & AIDS and notes that women are generally blamed for the disease or projected as helpless victims. Chitando's study selects female writers and reveals that they do not have a similar understanding of gender and neither do they represent gender relations in similar ways. This research includes male authors to analyse how gender relations affect the construction of

Shona women's identity in various circumstances, including HIV & AIDS as a contemporary challenge.

McFadden's (1992) work on sexualities includes a discussion on how representations of Zimbabwean womanhood and activism are premised on heteronormative notions at the exclusion of other sexual orientations such as lesbians, gays, transgender and bisexuals. These transformations in the sexual identities that women can adopt means that there is no longer one way with which to understand the notion of identities of Shona women. This is why Christiansen (2013) shows that even within heteronormative relationships there are further divisions of women based on respectability in marriage in the cultural nationalist narrative. The concept of male daughters and female husbands also challenges the notion of a single understanding of the identities of Shona women. In light of these complications of the identities designated and ascribed as the identity of being a Shona woman, this study engages the figure of Shona women described as "deviant". The study argues that ascribing negative values to the identities of most Shona women reveals the fear of strong Shona women that colonial masters and African patriarchy shared. Furthermore, Weiss (2004) argues that despite the fact that homosexuality is abhorred in some African cultures, some Shona women in Dangarembga's works exhibit homoerotic desire along a continuum, though it may not expressly be called lesbianism. These dimensions in the identities of Shona women remain unexplored in academia partly because these identities considered unAfrican are sometimes viciously suppressed in the public sphere by government officials.

Boltz (2007) writes on women as artists in contemporary Zimbabwe and argues that the act of writing is a direct challenge to nationalist narratives that exclude or understate the potential contributions to society of Shona women's agency. This is despite the fact that the women who express their own aspirations through self-representation appear to speak against inherited symbolic languages of gender. In other words, transgressive women seek to reclaim cultural space and demand to be included as citizens and not as subject in the nation, and they seek to do so on their own terms (Bolts, 2007:76, 283). As argued above, it is important to be awake and not promote the essentialising assumption that when women write they always do so in terms that promote the freedom of all women. It is possible that non-nationalist narratives by males might manifest more nuanced representations of roles that men and women perform in contexts of gender politics. In light of this view, this study includes an analysis of novels written by white and black men. To argue in this manner is not to willfully reproduce the political

unconscious that motivates even the most benign men to manifest tendencies that attempt to control Shona women's sexuality.

This is why this study also argues that it cannot totally be disregarded that being a female author might allow one to access certain subjectivities closed to male writers. However, this fact does not necessarily mean that the ideas expressed in all narratives by women are positive and seek to rehabilitate Shona women's identities that have been distorted by colonialism and men's rule over women.

1.7 Literature Review

Zimunya's (1982) critical work claims that there is a strong sense of the presence of serious African fiction in English in Zimbabwe. He argues that the importance of the novel is to clear up historical fallacies as

the individual artist is preoccupied in bringing a people's past into sharp focus in order the more to mirror, interpret and comprehend the prevailing national, racial, or for that matter, human situation. Inherent in this is also a quest for heroic values, human faith, pride and dignity, and reassertion of identity with the living past (Zimunya, 1982:9).

Zimunya highlights the function of literature, which for him is to interrogate historical narratives through creating alternative stories. He is supported by Zhuwarara (2001) who shows how traditional Shona cultural values are challenged, contradicted and sometimes reaffirmed in the representations of women in Zimbabwean literature in English by Mungoshi, Dangarembwa, Vera and Hove.

However, Zhuwarara notes the ironic narrative voice that seems to affirm the traditional narrative yet that voice exposes the inadequacy of male-authorised identities that they ascribe to Shona women. In addition, this point is picked up by Drew Shaw (2005) who introduces the need to analyse same-sex transactional relationships amongst Shona people as depicted in Zimbabwean fiction. This critical gaze is important because this study also engages questions of homosexuality in the novel, *The African Tea Cosy*. Such new identities performed by Shona women are often ignored in critical analysis of Zimbabwean literature. And yet, in contemporary times the roles of mother, wife or husband are no longer fixed gender roles as

...there is a growing ambivalence in the concept of gender principally because its definition has moved from biological to social, implying that gender categories are not simply limited to male corresponding to man and female

corresponding to woman, as it was traditionally, but man can now pass for woman and vice versa depending on individual. (Dasi, 2017:115).

There are a number of critical works that specifically focus on the representations of women in Zimbabwean literature in the English, Shona and Ndebele languages (Gaidzanwa, 1985; Mguni et al, 2006). Mguni et al (2006) argue for a cultural revival and retrieval to counter the negative effects of colonialism on the conception and representation of African womanhood as expressed in Zimbabwean literature in indigenous languages. Their emphasis on the complementary role of the sexes is problematic because complementarity does not necessarily entail equality or fairness. This means there is need to reconceptualise what it means to be a Shona woman and fashion new identities that may neither be related to the glorious Shona past, nor the repressive colonial era.

Berndt (2005) focuses on representations of black female artists who are writers and musicians in contemporary Zimbabwe. What the artists have in common is the ability to create images that attempt to dislodge stereotypes in colonial and nationalist discourses. Gunner (1994) demonstrate that such creative artists are abhorred in male discourses in which Shona women subjectivities are described as loose and dangerous. The range of fictional texts that will be analysed in this study can enable one to specifically focus on Shona women. This is important because there is danger of denying Shona women the creation of their context not infiltrated by colonialism and African patriarchy. Therefore, this study acknowledges Shona women's alternative conceptions of sexuality which they aspire to as some of the tropes of identities that are affected by social class and cultural affiliation. The inclusion of male-authored texts can allow for a comparative study aimed at pinpointing how oppressive forces are able to construct enduring but negative identities in their depiction of Shona women.

Maria Bungaro (Veit-Wild & Naguschewski, 2005:50) notes that;

The movement towards more sensitive and interesting portrayals of female subjectivity by male authors is a sign of the way in which the recent African writing is attempting to break away from colonial paradigms and anxieties. Through their vast and colorful tableaux figures (market women, wives, mothers, healers, prophetesses, leaders and prostitutes), earlier African writers illustrated the tormenting world of the double-self, with its plenitude of anxieties and alienation. These female characters, if taken as the embodiments of "things African", are at their best intriguing examples of the alienated being torn by a sense that old, well-known practices and ideals are progressively disintegrating.

The above quotation points to a shift in the portrayal of women as individuals with distinct processes of identity-formation rather than mere symbols within a nationalist discourse. This means that the social roles highlighted become part of the individual's narrative. Gender performance exhibits the hybridity of identities that contradicts the discourse of "alienation" and "double-self". Contemporary Zimbabwean literature has characters that embrace global citizenship without knowledge of/ guilt over disintegrating Shona practices and ideals.

Veit-Wild and Naguschewiski show in their book, *Body, Sexuality and Gender*, that critical discourse has shifted from race relations to changing gender and sexuality norms. In Veit-Wild's own words;

Homosexuality is one among the many themes surrounding the body and sexuality that have been avoided in African literatures and its academic criticism: desire, rape, and stigmatisation have also been shrouded in silence. But even where corporeal matters have been depicted, literary representations at times have remained all too stereotypical. The African female characters are sometimes idealised for their beauty, sometimes venerated as mothers, and at times condemned as witches or loose women. Gender roles and such topics as polygamy, bride price, arranged marriages, and abuse of women by men have been treated mainly from a sociopolitical angle and not in terms of what it has meant for women's bodies. The male body was even more excluded from literary exploration. It is only fairly recently that a new generation of African women writers have dared to touch on 'unsafe issues' regarding the woman in her femaleness and corporeality. (Veit-Wild & Naguschewiski, 2005: xii-xiii)

The quotation highlights that images of women in literature have largely been created to push a sociopolitical agenda and hence have functioned as symbols rather than a full exploration of the experiences of the female body as a living entity complete in itself. Women have thus either been idealised, venerated or condemned at the expense of other lived experiences. These other spaces where liberative values can be articulated may fall outside the official discursive spaces (Primorac, 2006). This study seeks to trace the fissures in Shona identities in the selected texts without being restricted to a particular narrative but guided by the specific story. Womanhood is, therefore, not locked to traditional conceptions of what the male or female body is expected to do.

This study focuses more on the literary texts for a textual analysis of the representation of Shona women. One can find several layers of constructions within one text, which show the multidimensional and fluid nature of identity. This view follows Vambe's (2005) assertion on the necessity of engaging in meta-commentary as opposed to imposing a framework on a work of art. Theoretical lens employed to read a text determine what to look for and the conclusions

reached at times distort the storyline. In this study I intend to be guided by the story and author's narrative style rather than impose theory. The theories employed are those that illuminate the phenomenon described in the story itself.

Muponde and Primorac (2005) note that there are versions of Zimbabwean identity premised on the theoretical and ideological standpoint of the grand narrative (colonial or nationalist). These grand narratives determine the depiction of women either as mothers of the nation or victims to be protected (nationalist), and the epitome of savagery in colonialist narrative. Grand nationalist narratives need to be interrogated. This is important and as Vambe (2005) argues, "fiction is a force field where the people's identities are neither totally distorted by dominant forces nor a cultural space where it is possible to recuperate an unproblematic African identity" (2005:100).

Zimbabwean fiction in English carries various images of Shona women; docile, rebellious, loose, decent, quiet, outspoken, passive, agentive etc. The social and political context in which these identities are produced determines how labelling of the action of Shona women is enacted. Musiyiwa and Matshakaile Ndlovu (2005) show that Shona women are more accommodative and willing to adopt a broader Zimbabwean identity beyond ethnicity as exemplified by inter-ethnic marriages. Some texts in this study have characters who operate outside their ethnic groups and the extent to which they are accommodative can dramatise these women's desire to move out of their ascribed constraining values. This study argues that there are versions of Shona women's identities that challenge men's notions of what African nationhood should entail.

Primorac (2006) further argues that versions of identity are locked in time, space and genre, hence literary criticism that is prescriptive tends to distort and give an impression of monolithic identities. This is significant in that while representations are constructions, they cannot be totally divorced from the time and space that enable their construction. An interpretation of whether Shona women's identities conform to or subvert nationalism is important because this can allow a critic to access Shona women's subjectivities that are threatened with closure in male-authorised versions of nationalism. Primorac also uses the term "time" to denote space within the duration of storyline (detective, mythic, realism) and argues that genre determines the type of characters depicted (static, round). This means that what is important is not the extent that Shona women's identities correspond to temporal reality. Patriotic and cultural narratives police the behaviour of Shona women by rejecting what is considered as deviant

behaviour. In patriarchal narratives, sexualities are governed through construction of women as either wives or mothers and those outside these norms as loose and dangerous.

Muponde analyses Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* from a postcolonial perspective in the context of national identity. He argues that childhoods are largely violent and characterised by displacement as victims of a monolithic view of nation. Muponde's study is informative to this research because it focuses on Shona women's identities in a violent internal diasporan experience. This enables one to trace the shifts and stagnations in the construction of identities of Shona women which creates new identities.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on the representations of Shona women in Zimbabwean literature in English. It thus follows that the best theories to employ are those that speak to the concepts of "signification, representation and construction" (Hall in an interview with O'Hara, 1984:15).

According to Hall (1997: 28), representation

...is the production of meaning through language. In representation, constructionists argue, we use signs, organised in to languages of different kinds, to communicate meaningfully with others. Languages can use signs to symbolise, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called 'real' world. But they can also reference imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas which are not in any obvious sense part of our material world. There is no simple relationship of reflection, imitation or one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world. The world is not accurately or otherwise reflected in the mirror of language. Language does not work like a mirror. Meaning is produced within language, in and through various representational systems which, for convenience, we call 'languages'. Meaning is produced by the practice, the 'work', of representation. It is constructed through signifying - i.e. meaning-producing - practices.

Literature represents, in words, the uneven values that characters and objects "symbolise, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called 'real' world". Representations are arbitrary. They reflect the dynamics in which one exhibits power to generate meaning and impose it on a subject of choice. The meaning ascribed to the subject "Shona woman" depends on the agenda of the person constructing the identity. Hall's encoding/decoding theory is also of significance as it points to the value of cultural background in interpreting texts. The reading of a particular text may then turn out to be different from what the author intended. Hall states that "the level of connotation of the visual sign, of its contextual reference and positioning in different discursive fields of meaning and association, is the point where already coded signs

intersect with the deep semantic codes of culture and take on additional more active ideological dimensions”. In other words, there are identities that can be described as “authenticity” in cultural terms (c.f. Chinweizu et al, 1983; Primorac, 2006). This view is accepted in postcolonial theory. According to Parashar (2016: 371);

Postcolonialism and feminism as critical discourses have enriched the understanding and explanatory potential of international relations. One could argue that in the last two decades these two theoretical approaches have grown exponentially in their capacity to embrace the diversity and unpredictability of global political and social life. They stand resolutely in support of subversion and change in the political, cultural and social landscape; not just to bridge the distance between the centre and the margins but also to bring the knowledge of and from the margins to the centre. As Leela Gandhi notes, it is the encounter with feminism that encourages postcolonialism to ‘produce a more critical and self reflexive account of cultural nationalism’. On the other hand, postcolonialism offers feminism the conceptual tool box to see multiple sites of oppression and to reject universalisms around gendered experiences of both men and women.

Shona women are postcolonial subjects who have been subjected to colonial domination and its gendered notions that make feminism relevant. Parashar suggests that postcolonial theory encourages self-reflexivity on the part of the formerly colonised. In addition, postcolonial theory assists in identifying where Shona women can recuperate alternative identities. Tyagi (2014) suggests that postcolonial feminism draws from the strengths of postcolonial theories to suggest multiple sites of oppression and empower Shona women to reject dominant discourses that thrive on invoking the language that describe identities in terms of universalisms. This is significant in the study of representations of Shona women as there is no universal Shona identity and each representation can be studied in its own context in the form of ethnic, gender, class and religious identities. According to Young (2001: 11);

Postcolonial critique focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world; that is; the politics of anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain. It constitutes a directed intellectual production that seeks to articulate itself with different forms of emancipatory politics to synthesise different kinds of work towards the realisation of common goals that include the creation of equal access to material, natural, social and technological resources, the contestation of forms of domination, whether economic, cultural, religious, ethnic or gendered, and the articulation and assertion of collective forms of political and cultural identity.

As noted earlier, the signifier “Shona” is not natural but has been ascribed to the people over time to describe a specific ethnic group. Mutswairo’s (1996) critique rejects this signifier on the basis of a postcolonial notion whereby being spoken for and about shows a lack of power.

This is significant for this study because at times the constructions are used as “forces of oppression and coercive domination” in determining spaces that can/cannot be occupied by Shona women. Gender roles are therefore not biological but ascribed by the dominant gender which is men and this is known as patriarchy. It thus became imperative to tell the story from a female perspective which gave birth to Feminist literary theory (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Toril Moi, 2001; Mcfadden, 1999).

Butler’s (1990) theory is the most recent in postcolonial feminist discourse with its inherent rejection of exclusionary identities in the concept of gender performance. She argues that all humans have masculine and feminine attributes that are not fully represented in the use of male/female, man/woman binaries. The main point is that gender and sex are not interchangeable, and gender goes far beyond the biological and social prescriptions assigned to it (Dasi, 2017:116). In Butler’s (1990:19) words, “the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category woman has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘Women’ are constructed”. A male or female body can perform roles traditionally ascribed as feminine or masculine in a specific context. In this regard, other sexualities other than heteronormative are included and accounted for. This insight is invaluable in the analysis of Masilo’s *The African Tea Cosy* which highlights sexualities of young men and women who are considered deviant within heteronormative discourse. It also speaks to the selected texts in this study that are grouped to highlight the various facets to Shona women’s identity within the postcolonial (affected by colonialism and still dealing with the aftermath) society of Zimbabwe. According to Butler (1990: xi), the complexity of gender requires an interdisciplinary set of discourses in order to resist the domestication of gender studies or women studies within the academy and to radicalise the notion of feminist critique.

Azodo and Eke (2007: xv) note that “dialogue is imperative, especially in the wake of protestations, contestations, and representations by subordinate and minority groups”. The quotation highlights the struggle inherent in the formation and assertion of identities. Rather than focusing on a general Zimbabwean identity premised on nationalist discourse, this study seeks to locate the Shona woman within all these scripts to see how they conform or subvert the identities as they negotiate personal freedom. The study privileges readings of Zimbabwean fiction that underline the fact that there is no one version of the Shona woman. The various representations from different authors give us insight into the different identities that Shona

women can command and use to challenge their symbolical marginalisation in post-independence discourses.

1.9 Research Methodologies

This study falls within qualitative research as it studies social phenomenon. Qualitative research recognises that meaning is generated through interaction. Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that qualitative research focuses on human behaviour to bring out human subjectivities. Qualitative research, informed by symbolic interactionism, acknowledges that interpretations of the world are constructed and all accounts “however carefully tested and supported are, in the end, authored” (Hall 1996a; 14). Literary texts are representations of the world reflecting the character and/or author’s point of view.

Critical textual/narrative analysis is employed in this thesis as it closely examines the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse. Novels analysed in this thesis fit Rimmon-Kenan’s (1983: 2-4) definition of ‘narrative fiction’ which is made up of ‘story’, ‘text’ and ‘narration’. Novels are fictional ‘texts’ and it is through analyzing them that we glean “the story (its object) and the narration (the process of its production).” The style, language and sign systems employed by the author are very important in extracting meaning. Van Dijk (1988) argues that discourse analysis is concerned with words used in particular contexts so as to reveal the source of power, abuse, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed within specific social, economic, political and historical contexts. Texts selected for this study project various symbolical worlds that reveal the sources of power that seek to demean Shona women’s identities. Fiction allows a critic to unravel the subterranean source of the power that oppressed women can tap from in order to negotiate their identity within those contexts of power, abuse, dominance and bias. Literature provides subjective representations of multiple truths that are socially constructed. Qualitative research is, therefore, the most apt method for this research. The study also uses secondary sources from the library.

1.10 Chapter Organisation

Chapter One is the introduction. It defines the area of study, justifies, outlines the statement of the problem, supplies the theoretical framework and clarifies key concepts. It also indicates the placement of novels into chapters.

Chapter Two provides an extended literature review. It locates the study within existing discourses on narrative, post-colonialism and representation of black women in Africa and the African Diaspora. This helps clarify the concern of this study, which is the representation of Shona women in literary texts that are inevitably informed by the historical context of colonialism and globalisation. The critical approaches in postcolonial theory allow for new readings of texts that have already received critical attention and new approaches to identity formation which is not cast in stone.

Chapter Three depicts the racial profiling of Shona women. The works by Olive Schreiner and Doris Lessing will be analysed as they give and differentiate meanings attached to Shona women from the perspective of white authors' narratives. Schreiner depicts *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* by juxtaposing the conquest of 1896-7 to Christian ideals thereby questioning the civilising mission of Britain. The portrayal of the Shona women also raises the question of whether they really needed civilising which was a euphemism for control, conquest and subjugation. Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* depicts identities of Shona women in the 1950s. Schreiner and Lessing employ the ambiguous colonial stereotypes of Shona women.

Chapter Four discusses how Shona women appropriate the institution of spirit possession in order to authorise narratives that question both the colonial system and African patriarchy. In this chapter it is argued that Shona women seem to acquire more power as symbols than as ordinary people. The texts studied in this chapter are Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* and Cynthia Marangwanda's *Shards*.

Chapter Five focuses on Shona women from different social classes so as to find out how that affects their behaviour and representation. The chapter reviews women's shared concerns regardless of economic or educational status as well as points of departure. Texts examined in this chapter are Valerie Tagwira's *Uncertainty of Hope*, Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* and Harrison's *Jambanja*.

Chapter Six explores the representation of Shona women in *The Book of Not*, which is set in Rhodesia of the 1970s to independence, *Running with Mother* which focuses on the strength of a Shona woman in Matabeleland in the context of genocide in the 1980s and *Harare North* (2009). The sensibilities of those Shona women born in the Diaspora are both similar and divergent to those on the continent. The authors' representations of the characters account for the differences. The concepts of hybridity and performance and how they work as rhetorical devices to represent Shona women are put to test in these novels.

Chapter Seven is the conclusion to the study. The chapter manifests the findings of the study and suggests recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Two: Extended Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the aim of the study, outlined the objectives of the research, delimited the scope of the study and justified the methodology employed. This chapter is an extended review of the literature that is pertinent to the study because it offers a critique of scholarly works that have framed previous analyses of Shona women's identities depicted in Zimbabwean fiction in English. The chapter critiques written literature that suggests that there is some uniqueness about being a Shona woman and then interrogates the problematics that arise from this assumption. Existing critical analyses that specifically seek to redefine the Shona-ness of Shona people in general, and Shona women in particular, are also reviewed in order to expose the ideological impact of the scholarly gap that such essentialising discourses promote. This task will be accomplished through applying relevant and recent postcolonial theories on the ambiguities of cultural and symbolic representations.

2.1 Tracing Discourses on Shona Women in Non-Fictional Accounts

History and sociology as disciplines have been known to provide useful information on specific objects and events. However, Hayden White has argued that all disciplines are not as neutral as they seem to be because there are "distinct ideological and even specifically political implications of narrative discourse" (White, 1987: ix). In addition, academic disciplines are sometimes presented or present themselves as possessing a certain coherence marked by strict boundaries that create, enforce and maintain misleading binaries, one of which attempts to oppose history to fiction. This view is contested by White who insists that both history and fiction are narrative constructs whose contents are much "*invented as found*" (ibid, 2). In this perspective, it is borne in mind that "history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation" (ibid, 122). Therefore, it is important to critically reflect on historical sources that have been written and projected as authentic and genuine representations of Shona women's identities that are made to pass as uncontested and pure fact.

Narrative of every type is not ideologically neutral in so far as it is constructed on the basis of suppressing and silencing other possible versions of reality. This means narrative can and actually has been manipulated in colonial histories to represent colonised people as the Orient and the coloniser as Occident. What is key to these forms of representing others to the self, and

the self to others is the ability of dominant systems to authorise "... a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (Said, 1978: 2). These colonialist views survive by naming the colonised as its inferior *Other*. Dominant systems possess the power to make "... statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it." (ibid, 3). Thus, restructuring the colonised people's lives and presenting their identities as exotic, quaint and savage is a form of discursive violence in the coloniser's weapons of cultural domination.

However, as Paul (2011: 29, 31) notes, despite attempts to render the colonised immobilised in ascribed identities, "There is no such thing as a fixed human nature ... because human beings always have to make up their own minds on how to act." This view is significant to this study because it allows one to search for alternative cultural sites where the oppressed can recover their voices and agency. In other words, historical narration is a *poesis* - a form of discourse that relies on conventional narrative forms and the imagination in order to generate meaning. This means that how one narrates human identities and the content of what is narrated can open up the possibility of suggesting alternative versions and subversions of identities constructed for the colonised by the coloniser. Put differently, the dynamics of narration is that this symbolical process can inform the ways human identities are perceived in the past and present. Ascribed identities are cumbersome to Shona women for whom they are designed to be a permanent cultural burden.

The above observation is important for this study whose central claim is that human identity constructions are closely related to power dynamics. Furthermore, historical texts that illuminate power dynamics provide insight into how Shona women are represented in writings that claim monopoly of knowing the colonised subjects such as Shona women. The question of how to rethink Shona women's identities is made the more urgent and acute because these Shona women are named as inferior in the African patriarchal discourses circulating within African communities. The distortions of Shona women's identities were further complicated in a colonial Rhodesian context where Victorian values and notions of passivity were ascribed to what women in general, and colonised Shona women in particular, could, should and were meant to be within a male-authored constrictive symbolical economy imposed on colonised Shona women. The resultant identities of Shona women constituted what Alvin H. Rosenfeld, writing in the context of the Jewish holocaust, described as a form of "double dying" (1980).

This brief background on the politics of narrative, narration and representation is important because it allows this study to ground the task of tracing the historical positions of Shona women in Zimbabwe within known and knowable socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. This process might likely end up revealing not a stable, single, and coherent identity for Shona women, but identities that register uneven levels of consciousness amongst the Shona women, concomitantly named differently by different dominant groups, depending on the need to maintain the subordination of women to achieve different material ends. Jean Davison (1997) explores further this idea of how gender, lineage ideology and ethnicity affect women in cultural contexts that thrive on recognising inequalities as natural and the new normal in real life as in narratives. The scope of her study, which begins in the pre-colonial era, aims to capture the transformation of society, focusing on key concepts such as clan and lineage, and how these produce a gendered notion of the nation.

In the preface to *Gender, Lineage and Ethnicity in Southern Africa*, Davison boldly asserts that her book is

... about the confluence of gender, lineage ideology, and ethnicity in central Southern Africa – a region that encompasses the length of the Zambezi River and its tributaries. The intertwining of gender and lineage over time within specific ethnic contexts is a primary concern. Gender is both the catalyst and the conveyor of lineage and descent differences in the region. The way that matriliney and patriliney and their attendant residence practices influence women's and men's access to and control over productive resources is at the base of this study (Davison, 1997: xi).

In the above passage, descriptions of women as “catalyst and conveyor of lineage and descent,” alert one to the significance to patriarchy of women's reproductive capacities, without which men can perpetuate their discriminatory patriarchal ideologies of superiority. In addition, what is also implied in the passage quoted above is that patriarchy has an overarching appetite to control women's sexualities for the benefit of men. The same men dominate access to material resources, even when it is mostly the women who work to produce subsistence food for family and nation (Schmidt, 1992). In the grammar of the moral economy of men's discourses of cultural violence, women are both a form of currency and symbols of men's material investment. Thus, the control of women through naming them via stereotypes is a serious preoccupation that men will not leave to chance.

According to Mtika and Doctor (2002), matriliney means genealogy is traced through women and consequently property is acquired along the same lines. For most men, whether African

partriarchy or colonial masters, women in a matrilineal society are viewed by men as an existential threat to men's self-affirmed cultural superiority. In a patriachal social context women become a latent source of fear by men who understand the capacity of women to undermine and affect inheritance patterns. It is for this reason that feminists have located the oppression of women in patriarchy, which is a system that privileges men at the expense of women. For example, Toril Moi (1985; 42) draws one's attention to the significance of the cultural movement of "Images of Women's Criticism" in which what is manifested and encouraged is a robust critique of "female stereotypes in male writing". By implication, Moi's formulation forces on us or encourages critics to interrogate how male and female authors represent the images and identities of women in their fiction. In this thought, there is suggested a much-needed impulse to empower Zimbabwe's black and white creative writers to deconstruct women's writing and writing about women.

However, this study questions constructions of Shona women in writings about women from a perspective that seeks to establish the ideological grounds upon which one can generously describe this creative process as instances of several concatenations of ambivalent shifts in identities. It is the moral and ideological directions that these shifts of Shona women's identities assume that makes a study such as this one worthy. This perspective enables this study to reveal how Shona women are represented by Zimbabwean authors, whether male or female. Underneath, or what informs this conviction is that even where white and black authors write about the Shona women, there remains the likelihood of the authors recreating ambiguities in terms of the meanings of the shifts for Shona women.

Cultural identities amongst Shona women have certainly changed in the context of the ideological values of the Shona-ness of Shona women. However, the vocabularies that are used to define Shona women have also been transforming at different paces over time and space to signal, on one hand, the emergent newness of Shona women's identities. In addition, Raymond Williams (1958) has also identified what he views as residual tendencies in human identities that have been left stranded by the cultural revolutions of the day and in the present themselves deliberately maintained and firmly embraced by a panicking patriarchy. Worse still, the consciousness of the possibility of radical change in Shona women is neither intuitive to art at all times, nor inherently obvious from the materiality of metaphors used to symbolise women's identities. Zimbabwean authors are amongst themselves not motivated by similar or uniform ideological interests in representing Shona women. This means artists' views and consequent

imaginaries of how Shona women can be depicted are formed by social factors authors may or may not have total control over.

To acknowledge the limitations of, well-meaning and not-so-well-meaning, authors can inspire one to also interrogate the creative temperament of these authors. Zimbabwean authors also confront the literary challenge of translating mental knowledge into narratives of telling. What authors know or claim to know of Shona women's identities and how they imaginatively tell what they think they know of Shona women's subjectivities is not an easy leap. This is so because facts do not speak for themselves; authors "...speak for them, on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past [or the present] into a whole whose integrity is – in its representation – a purely discursive one" (White, 1978: 125). White clarifies this argument by suggesting that the "fictions of factual representation may indicate the levels or extent to which the discourse of the conventional historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other" (ibid, 121).

In other words, it would amount to a major liability to entertain a view that might imply that Zimbabwean fiction grows in stature only when it imitates and equals how other disciplines establish, signify and index identities of Shona women. This study seeks to demonstrate that Zimbabwean fiction is not exempt from the bias of representing Shona women's identities by an "act of suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterisation, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view" (ibid, 84). This symbolical act of annihilating or hiding from sight alternative views that define the multiple subjectivities of an individual human being can occur wittingly or unconsciously.

This view is important to this study, because the idea behind it can provoke one to rethink the act of reading or interpreting written words because these are signs that can be interpreted differently, and render it possible to argue that there are no descriptions of human identities that are stable. This insight further allows one to question the assumption that a reader can have access only to a single meaning in any form of cultural identity. On this score, this study would agree with Stuart Hall's (1992) view that representation of social identities occurs inside and not outside language. This means that language is the only cultural resource through which creative authors can authorise narratives through which authors acquire and refine the creative gift to describe human identities in the artistic forms they use to represent these identities.

However, Nadine Gordimer (1979) curiously points out that creative authors are not always in total control and may not always know the implications of metaphors they use in the process of creating their own metaphors, unfortunately most of which are burdensome identities and cause emotional suffering to women.¹ This means that some efforts by authors who use fiction to know Shona women by ascribing to them certain socio-cultural identities can occasion or prompt readers to interpret Shona women in certain ways, many of which might be negative. This implies that the act of interpretation has consequences to the victims and survivors of dominant views/perceptions of Shona women. Ascribed identities can encourage discriminatory practices of those being described by those in power. On one hand, being named and “known” through the prism of imposed identities can imprison the victims in silence. On another hand revulsive identities attached to Shona women generate in them a sense of defying these oppressive symbolical markers. This study seeks to ascertain whether or not Zimbabwean writers manifest in their fiction a knowledge of the variety of ways Shona women respond to how their humanity is objectified, mostly by African patriarchy in the post-independence black nationalist-led dispensation.

Many of the representations of Shona women’s identities in fiction, as in real life, are based on pernicious stereotypes. How negative images of Shona women’s identities enter the realm of fiction is something of a product of cultural implantation of values inimical to Shona women’s interests. Davison (1997) has shown in her critical work that British colonialism in Rhodesia tended to impose Victorian patriarchal values on the African people. This undermined the material basis of Shona people’s indigenous African values. Shona women suffered the most from the cultural shock induced into their lives by colonial forces and the activities of white missionaries. Colonial official law decreed that African women were a sexual threat to the white community. The unfounded fear was based on the myth perpetrated by white women who believed that their white husbands could be snatched from them by Shona women. The fear of miscegenation was called the white peril. Shona women were thus restricted to the rural areas where their movements were monitored by their husbands and male guardians.

A vocabulary that despised African women was sanctioned and originated from white native commissioners, and white women. Racial epithets used to describe Shona women characterised them as “...indolent, lazy, immoral, frivolous, savage, uncivilised” (Schimdt, 1992: 99). White

¹ Nadine Gordimer, 1979. *Burger’s Daughter*. London, Penguin

women who feared Shona women's sexuality described them as lacking restraint, forward, ensnaring, adulterous (ibid,103) and carriers of venereal diseases. This language of denigration identified Shona women as slothful, dirty and the cause of moral degeneration that white women viewed as a potentially destabilising factor within white communities. On a scale of respectability, African women were described as carnal, lustful and displaying animal sexuality (98) while the white masters exercised seigneurial rights over the bodies of black women.

Native Commissioners further blamed Shona women's strength of belief in their indigenous culture as responsible for the slow acculturation of Shona people (ibid, 129). Strong Shona women like Nehanda were labelled as witches and when she ordered the killing of Pollard, the white man in the Mazoe district, Nehanda was singled out as a dangerous political instigator. Nehanda was hanged in 1898 and the manner in which she was killed was meant to be deterrent and a grim example of what would befall any Shona women who would want to challenge British imperialism in Rhodesia. Thus, overnight, Shona women lost the sort of little respect that they had enjoyed under the control of African patriarchy before the advent of colonialism. White men were allowed by colonial laws to sleep with Shona women. The level of deterioration of the status of the precolonial identities of Shona women is noted by Schimdt (1992) who states that, in a colonial context these female bodies were made to mean less than their actual worth.

The nadir of how Shona women were perceived is implied in the biased and selective application of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1903. This law decreed that "White men who not only attempted but actually achieved, the rape of women of any race were not sentenced to death. Nor were black men who raped black women" (Schmit, 1992: 175). However, "for a slightest approach to intimacy with a white woman, a black man could be condemned to death...but if a white man did the same to a black woman, his action would be met with a shrug of the shoulders, or at most a smile of contempt" (ibid). From these colonial legal pronouncements, victimising a Shona woman was acceptable, whether it was performed by white or a black man. At the same time, white women were accorded disproportionately higher status over the identities of Shona women and men.

The Shona men had no problem with the power of the women until it became a disadvantage to them, leading them to appeal to the colonial powers for assistance. Schmidt (1992:105) notes that

In 1913, the chief native commissioner in Salisbury wrote of the elders' complaints throughout Mashonaland:

At almost every meeting of Chiefs held by me the chief topic of conversation is in regard to their wives and the way they run off with other men (chiefly aliens on mines) with impunity. The chiefs are very bitter on the subject and would welcome an amendment to the [Native Marriages] Ordinance placing some restraint on their wives running away as they do. Another official referred to the "continual outcry" for the criminalisation of adultery from "the more influential portion of the community." He maintained that the present law "does not meet the most urgent claims of the older and middle aged men" – the primary constituents of the Native Department and those whose discontent was to be assiduously avoided.

It must also be noted that the complaints against women may not have been all women, but a portion. The changes in the law were then made to please the privileged few men who had access to native commissioners. The privileging of male perspectives is clear in this because the women themselves are not consulted. Schmidt (1992:105) further notes that a new cultural morality was imposed on Shona women;

The Natives Adultery Punishment Ordinance was enacted in 1916 as a "result of continuous representations made by Chiefs, Headmen, Heads of Kraals and responsible natives throughout the country." According to the new law, extra-marital liaisons were considered adulterous only if the woman was married. Married African men could continue to have sexual intercourse with as many unmarried African women as they chose, without fear of criminal penalty. European men could have sex with African women of any marital status without being liable to charges of adultery, despite the pleas of African men that European males be included within the law. While colonial officials were intent upon bolstering African patriarchal authority, they enacted within circumscribed boundaries. They were not willing to jeopardise the seigniorial rights of European males.

Both European and African men viewed women's sexuality as theirs to control. The debasement of women is assured as they were considered less human at law. The 1916 law reversed this order by protecting the interests of the men and making women vulnerable. Makaudze (2015) argues that this led to increase in rape and other forms of sexual abuse because the checks and balances from Shona traditional culture had been removed. European men continued to abuse African women at will without any recrimination.

The disregard of the rights of women stems from the Victorian principles of the white men. Schmidt (1992:101) records that

If it were purely a question of race, African men would have been regarded in the same light as African women. However, gender as well as race entered the equation. European men, administrators and missionaries alike, were the product of Victorian society, and did not hold women of any race in particularly high esteem. Their racial bigotry only compounded their low opinion of women in general. African women, wrote one official, were truly “at the bottom of the ladder.” The African girl, mused one missionary, “like her black brother [is] naturally idle.”

Furthermore,

Like her white sister, when she has reached her teens and becomes conscious of her fancied or real charms, she is apt to be vain, coquettish, trifling. It will be no easy task,” he concluded, “to teach her habits of work, to make her realise the serious character of life and of her duties.”

Europeans imposed their prejudices against women on Shona women with the logic that they could never be better than European women. This led to such stereotypes as that Shona women are naturally idle, lazy, vain, coquettish and trifling. In colonial discourse, Shona girls who reached puberty were considered potential prostitutes with an aversion to honest work. The dominant image of African women in colonial vocabulary is that they are primitive savages, morally depraved and inclined to resist civilisation.

From the early years of the establishment of Rhodesia, missionary voices participated in developing ways to control Shona women’s sexualities. Father Richartz’s unscientific views on the identities of Shona women were adopted as gospel truth and applied in governance, missionary work and literature. The religious Father acting as a pontiff on Shona people in general, and Shona women in particular averred that,

Having lived among the Shona people for four and one-half years, Father Richartz deemed himself an expert on their character and customs. Shortly after the rising of 1896-1897, he described the Shona as an altogether degraded race. Their main vices are immorality and avarice and consequently they are extremely cowardish [sic], lazy, cruel, constantly quarrelling between themselves.

In addition, Schmidt comments that Father Richartz wrote that Shona people’s religion was merely a “system of superstitious rites” that were practised primarily in order to “pursue immoral objects”. The main concern of parents in regard to their children, and the fundamental preoccupation of the people in general, was “the development of the sexual powers” (Father Richartz quoted in Schmidt, 1992: 100-101).

From the quotations above, it is easy to argue that the discursive violence in the language used to describe African identities circulated freely in white colonial communities. It is in light of this colonial habit of assigning meanings that stereotyped Africans that another religious personage in Rhodesia, Father Biehler, became convinced that regenerating the Mashona was a hopeless undertaking unless it involved the extermination of Shona people over the age of 14 (Zhuwarara, 2001:13).

The colonial government did not accept this recommendation because it needed cheap African labour. However, Shona women were excluded from formal employment in mines, farms and homes as they were considered lazy, dirty, evil and highly libidinous. Schmidt (1992:101) clearly outlines these perceptions and how they were formed in the imaginary of colonial officials;

Women were judged primarily responsible for the perceived depravity of African society. Missionaries and colonial officials blamed African women for adultery, venereal disease, and unhygienic conditions in the home, and for the men's refusal to enter wage employment and to become otherwise "civilised" Native Department officials even claimed that African women's sex drives and overwhelming influence over their men lay at the root of the ever-present labour shortage. Young able-bodied men were being enticed to remain at home to satisfy female sexual desires rather than going to work for Europeans. "At the present rate of retrogression, it is only a matter of time when every woman in the country will be a prostitute," charged one native commissioner. Colonial officials were particularly vocal on the subject during the years 1908-1911, 1914-1920 and 1925-1929, when the severe labour shortages eroded profits of European farms and mines.

The colonial language and attitudes that degraded the humanity of Shona women were perpetuated further by over-zealous African men. Shona men created cultural institutions in which the identities of African women were firmly fixed as static within fragile and brittle moral frames of values hidden in generalised customary laws, loosely defined as indigenous African values. These values were themselves based on African men's own perceptions of their powers over Shona women as unlimited. The elevated social positions and identities of African men, though based on African conceptions of patriarchal values, ironically were not entirely a result of African men's making. These values manifested as a congerie of social belief systems with most being re-invented obscurantist cultural practices created by African men. However, in some cases, what African men called indigenous traditional culture and worldview contained values that were grafted on African communities by white missionary cultures.

Colonial native commissioners manipulated these questionable African values and they rebranded these values with such names as “customary law”, to make them appear “modern”.

Where the so-called African traditional values achieved the silencing of African women’s voices without destabilising the colonial project, the colonial authorities urged African men to “preserve” these values. African men complied and were complicit with the new colonial system in limiting and constraining the identities of Shona women. The result of these politics of collusion to downpress African women’s identities is that the cultural identities that African men authorised for Shona women imposed a conviction of male supremacy and superiority over Shona women.

Those Shona women who sought empowerment from oppression through resistance were sanctioned and framed in narrow and scandalous labels as witches, sexual consorts of the devil, and headstrong. These identities in which Shona women were framed as outcasts, empowered colonialism to impose punitive action on Shona women. Those Shona women who found themselves so named as witches could meet with severe sanctioning such as the hanging of Nehanda, or generally ostracised and marginalised in their communities. Other Shona women were cast out of the community and thus found themselves deprived of the privilege that is enjoyed through possessing a sense of belonging. African men worked with colonial masters to deter and warn politically active Shona women not to emulate the heroic acts of defiance displayed by Charwe, alias Nehanda. This Shona woman had ordered the killing of a white man called Pollard and therefore Nehanda was most reviled, feared and sought after by colonial forces. Nehanda was considered a dangerous ringleader whose anti-colonial stance was imaged as politically contagious and therefore, could, in the views of colonial officials, contaminate or influence other Shona women previously considered loyal to authority to begin to defy the colonial civilising agenda, on one hand, as well as influence African men not to work on European farms and mines. This was deemed a threat to securing loyal African men’s labour so necessary to the colonial enterprise.

In addition, Davison (1997) proves that in a Rhodesian colonial context, women – whether loyal to men, or politically aware - gradually lost their rights and privileges due to land alienation and imposed taxes that led to males being coerced into providing migrant labour in mines and farms. Shona women were made minors under the control of men thereby losing some forms of cultural autonomy that they invented and enjoyed in the restrictive traditional culture. This led to the production and circulation of cultural stereotypes that equated women

to children and reserved economic property and political power to be regulated by African men. African patriarchy was aided by a raft of colonial laws developed by white native commissioners, described as customary laws, but were primarily designed to control the sexualities of Shona women. African men had traditionally invented gendered roles for Shona women in which these women were considered as inferior.

Be that as it may, there is a misleading impression that Shona women reacted similarly to their agonistic experiences brought about by systems of double oppression. Elizabeth Schmidt's (1992) comprehensive study of Shona women, in Goromonzi, around the Chishawasha area, correctly notes that generally women were held in a subordinate position, could be made pawns and that they were vulnerable during war and famine. However, the critic suggests that some Shona women in the upper class had influence and also could control poor men in terms of labour. This is important to this study because there is a tendency of viewing precolonial society as homogeneous.

In addition, Schmidt also highlights the enterprising nature of Shona women by tracing their agricultural skills which brought income in the families and disturbed the plans of the colonial government to acquire cheap labour. When legislation made it difficult for the women to trade in agricultural produce, some moved to selling beer in mine and farm compounds. When laws closed that avenue others moved into towns as maids and prostitutes. Women who acquired missionary education used it to gain economic and social freedom through negotiations with the indigenous and colonial patriarchy.

The collusion between indigenous and colonial patriarchy was specifically meant to destroy the power and influence of women. As mothers, Shona women had great control over their children. Schimdt (1992: 104) writes that according to the report of the Native Affairs Committee of Enquiry (1910-1911),

Women frequently adversely affect the labour supply, as they refuse to allow their sons to proceed to work lest they should die or be injured in the course of their employment. Such women, the report concluded, were known to force their husbands to sell cattle in order to pay hut taxes for their sons, even though the sons were fully capable of earning the tax themselves through wage labour. The committee of inquiry and its government supporters did not consider the possibility that such women were consciously resisting colonial intrusion into their lives.

The power of the women comes from the cultural values where the woman is at the centre of running affairs in her home and hence the saying *musha mukadzi* (the woman is the home). In

traditional Shona culture a woman gained status and power through marriage and having children. Other critics argue that when a Shona woman had her own home and could control its food resources including owning fields and granary, the woman commanded influence and power to reorganise the African family threatened by the absence of African men who had been recruited to work away from home, on European farms and at white-controlled mines (Gelfand, 1973; Bourdillon, 1976; Mararike, 2006). These sociological findings are significant in that they provide a mode of “factual” representation of Shona women’s identities from the disciplines of History and Sociology that can be used for comparison with literary representations. This current study is interested in accounting for how this image of powerful Shona women contradicts the one projected by some black authors whose creative art is criticised in Rudo Gaidzanwa’s book, *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*.

It is, therefore, the express task of this study to interrogate the ways the ascribed identities attached to Shona women were operationalised by them to take advantage of commercial opportunities opened by colonialism’s appetite for cheap labour, outside the restrictive physical space of the rural reserves patrolled and patronised by African men. This perspective challenges the idea of representing Shona women as perpetual victims that appears to influence the construction of the character traits of Shona-ness of Shona women in the fiction under study. Furthermore, one is able to evaluate how Shona women negotiated the cultural ambiguities and contradictions encouraged in the double standards practised by whites and African men when interpreting the meanings of the bodies of Shona women. This conceptual approach might assist one to identify ways the Shona women might have used to alter, shift and produce unexpected meanings that did not always conform to a pattern of human behaviour contemplated by colonial officials to match the cultural expectations associated with social roles and identities invented and ascribed for Shona women. This argument means that it is possible to decipher how the unstable meanings that Shona women invented for themselves away from the gaze of white society, at the margins of colonial society, might have emboldened Shona women, improved their perceptions of self-worth and aroused a different sense of respectability for Shona women.

The fact that Shona women’s identities in fiction have been produced by black and white authors writing in both colonial Rhodesia and in the period after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980 further complicates representations of Shona women’s identities. This is so because of how the authors’ different cultural histories and horizons of expectations might impact on the act of narration. The life experiences of black and white authors whose works will be analysed

in the current study are founded upon, formed as well as influenced by separate ideologies that may inform the authors where their lives are dictated by the frames of race, class, gender and generational responses to the politics of collusion between colonialism and African patriarchy.

Shona women actively participated in the liberation struggle of the 1970s with the hope of regaining dignity. The anti-colonial struggle provided a context in which the identities of Shona women could be reconstituted and allow these women to acquire the status and social roles equal to those of Shona men. The context of the armed struggle, thus, to some extent enabled some sort of important psychic rehabilitation of identities of Shona women. However, those who ventured into this male-dominated space were quickly labelled prostitutes and faced challenges reintegrating into their communities after the war. Nhongo-Simbanegavi's (2000) work on ZANLA discusses the subordination of women in detail and shows that most of the female guerillas were forced to entertain high officials sexually and take care of the children thereby maintaining the domestic role albeit away from home in guerilla camps. The Zimbabwe Women Writers' research on the lives of ex-combatants reveals that women were viewed with suspicion as either prostitutes or failing to submit to husbands as proper Shona wives should do. Weiss' (1986) study focuses on the contribution of women to the success of the liberation struggle. She points to the role of the spirit of Nehanda through female mediums in both the first (1896-7) and second Chimurenga (1972-1979) and argues that women initiated the war and carried the burden by hiding and feeding combatants.

In other words, the liberation struggle re-ignited the ideological shifts in the identities of Shona women some of whom took the opportunity with both hands. This is significant to this study that questions the reasons as to why some creative artists tend to depict war heroes as being male. However, the film, *Flame* by Ingrid Sinclair shows that in the context of the armed struggle, there were concerted efforts by Shona men to push back the identities of Shona women by limiting Shona women's roles into the domestic spaces where Shona women would be appreciated as child-bearers and labourers whose peasant labour would provide food for African men in new urban centres. As human vessels to reproduce African men soon to become colonial sources of labour, the burden of keeping African communities "stable" in reproduction and production was squarely made to fall on Shona women's shoulders, especially in the rural areas. Therefore, in the armed struggle, Shona women's positive contributions were often subverted by African men. Shona women could be raped by fellow male comrades, or kept away from the frontline which was considered the space of Shona men. This study will argue that the ideological shifts in the identities of Shona women in both the colonial and

“revolutionary” context provided by the liberation struggle were nearly always stacked against the improvement and empowerment of Shona women.

This is so because after independence the new black nationalist rulers were unwilling to relinquish the patriarchal authority that they amassed for themselves as leaders of the struggle. Davison (1997:237) notes that;

Only in the latter part of the 1980s did policymakers begin to acknowledge women’s *economic value* to African agriculture and to development generally and to put forward measures to redress the long neglect. However, these measures have not given much recognition to the differences among women by lineage, marital status, or ethnicity.

Lineage, marital status and ethnicity are markers of identity and in a way reflect power positions that affect the construction of identity relationally. This study pays particular attention to Shona women, knowing that they are affected by laws and social systems differently. Mwatwara (2012) notes that during the post-2000 economic meltdown married Shona women could not easily join the lucrative cross-border trade due to control by husbands.

However, despite these restrictive measures invoked on Shona women using the authority of male authorised African traditional culture, the single women capitalised on opportunities and some even managed to settle in the Diaspora. These efforts were to some extent empowering to these women. But African patriarchy would present these efforts as negative. Independent-minded Shona women who sought to re-adjust their identities in response to African men’s bad economic policies were considered as undermining the “stability” of the African family (Vambe, 2006; Mungoshi, 1998). African men maintained that pre-colonial and colonial society marriage offered security and status to women. This view is founded on a myth of men as natural leaders and its validity runs counter to the shocking reality in post-independence period where due to economic meltdown in the country, the identities of most African men came under fire as men lost jobs due to economic adjustment programmes. Most families depended for survival on women’s unremunerated labour in the informal sector and crossborder activities (Vambe, 2006, Mungoshi, 1998). Some of selected post-2000 literary texts such as *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *The African Tea Cosy* reflect these changes in the Zimbabwean society. This study investigates the source of the creative impulse that depicts Shona women’s capacity to acquire the improved status of bread-winners and then critically interrogates the consequences of interpreting these ideological shifts to Shona women’s identities.

One such consequence of interrogating Shona women's identities made it evident that after the war, Shona women faced new forms of injustices and inequalities. In order to ameliorate the challenges Shona women faced government officials in the post-independence period introduced some benevolent policies. The Sex Disqualification Act (1982) for the first time allowed African women to hold public office. Some new labour regulations were also passed in order to allow women to earn equal pay for equal work with men. Other regulations made it possible for women to take maternity leave from work (Essoff, 2013). The Legal Age of Majority Act (1982) benefited Shona women because it afforded them a majority status at the age of 18. This meant that a woman could inherit property, freely choose their sex or marriage partner, a woman could also have a bank account and own property in their own right. The Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (1981) provided maintenance claims for women in legally registered or unregistered customary marriages. The Matrimonial Causes Act (1981) allowed for the provision of matrimonial assets upon divorce, it also allowed the girl child to inherit her father's wealth which had not been possible under Customary Law. In addition, the Deceased Person's Family Maintenance Act (1987) made property grabbing and dispossession of the surviving spouse and children by relatives of the deceased illegal. The Administration of Estates Amendment Act (1997) allowed women to inherit from their husbands and dispose of the wealth as they wish.

This study will argue that despite the establishment of these policies in post-independence Zimbabwe, most Shona women are still disempowered. This continued oppression of Shona women reflects power relations revealing how power is used to serve the interests of dominant power groups who project social roles to appear as neutral and representing common values (Butler, 1990). This study investigates how Shona women react to laws diminishing Shona women's identities in the public and private spheres as represented in selected texts. Furthermore, this study critically reflects on how social forces hostile to changing identities of Shona women ironically embolden and motivate these women to perform a variety of identities in the public sphere even though this often invites cultural censorship from the legacies of patriarchy.

A study that seeks to analyse *what* is shifting in the identities of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction is bound to explain the forms taken by the disapprovals of new identities of African women that appear unfamiliar to African men or are perceived to be an existential threat to the

power of patriarchy. For example, African families that moved into the Diaspora in the post-2000 era had to fit in the social and cultural systems of the host country. Some of the ways the African migrants used to fit into host countries are considered unconventional by Shona women and, therefore, a challenge to Shona patriarchy. For instance, the primary aim of making money at times led to manipulation of the traditional identities by Shona women determined to change their lives. Shona women who were left behind as husbands went to the Diaspora faced similar challenges to wives of immigrant husbands in the colonial era (Mwatwara, 2012). Some husbands abandoned their wives at home and found new wives in the Diaspora. Most African men only came home to die from diseases contracted away from home, not before these men passed the life-threatening diseases to their wives. Some African men brought back capital to reward the wives who had waited patiently, only to find out that some women had taken the initiative to re-marry, while other women had become promiscuous in the absence of their husbands. In some instances, it is the women who went abroad only to come back and realise their remittances had been used to marry another wife and had been literally duped.

Negative qualities of prostitution and depravity are ascribed to Shona women. Mwatwara (2012) in his article on the impact of male emigration on Zimbabwean women 2002-2010 quotes a woman, who says,

How could I have told my husband that I wanted to leave Zimbabwe to work in South Africa when in the first place he almost stopped me from going to work because he believed that women who work are prostitutes? In actual fact, he was ready to endure the hunger as long as I did not go to South Africa. (Muwati et al, 2012:151)

The combination of the laws and the constantly repeated images of the Shona women as prostitutes might lead many to believe it. Many men began to consider women as possessions as exemplified below,

My own view is that my wife is my property and I should not keep her far from my house. I believe that the work of the wife is in the house and to improve the family's standard of living and not be employed where she is going to behave as if she is still a girl looking for a husband. (Barnes, 1999:132)

The negative attitudes towards women planted in Shona men became deterrents to formal employment of women after independence. The colonially ascribed identities were uncritically accepted as fact by some men and used to whip women into submission. Regardless of political independence and laws of equality, negative attitudes continue to limit women's freedom by reinforcing stereotypes that confine women to the home.

Whether the responses of Shona women indicated above could be taken as evidence of “flawed agency” (Motsemme, 2007), what is clear is that the identities of Shona women are not static. Instead, they appear as a contested terrain that reflects the power dynamics in society. In other words, although scholars have suggested that there is something common to warrant the classification Shona women (Gelfand, 1976), this study argues that there is also diversity of identities within the community of Shona women so that what defines the Shona-ness of Shona women is their capacity to command multiple identities. These identities are then deployed by Shona women to initiate new action in hostile contexts that Shona women may perceive as threats to their lives. In order to fully understand how diverse representations of Shona women in literary works are formed and then manifest, this study adopts and debates how postcolonial theories explain the impulse that informs Shona women’s capacity to pluralise their identities.

2.2 The Concept of Postcolonialism

Postcolonial theory has generated much debate, especially on the meaning of “post”. Critics have asked whether the “post” in the term refers to both a chronological marker of time, that is, the aftermath of colonialism, the effects of colonialism or a mode of rethinking and writing about the past and the present existence of continued inequalities. For example, Leela Ghandi (1998:3) argues that the term “postcolonial” is largely disagreed upon because the postcolonial theory incorporates mutually antagonistic theories and multiple approaches to the issues discussed. Consequently, there is little consensus regarding the proper content, scope and relevance of postcolonial studies. Ghandi (1998:3) further notes that the hyphenated form “post-colonial” as marker of decolonisation process - the end of colonialism - is flawed as colonial structures and power dynamics have largely remained intact to date.

Loomba (2005:12) also argues that it is premature to proclaim the end of colonialism as the inequalities stemming from colonial rule are still present. A country may therefore be postcolonial in both senses of the word (having attained formal independence from a colonial power but remaining economically and culturally dependent on the coloniser - neo-colonialism). It is in this regard that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995:2) highlight that it would be folly to restrict the meaning of the term “postcolonial” to “after colonialism”. This is so because many postcolonial societies are still subject to overt and subtle forms of neo-colonial domination which independence has not erased. The term “postcolonial” in its unhyphenated form best captures the contradictions in dealing with the effects of colonialism, which are diverse.

Treacher (2006:374) notes that “postcolonial theory is concerned with how political and social conditions form subjectivity ... in a social order that focuses on, and perpetuates, a hierarchy of domination and subordination”. Her work is premised on Edward Said’s work, whom she calls the father of postcolonialism. Said (1979:3) writes;

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient ... It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.

The quotation above elaborates on how “a hierarchy of domination and subordination” is created in the context of the Orient. However, this is also applicable to all areas that have experienced colonialism or domination by another power. This thesis examines the construction of Shona women’s identities in selected literary texts, which entails analysing statements about them and the authorised views in the context of social and political situations.

A certain vocabulary has been created to describe the Shona woman and in many cases these descriptions differ from the actual Shona woman. In other words, ascribed identities describe the subjective elements and reflect the speaking positions (Ngoshi, 2013) of those in power, who use their authority to speak for or on behalf of the spoken. The colonial designation of Shona women as lazy, dirty and promiscuous is one example of this tendency. But, the richness and suggestiveness of postcolonial theory also alerts one to the fact that even though the subaltern or ordinary people speak about their identities there is not always firm guarantees that their voices are not reflecting, subtly, the interests of those in power. This is probably what Gayatri Spivak (1995) implies in the question of her popular critical essay, “Can the subaltern Speak?”. The versions of postcolonial theories used in this study suggest and warn critics to anticipate the possibility that the victim can speak in ways that confirm as true the biases and prejudices used to describe women by patriarchy. According to Gareth Griffiths, it is possible that “even when the subaltern appears to ‘speak’ there is a real danger as to whether what we are listening to is really a subaltern voice, or whether the subaltern is being spoken to by the subject position they occupy within the larger discursive economy” (1992: 75). What is implied is that there are no authentic identities and this interpretation suggests that the search for a single identity that can be called distinct Shona women’s identities is at best illusory and at worst reactionary and a form of dangerous essentialising. That is why Said (1978, 1995, 2003)

reiterates the view that identity formation is in relation to the other identities in the context of politics of domination.

Another critic, Young (2001:6) notes that postcolonial theory involves a political analysis of the cultural history of colonialism and its effects on contemporary Western and non-Western cultures. This points to a give and take relationship between cultures as well as the connection between the past and present, which in turn discredits the idea of an authentic monolithic identity. Identities are shaped in interaction and are therefore in flux. Young (2001:11) goes on to say,

Postcolonial critique focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world; that is; the politics of anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain. It constitutes a directed intellectual production that seeks to articulate itself with different forms of emancipatory politics to synthesise different kinds of work towards the realisation of common goals that include the creation of equal access to material, natural, social and technological resources, the contestation of forms of domination, whether economic, cultural, religious, ethnic or gendered, and the articulation and assertion of collective forms of political and cultural identity.

The quotation above places emphasis on contesting and fighting domination in order to assert an identity. This thesis seeks to find out how Shona women contest ascribed identities and also create their own within the spaces they find themselves, which are determined by the politics of the day. The extent to which Shona women accept the signifier “Shona” is also assessed. The Shona women’s reasons for accepting or rejecting the ascribed views on the Shona as a group are also significant in understanding how these identities are forged. In other words, at times people are coerced into an identity by the dominant powers but react differently as individuals by either resisting or conceding. Achille Mbembe (1992a:5) opines that

... the postcolony is made up not of one coherent ‘public space’, nor is it determined by any single organising principle. It is rather a plurality of ‘spheres’ and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts: hence the postcolonial ‘subject’ has had to learn to continually bargain and improvise. Faced with this ... the postcolonial subject mobilises not just a single ‘identity’ but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly ‘revised’ in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required. (Webner and Ranger, 1996:1)

In the quote above, it is suggested that humanity has the capacity to command different identities that are used in different contexts. This perspective informs my study and is

applicable to the analysis of the shifting identities of Shona women that have transformed over a number of years and in different social and political contexts.

Following on Mbembe's astute theorising on identities, one can be able to find out whether or not there is really something called a "Shona" identity. Or as Said's thesis of "Orient" suggests, absolute identities are fixed and in their emphasis of singularity of values, such identities are a creation or social construct aimed at achieving certain goals related to consolidate powerful interests of certain groups of people.

The novels selected for this study span from the 1890s at the onset of colonial conquest to 2015 after Zimbabwe went through economic and social upheavals. Beyond a preoccupation with analysing visible political movements based on the dynamics of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, postcolonial theories also engage the creative methods by which memories of past oppression and resistance to these oppressions are recovered. For example, Elleke Boehmer, in her *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* (1995) is of the view that in their works, creative artists

...retrieve suppressed oral traditions, half-forgotten histories, unrecorded private languages, moments of understated or unrecognised women's resistance. To the more general postcolonial interest in multiplicity, therefore, they add the concept of women's many-centred, constellated power, the stress being at once on the importance of diversity and on having the power to articulate selfhood (227-8).

Phrases like "half-forgotten histories" suggest that it may not be possible for an individual to know and perform all of one's potential identities. Furthermore, the emphasis of the passage on the "many-centred" aspects of women's identities stresses diversity over the search for monolith values.

The views that show how women like the Shona women can resist having their identities being pigeon-holed and fixed for all times in stereotypes are elaborated further, in the context of postcolonial feminism in Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler questions feminist discourse on gender that is skewed in favour of heterosexuality and First World women. Butler's contribution is seminal to this study as she questions the category "woman" as a signifier of a female body and necessarily describes femininity. For Butler (1990), gender identity is performed depending on context and power dynamics and is, thus, fluid. This observation is critical to this study in that it critiques the imposed colonial notion of gender that disregards the cultural views of the Shona women where motherhood is not necessarily a feminine role. On another level the critique accommodates the way individuals negotiate and construct their own identities outside the prescribed cultural norms.

Other critics of postcolonial theory argue that some versions of it are too abstract and narrowly concerned with culture and preoccupied with textuality and discourse. In Abrahamsen's (2003: 191) words postcolonial theory is

perceived to be too theoretical and its language impenetrable and esoteric ... it is perceived to be almost singularly preoccupied with words, textuality and discourses and to be either disconnected from the world of raw politics and economics, or to mistake the textual for the real world.

While some postcolonial theorists, such as Mbembe and Bhabha may appear to use difficult language for some readers, this does not discredit the validity of the issues they address. Language represents perceptions of the real world and postcolonial theory serves to explain the workings of the "world of raw politics and economics".

In addition, as argued by Kwame Anthony Appiah, post colonial theories seek amongst other things, "to delegitimize not only the forms of realism but the content of nationalism" (2007: 662). To the extent that African patriarchal forms of nationalism thrive on assigning identities to those the theory cannot understand, or seek to control, one can see in postcolonial theory, the desire to "reject not only the Western Imperium but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie" (ibid). This means that if the Victorian conception of female identities imposed on Shona women by colonialism limited the kinds of identities that these women could adopt, command and use in various contexts, the same can also be said about African nationalism and its penchant to assign controlling metaphors in defining Shona women's identities. Furthermore, to the extent that postcolonial theories can explain the motives of narrowing identities of women, these theories are, therefore, the most appropriate tools to assist in understanding the politics that inform the constructions of Shona women's identities and may enable one to produce a complex account that gives various meanings to the shifts in Shona women's identities over space and time.

2.3 The Concept of 'Representations'

Postcolonial theories also engage the meanings of the term "representation", which is key to any attempts at explaining identities as arbitrary labels and social constructions. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that representation is a way in which meaning is given to things depicted through images or words. In essence, a representation is not the real thing, but stands in for/takes the place of the real thing in a way that is meant to suit the aim of the one creating the representation. However, since representation is a symbolical process, the signs it uses can

overflow with other meanings not anticipated by those who create them. Hall understands this gap between the true meaning of an event and how it is represented. In doing so, one needs to consider the specific social, cultural, political and economic context of the event. Young (1988) goes so far as to argue that what is remembered about social identities depends on how these identities are remembered, which in turn depends on texts giving these identities form. In other words, although constructed identities can assume the mantle of coherence that narrative necessarily imposes on them, representations suggest versions of reality because signs have a tendency to usurp the events they represent. This view is significant to this study which seeks to explain identities ascribed to Shona women as an aspect of stereotypes. My argument is that stereotypes are based on excess signification of values endowed with a singularity of meaning and this tends to inhibit identifying other alternative identities of the people so described.

Writing in the context of recovering African-American cultures, bell hooks (1992) notes that contexts can shift the meaning of identities. Her argument is made in the context of hip hop in America where the artists capitalise on the racist, sexist and misogynist views of white suburban youths to sell their products. Rap music, therefore, does not represent authentic black culture because it is a response to an economic situation. However, the representation does affect perceptions of black people by those who have not had direct contact with them. This study finds the idea of representation useful in examining constructions of images of Shona women. This is so because language, signs and images are used to represent things in a reflective, intentional and constructionist way (Hall, 1997).

“Reflective” implies imitation of a fixed truth already present in the world generally accepted in the Aristotelian concept of *mimesis*. In the intentional mode, the author or speaker imposes meaning on to the world through the use of language using shared linguistic conventions and codes within a culture. Implied in this view is that the image so created may not necessarily exist in the world but a creation of the author. This study views and interrogates some identities ascribed to Shona women as forms of stereotypes which project singular views as a substitute for the diversity of human identities. As Rwafa puts it, stereotypes can deny the possibilities of imagining plurality” (2012: 114) of identities. However, that attempt by certain forms of representations to hide some versions of reality encourages critics like myself to seek for the multiple sites of identities of Shona women from which it may be different for dominant classes to infiltrate and erase.

Lang (2000: 92) refers to the mismatch between an object and the language used to talk about it as *misrepresentation* which might occur when the author purports that what is represented be construed as real. The constructionist/constructivist view takes this idea further by noting that meaning is constructed using systems of representation. Hall notes that,

Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others. (Hall, 1997: 25)

What the above quotation highlights is that while representations may be related to the material world, the possibilities of distorting social identities using visual and verbal signs is real. Literature is an artistic representation in words. Hall (1997) says that the aim to “communicate about that world meaningfully to others” through fiction constructs another reality that can change people’s lives in unexpected ways. This study questions the tendency in existing studies that have either taken for granted the existence of Shona identity (mimesis) or rejected certain images as mere creations of authors. This study adopts the constructivist approach in a bid to explore and understand the various representations of Shona women’s identities.

2.4 The Concept of Stereotypes

Seminal to the critique of existing representations is a rejection of stereotypes. Stereotypes create binaries of civilised/primitive, advanced/backward, superior/inferior, white/black. The positive markers are normally reserved for the West and African patriarchy and the negative for “the other” (Orient, Black, Third World, Women etc.). Said (1978:207) notes that,

Along with all other peoples variously designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilised, and retarded, the Orientals were viewed in a framework constructed out of biological determinism and moral-political admonishment. The Oriental was linked thus to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien. Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or- as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory - taken over. The point is that every designation of something as Oriental involved an already pronounced evaluative judgment, and in the case of the peoples inhabiting the decayed Ottoman Empire, an implicit programme of action. Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple.

Implied in the quotation is that the identity of the Orient was assumed to be known and determined by the coloniser who acted on the basis of those assumptions. Gaidzanzwa (1985) outlines such stereotypes in the context of Ndebele and Shona women represented in Zimbabwean literature as wives, mothers and prostitutes. Said's thesis seeks to reject these stereotypes as they militate against some knowledge of the Eastern people.

It is the contention of this study that Shona women have suffered the same fate as colonial subjects who are "rarely seen or looked at or analysed as citizens". Most Shona women were confined to spaces created by the colonial system and the values defined and agreed on with the nativist African patriarchy. The African men are accorded a status much higher than the women, even when some of the Shona women have achieved higher social status than less successful men. According to Chakrabarti (2012:8), a stereotype is created on the basis of a problematic binary opposition and that this binary is at the centre of strategic function of colonial discourse meant

...to create a space for the colonised through the production of knowledge, a continuous mechanism of surveillance, and the creation of stereotypes. Such a strategy of surveillance and typification helped the colonizer to categorise and hence establish a system of administration on the one hand, and to locate the colonized as the 'other' so as to ratify cultural authority/superiority, on the other.

The construction of stereotypes was meant to justify colonial culture of racial superiority. This study focuses on Shona women as represented in literary texts, and the stereotypes recycled to create identities meant to subvert the dignity of Shona women. The study, however, suggests that the intentions to domesticate Shona women in some cases succeeded and in other cases did not succeed to wrap and stifle Shona women's voices in certain cultural practices.

Bhabha argues that a stereotype is actually split even when it is presented as coherent. This view points to the limitations of stereotypes as a way of representing reality. The interaction between the coloniser and the colonised created a hybrid culture that could never be explained in binary terms as these oversimplify human experience. Binaries create an impression that outside the colonial constructs is an authentic natural identity that has been misrepresented and can be recovered. This premise is false as cultures feed into each other and the identities of the West and South feed into each other in the global era. This idea is hitched on the notion of the ambivalence of the stereotype. Bhabha (1983:18-19) argues as follows;

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. It is this process or ambivalence, central to the stereotype that constructs a theory of colonial discourse. For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. Yet, the function of ambivalence as one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power - whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan — remains to be charted. The absence of such a perspective has its own history of political expediency. To recognise the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics, and questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination. My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the identification of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. (...) Only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse-that 'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity. What such a reading reveals are the boundaries of colonial discourse and it enables a transgression of these limits from the space of that otherness.

From this long passage one can deduce that for Bhabha stereotypes are based on excessive valorising of narrow values as defining the sum total of the diversity of human identities. Bhabha brings an insight which is that for all the posturing of those who insist on the purity of identities, stereotypes are ambivalent. According to Bhabha, ambivalence cracks the certainty endowed on identities that are represented as static. It is within the crevices of the ambivalent significations of stereotyped identities that, according to Bhabha, one can recuperate a sense of “transgression of these limits from that space of otherness”.

This sophisticated way of describing stereotypes is useful in explaining the diverse agencies of Shona women as depicted in Zimbabwe's fictional work. In doing so, this study rejects the reading of stereotypes as negative or positive and insists on multiple readings as the object of analysis which can use stereotypes to subvert the original meaning. This reading applies to

most contemporary writing, especially by the young writers who critique both the colonialist and nationalist discourses. It will therefore be useful in my analysis of the identities of Shona women in the context of class, racist and sexist discourses as depicted in selected texts. By noting that stereotypes are generally exaggerated, it follows that there is need to find out the reason behind the exaggeration which enhances understanding of identity constructions. The idea of boundaries and transgressions is in sync with Lang's (2000) notions of limits of representations that imply that at times artists are limited in their representations to use what their audience is familiar with but choose ways to evoke more critical reflection amongst readers. In short, stereotypes do not have monolithic meanings. Bhabha explains this paradox that works against a stereotype's initial impulse to present itself as commanding and monopolising all possible meanings behind human identities. The colonial and nationalist stereotypes are complex, ambivalent, contradictory modes of representation, and "anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself" (Bhabha, 1983:22). This study, however, agrees with Lang's qualifications which are based on the fact that to be able to identify identities as being based on even the most condemned stereotypes is important because it adds one's knowledge of the mercurial nature of the represented object.

2.5 Construction of Identity in Fictional Narratives

While it has been established that all narratives, by virtue of using language as medium of communication, represent a version of the object/subject of representation, literature is a special medium of representation. Literature uses language figuratively and Bhabha (1983) notes that it must be read beyond the literal meaning. Literature uses metaphor (works from point of similarity), metonymy (works by association) and symbols that have a representative function which can change the meaning of stereotypes when read in their figurative mode. When these signs and symbols are read from particular cultural standpoints, there can never be a monolithic interpretation of identities in fictional narratives. While other disciplines purport to represent reality, literary works usually bear a disclaimer to reality as works of imagination except for memoirs and autobiographical writing. Rimmon- Kenan (1983) emphasizes that 'narrative fiction' implies a succession of fictional events.

Lang (2000) further notes that for literary works to be effective, they have to be written within modes that people are familiar with. Even when fiction departs from the norm, this is

understandable because, as Hayden White (1978) argues, fiction represents the actual, the probable, the possible and the imaginative. Fictional representations may be constrained by the genre chosen, the creative temperament of the artist, as well as the historical context. This observation is pertinent to this study as it explains why some authors experience constraining symbolical vocabulary to capture complex social transformations. This problem imposes constraints on other authors in their attempt to represent identities of Shona women in their novels. Thus, in composing Shona women identities, authors do often experience the problem of translating what they know into telling it. Another problem that this study is conscious of is the danger of opposing history to fiction because, “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation” (1978: 122).

For instance, an author such as Lessing might not have the liberty to represent Shona women “authentically” since she is not a Shona woman and as such may not have access to certain subjectivities of Shona women formed by their experiences as black, Shona and women. Literature attempts to allow readers to only vicariously experience what putative Shona women go through in their daily lives as they negotiate new identities even in the most hostile circumstances. But the converse is also true, which is that victims of social prejudice are not necessarily and naturally endowed with extraordinary capacity to tell only their stories that reveal every necessary aspect of the traumatic experiences they pass through in their lives. In other words, the fact that one is white, black, man and woman does not by itself guarantee that these authors will represent knowledge of Shona women’s identities anymore less than could come out of the victimised women. This way of argument does not minimise the pain that Shona women go through, nor does it imply that Shona women need interlocutors outside their racial and gendered identities to know themselves, nor is it meant to deny white authors the capability to represent Shona women’s subjective experiences. It would be a-historical to argue in that direction.

However, although this study recognises the significance of the specificity of context in making meaning of fictional images, it is not necessarily fruitful to construct a social history of Shona women’s backgrounds to extrapolate the diversity of women’s identities. A sociology of Shona women’s identities can hit a creative brickwall if it is imagined that there is a one to one relationship between the social conditions of women’s experience and how these are represented in Zimbabwean literature. Fiction, mediates reality and this process involves selecting, ordering and projecting certain values as more important than others. This process

involves suppression of certain identities which could have been surfaced but have not. This insight is useful in understanding the dynamics of the Shona-ness of Shona women's identities and informs my analysis of Zimbabwean fiction in search of alternative identities from those that might obviously be suggested from a surface reading of the novels.

Frye (1958) notes that genres are cyclic and represent the natural seasons thereby exhibiting various aspects of humanity. Satire and comedy highlight the follies and vices of mankind in anarchic mode, while epic and tragedy focus on fortitude and dignity of man in the face of adversity in realist mode, romance and myths point to the ideals of society with a moral quality where good is rewarded and evil is punished or defeated (projects desires). The characters are bound to be represented differently and hence reflect different identities. In Aristotelian definition, comedy has characters that are worse than many in real life, while tragedy represents man greater than what they actually are in real life. What is common in all these definitions is that no single representation can fully contain all aspects of humanity's identities.

This study recognises and will attempt to theoretically explain why some authors mix genres in order to capture multiple agencies of their characters in different modes so as not to fix human behaviour in one dimension. An author may wish to achieve certain meanings through their fictional works, only to find out that the surplus meanings suggested by images as signs can suggest unanticipated meanings. However, as Lang (2000) notes, representation is a form of creating a second layer of the meaning of life which can or is richer than the actual sordid facts of existence. This point is made possible by the fact that fictional works have the capacity to stylise even the most gruesome identities in ways that transform raw experience into an aesthetics of multiple possibilities.

Representations take various forms as noted above but are seminal to studying constructions of identities of Shona women. This study aims to understand the representations within their contexts thereby going beyond noting how positive or negative the representations are. As Bhabha (1983:27) notes;

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits) constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in signification of psychic and social relations.

Where binaries seem to exist in the selected texts for this study, the causes are examined as well as the possibilities of change, as circumstances change, are highlighted in order to underscore the one thing about life, which is that identities shift inspite of ourselves.

2.6 Identifying the Shona People

The term “Shona” is used to refer to people who are largely found between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers and speak a number of connected dialects referred to by the same name. It is generally agreed among scholars that the term is a recent one, mainly popularised by European researchers and explorers. Mutswairo (1996) advocates reclaiming an original identity and states that the so-called Shona are Mbire. He traces the Bantu migrations from Tanganyika through academic historical sources. Chigwedere (1980) uses sources from oral history to reconstruct and prove the identity of people living in present day Zimbabwe. Mutswairo quotes several white scholars who attest to the use of the term “Shona” as an imposed phenomenon. It is expedient to copy the quotations;

Beach (1980:18) notes that;

The term Shona came into use in the 19th century. The nearest historical approach to a name for the Shona speaking people, ‘Karanga,’ cannot be proven to have been used outside the south and east before the 18th century. The word itself was apparently first used by the Ndebele and others to the south in the early 19th century to describe the people of the south-west of the Plateau, especially the Rozvi. The word was extended by degrees, first to the central Shona and then to the rest of the people.

And Theal (quoted in Mutswairo 1996: 34) acknowledges that, “The word Mashona is a contemptuous nickname given them by their enemies and adopted by us (Whites) unwittingly, but it is now in general use by Europeans.”

Beach and Theal’s quotations show that the naming of the peoples of the plateau as Shona was a construction by foreigners seeking to control the plateau. As a “contemptuous nickname” it was meant to prove the superiority of the namer. It is in the context of this background that Mutswairo rejects the term and insists on the signifier “Mbire” instead.

Doke (1930: 3) who is accredited with the unification of the numerous Shona dialects after being assigned the task by the Rhodesian government says;

It is essential to use a definite name as a label for the whole cluster of groups. The fact that the people themselves do not acknowledge the name is immaterial,

for no true name exists by which the cluster may be called, and the name is only a classificatory convenience, for the people will continue to call themselves by their true dialectical or tribal names.

The above quotations point to the fact that Shona is a term imposed by foreigners in order to identify a group of people on a specific physical location with linguistic affinities but with diverse traits that signify distinct identities. The “classificatory convenience” was to facilitate efficient administration by the colonial government. The colonisers used their power to create an identity that did not exist before their occupation of the land. The imposition is clear in the quotation from Doke, who categorically states that it is “immaterial” that the people themselves do not acknowledge the name.

Shona identity was, therefore, constructed in the same way that the Orient was created, for the convenience of European conquest. Gelfand (1973) and Bourdillon’s (1976) studies acknowledge that the Shona themselves hardly referred to themselves as such. However, it is ironic that the term “Shona”, is now a generally accepted term used in accordance to Doke’s classification.

Mutswairo (1996: 37) concludes his argument with the following declaration;

The strength and unity of a Mbire family lies in its name. It is mystically, philosophically, spiritually and emotionally interwoven with the situation surrounding that nature. A name as a name is what it stands for and not a name for its own sake. So the Shona are Mbire because they derive their name from their ancestor, Mambiri or Mambiro, from whom the name Mbire is derived and not Shona, whose significance is linked to perceptions of us by aliens.

We are not that which is spoken about: faces which have no voices which need to be deciphered by others; we are not images, or mirages that need definition from outside; nor are we objects that need to be defined by foreigners.

We are Mbire and not Shona.

Mutswairo might speak as an insider, a Mbire man rejecting the label by foreigners. However, the above quotation highlights that identities are two-fold: as perceived by observers and as perceived by self. Perceptions are socially constructed, agreed upon and repeated to a point where it appears natural when it is not. Mutswairo contests the use of the term “Shona” based on his understanding of the genealogy of his people and yet it has now become a common referent for people in Zimbabwe. His views are only one way of representing these people and they are informed by his pride and sense of belonging. However, as Lang (2000) notes, all representations are shadows of the real thing but can add knowledge of the represented object by introducing new ways of seeing and understanding the represented object. In essence, the

existence of a 'Shona (female) identity' is slippery as it is premised on conceptions by various people and at times these conceptions are conflicting depending on author's standpoint.

2.7 Shona Women in Zimbabwean Fiction in English

This study critically examines the constructions of identities of Shona women - identities that are always in constant flux. In the early years distinguishing Rhodesia and South Africa was difficult and that is why this study includes Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). Now Schreiner is generally identified as a South African author. This is despite the fact that the title of the novel also directly points to Mashonaland, the direct subject of this study. Moyana (1999: 15-16), in her study of the Rhodesian novel (1890-1994), observes that;

Rhodesia is applied to present day Zimbabwe between 1890 and 1979 and Rhodesian to the white novelists who wrote between 1890 and 1979. Although 'Zimbabwean' may be applied to white novelists after 1980 by virtue of the fact that the country became known as Zimbabwe, it is to be noted that the basic vision of the white novelists remained Rhodesian ... The reader will note that the Rhodesian novel, indeed, exhibits a 'British consciousness ... with prejudices calculated to appeal to [the authors'] British audience.' Although some of the novels were written after independence in a country called Zimbabwe, their visions remain Rhodesian.

Moyana distinguishes the Rhodesian from Zimbabwean in terms of sensibilities exhibited in the representation of issues in the texts. Rhodesian novels are, therefore, those that exhibit prejudices against blacks despite being written after independence when the country had changed its name to Zimbabwe. For the purpose of this study, such texts are included and considered Zimbabwean literature as they offer perceptions of Shona women in the colonial era and explain the creation of certain images that have persisted, despite the change in political and social situations. This accounts for the inclusion of Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and Harrison's *Jambanja* (2006).

In fact, Rhodesian literature critic Chennells (1982: iv) notes that novelists employed myths because,

...the myths enabled the novelists to give their setting and characters features that were uniquely Rhodesian and since the myths served to justify the settlers' presence in the country, the novels helped develop the awareness of a new and distinct Rhodesian identity.

The use of myths in creating Rhodesian identities with which to justify the settlers' control of African patriarchy in general and Shona women's identities in particular was a subtle tool of exerting power. Chennells (1982: vii) believes that Rhodesian novels were the opposite of novels by the black inhabitants of the land. He states that;

The black novelists were concerned to retain an African identity despite the settler presence and most of their novels implicitly or explicitly look forward to the day when that identity would be allowed full expression in an independent Zimbabwe. They may have been written in Southern Rhodesia but unlike the settler novel they were not concerned with the progress or survival of Southern Rhodesia (ibid).

From the above quotations it is clear that literature reflects the aspirations and tensions of a specific historic period. The difference in visions accounts for the tendency to look at either white authors or black authors in existing literary criticism. But Chennells' argument carries with it a residual perspective which might not usefully assist one to explain why some black artists might write in ways that unwittingly glorify the values of empire. Furthermore, the assumption that it is possible to African authors to "retain an African identity" carries with it a view that this African identity is characterised by homogeneous values amongst black people. This study questions this essentialisation of Shona women's identities. Zhuwarara (2001: 8) notes that;

In general, one finds that Zimbabwean fiction is responsive to and reflective of the historical processes which were affecting society as a whole. There is a parallel movement here which points to the existence of a strong umbilical cord between history and fiction as well as poetry and drama. The organic tie in itself is not new or original Zimbabwean phenomenon; it has existed in the history and literature of other societies, especially those in Africa where oral literature was an integral part of the history and religion of the tribe. In the Zimbabwean case, the historical experience sheds light on the tone, form and thematic preoccupation of the fiction.

The fact that the fictional texts are closely linked to history makes them significant in gleaning the identity of Shona women across historical epochs. The selected novels can also provide plural narratives that speak to the diverse political and economic situations and reflect the authors' ideological positioning. This means that, for this study, Zimbabwean fiction must be analysed and understood in its own right; that fiction can authorise its meanings of Shona women's identities whose validity will not necessarily grow in stature if fictional identities are made to equal identities as captured in the form of facts, which is the staple form of conventional history.

Including texts from both white and black authors enables one to analyse Shona women's identities from multiple dimensions. Moyana (1999) notes that Africans are generally portrayed negatively in novels written by whites, with the master/servant relationship being the most commonly portrayed between white men and black men. This study seeks to find out if this is always the case and how the race or gender of the author affects the representation of Shona women. It is important to carry out such a study as mine, because even in Moyana's view, there is also a contentious suggestion which is that when black authors write about Shona women's identities, these authors will necessarily recreate the diversity that defines the complexity of these identities. It is then interesting to study the difference in portrayal of black women by whites such as Schreiner and Lessing. After independence we have blacks representing their relationship with the white world and how it impacts on their identities as in Dangarembga and Marangwanda's novels. This study seeks to unravel the complexities of identities and move away from dichotomies that have largely dominated existing studies.

Zhuwarara (2001:12) comments on both Schreiner and Lessing's work in the context of colonial brutality, arguing that;

It was the brutality with which the uprising was put down and cruelty with which harsh conditions were imposed on Africans afterwards that prompted one of the prominent ancestors of South African Literature - Olive Schreiner (author of *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) to write her novel - *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). Although written in the form of a moral tract, the novel expresses with passion the outrage of a writer who saw a supposedly civilised race violating Christian ethics with impunity. Hers was a voice lost in the wilderness. As more whites flocked into the new country after the First World War, more racist legislation was passed in order to reserve more land for whites. The process of dispossession continued unabated throughout the 1930s and intensified immediately after the Second World War. Meanwhile, Africans were divided, weak and too confused to challenge the settler order.

The quotation above points to the material reality that was altered and resulted in shifts in identities for both the coloniser and the colonised as the former consolidated power through legislation and violence. On Lessing, Zhuwarara writes that;

The only white novelist who succeeded in capturing the nature of the painful contact between whites and blacks, and the source of conflict between the two races, is Doris Lessing. In her *African Short Stories* such as "*The Old Chief*

Mhlanga” “*Antheap*” and in her novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and in other works, what is dramatised in fictional form is a fundamental failure of the human imagination to bridge the gap between two races of different complexion. The whites found it extremely difficult to regard blacks as part of mankind and therefore belonging to the human family. Lessing dramatises in a forceful way the submergence of the African and the marginality of his existence during the time when the settlers were preoccupied with the consolidation of their power in the country. (Zhuwarara, 2001:12)

Quoted at length, this serves to justify the choice of Lessing and Schreiner in this study as they deliberately chose to represent Africans where other whites’ novels are conspicuous in the absence of black characters, especially women who are represented in mythical terms that consolidated colonial power. White authors’ works represent the historical “submergence” and “marginality” of the identity of Shona women within the colonial discourse.

In addition, Schmidt (1992) adds that there was also collusion between colonialism and African patriarchy to name Shona women in ways that were convenient to them. One is, therefore, able to trace the effects of colonialism on that identity as they write 50 years apart. This study seeks to investigate how the women reacted to the forces that sought to shape them in oppressive ways and how the same Shona women’s quest renewed identities. It critiques the binary reading of victim and conqueror and focuses at intersections and hybrid identities of Shona women.

The study also critiques the notion of “identity crisis” in Zhuwarara’s (2001) argument. The clash of African and European culture at times accorded women spaces for fostering new identities to their advantage, albeit contrary to the dominant scripts of colonialism and indigenous patriarchy. For instance, the prostitute was an enterprising woman who saw opportunities to acquire monetary wealth in a context where she was denied access to formal employment and her traditional space had been curtailed by colonialism. It is also pertinent to examine the extent Schreiner and Lessing conform or depart from other white writings and account for it.

Magosvongwe (2013) notes that the struggle between whites and blacks, which is captured in literature, is primarily over land. The title of her thesis is *Land and identity in Zimbabwean Fiction Writings in English from 2000 to 2010: A critical analysis*. She boldly declares;

Zimbabwean history has shown that land ownership and cultural identities are intertwined. Apart from it being the nexus of existence, land among the indigenous ethnic groupings, is viewed as an essential key to people’s sense of belonging and self- knowledge. (...) As far as land ownership is concerned, Zimbabwe’s history shows that settler conquest underpins the underlying

turmoil and exploitative relationship between colonial settlers and original inhabitants. The new set-up demanded that the original inhabitants reorient themselves in line with their new realities of being “other people’s tenants even in their own lands” (Abrahams, 2000:376). By alienating the indigenous inhabitants from their land, the new system undermined their self-sufficiency, and also fractured and distorted relationships and identities. They were subjected to a negotiated social reality that dislocated them from cultural traditions, self-respect, spirit of place, as well as self-perceptions of history and lived experiences.

In Magosvongwe’s view, colonialism manipulated indigenous identities (including Shona women) which became fractured, distorted and dislocated in order to justify subordination of the colonised. Although land is the single productive force without which humanity cannot assert its independence, it is important to stress the point that not all identities of Shona women are directly linked to the land issue. To argue so would be to succumb to a certain determinist explanation of how individuals are subdued by land as if land means something more than what meanings that land is ascribed by those who benefit from it. This means that there are certain cultural identities that are divorced from the land issue; identities that are imagined and then projected as truth. It is these identities that are toxic to the lives of Shona women because many of these identities assume spiritual dimensions and psychological dimensions which are difficult to detect and then expunge from those who are victims of these identities.

Furthermore, Magosvongwe may be questioned for assuming an essential African, and by inference Shona, identity that is then “fractured and distorted”. The initial assumption is that identities are already found in a state of coherence instead of arguing that it is narrative that gives identities a certain coherence they may not have in real life. In other words, all identities are constructed and, hence, can be deconstructed to suit new contexts. At times it is the representation that is fractured and distorted while the represented object remains constant due to existing power dynamics. This study does not negate the fact that colonialism did affect the identities of Shona women, but one needs to problematise in an astute way the nature of the shifts in the African identities. There is need to explore representations of Shona women’s identities as depicted in Zimbabwean fiction by authors of different social and racial backgrounds, yet sharing the same physical scape at different times in Zimbabwe.

2.8 Representations of Shona Women in Zimbabwean Literature

Eagleton (1984:123-124) notes that representations in literature are;

...symbolic process of social life, and the social production of forms of subjectivity. ... For it is surely becoming apparent that without a more profound understanding of such symbolic processes, through which political power is deployed, reinforced, resisted, at times subverted, we shall be incapable of unlocking the most lethal power-struggles now confronting us.

Representations in literature are not neutral; they reflect a position of power that requires a critic to decipher. The critic too is hardly neutral as the theoretical lens he/she chooses to analyse fiction exhibits a specific ideological stance. It is then important to understand the context in which a novel is written to fully interpret it. In Lang's (2000:51) words,

By definition, there must be a difference between a representation and its object *unrepresented*, with the former adding its own version to the "original" it represents. In this sense, the opposite of *representational* is not abstract (as applied, for example, to nonrepresentational painting) but *literal*, the object as it is before or apart from being re-presented.

This means that representations are not to be necessarily judged in relation to the literal object but for the meanings generated by the representation (Hall, 1997). As highlighted by the quotation above, there is likely to be reinforcement of certain images, subversion and resistance aimed at the dominant power embedded in Shona women's. Each representation provides a version of a Shona woman's identity that is guided by the existence of the original and the power dynamics at play, which is what Lang (2000) calls "the limits of representation". In other words, one can talk of versions and sub/versions of identities amongst Shona women because as a social group, the women do not experience symbolical violence with the same intensity. Class positions amongst women matter, just as race and gender can modify our understanding of how identities are formed and operationalised in the context of the matrix of oppression and resistance that women can enact with different levels of consciousness.

It is important to have as many stories as possible reflecting a variety of identities of Shona women. Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (2009) states that the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Single stories are born out of cultural prescriptions forged in order to allow certain social groups to exert control over others. However, it is important to argue here that the relationship between Shona women and those who impact Shona women's lives can be described as hegemonic in the sense that it involves coercion and consent sometimes, as Gramsci (1971) argues, with none being more dominant than the other. Such a perspective is embraced in this study because it will allow one to explain some ambiguities and ambivalences expressed in situations where sometimes it is elderly

Shona women who can be at the forefront of aiding African patriarchy to have undue control over Shona women.

Chimamanda Adichie further comments that to create a single story is to show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become in public discourse. In other words, there may be some Shona women who aptly fit the descriptions ascribed by colonial discourse but that does not mean all Shona women fit that mode. Adichie (2009) is aware of the dialectical nature of images that attempt to present different sides of life's experience when she writes of how powerful people are able not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.

The colonial government created images of the Shona woman as submissive, loose, dirty, a prostitute, stupid, and as rebellious people who needed to be controlled. The desire to control Shona women was viewed as necessary to stabilise the much-needed cheap labour that African natives could provide. This would in turn, validate the white people's claim of superiority over the Africans. The colonial government understood the value of narrative in constructing identities for those to be conquered and hence promoted the creation and dissemination of the negative images of Shona women through literature. McLoughlin (1990: xi-xii) observes that;

In 1954 [the Rhodesian] Government decided to set up the Literature Bureau to foster 'sound and healthy literature' among Blacks. Hence from an early date writers, Black or White, who wanted to imaginatively explore social issues were taking a risk. This was particularly true for Black writers who worked in a milieu where local editors had narrow expectations of style and theme. If these were not realised the editor would silently adapt or censor the contribution. The obvious intention was to write what the education system, government policy and publishers regarded as good literature. The effects of such policies and attitudes were legion particularly in the 1950s and 1960s.

The process of how, through the Literature Bureau's Shona, IsiNdebele and African literature in English in Zimbabwe, colonialism was channelled to create and circulate art in which stereotypes of Shona women were allowed to pass as good writing has been studied (Chiwome, 1996). Women in the city were largely represented as prostitutes, and the women in the rural areas as good wives. This is the kind of representation that Gaidzanwa (1985:7) protests against in her analysis of Shona and Ndebele novels produced under the Literature Bureau. She notes that;

The ways in which different authors view relationships between men, women and children are varied. There are similarities in the stereotyping of women's images while at the same time differences exist in the way works written in

English depict women. The works in English depart from the main body of Shona and Ndebele literature in that they are not heavily moralistic, condemning and punitive of female behaviour that deviates from the norm.

Unfortunately Gaidzanwa's book does not begin to suggest alternative images that would manifest the diversities of the lived experiences of Shona people. This study seeks to go beyond merely condemning images that worked against Shona women but to also identify the lineaments of shifting images of Shona women. It is expedient to check the ideological content of the images of Shona women undergoing inexorable changes in order to underscore the significance and consequences to real Shona women of those images. Shona and Ndebele women were ascribed certain constraining identities largely existing in the realm of cultural stereotypes. However, this study specifically focuses only on the representation of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction in English. This choice is partly dictated by the fact that the researcher teaches Zimbabwean literature in English. It is hoped that studies on the changing identities of Shona and Ndebele women can also be fruitfully carried out in the departments of African languages and literatures. Future critics can then determine the extent to which the depiction of Shona and Ndebele women in fiction exhibits similarities and differences. This justification of why it is important to carry out this study is apposite because one can only do as much within one's disciplinary boundary so as to deepen scholarship in that discipline. This way of arguing in favour of analysing depictions of Shona women in Zimbabwean fiction in English is not blind to recent emphases to carry out interdisciplinary and comparative studies.

In addition the ability to narrow focus of any study might enable an in depth study on the concept of "Shona Women" as opposed to aspiring to study the whole gamut of what has come to be called "Zimbabwean women" used in most existing studies. Ethnic power dynamics are also studied which would not be possible with the blanket "black women in Zimbabwe", which would include immigrants from neighbouring countries with various cultural sensibilities. Therefore, an ethnographical approach to the study of Shona women might yield insights that can be applied to women in general or that studies that seek to demonstrate how culture assigns meanings to Shona women; meanings that might not be easy to generalise because of the peculiarity of Shona women's mode of insertion in the patriarchal and capitalist society of Zimbabwe.

This study also deems it worthwhile to explore the kinds of stereotypes that white, black, female and male writers who occupied the same physical space of living in Rhodesia at different historical periods used in their depiction of Shona women. This perspective is

important because the way authors create stereotypes of Shona women are sophisticated because stereotypes themselves grow in sophisticated ways in how they are made to manifest the agency of Shona women. Bhabha reminds us that when it is that stereotypes are static, what is actually meant is that the so-created stereotypes are based on the idea of singularity of values. However, the content of the values represented in their singularity transforms and changes to reflect the new ways through which dominant sensibilities respond to efforts by Shona women to shirk old identities.

In addition, the creation of sophisticated cultural stereotypes designed to arrest Shona women's identities also depends on the intellectual traditions from which authors, whether black, white, male or female, draw their created resources from. The non-moralistic depiction of deviant women enables an honest analysis of the dynamics that govern their behaviour. McLoughlin (1990) attributes the difference in the depiction of women between English and indigenous novels to a mastery of literary techniques such as irony that were not found in the earlier vernacular largely narrative modes. The complex use of imagery allows for a broader and complex representation of the subject matter. Traditionalist African cultural imagery as well as modernist styles of writing come to authors already mediated by the politically conscious, as well as what Jameson calls the political unconscious. This latter spiritual frame can unwittingly be used by authors without them being fully conscious about it. This view is important for this study which argues further that even the most astute creative writers are never always able to "police" the symbolical meanings that come out of the kinds of metaphors they use to describe and fix identities of Shona women in literature. Besides this point, readers also bring to the reading experiences their own cultural biases which might allow them to arrive at interpreting identities of Shona women from their horizons of expectations.

Gaidzanwa (1985) focuses on the images of women in Zimbabwean literature by selected black authors in Shona, Ndebele and English from 1964-1983. She analyses the representations of the women as mothers, wives, women without husbands, rural and urban women and notes that the women are not defined in their own right but in relation to men. Gaidzanwa's (1985:8) reasons for her study are valid for this particular study;

The views of black writers are very important because as formerly colonised people, it is interesting to examine the way they internalised and interpreted the experience of colonisation as reflected in the way they form images of women. Long after independence, it will be interesting to see if the way women are viewed will change to reflect the social and political order.

Women's images are important because as the bulk of the rural, most materially disadvantaged sector of Zimbabwe's population, women have a major stake in encouraging and struggling for a more just order. A negative image delegitimises their struggle for fundamental rights and freedoms such as the right to jobs, education, health and other valued goods and services in society.

Gaidzanwa is correct to suggest that men, whether white or black authors, had a headstart in writing fiction that ended up sedimenting certain ways of representing Shona women. The consequence of this advantage for men is that they created a tradition that canonised certain ways of depicting which some white and black female writers came to emulate as the true models of Shona women's womanhood. The critic is also on spot to suggest that "women have a major stake in encouraging and struggling for a more just order". This however, is a contentious view as it suggests that all women in life seek to establish a more just order. Such a perspective glosses over the view that some white female authors wrote about Shona women, emphasising the need for these women to accept social positions of inferiority. Furthermore, although it might be in the interest of most female authors to encourage and struggle through their artistic creations to suggest a just social order for Shona women, this process proceeds unevenly to the uneven levels of conceptualising the range of identities that Shona women might command.

It is true, as Gaidzanwa implies, that in colonial and post-independent Zimbabwe the Shona women are portrayed as prostitutes and the consequences of these depictions often allow corrupt men to demand sex for jobs, housing or other amenities that the women should rightly have access to as citizens of the country. However, this study modifies Gaidzanwa's (1985) view that maleness predisposes male authors to authorise biased images of Shona women. Such a view threatens to undermine efforts by some male writers whose creativity can deconstruct negative social roles, images and identities ascribed to women. Furthermore, one needs to sufficiently theorise the ambiguities of identities ascribed to Shona women in fiction, and contradictory subjectivities that can be performed by Shona women in their putative lived experiences. The fact that this study includes an analysis of both white and black, male and female authored texts from the onset of colonialism to the post-2000 era is an acknowledgment of the fact that identity markers that define Shona women's identities are formed by social forces from Shona culture, colonialism and globalisation.

Veit-Wild's *Teachers, Preachers and Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1992) focuses on the influences on the writers and points again to the pervasive influence of Rhodesian Literature Bureau on the creativity of Zimbabwean writers in English.

However, Veit-Wild mistakenly assumes that it is only the material forces and social history that shapes Shona women's identities. Such an argument can foreclose the possibility that the same victimised women can use the knowledge of marginalisation to contest their marginality. Vambe (2006) notes that narratives that privileged nation and nationhood legitimise discourses that silence women's voices and trivialise women's issues even though these oppressive discourses have been countered by new narratives authorised by women as victims. This argument suggests that the moral economy of the process of identity formation and reformation allows one to imagine that Shona women can appropriate the cultural resources made available by their tormentors to contest these tormentors. This perspective acknowledges the fact that victimised Shona women can shift the ideological terms by which their new struggles can generate alternative identities that contest those identities previously designed by forces of oppression.

Thus, shifting identities in this study might come to mean that vulnerable Shona women can shift discourses based on struggles *against* violence, in favour of discourses that confirm the possibility to struggle *for* the creation of new meanings. A discourse that *only* fights *against* a perceived enemy can be constricted because it is writing back to the coloniser, sometimes using the culturally-rehearsed terms of the dominant forces. This can be contrasted to a discourse predicated on and *for* the establishment of new identities because these might imply originating a different poetics that might liberate both the colonised women and those who colonise them. This study acknowledges the vulnerability of Shona women but at the same time applauds Shona women's resilience.

Muponde and Primorac's *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to literature and Culture* (2005) focuses on the role of Zimbabwean literature in authorising alternative versions to official history and politics. However, the problem with this book is that its chapters are still festooned to the idea of using the images of women as carriers of cultures of resistance depicted as unambiguously revolutionary. The ideal images of Shona women are thus privileged at the expense of conducting nuanced accounts that acknowledge cultural ambivalences as inevitable in a process of forging new identities. Christiansen's (2005) 'Yvonne Vera: Rewriting discourses of history and identity in Zimbabwe' focuses on the spirituality of Nehanda as a Shona spirit driving the war of liberation.

Chennells's chapter, "Self-representation and national memory: White autobiographies in Zimbabwe", shows how memory of author and literary genre intersect to represent a specific

identity resulting in different versions of the same experience. This is important to the study as it focuses on shifting representations of Shona women's identities. Chennells writes,

Because Lessing's sense of who she was is as elusive as the accuracy of what she recalls and the provenance of her own memories, her story cannot be accommodated within a formal emplotment. The classical genres of romance and satire are absent in Lessing's book as they are present and used to give form to the informing ideologies of Godwin's and Smith's autobiographies. The Rhodesia of Lessing's autobiography is not the exclusive and homogeneous family of Smith's recollections or the violent place that Godwin recalls from which whites have been excluded. Lessing refuses the constraints of narrative genres because her Rhodesia is more diverse than theirs. Where she deals with what are seen as stereotypes in colonial writing, we can see them being constructed, contested and transformed. Neither she nor the place she recalls is locked into categories whose meanings are fixed. When asked whether *Martha Quest* was autobiographical, Lessing's reply is that she tried 'to take the story out of the personal into the general ... [and that] "If [she] had wanted to write an autobiography ... [she] wouldn't have written a novel"' (1994:160). The 'facts' of the 'chronicler' are as a result closer to our stumbling experience of our pasts than the general truth that a novel provides (Muponde & Primorac, 2005:144)

The above quote draws attention to how the authors' choices to use certain genres and not others produces a diversity of identities of the Shona women that can be "contested and transformed". Thus, adopting different genres encourages the possibility of basing creative art on alternative formal emplotments that can free the authors' imagination from the constraints imposed by the use of conventional realism.

The significance of adopting genres that embed multiple temporalities is reinforced in White's (1987) theory on narrative that amplifies the idea that form or style in art affects the meaning of the text. This current study analyses texts that can variously be described as being steeped in the genres of romance, autobiography, and the satirical novel. The existence of these genres in a text might prevent any one of the genres from imposing its authority based on a single meaning of the Shona-ness of Shona women's identities. Multiple genres that exist side by side within a text are constitutive of the narrative composition of the text and might discourage presenting narratives of Shona women's evolving identities, linearly. The creativity that emphasises non-linearity of plots anticipates not only reading of multiple representations in the meaning of cultural identities, but also contemplates that the process of shading old identities and *becoming* or assuming new identities is fraught with necessary contradictions. Ambiguities in representations of Shona women function to render the novel open-ended and discourage

modes of reading novels that are informed by anti-pluralistic tendencies. Vambe (2005) seems to have this view in mind in arguing that deploying multiple frames of reading practices can,

“...help us to understand that as a symbolic act, fiction is a force field where the people’s identities are neither totally distorted by dominant forces nor a cultural space where it is possible to recuperate an unproblematic African identity (2005:100).

This study embraces the porous perspectives suggested in the above quote, because in them, one can modify the theoretical overzealousness displayed by some Afrocentric scholars (Asante 2003) whose emphasis on essential African identities works to submerge the diversities within the identities of Shona women. When critics fail to individuate the variety of identities even in a single Shona woman, this suppresses, the woman’s other selves. In political terms, such limited characterisations of Shona women’s identities attempt to deny these individual Shona women, the freedom to choose their course of action and freedom of association.

Mguni et al’s *African Womanhood in Zimbabwean Literature: New Critical Perspectives on Women’s Literature in African languages* (2006) contains chapters that focus on how the roles of men and women and the distortions of gender relations arise from myths and stereotypes produced by Western social anthropologists, missionaries and colonial publishing institutions. Moyana’s (2006) article highlights images of women as commodities to be pledged to older men and professional women as “waiting wives” for men in the Diaspora. In both instances women suffer because of choices made by men and hence are victims. These critics project the identities of Shona women as mainly constituted by victimhood. While the indignities that Shona women go through should not be underestimated, there is danger in studies that take this identity of victimhood as representing the sum total of what it means to be a Shona woman. Shona women are as much victims of African patriarchy, forces of colonialism which unwittingly can be perpetuated by women on other women (Vambe 2006).

Therefore, studies on identities of Shona women that excessively use the language of disease in literature by women to debate Shona gender conceptions can naturalise suffering of women and perceptions of suffering as women fateful. This perspective should be questioned because it works to the detriment of Shona women who exercise their spiritual and subteranean resources to survive under hostile circumstances whenever they chart new forms of being. In fact, Masowa and Chivandikwa criticise Zimbabwe Women Writers’ limited understanding of

the meaning of social activism performed on behalf of women as depicted in post 1990 literature in Zimbabwe. The duo are worried that;

In their bid to reconstruct positive images of women in *Totanga Patsva* and *Light a Candle*, Zimbabwean women writers portray distorted images of women in Zimbabwe. Such images undercut the possibilities for growth and triumph. For instance, the consistent creative position in the selected stories is that of women characters who are blatantly oppressed and helplessly victimised. The creative modality is consistent with the feminist perspective which prioritises first and foremost, the polarisation of relations between men and women while also putting emphasis on the plight of women as victims of masculine domination and oppression. Seen from this vantage point, the writers seem to have embraced what Mguni (2006:54) defines as “narrow notions of feminism that focus on the idea of woman as victim and man as the oppressor or enemy” (Muwati et al, 2012:141).

The markers of Shona Women’s identities in existing studies are mainly based on roles ascribed to Shona women as mothers, witches, wives, daughters, girlfriends, traders, prostitutes, doctors. However, if one were to devote a whole thesis to confirming how these images manifest in Zimbabwean fiction, this would affirm the limits of a critic to contest the limits of representations. Therefore, my study will not only look at women as victims but reveal strong Shona women who strive to transform their circumstances.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has contextualised the study of Shona women’s identities in the framework provided in postcolonial theories. The discussion has largely drawn on Said’s *Orientalism*. Said’s perspective is favoured and adopted for my current study because he highlights the role of colonial discourses in distorting identities of the colonised to justify oppression. The chapter debated the ambiguities that characterised the formal appearance of cultural stereotypes as a mode of representing Shona women’s identities. Bhabha’s (1983) work was invoked and used to explain how stereotypes can be deconstructed to create new meanings that are spiral rather than dichotomous. This idea forms the crux of this study as the study attempts to rediscover other constructions of Shona women’s identities. In addition, the chapter theoretically benefited from Stuart Hall’s (1997) idea that representations are tied to power dynamics. This view was adopted in this study and tied to Hayden White (1987) who argues that narrative is fiction and hence representations need to be engaged critically. Cultural representations are forms of fictional realities that refuse to or complicate how conventional history validates its modes of narrating as constituting factual reality.

The chapter acknowledges that Shona women are victims of patriarchy and colonialism and a male-authored globalisation. However, the chapter contests the tendency to overglorify the processes that distort women's identities. Instead, it argues that identities ascribed to Shona women are constructed on the basis of other potential identities of Shona women. It is these alternative identities that the analysis of Zimbabwean fiction seeks to unravel in order to establish the consequences of interpreting women's agency.

The next chapter analyses white-authored texts that depict Shona women as colonial subjects in the 1890s and 1950s, the onset of colonialism and when the colonial ideology had become unwritten law respectively. Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* are the focus of Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Representations of the Shona Women in White- Authored Novels

3.0. Introduction

Chapter Two reviewed literature on how critics understood representations of women in Zimbabwean fiction. The current chapter uses the creative works of Olive Schreiner and Doris Lessing to apply the critical insights derived from Chapter Two on the politics of representations. The novels to be analysed are *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and *The Grass is Singing*. It will be demonstrated that although these two novels were written by white authors, their ways of racially profiling the identities of Shona women are similar and as well different in some respects. This creative overlap shows that a colonial context can form the subjectivities of white writers not in the same ways. *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* juxtaposes the conquest of 1896-7 to Christian ideals thereby questioning the civilising mission of Britain. Therefore, this novel is discussed first. Lessing's *Grass is Singing* goes further to depict stereotypical identities ascribed to Shona women in the Rhodesia of the 1950s.

This current chapter argues that the fictional space of representing Shona women's identities must be seen as a zone of war, struggle and symbolical instabilities. This perspective is steeped in Butler's (2009) seminal work, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* in which literary images and metaphors are viewed as creative frames. In these artistic frames, certain fictions of factual representations are embedded. Furthermore, as artistic frames, images attempt to regulate, seek to contain and then define what will count as identities worth preserving and also indicate those identities whose loss does not need one to grieve for. In addition, as artistic frames, metaphors also attempt to structure the semantic field of constructed identities and then are projected to influence readers to interpret them in certain preferred directions. Thus, this process unwittingly and sometimes consciously involves suppressing other possible values and identities that have been silenced, and represented as "absences". However, although, artistic frames intend to condition readers' senses, to believe that certain identities are not grievable if they were lost, or their significance understated, it is equally true that what lies outside the frame of an image or metaphor might open up the possibilities of reinterpreting discarded identities to produce unanticipated meanings. This dialogical perspective informs the analysis of the novels' representations of Shona women's identities in this chapter.

3.1 Contextualising White Writing

The British South Africa Company operated in Southern Africa and the border between modern South Africa and the country later known as Rhodesia. The company was formed specifically for the occupation of Mashonaland, as noted by Sir Fredrick Crawford in the foreword to Robert Cary's *The Pioneer Corps* (1975);

As THE LAST Resident Director in Rhodesia of the British South Africa Company, it gives me pleasure to be asked to write the Foreword to a book dealing with the exploit for which the company was formed in 1889 - the occupation and development of Mashonaland.

On the first of January 1890 a contract of occupation of Mashonaland was signed between the British South Africa Company and Frank Johnson. Cecil John Rhodes was made the Premier of Cape Colony in July of the same year. By September 13, 1890, the Union Jack was hoisted at Fort Salisbury, signifying the occupation of Mashonaland as accomplished.

In order to justify the conquest of Mashonaland, white settlers and their white authors created and published narratives in which they portrayed the land they occupied as “empty”. White writing popularised myths of Shona people as savages, and people whose identities were depraved. Chennells (1982) notes that white writing was couched in myths in order to control both the land and the Shona inhabitants. However, what is key in these myths is their basis in stereotypes. An identity of white colonists is contrasted to identities of Shona not as people but some species of unknown beings who could only qualify as humans when put under white control. Chennells says that white writings were a form of mythopoesis implying a,

...collective perception and basic to more complex formulations of ideology to subsequent political programmes and social attitudes. At the same time myth seems to have the capacity to be seen as to be true even while institutional changes enacted contradicted them (Chennells, 1982: xviii-xix).

In these mythopoetic white narratives justifying controlling spaces and people arose a discourse that belittled Shona women as morally and mentally deficient, inferior and undeserving to be called human in order to manage Shona women who were considered as possessing a “disruptive excess” (Weiss, 2004:229). Colony could only function if white defined order was to be imposed on natives.

3.1.1 Plot of *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*

Olive Schreiner was known as a South African author, feminist and anti-war campaigner but wrote a novel that commented on the politics of colonisation of the land that came to be known as Rhodesia. In the novel, the main white character is Trooper Peter Halket. Although he had left Britain in search of material fortunes, he is closely identified with Mashonaland to legitimate his presence in the land occupied by African people. Trooper Peter Halket had been recruited by the Chartered Company to fight the natives with a promise for land and labourers. While in Mashonaland, Halket finds a new kind of power that he did not command before he signed as a mercenary. He boasts of his treatment of the Shona women. In the vocabulary of his newly acquired colonial discourse, African women are nameless, and are known and identified only by their ages. The old Shona woman, who works in the garden, the 30-year-old married woman, and the fifteen year old are framed using the rhetoric of absencing and this denial of recognisable names for African women is a form of symbolical annihilating of identities of Shona women.

Schreiner's interest in depicting Shona women is highlighted in how she portrays the presence of white men in the land, and specifically the war that affects women negatively by destroying their livelihood and relationships. In the novel, Schreiner indicts Britain for abrogating her duty towards the colonised by leaving them at the mercy of Rhodes and the Chartered Company. Trooper Peter Halket is the frame through which readers are allowed to enter the world of Africans in which identities of women are framed as less than the humanity of white people. Thus, Trooper Peter Halket is a literary mouthpiece used to represent the prejudices against Shona women, whom the colonialists describe as dirty, fly-ridden, thieves and slothful. This characterisation of Shona women gives the colonists the power to name themselves as proponents of white civilisation in Rhodesia. In this way, white colonists portray themselves as saviours to Africans whom whites viewed as a degenerating species only which the assumed whitemen's burden could prevent these Africans from being extinct.

However, Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland sees not only the assumed backwardness of African people. He sees how the Chartered Company subdues Africans by burning their crops and shooting them in combat. Halket also is witness to how Shona women are raped and forced to leave their families in service to the white man. He is uncomfortable with flogging shackled defenceless men because he has not been raised that way. As a son of a washer-woman and labourer, he dreams of making money in Africa and improving his fortunes, including being

able to marry from the upper class. In this regard Peter Halket is both a vector and victim of his ambition. The ambiguity of his gaze fractures the colonial perceptions of Shona women as deserving rough treatment. Through Peter Halket, Schreiner deploys the figure of irony that fractures the colonialist assumptions as having a higher civilising mission. It can be argued that having been born in South Africa that accepted inequalities as normal, Schreiner believed that colonial injustice diminished the status of Shona women. The author's view of humanity was formed by the missionary background of her parents. This allowed the author to adopt a position which was outspoken against the ill-treatment of women in society. To this extent, Schreiner positively attempts to represent Shona women in *Trooper Peter Halket* as full human beings with motives and agency. It is in this sense that one can further argue that in the novel, the standard for judging human behaviour is Christian morality as highlighted by the Christ-figure in *Trooper Peter Halket*.

One critic, Morris, goes so far as to define Schreiner as a Native champion and feminist. He says;

I would die for the right of our Kaffir boys to decent treatment as I would for our splendid oxen. But I would not dream of making my home with them. Our Dutchmen with all their faults have never been guilty of cohabitation with the Kaffir women as too many of our British slave owners and soldiers have (Van Wyk Smith & Maclellan, 1983:12).

In this quote, it is ironical that black Africans are likened to oxen while Shona women are constructed as prostitutes whose being is limited to serving British slave owners and soldiers. In addition, although Trooper Peter Halket is both a prospector and soldier proud of his British heritage, he is also convinced, like other whites in the novel, of the inferiority of African people.

In Schreiner's novel, Mashonaland is distinguished from Matabeleland. Halket is said to belong to Mashonaland. He is thus presented as an authority on the behaviour of the Shona people despite having been in the country for only 18 months.

Schreiner describes Halket as occupying the space of ambiguity. On one hand, he seems to sympathise with the maltreated Shona people who are ill-treated as one would do to despised animals. On the other hand, Halket relishes in the prospective of being rich from depriving African people of their lands, and forcing the Shona people to work for him. This ambivalence in the characterisation of Halket reveals the ideological instability in the authorial voice. It is said in the novel that Halket,

...considered his business prospects. When he had served his time as volunteer he would have a large piece of land given him, and the Mashonas and Matabeles would have all their land taken away from them in time, and the Chartered Company would pass a law that they had to work for the white men; and he, Peter Halket, would make them work for him. He would make money (p29).

Halket's confidence in his dream of being a wealthy man is boosted by the fact that he already owns two Shona women whom he uses to satisfy his sexual appetite. When asked to deliver a message to the Queen of England and her people concerning the injustices on the natives, he responds;

Master, I cannot give that message, I am a poor unlearn'd man. And if I should go to England and cry aloud, they would say, 'Who is this, who comes preaching to a great people? Is not his mother with us, and a washer woman; and was not his father a day labourer at two shillings a day?' and they would laugh me to scorn. And in truth, the message is so long I could not well remember it, give me other work to do (163).

The quotation serves to show that Halket's background is not different from the position he seeks to reduce the native to (labourers on minimum wage) basing his superiority on the colour of his skin. His arrogance is backed by the force of colonialism that negates the humanity of indigenous people. Initially, Peter Halket had admired Rhodes and his mission, considering himself kind because he only took Mashona women for sex without any physical abuse as he never lifted a finger at them.

"I shouldn't have minded so much," said Peter after a while, though no man likes to have his woman taken away from him; but she was going to have a kid in a month or two - and so was the little one for anything I know; she looked like it! I expect they did away with it before it came; they've no hearts, these niggers; they'd think nothing of doing that with a white man's child. They've no hearts; they'd rather go back to a black man, however well you've treated them. It's all right if you get them quite young and keep them away from their own people; but if once a nigger woman has had a nigger man and had children by him, you might as well try to hold a she-devil! They'll always go back. If ever I'm shot, it's as likely as not it'll be by my own gun, with my own cartridges. And she'd stand by and watch it, and cheer them on; though I never gave her a blow all the time she was with me. But I tell you what - if ever I come across that bloody nigger, I'll take it out of him. He won't count many days to his year, after I've spotted him! (p 69-70).

In this passage Halket registers conflicting emotions; he looks down on Shona women as heartless, unthinking, ignorant, bearers of children and hard to please. At the same time, he insists he is the aggrieved party since the women leave him after he has supposedly "treated them well" and are carrying his babies. He does not think that buying and selling the women

is a crime as well as separating them from their families. The sexual relations between him and the women are not consensual. The sex is performed through coercion and therefore sexual abuse.

In other words, for Halket, Shona women are sex slaves, though he thinks of the same women as noble savages. However, a stranger in the novel, tells Halket a story of a prospector in Mashonaland who had a good relationship with his servant to the extent that he sought to save him during the uprising that targeted white people. When the prospector is killed, the Africans rebuke the servant in the following words;

Oh, you betrayer of your people, white man's dog, who are on the side of those who take our lands and our wives, and our daughters before our eyes; tell us where you have hidden him? (p111).

The epithets used by the Shona characters to describe one of their own, show that Africans had a voice. This voice identifies the grievances of Shona people as the loss of their lands and wives to white men. The uprising carried out by black people against colonial occupation contradicts the stereotype of Africans as passive. In addition, in the novel, Rhodes and his men are a threat to Africans, and Halket is also a morally depraved youth. Schreiner has changed the roles of the coloniser and the colonised. In other words, the materiality of metaphor and its symbolical dimension allow it to represent Shona people with more than a single identity. Although Peter Halket appears to criticise Rhodes' greed, Halket is complicit in the colonising enterprise. His preference to divest Shona people of their land is as evil as the deeds of those white colonisers in the novel who rape both the land and Shona women (p82-83).

3.2 Shona Women and Sexuality

Peter Halket testifies to the fact that it is difficult to separate women from their husbands and children; "but if once a nigger woman has had a nigger man and had children by him, you might as well try to hold a she-devil! They'll always go back" (p70). This points to the fact that Shona women are loyal to their husbands, contrary to the colonial image of Shona women as loose and dangerous. Halket negatively describes Shona women as "nigger woman" and equates them to a "she-devil". In this characterisation, one can glean Halket's ambiguous views that paint identities of Shona women as noble savages and murderers without regard to life.

The above perception of Shona women is contested by the view of the stranger who joins Halket on the vlei. The stranger appears sympathetic to the old woman caring for the young woman who has given birth in the cave, hiding away from white murderers;

There in a cave where there were two women. When you blew the cave up they were left unhurt behind a fallen rock. When you took away all the grain, and burnt what you could not carry, there was one basketful that you knew nothing of. The women stayed there, for one was eighty, and one near the time of her giving birth; and they dared not set out to follow the remnant of their tribe because you were in the plains below. Every day the old woman doled grain from the basket; and at night they cooked it in their cave where you could not see their smoke; and every day the old woman gave the young one two handfuls and kept one for herself, saying, 'Because of the child within you.' And when the child was born and the young woman strong, the old woman took a cloth and filled it with grain that was in the basket; and she put the grain on the young woman's head and tied the child on her back, and said, 'Go, keeping always along the bank of the river, till you come north to the land where our people are gone; and some day you can send and fetch me.'(p105-107).

From the above it seems as if this is the young woman's first baby as the old woman is the one that ties the baby on to the young woman's back. The older woman mentors the young woman and sacrifices her life for the wellbeing of the young mother and her baby. She is represented as nurturing and considerate unlike the image painted by Halket above of Shona women as selfish savages. The stranger thus counters Halket's negative image of Shona women to prove that the white man is the one who is a savage as he attacks innocent women. The women are also careful to conceal their presence and avoid detection by the white soldiers, which refutes the stereotype of women as stupid and requiring male guidance.

The old woman in the quotation above distributes the grain equitably between herself and the young mother, ensuring they are adequately fed while keeping some for the future. When the young woman is strong enough to travel, the old woman ensures she has grain for the journey to the extent of sacrificing her share. Shona women are known for this trait of sacrificial giving. The grain in the cave has been strategically placed there by women. Caves were used by the Shona as hiding places during warfare. Before the whites came to the land, Mashonaland was prone to raids by Ndebele warriors and these caves would have been used frequently. That also accounts for the old woman's knowledge of the escape routes along the river to the North. In other words, there is not one frame used by Schreiner to represent the identities of Shona women, but several, these frames contest each other's knowledge of the humanity of Shona women. In the words by Butler, artistic frames can represent identities of Shona women in

ways that "...exceeds the frame" (2009:9) to reveal meanings of embedded identities as refusing to conform to a view that seeks to narrow human identities by presenting them in the form of cultural stereotypes.

Furthermore, in Schreiner's novel, Shona women are enterprising and it is them that ensure constant supply of food in the years of the establishment of the Rhodesian colony. Peter Halket admires this trait in Shona women because it subverts the Victorian concept that a man should solely provide for the women. The work ethic of Shona women is celebrated and this contrasts definitions of the Shona woman as lazy. Furthermore, the Shona girl that Halket consorts with is intellectually gifted as she was quicker to pick up English than he was in learning Shona (p.60). Despite being drawn to the humanity of Shona women's positive identities, Halket suffers from a sense of ambivalence towards Shona women. This is so because Halket also remembers how he used to appropriate the woman's labour. This could be taken as a form of abuse. Thus, Schreiner's novel reverses Shona women's ascribed identities of being dirty (Gelfand, 1973; Chabata and Mashiri, 2012).

Moyana (2017) notes that pre-colonial Shona women were not confined to the kitchen but were masters of agriculture and participated in mining. Halket reveals the contradictions in the ideas peddled about Africans as opposed to his lived experience. He believes himself to be a liberal but shares the same prejudices against Shona women by perceiving them to be uniform and not warranting or having specific names to distinguish them. This is in contrast to the evidence provided in the novel, which is that Shona women are not thieves. However, while Shona women are portrayed as refusing to be tamed by the European men and culture, Schreiner unwittingly lives up to the identity of a Shona woman as wife and mother who nurtures and supervises developments in her family (Chabata and Mashiri, 2012).

3.3 Roles between Shona Men and Women

The ambivalent portrayal of Shona women in the novel is further underscored in the depiction of Shona women as firmly loyal to their husbands. For Halket, Shona women are cheap and easily bought. But Halket is also surprised when the unnamed Shona woman defies him and resists slavery. Peter Halket is also made a fool by this woman who persuaded him to part with the cartridges that the Shona woman handed to the African men who had begun fighting colonialism (p61-63). In the construction of the Shona woman's identity, this woman may not speak through words, but she has a point of view. She knew that Africans were at war with white settlers and her contribution was to dupe Halket to part with ammunition.

In theorising what critics see as the silenced and absence of Shona women's voices in fiction, what has not been highlighted is that Shona women may not in all cases openly voice their wishes but this silence does not mean that the women are agreeing to the dictates of African patriarchy and to the violence of colonialism. In other words, the stereotype of passivity ascribed to the identities of Shona women is a projection of the fears of those who make these allegations in a colonial context. The above view describing the complexity of Shona women's voice and identities is endorsed in the works by Homi Bhabha (1993). This postcolonial critic advances the idea that stereotypes are ambivalent. Shona women can revise traditional identities ascribed to them through appropriating the figure of a stereotype, only for the Shona women to subvert its original meaning. Through these ways, Shona women can re-instate new meanings that they can use to expand the range of identities that they can command and use to their advantage to change their individual social status and that of their community.

3.4 Shona Women in the 1950s – Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*

Doris Lessing writes fifty years later when the colonialists have consolidated their power and ensured the material realities of the Shona women conform to the constructed images of poverty, dirt, ignorance and prostitution. Lessing uses Mary Turner, the main character, to manifest the falsehood contained in the social prejudices and the contradictions inherent in colonial assumptions. In *The Grass is Singing*, Mary is both contemptuous and envious of Shona women. Mary recognises similarities between her and the Shona women in the farm

store but draws on colonial ideology to caricature their maternity, deportment and sense of fashion through discourse steeped in animal imagery. As in Schreiner's text, the women are described as a group without individual names. However, while in *Trooper Halket* Schreiner attempts to ascribe individual personality to her characters, Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* conceives of Shona women as a mob that threatens her wellbeing.

The novel is set in the 1950s after the whites had consolidated their rule in what was known as Rhodesia. Several laws had been passed that dispossessed the Shona people of their land and made them labourers for the white farmers and miners. The story centres on Dick and Mary Turner's farm. The women in the story are not named but described as a group that visits Mary's store when it opens, and the women she meets in the compound when she follows the workers to bring them back to work after lunch break. The images of the women presented are largely from Mary's point of view. The absence of the voices of Shona women from the main storyline reflects a deliberate colonial policy to make them appear insignificant in the economic and political space of Rhodesia. This was done through the construction of a language that negated Shona women's significance. In Derrida's (1976) terms, the "presence" of whiteness and "absence" of black women are mediated through text or discourse largely biased against Shona women.

3.5 Brief Description of Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing (1919 - 2013) was born Doris May Tayler (1919) in Persia and moved with her parents to Southern Rhodesia in 1925 where her father tried farming with little success. She left school at fourteen and was self-educated. Hazelton (1982) quotes Lessing commenting on this aspect of her life;

I had to be. The school was no good. I read, and when I was interested in something, I followed it up. Whenever I met anyone who knew anything, I would bore them stiff till they told me what they knew. I still have these terrible gaps; things that every child learned at age 14 I have to look up in an encyclopedia. I would really like to have learned languages and mathematics - that would be useful now. But I am glad that I was not educated in literature, history and philosophy, which means that I did not have this Eurocentred thing driven into me, which I think is the single biggest hang up Europe has got. It's almost impossible for anyone in the West not to see the West as the God-given gift of the world. (New York Times, Sunday, July 25, 1982: 21)

In the quotation above, Lessing claims not to have been directly influenced by European frames of women in representing literature, history and philosophy. Her novel might, therefore, be considered a critique of the colonial myths of superiority over the native.

In the novel, Moses, the mission-educated houseboy, is well read and more critical than Mary and Dick Turner. Moses, the house boy, turns out to be more romantic than Dick and awakens the woman in Mary. This depiction of the implied relationship between an African man and a white woman contradicts the colonially-held view that the only wish of a black man is to sleep with a white woman; in effect, to rape her. This view that ascribed bestiality to African men is captured in Schmidt's (1992) work. She comments that in colonial Rhodesia, an African man could be hanged for sleeping with or raping a white woman although the same punishment was not slapped on a white man who would have raped a black woman. Lessing's depiction of Shona women defends the humanity of black people in the face of a stultifying colonial frame represented by Mary. Mary's perceptions of Shona women and men in *The Grass is Singing* show that stereotypes are veneers to hide the white community's insecurities projected as superiority over the blacks.

Lessing has been acclaimed as a social critic who understands the colonial world and the social roles that white people and African people occupy. The author has been described as a communist, feminist, psychological, political, mystic and science fiction writer. However, her contempt for labels that would fix her multiple identities are manifested in an interview with Hazelton. Lessing mildly complains that,

The critics slap labels on you and then expect you to talk inside their terms ... What the feminists want of me is something they haven't examined because it comes from religion. They want me to bear witness. What they would really like me to say is, 'Ha, sisters, I stand with you side by side in your struggle toward the golden dawn where all those beastly men are no more.' Do they really want people to make oversimplified statements about men and women? In fact, they do. I've come with great regret to this conclusion. (New York Times, Sunday, July 25, 1982: 21)

The above quotation shows that Lessing was clearly aware of the complexity of people and life and this is reflected in her works. Consequently, her depiction of Shona women tends to critique the colonial constructions by highlighting the socio-economic circumstances under which Shona women live. Lessing's rebellion against being confined in societal expectations and norms is reflected in her leaving school, divorcing twice and changing her views when she noticed shortcomings of her beliefs as demonstrated by her leaving the Communist party.

Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* is set in the 1950s when blackmen have been made more relevant labourers for white people and are found in the farm compound. African women are depicted as following their husbands who are labourers on the white controlled farm land where black workers are dependent on meagre wages. *The Grass is Singing* highlights the falsehood of the settler ideology that assumes superiority over black people. The irony underscored in the novel is that the racist ideology destroys those who cannot live up to its standards like Dick and Mary Turner. Mary, the psychologically twisted protagonist represents the warped perceptions of the settler community. As a poor white woman, she is afraid of going "native" and sinking lower the social ladder. The Shona women represent Mary's greatest aversions as well as being a source of envy for what she can never have. The novel was banned in Rhodesia for showing the weakness of white people to spiritually belong to a physical space that they claimed to have conquered. The novel also suggests that white women also "hunger" for sexual fulfilment with African men. This was the greatest creative sin for which the author was not allowed to visit Rhodesia. Schmidt writes that the settler community's fear of the Black peril stemmed from unsubstantiated "sexual offenses purportedly perpetrated against European women by African men" (1992: 169). Furthermore, Lessing was reviled in the white settler community of Rhodesia for her antipathy of the South Africa apartheid system.

3.6 Setting of *The Grass is Singing*

The Grass is Singing is set in Ngezi district, which is in Mashonaland. It is part of Kadoma rural area in Mashonaland West and is known for its farming and mining activities. This is established in the opening of the novel which is expressed through an extract from the Rhodesian newspaper,

Mary Turner, wife of Richard Turner, a farmer of Ngesi, was found murdered on the front veranda of their homestead yesterday morning. The houseboy, who has been arrested, has confessed to crime. No motive has been discovered. It is thought he was in search of valuables. (p9)

The newspaper serves to highlight the belief among whites that blacks are murderers and thieves. The truth of the newspaper article is questioned as the story unfolds and the reader gets to know the characters involved. Most of the events in the story take place on the Turner farm which is isolated and its occupants are hardly aware of the farming community around them. The poverty of the farm is what makes the settler community hate Dick because they are letting the guard down as some natives have better houses than them. Black farmers in the Native

Purchase Areas were growing cash crops like tobacco and cotton and therefore could afford to build better houses, copying the European model. This shows that blacks are competitive and progressive farmers. The Native Purchase Areas are found in Sanyati and Gokwe. Dick Turner refuses to plant such crops as he is in love with the soil and does not want to destroy it. In the end he earns himself the nickname “Jonah”. By this time most of the successful farmers, both black and white, were growing the American variety of mealies and moving away from the so-called native crops. The farmers in the Native Purchase Areas mainly relied on family labour rather than hired labour. It is the industriousness of Shona women, as part of the family labour, that led to the success and competitiveness of black farming thereby debunking the myths of Africans as lazy and slothful.

3.6.1 The Character Mary Turner

Mary is a frigid woman who grew up poor with a drunkard father who worked as an artisan on the railway road. As a result, her family constantly moved to various stations along the dusty railroad. She grew up lonely because she was not allowed to play with the Greek girl in the store because they were dagoes, beneath the British as a class. She was also constantly warned to be wary of the natives who were constructed in colonial settler discourses as potential rapists and actual murderers who could harm a little girl. About the first time Mary gets to Dick’s farm and meets Samson, the houseboy, we are told that,

She had never come in contact with natives before, as an employer on her own account. Her mother’s servants she had been forbidden to talk to; in the club she had been kind to the waiters; but the ‘native problem’ meant for her other women’s complaints of their servants at tea parties. She was afraid of them, of course. Every woman in South Africa is brought up to be. In her childhood she had been forbidden to walk out alone, and when she had asked why, she had been told in the furtive, lowered, but matter-of-fact voice she had come to associate with her mother, that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her. (p70)

The accommodation in which Mary grew up did not allow for privacy and hence she was over exposed to her parents’ sexual relations which she found disgusting. This resulted in her frigidity as her mind shut out anything to do with sexuality. Her mother’s constant complaints about mouths to feed also resulted in her aversion to having children. The strained relations between her parents worsened her situation as her mother made her take sides with her as a confidante convincing her that men are evil creatures to be avoided. Lessing describes this attitude as “arid feminism”.

Mary is the white woman and the character through whom we are made to view the Shona women, women who have been dispossessed of their land. Mary berets the women for their maternal role, which she finds revolting but unconsciously envied. She receives her sexual healing by transgressing the Immorality Suppression Ordinance (1903) which made intercourse between a black man and white woman illegal. This act subverted white men as poor sexual performers and elevated African men as sexual studs. With the implied crime of having sex with a black man, Mary is perceived to have fallen to the level of Shona women; she had opened the smelly armpits of a colonial settler community for ridicule because its idea of its humanity was formed by insisting on exclusionary discourses in which whiteness was equated with authentic and pure identities where blackness and the Shona-ness of Shona people was described in terms that invoked a sense of a people morally degenerate.

3.6.2 Depiction of Shona Women in *The Grass is Singing*

The novel is mainly about Mary Turner and her relationship with her husband and houseboys. There are only two instances when she gets in contact with the Shona women; at the store she was running and in the compound when she followed the farm boys to call them to work while Dick was sick. What is dominant in these descriptions is her irritation and disgust towards the Shona women whom unfortunately, in reality her identity as a white woman was not above theirs as Shona women.

When Mary is asked to run the store she retorts her resentment to “Selling kaffir truck to stinking kaffirs” (p115). The native women are poor without much money to spend and hence she stands for hours at times only to sell a six pence string of beads (p117). Below is the store encounter in extended descriptive detail;

By ten in the morning half a dozen native women and their children were sitting under the trees. If she disliked native men, she loathed the women. She hated the exposed fleshiness of them, their soft brown bodies and soft bashful faces that were also insolent and inquisitive, and their chattering voices that held a brazen fleshy undertone. She could not bear to see them sitting on the grass, their legs tucked under them in that traditional timeless pose, as peaceful and uncaring as if it did not matter whether the store was opened or whether it remained shut all day and they would have to return to-morrow. Above all, she hated the way they suckled their babies with their breasts hanging down for everyone to see; there was something in their calm satisfied maternity that made her blood boil. ‘Their babies hanging on to them like leeches’ she said to herself shuddering, for she thought with horror of suckling a child. The idea of a child’s

lips on her breast made her feel quite sick; at the thought of it she would involuntarily clasp her hands over her breasts, as if protecting them from a violation. And since so many white women are like her, turning with relief to the bottle, she was in good company, and did not think of herself, but rather of these black women, as strange; they were alien and primitive creatures with ugly desires she could not bear to think about (p115-116).

The quotation highlights several images of the Shona women from Mary's view: they are loathed, hated, talkative, savages without clothes, insolent, child-bearing machines, pests, alien and primitive creatures. The black women are an antithesis to Mary both in appearance and values. She is a thin woman with dry skin who hates the native women for their fleshy soft brown bodies. Shona women value their nurturing role which includes procreation, evident in babies clinging to them.

In addition, the racialised perception of Shona women is expressed by Mary likening the babies to leeches, implying that they are parasitical. It also reflects the attitudes of whites towards blacks that assumed blacks were benefiting from white presence, therefore parasitical. Lessing is, therefore being ironic in her representation. In the 1940s when land had been taken away from the natives, it is the procreative role that remained un-tampered with. In this instance the women are staying in the compound on Dick's farm without much land for market gardening. Water is scarce as well but Shona women are depicted as continuing their role in growing their husbands' lineages and ensuring that they will not be buried with rats. Mary's aversion to sex and babies makes her to conclude that the women are primitive and alien creatures, especially as they exhibit a "calm satisfied maternity" she can never hope to achieve.

The Shona women's ability to adapt to circumstances also irks Mary because she fails to get used to the hot weather and poor condition of Dick's farm. The calmness in the women regardless of circumstances points to a disciplined people and yet Mary's training and prejudices do not allow her to acknowledge the superiority of the Shona women in that regard. Mary makes the women wait and feel her will so that she retains a sense of self-satisfaction. She also conceives the women in animal terms so as to assert her superiority over them. Lessing gives a vivid description of the women's actions, punctuated by Mary's thoughts in order to highlight her prejudices against the Shona women,

When she saw there were perhaps ten or twelve of them waiting there, making a bright-coloured group against the green trees and grass, with their chocolate flesh and vivid headcloths and metal ear-rings, she took the keys off the hook in the wardrobe (they were put there so the native servant should not know where they are and take himself to the store to steal when she was not looking)

and shading her eyes with her hand, she marched off along the path to get the unpleasant business finished.... The women slowly crowded in, fingering the stuffs, and laying the brilliant beads against their dark skins with little exclamations of pleasure, or of horror, because of the price. The children hung to their mothers' backs (like monkeys, Mary thought) or clutched their skirts, staring at the white-skinned Mary, clusters of flies in the corners of their eyes. Mary would stand there for half an hour perhaps, holding herself aloof, drumming with her fingers on the wood, answering questions about price and quality briefly. She would not give them the pleasure of haggling over the price. And after a few moments she felt she could not stay there any longer, shut into the stuffy store with a crowd of these chattering evil-smelling creatures. She said sharply, in the kitchen kaffir, 'Hurry up now!' One by one, they drifted away, their gaiety and pleasure quite subdued sensing her dislike of them (p116-117)

For Mary, all natives are thieves and hence the need to hide the keys. They are also depicted as dirty, diseased and evil-smelling creatures. The attack on the women's maternity is continued by likening suckling babies to leeches and their hanging on to their mothers like monkeys. This is an allusion to Social Darwinism that was used to justify the treatment of blacks as animals. The logical conclusion for Mary, is that she must subdue and conquer them as a representative of a superior race. Mary does not realise that her presence poses a threat to the black children and they cling to their mothers for comfort and protection, which is part of the nurturing role. Shona women are thus depicted as protective of their children.

Mary also demeans the women's identities by dismissing their sense of fashion. She finds their clothes too colourful and abhors their metal ear-rings. Subconsciously Mary recognises that she has the same desires as the native women; to look good aided by jewelry. She is also jealous of the women because, unlike them, she does not have the means to fulfil these desires as kaffir truck is below her status as a white woman. The racist ideology she has imbibed from childhood forces her to make the distinction and consider the Shona women to be inferior to her. She denies them language by claiming they chatter like monkeys in a noisy way she cannot stand. Mary also denies the women the opportunity to exhibit their trading skills by standing aloof and not allowing them to haggle over prices. Her major aim is to remove the pleasure of their shopping visit since she feels tortured by the experience. However, in subduing the Shona women she also loses out because she chases them out and the Shona women leave without buying. The fact that the women realise that she did not like them does not encourage them to

come back. It is not surprising then that they retaliate when Mary invades their territory, and at the compound they return the courtesy;

Native women, draped in dirty store-stuff, and some naked above the waist with their slack breasts hanging down, gazed at her from doorways in astonishment at her queer appearance, commenting on her among themselves, laughing, and making crude remarks (p134)

Mary's appearance is queer due to her skin colour. Initially the black people thought white people did not have skin. This could have been the first time some of the women were seeing a white woman. Mary was very thin and the women would have heard from their husbands that she had no children and her nagging habits from the houseboys. The women that Mary mistreated in the store would also have taken opportunity to narrate their story, eliciting further comments from the other women. Barrenness in Shona community is regarded negatively and if the barren woman is mean then she does not receive sympathy from the community. The description of the compound points to extreme poverty with the children exhibiting signs of malnourishment (pot-bellied and naked). The huts are constructed hurriedly and do not allow the women to show their expertise in decorating:

The compound was built on a low rise above the vlei, about half a mile from the house. The system was that a new labourer presenting himself for work was given a day without pay to build a hut for himself and his family before taking his place with the workers. So there were always new huts, and always empty old ones that slowly collapsed and fell down unless somebody thought of burning them. The huts were closely clustered over an acre or two of ground. They looked like natural growths from the ground, rather than man-made dwellings. It was as though a giant black hand had reached down from the sky, picked up a handful of sticks and grass, and dropped them magically on the earth in the form of huts. They were grass-roofed, with pole walls plastered with mud, and single low doors but no windows. The smoke from the fires inside percolated through the thatch or drifted in clouds from doorways, so that each had the appearance of smouldering slowly from within. Between the huts were irregular patches of ill-cultivated mealies ... Flies everywhere. They hummed round Mary's head as she walked, and they were clustered around the eyes of the dozen small black children who were pot-bellied and mostly naked, staring at her as she picked her way through the mealies and vines past the huts. The native mongrels, their bones ridging through their hides, bared their teeth and cringed. (p134)

The houses are erected by men who are worried about losing a day's wages. The blacks are valued as labour only and their comfort is not important to the employer. Being a new labourer earns the black man the right to settle on the white man's land and bring his family if he so

wishes. The whites capitalised on recruiting as many workers as possible on as little pay as possible. This resulted in overcrowding and the high rate of movement among blacks seeking better employment opportunities. The hurriedly built structures are depicted as natural and fitting for blacks in the image of a large black hand dropping sticks and grass magically to form huts. What this does is to equate the blacks to animals in the natural habitat. The animal imagery is continued in the description of fly-infested, naked and pot-bellied black children, which translates to mean that they are wild, primitive, diseased and dirty. The native dogs are starved and ineffective as they cringe, rather than attack Mary. The images are juxtaposed to imply that natives are ineffective dogs in the eyes of the whites, represented by Mary in this instance.

The above reflects the social and material loss of the Shona women due to the appropriation of land and the restrictions on the market. The huts are depicted as overcrowded and the efforts at gardening are pathetic. However, they are still necessary since the meagre wages of the native men are inadequate in taking care of the family. Kinship ties are disrupted and it becomes difficult to organise labour. In the original village set up, women assisted each other in keeping compounds clean and gardening. The neglect of the pumpkins may reflect the non-permanence of the residents and labour migrated quickly in search of greener pastures.

Overcrowding leads to easy spread of diseases, especially when dirt is not controlled. The women and children are depicted as dirty as there is limited access to water. Dick complains when Mary wastes water but he has a privilege of fetching it in drums using an ox-drawn cart. One then can only imagine the difficulties the women experienced in fetching water. For Mary, the picture in the compound fulfils the stereotypes of the natural inferiority of the black woman but Lessing makes the reader aware of the circumstances the Shona women found themselves in in order to debunk the stereotypes and putting the blame on colonialism. Pape (1990:718) quotes a Mrs Williams in 1932, in a debate on whether or not to replace male houseboys with females, to have said,

Native girls in this country are really not suitable for domestic service. They have not got the moral character. I consider they are immoral and feel I could not trust them ... I do think that at present the native girl is definitely inferior to the native boy.

Shona women are depicted as less capable than Shona men, lacking moral character, and outright immoral. Mrs Williams' assessment of black women suggests that Shona women can easily attract white men. There is fear of miscegenation. This point is elaborated by Schmidt who says Shona women were loose and vain, with unbridled sexual appetite, and hence the

need to confine them to rural areas under the guardianship of male relatives. In other words, in *The Grass is Singing*, Mary's fear of maternity makes the Shona women's love for children and fertility a threat to her and increases her resentment against them. She acknowledges that Shona women are poorer than her, even when the women appear more contented with their lives than she is.

3.7 Comparative Analysis of Shona Women in *Trooper* and *The Grass is Singing*

The analysis of the depiction of Shona women in Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* seems to be premised on how they were perceived within the colonial sexual matrix. According to Pape (1990);

The history of Southern Africa during the early period presents a classic example of how sexual relations both influence and reinforce the values of a ruling class, race and gender. Zimbabwe ... is representative of the dynamics of sex between blacks and whites in the region. The phenomena that the settlers called the 'black' and 'white perils' were an essential factor in building and maintaining a white and male supremacist society. As the history of the 'perils' will show, the roots of racism can be found not only in the demands of the economic force of the day, but in sexual relations between the races as well.

Schreiner address the "white peril", that is, sexual abuse of black women by male settlers while Lessing addresses the "black peril"; the alleged sexual violation of white women by black men. Both novels critique the assumptions of colonial society that blacks were not fully human, given to primitive impulses and sexual immorality. Peter Halket does not consider the sexual violation of black women a sin until confronted by the Christ figure. He does not understand why Mashona women always fight to return to their husbands despite seemingly enjoying the benefits of white civilisation. He reduces the equation to sexual experience without exploring the underlying world view of the Shona as they are presumed not to have a culture and civilisation. However, the Shona women's identities are steeped in the values of their people that they continue to uphold despite the presence of the white man in the land nor violations from him. Some of the values that women hold onto, are shaped by Shona patriarchy, and therefore, by some irony, Shona women are also submerged under a Shona patriarchy. This is illustrative of what one critic, Rosenfeld, has described as something akin to "double dying". This implied death is more symbolical than real because in the real world, it is the Shona women's unremunerated labour that subsidised Shona men's labour at European farms and

mines. These identities of Shona women as providers of food in their families contradicts colonial perceptions of these women as morally degenerate.

Lessing explores the differences in perceptions of sexuality between black and white women and how it impacts relations between them. This is represented through Mary's relations with the Shona women whom she regards as inferior to native boys and the whites themselves. Mary was raised amidst the scare of the black peril and is afraid of natives but abhors native women. She insists on looking at the women with the lens of colonial stereotypes rather than acknowledging the reality of shared vulnerable femininity.

The Shona women in Schreiner's novel are more confident and fulfil their role as centre of their homes to the extent that the settler community acknowledges their skills. The Shona women in *The Grass is Singing* have been dispossessed and largely dependent on their husbands' wages to the extent that families suffer from malnutrition and ill-health. The shift in identity is not because of an inherent natural trait but socialisation in a specific political and economic environment. In both novels, Shona women's voice in the public sphere is erased but their enforced silence does not prevent them from forming views and perceptions in which white colonists are viewed as brutes, and an overweening race determined to undermine Shona women's narrow spaces of agency, existing and exercised under a Shona patriarchal rule.

3.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explore the construction and representation of Shona women in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and *The Grass is Singing*. The chapter found out that in *Trooper Peter Halket*, Schreiner depicts Shona women as resilient, resourceful and hardworking though the colonial discourse constructed negative images of them as dirty, slothful and deceptive. As the colonial powers consolidate their claim over Mashonaland, Shona women are ascribed marginal roles. The women are denied voice, are faceless and denied individual identity. In *The Grass is Singing* the attitudes of whites, such as Mary, towards Shona women is that the women are slothful, dirty, poor, noble savages, tamed, and timid. However, the novel depicts the seemingly silenced Shona women as appearing to be contented with their lives more than Mary. It is part of the functioning of the colonial rhetoric of negativity to present Shona women as content under a Shona patriarchy when the reality shows otherwise. The tendency to homogenise the agency of Shona women derives from the ambivalence of the colonial imagination. In this rigid colonial imaginary, either the Shona

women are talkative and control their men or the women are for ever silenced. There is no middle ground that characterises Shona women's agency as politically uneven in terms of their capacity to grasp, explain and respond to the forces of African patriarchy and colonialism.

In *The Grass is Singing* Shona women are depicted as children who chatter like animals, dirty, child-bearing machines, and lazy. These stereotypes arise because white writers created myths to justify the subjugation of Africans in their own land. Chennells (1982) notes that myths can be based on some truth or can be fantastical but the aim is to justify dominance over the colonised in their own land. In addition, Weiss (2004) claims that myths are tools to structure the way one sees the world and that myths are a symbolical conduit to transmit values that seek to structure people's minds to make these minds conform to the values of the dominant group in society. Myths can pose a danger when these values are negative and discriminatory. Furthermore, Bhabha (1983) suggests that depicting a character by emphasising singularity of values obscures the complexity of human beings.

In *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and *The Grass is Singing* stereotypes of Shona women are highlighted and held up to ridicule through the ironic tone of the narratives. They are thus exposed as mere constructions to justify the ill treatment and disenfranchising of Shona women. The following chapter explores Shona women's agency through the cultural prism of the Shona institution of spirit possession.

Chapter Four: Shona Women and Spirit Possession

4.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter analysed Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*. The chapter traced the values of pre-colonial Shona society and reflected how these values manifest themselves as suppressed voices in the new circumstances created by colonialism. The chapter also analysed how colonial policy was imposed to create circumstances that justified prejudices against Shona women who were described in colonial parlance as dirty and promiscuous. Images of Shona women so-created are largely projections of European fantasies on the black body and mind. These images are critiqued in so far as they serve to justify colonial subjugation of the Shona women and impact negatively on their identities, perceived and lived experiences. Shona women seem to possess a sense of subteranean and spiritual resources with which to counter the rough-shod cultures of superiorities of white people that are in the fiction popularised by white characters.

This chapter then analyses the consequences of interpreting the identities of Shona culture as possessing qualities with which Shona women could reconstitute their identities in positive ways to counter both the imposition of masculine agency whether these were coming from African patriarchy or from colonial agents and their new new black surrogates. This chapter argues that Shona women re-signify their identities with unheard of voices and that this is performed through the appropriation of the predominantly Shona men's cultural institution of spirit possession. When Shona women enter this space they are able to question both the Shona men and colonial values, even when this process is not entirely free from being "redomesticated" by men. Colonial discourse tends to dismiss Shona spiritual world view as superstitious and hence distorts a reading of the actions of the people.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the impact of spirit possession on the women's individual identities and this in turn pushes women's agenda to empower themselves as well as the African community. The texts selected for analysis in this chapter are Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993) and Cynthia Marangwanda's *Shards* (2014). The two novels written by two Shona authors seek to highlight the fact that Shona narratives cannot remain for ever suppressed by colonialism and dominant, African male-authored nationalist thought. The novels' main female characters appropriate for women the religious narratives of the Shona people based on the cultural institution of the role of *mhondoro* spirits in national discourse.

Nehanda focuses on the role of the spirit medium in the 1896 Shona uprising while *Shards* focuses on Shona spirituality as a solution to 21st century malaise. Both authors use a poetic narrative in the novelistic form that focuses on the inner processes of the characters rather than just the outward representations of the experiences. Both authors also claim a certain degree of spiritual engagement with their art and their texts reflect more on this phenomenon than anthropological and historical writings would offer. The novels' point of departure is that *Nehanda* depicts the flexing of Shona women's identities, showing that this spiritualisation of historical space introduces the centring of Shona women's interpretation of the European ways as destructive to Shona cultures.

Existing scholarly works on *Nehanda* focus on its feminist nationalist outlook (Vambe, 2002; Wilson-Tagoe, 2002), the historical and cultural significance (Ranger, 2002; Chiwome, 2002) and the literary quality of the novel (Muponde and Maodzwa-Taruvinga, 2002). This chapter is more concerned with the depiction of the Shona woman who is possessed by the spirit of Shona ancestors and in the process revealing that this act of repossessing the spiritual space that colonialism had claimed to control constituted an assertion of returning to the source in order to use the cultural resources from the past to re-energise Shona people's desire for freedom in the present and future in which a colonial culture is seen as diminishing in stature. In this sense, *Nehanda* is closer to constructing and redefining an ethnic identity based on the idea of the Shona nation. Vambe (2002: 127) makes an observation that is critical to this study on the temporal, spatial and spiritual significance of spirit possession;

In Shona ancestral veneration, spirit possession is the ritual myth that establishes the link between the departed ancestors and their living descendants. Spirit possession articulates a contradictory life principle. In some contexts within Shona culture, spirit possession can be used to maintain the *status quo ante*. Yet in other contexts, the same spirit possession refuses diachronic historical time, and possession celebrates the myth of eternal return and regeneration. It is due to the spirit possession's existence as a myth of 'life-crisis or initiation ... and liminality' that, in the hands of creative artists, it becomes an '... instrument of speech for the possessing spirit. At the same time the [writer] becomes, in a sense, possessor of the spirit because he or she can induce it to speak when needs be

This above perspective that acknowledges humanity's ability to change the course of its history by resignifying its action is supported by Magesa (1998). The critic expands the meaning of spirit possession when he argues that it is a time lived not only for the collectivity and its recurrent communal memory, but also for the (possessed) individuals in so far as it is a time of

personal growth. Another critic, Jes'us Martin-Barbero argues further that spiritual possession represents "... a world decentralised, horizontal and ambivalent which enters into radical conflict with the new image of the world designed by 'reason': vertical, uniform and centralised" (Vambe in Muponde and Maodzwa-Taruvinga, 2002:127). The rationality that spirit possession seeks to subvert is the patriarchal and the colonial that represents historical time selectively, as linear, ordered and male-driven. The modernity of spirit possession is that some of its central elements can be re-used in the present to make sense of the histories that conflict each other in the colonial era.

Nehanda is written at a time when belief in Shona world view is doubted by Shona nationalists although they mobilise the African people to challenge colonialism using the images and traditional discourses culled from the traditional cultures. Missionaries also frowned upon spirit possession although the energy of their Christianising agenda was drawn from veneration of Jesus Christ as an alternative centre of spiritual anchorage. Those who have converted to Christianity largely regard African spirits as evil to be avoided. The world of scientific rationalism has relegated belief in the supernatural as superstition, a malady that can only be cured by acquiring scientific knowledge to explain the world around (Keller, 2002). Both Vera and Marangwanda are driven in their writing to expose the reader to this unique spiritual experience as a form of gaining knowledge about the universe. Their works are, therefore, both a critique of the Modernist paradigm and an assertion of Shona women's identities that refuse to be submerged in the totalising discourse of colonialism and its values as the new normal.

The poetic narratives emphasise the urgency, the here and now experience, while also imprinting a sense of timelessness in poetic words remembered from the past and carried into the future through performance, and continuous recitation. This reminds one of the song *Dangu rangu* touched upon in Chapter Six; Mediums come and go but the spirits live forever and continue to watch over their people. This is regardless of people's attitudes towards them.

4.1 Plot of *Nehanda*

Nehanda is set in the 1890s, a historical moment of the clash between forces of African resistance, constructed around Nehanda's militant response to encroaching British colonialism. The implications of analysing Nehanda's ways of re-valorising Shona women's identity is timely because some Rhodesian scholars and black nationalists inclined to promote colonialism

had dismissed spirit possession as resurgence of African people's atavism. Daneel (1970) looks at the Mwari cult, and Crawford (1967) gives a comprehensive study of Shona spirituality in order to hold it for ridicule. These studies are calculated to exemplify that identities of Shona women are formed by various obscurantist and residual cultures associated with witchcraft and sorcery in Rhodesia. Other critics have looked at various familiar spirits and the powers they confer on their mediums (Shoko, 2011). Thus, apart from re-signifying Shona women's identities with positive values, *Nehanda* is primed to engage other narratives that constituted the values of the colonial enterprise as a force for modernity. The chapter argues that for Shona women, colonial modernity does not allocate the benefits of this new phenomenon equally across racial, and gender lines.

This chapter focuses on the *Mhondoro* spirit because that is the cultural fountain of the values closely related to ethnic identity of Shona identities. In Shona people's mediumistic belief systems, spirit possession is an alternative route to knowing and generating knowledge that found significance in Shona communities. This agentive role of spirit possession in conferring identities that worked to the advantage of Shona women contrasts sharply with the colonialist notions of spirit possession as a manifestation of a culture whose values have been left stranded by the values introduced by colonialism. Crawford's (1967:83) work on *vadzimu* concretises these distortions in the understanding of spirit possession of which *vadzimu* is a sub-cultural category. For Crawford, *vadzimu* confer permanent status on their mediums unlike *mashave*. This is not always true as *mashave* confer identifiable skills such as hunting, farming, healing and stealing. The term *shave* can also be used to refer to the skill rather than the spirit. Vera, in *Nehanda*, explains the phenomenon as follows:

The dead are not dead. They are always around us, protecting us. There is no living person who is stronger than the departed. When the whole village prays together, they pray to the ancestral *mudzimu* of their clan. When we pray to a *mhondoro* for rain, we are praying to the guardian that unites the whole clan. This is one of the strongest spirits of the land (*Nehanda* p27).

The living are largely influenced by those who have died and passed on to a spiritual existence. The spirit world is ordered in hierarchies. *Nehanda* is possessed by a spirit of a high order and hence the ability to coordinate the uprising to the incredulity of Mr Browning who considers women to be inferior.

4.2 Shona Cosmology

For one to understand spirit possession, they must understand the Shona religious worldview. Scholars, such as Taringa (2004), and Daneel (1970:16), agree that the Shona believe in a supreme being who watches over everyone;

As the God of crop Fertility, Mwari is first and foremost regarded as the *rain-giver*. Political issues may occasionally, under the stress of circumstances, become the major topic of 'discussion' when delegations visit the oracular shrines, but up to this day His 'messengers', who move between their home districts and Matonjeni, still regard the petition for rain as their major assignment. When they approach the caves they all use Mwari's most popular praise-name, *Dzivaguru* (great pool) which-has a direct connotation with rain. As *Dzivaguru* or *Chidziva chopo* (the little pool that is always there) Mwari can be relied upon to provide His people with rain. When this God manifests His presence in the loud thunderclap after a period of drought the Shona rejoice at the prospect of rain with the exclamation: *Dziva! Dzivaguru! Mwari* is both male and female. The terms *Dziva*, *Mbuya* (grandmother) and *Zendere* (the young woman who is regarded as Mwari's emanation) represent the female aspects of this ambivalent deity; the male is revealed in *Sororezhou* (Head of the Elephant, and as such: Father), *Nyadenga* (Possessor of the sky) and *Wokumusoro* (the One above). As a female, inseparably involved in this existence, merged in the pool with its darkness and mystery of fertility, this is the *God of below*. As a male this is also the owner of the skies, the God of light, the Father of creation who manifests Himself in lightning or the shooting star *from above*.

The Shona Mwari has both male and female characteristics that are associated with the mysteries of fertility and rain central to the agrarian lifestyle of the people. This means that authority is conferred on both males and females for the power of God to manifest fully. This is contrary to the subordinate position of women in the dominant Biblical interpretation of the Judeo-Christian God by missionaries in Africa. Mwari is represented as an overlord who does not discriminate against the inhabitants of the land he watches over.

In *Nehanda*, Mwari is humanised. He speaks directly with the people, without aid of a medium as his voice is direct, coming out of a cave. There are other spirits that deal more directly with the needs of communities and individuals. Kaguvi in *Nehanda* says;

My god lives up above. He is a pool of water in the sky. My god is a rain-giver. I approach my god through my ancestors and my *mudzimu*. I brew beer for my god to praise him, and I dance. My *mudzimu* is always with me, and I pay tribute to my protective spirit. (*Nehanda*, p105)

The spirits are in three forms of *mhondoro* (territorial spirits), *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) and *mashave* (alien spirits). Schmidt (1992:24) explains their function as follows;

The most important spirits were those of *mhondoro*, the royal ancestors of the chiefdom. These territorial spirits were concerned with the welfare of all people living within their domain. As such, they were guardians of the land, ensuring its fertility and providing adequate rainfall. Lineage spirits (*vadzimu*) were slightly less powerful, concerning themselves with the welfare of a given lineage, rather than the chiefdom in its entirety. Possession by alien spirits (*mashave*) conferred upon the medium particular skills such as divining, healing, singing, dancing, or hunting. While women were often among those possessed by *vadzimu* and *mashave*, it was extremely unusual for women to be acknowledged as *mhondoro* mediums.

Schmidt's idea that *mhondoro* rarely possess women is incorrect. The spirits serve the community by addressing the challenges and concerns of the people through the mediums. Their choice of a medium is not gendered but dependent on the spirit's choice and temperament. Taringa (2004) highlights the attributes of the Shona God to prove that sexism is not part of Shona culture. This is a problematic conclusion because there are certain roles that women cannot perform, whether in the past or present of Shona patriarchy.

Gelfand (1973: 132) identifies Mwari as Creator and overlord of all the other spirits. He includes evil spirits in his analysis and provides the following list: *Mhondoro* of a clan or extended family lineage; *Vadzimu* of a family unit, *Ngozi* revengeful *mudzimu*, *Shave* several spirits with different functions, Healing Spirit *kurapa* or *kushopera* (healing with medicine or divining) and lastly, spirit of evil (*Muroyi*). Gelfand's classification is problematic in so far as he highlights healing spirits as a distinct category yet healing powers are conferred by *Mhondoro*, *Mudzimu* and *Shave*. That is why the *nganga* or *n'anga* is seminal in diagnosing the source of the power and the procedures for installing the spirit on the medium (*svikiro*).

Gelfand's classification is useful in that it shows that not all spirits among the Shona are evil. This characterisation is however, problematic in that it emphasises function rather than source which is the concern of the Shona people. Understanding the source enables them to deal with the phenomena accordingly. Witchcraft is either inherited from an ancestor, or it is an alien spirit (*shave*) or one seeks medicines (*gona/kuromba*) to become a witch. Both the healing (*nganga*) and witchcraft spirit (*muroyi*) are usually classified under alien spirits as they confer particular skills which can be good or bad (Shoko, 2007, 2011). Witchcraft is considered evil and therefore not encouraged in society. Bourdillon (1976) highlights witchcraft as one of the grounds for seeking divorce. Chavhunduka (1978, 1980) deals with the topic of witchcraft at

great length and argues that understanding of the African world view has been marred by Euro-modernist approaches in the form of political ideology (Marxism), religious doctrine (Christianity and Islam), scientific rationalism and popular culture (both colonialist mythology and post-independence grapevine on the underworld) (Last and Chavhunduka, 1986:12-13). The construction of images of Shona spirituality is therefore a contested terrain as revealed in the voices of anthropologists and historians that do not agree. Vera adds her voice to this debate in her literary depictions of spirit possession in *Nehanda*. The novel does not wish to validate historical accounts of Nehanda. In fact, the novel uses the figure of Nehanda to revise some of the assumptions about Shona men's heroism. Kaguvi allows himself to be converted to Christianity, while the historical Nehanda remained radicalised against white encroachment until she was hanged for resisting colonialism.

Becoming an ancestor is dependent on rituals carried out at death such as how one is buried and whether the *kurova guva* (bringing the spirit back into the home) ceremony has been performed. One who has recently been installed as *mudzimu* of the family becomes the least in the hierarchy and urged to represent the family according to the hierarchy in the spirit world. This follows the pattern of *Kusuma*, where an issue is raised from the least significant person in the group to the highest in the hierarchy, for instance, from the youngest to the eldest. The family spirit caters for the needs of the immediate family and defers to the tribal/clan spirit (*mudzimu weDzinza*) which is determined by totem. This spirit also defers to the territorial spirit or guardian of the land. These spirits are usually identified with lions and hence the term *mhondoro* (*mudzimu wenyika*). The land under their jurisdiction was large tracts of land covering numerous tribes. It is usually the spirit of a king or great ancestor of the first inhabitants of the land who would have carried out a ritual to tame the land (*kupinga ivhu*). Nehanda is not concerned with the details of spirits; rather the novel seeks to show how women can appropriate this previous male dominated space, and infuse it with women-centred meanings.

It is in the above context that one can agree with Veit-Wild (2006:4), who argues that spirit possession is a form of borderline experience. African authors use it to “mock, contort and subvert figurations of colonial or postcolonial violence”. *Nehanda* speaks to the colonial and postcolonial experiences of the main characters and their active role in countering the negative colonial influences in their societies. In this regard they re-inscribe images of spirit possessed Shona women.

4.3 *Nehanda*: Matriarchy and the Medium

Nehanda is Vera's first novel published in 1993. It revisits the well-known story of Nehanda in Zimbabwe and how she led the first Chimurenga 1896-7. In an interview with Jane Bryce in the year 2000, Vera says;

Nehanda is really at the centre of our spiritual belief as a whole nation, and to write about her was very daring. It transformed me. I remember after I wrote that book, feeling physically so old because I felt so wise, I knew so much about the spirit world. I hadn't travelled in it before in a concentrated fashion like that, and I felt as if I were a spirit as I wrote it. I felt in the end it came out of a state of possession. I had asked her in my traditional manner of asking - getting up before dawn to ask her guidance - and she had visited. And in the end I felt physically exhausted, and that I had lost my youth, because I couldn't pretend to the world I was naïve. I felt a fierce sense of responsibility to tell this story. And to do so, I had to coexist with Nehanda's spirit. It really gave me a lot of strength as a woman. (Bryce in Muponde & Taruvinga, 2002:222)

From the above quotation one gets the impression that Vera was compelled to write the story by the spirit, she acted as a medium of sorts. Vera suggests that female writers have choices when dealing with themes that have been the domain of men; female authors can follow in the written footprints of male authors in which case the female voice might be choked to conform to male ideas. But Vera also implies that female writers like herself have the liberty to oppose or re-interpret events and in the process find themselves creating an alternative version of a set of dynamic identities for women. Vera goes on to say;

Nehanda (published 1993) was my first novel, and it came out of me almost like a dream. It has the feeling of a dream when I look at it now. And that suited it, because it concerned a myth, a legend. It was a story of spirituality, of ancestors, a mystic consciousness and a history ... so it was much better to write it almost intuitively, out of my consciousness of being African, as though I were myself a spirit medium, and I was just transferring or conveying the feelings, symbols and images of that. I wrote it at a time when I could write it, the way one might write a folk song. Today I would probably spoil it. I wrote it from remembrance, as witness to my own spiritual history. (Bryce in Muponde & Taruvinga, 2002:220)

The novel is a record of "spiritual history" and the form it takes is appropriate as it is not linear but cyclical. A spiritual history is not the space of coherent and stabilised narrations. The meanings generated in performance are uneven and signify different meanings that may not be patrolled by patriarchy. Thus, the focus is on capturing the spiritual essence rather than historical accuracy. In this sense, Vera does not make a distinction between *Nehanda* the

medium and Nehanda the spirit. In Vera's narrative, Nehanda's birth is foretold by the ancestors and special women chosen to be present at her birth. From childhood, Nehanda has extraordinary visions and her mother is plagued by a foreboding that she will not live long. She then sits for hours on end oblivious of the world around her because she is travelling in the spirit world. A ceremony is then performed to welcome the spirit and only then does she issue the instruction to fight the white men. Kaguvi does not speak but dances to the instruction.

Vera acknowledges the role of the male medium as hunter-warrior effecting Nehanda's instructions. In the novel, Kaguvi is deliberately denied voice. This might be a way by Vera to privilege the identities of Shona women in a female-authored narrative. In *Nehanda*, Vera subjects nationalist discourses that privilege male narratives of resistance. The war against whites in the novel is driven by Shona spiritual belief. This is because the whites had desecrated the land and made the ancestors angry;

“Our eyes sought comfort, but the sky accused us of neglect. Empty enclosures replaced our ancient claim. Our ancestors say they have been abandoned, and when we worship, our voices can no longer reach them.

“We extended too long a hand to the stranger. Now there is much work to be done, and it must be done quickly. Together, with our spears and our hard work we must send the enemy out of our midst ...”

“I am among you. I carry the message of retribution. The land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to us, and for your departed. I will speak until the birds depart from the tree.” (*Nehanda* p61)

Vera's creative temperament obliquely criticises the post-independence nationalist government for extending “too long a hand” of reconciliation to the strangers. The land remains a theme and subject for contestation in the post-independence era and until this land issue is resolved Nehanda in the novel believes that Shona women still have “much work” to do. The old war made use of “spears” but the war requires new strategies to defeat the stranger.

In other words, the passage above seems to suggest that there is need to rethink the very idea of justice. Nehanda wants the land restored to its original occupants so that their communication with the ancestors is undisturbed. The white strangers must be punished for sacrilege and the Spirit of the land demands that they be completely wiped out which is retributive justice. Mr Browning is the representation of the arrogant, racist whites who created

discriminatory policies that destroyed the blacks in the name of civilising them. He is also sexist and projects his sexism on the natives when he declares;

“I doubt the natives can listen to an old woman like her. What can she tell them? This society has no respect for women, whom they treat like children. A woman has nothing to say in the life of the natives. Nothing at all.” His voice quivers. Mr Smith maintains his silence.

“It is hard to deal in a civilised manner with people who possess so many superstitions.” The urgency of introducing the Bible in Africa had never been more clear to Mr Browning. (*Nehanda* p75)

Mr Browning consistently refuses to listen to and understand the native. He acts on his assumptions that Shona religious beliefs are superstitions and wants to replace them with Christianity. Mr Browning wishes to impose Victorian values on African people. He is surprised to realise that there are spaces where African men can rely on the initiative of Shona women as this contributes to social cohesion.

Vera’s story challenges the dominant narratives that valorise the male warriors and presents women as weak victims of colonialism, benefitting from male bravery and sacrifice. That is why in Vera’s narrative *Nehanda* drives the war with messages from the ancestors while both men and women carry out the commands in actual combat as they roll boulders off the cliff to crush the white men and their horses (p86). They give feedback to *Nehanda* after each battle. *Kaguvi*, the male hunter and medicine man also participates in actual combat, exhibiting the bravery of a lion, both as incarnation of *Gumboreshumba* the ancestor and a physical brave warrior. *Kaguvi*’s spirit then might also have been a hunting *shavi* spirit.

“My name is *Gumboreshumba*!” he shouted. “My name is *Leg-of-the-lion*!” In his death-denying dreams he shapes a meandering path full of secrets that will only be discovered in the next dawn. The power of his evocation is not lost, and the youths carry it away with guns and spears. He speaks of the reshaping of lives.

Now *Kaguvi* speaks with his dancing staff. He stands in the middle of the circle of people, under the shade of the large *musasa* tree, the largest within two days’ journey. The men of the village dance enthusiastically around him while bearing branches torn from the trees. Together with *Kaguvi* they enact a traditional hunt which speaks of their intention.

Kaguvi would rather beat the drum than shape his message into words. (*Nehanda* p71)

Kaguvi is represented as a man of action rather than words. However, he only enacts what *Nehanda* has communicated in words. While *Kaguvi* is associated with the lion, *Nehanda* is

depicted as being one with the land (the river, the sky, the birds and the animals). Nehanda is past, present and future, which makes it difficult to separate the Spirit and the Medium. In the end Kaguvi is conquered by the priest's words because he seeks conviction from observed action rather than the import of the words (p106).

In *Nehanda*, the warriors dance their victory and the drums pass the message to those not present in the location of the ritual. The way a drum sounds tells those from the community what ritual is to be enacted. Mr Browning does not try to understand and hence the attack on the whites becomes a surprise to them. The introduction of Christianity is meant to silence the Africans and keep them in submission to the white man's will. This is a scenario that Nehanda warns against;

“Is this what our ancestors prepared us for? Did they prepare us for a death among thorns? Do you already feel shame to claim what is yours? Do not submit to the unknown wisdom of strange tongues. Those who have submitted to the spirits of the stranger have brought an abomination to the land. Can we defeat an enemy whose god is already in our midst? Rise up and fight.” (...)

There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. ...

“Our dead should not be left to rot in the ground, unburied. Why should we dig graves in empty ritual? In places where we have buried and worshipped, new owners have arrived and led us off with guns. How long shall we suffer this indignity?”

“Who are these strangers ... these gold hunters? Our men helped them hunt for gold, and we thought they would leave. Now they hunt us out of our land. Is it not clear that they have discovered that our land is the gold they sought?” (*Nehanda* p65-66)

Nehanda's words are prophetic as in the end she is hunted like an animal throughout the forest until she surrenders to save her people from being killed arbitrarily. Shona religion is clearly premised on the land and its usage in sustaining the inhabitants through agrarian activities. That is why the acknowledged *mhondoro* spirit is that of the original inhabitants of the land.

Vera captures the insistence on labelling black people and refusing to acknowledge their true identity in the following passage;

“The only certain thing is never to trust the natives, no matter how well behaved they seem. They are the most dishonest race on the face of the earth. The natives have already killed twelve white men at Nduroma station. ... They are unaccustomed to work, these natives that is why they are fighting us. They prefer to sit in the sun all day, than to be brought under the most advanced civilisation in the world.”

“They would have resented any government. If we had been angels they would have stolen our harps. We have to subdue them completely, otherwise they will never learn that the ways of the white men are superior to their heathen beliefs.” Mr Browning feels betrayed.

“Only the rifles will Christianise the natives. This Nehanda is a wizard. After all, what more are these kaffirs besides blood-thirsty cattle-keepers?” The priest responds to Mr Browning’s shadow which moves across the wall. When it stops, he knows Mr Browning is about to respond.

“We need a search party, especially to rescue our laagered men. Who is this Nehanda, and this Kaguvi?” Mr Browning laughs. The priest keeps his hand on his Bible. Mr Browning carries a knife with which he slashes the air.

“We are proud people,” Moses had said. (*Nehanda* p76-77)

Nehanda is described as evil and the natives as “blood-thirsty” which evokes images of the dark ages and the need to burn the witches on stakes for the sake of spreading Christianity. Mr Browning seems thoroughly incensed that the natives should have any pride and seems bent on destroying any trace of it by thoroughly humiliating the leaders.

Christianity is supposed to be a peaceful and civilised religion as opposed to the native’s heathenism, yet the symbols of violence (rifles and knife) negate this image. It also seems to be an allusion to Father Biehler of Chishawasha’s pronouncement that “the only chance for the future of the race is to exterminate the whole people, both male and female over the age of 14!” (Vambe quoted by Chitando, 2012:1). Nehanda is said to be a wizard, therefore representing the dark world whose followers drink blood. The image suits the common description of Satanism even in contemporary times. The rebellion is dismissed as the desire to go back to loafing around since the white man has taught the natives how to work.

The irony in *Nehanda* is that it is the white man who does not work as the blacks do all the work (housework and digging for gold). The blacks *resort* to armed struggle because the stranger is too arrogant to engage in dialogue with them. The stereotypes therefore serve to clean the conscience of the white men in the atrocities against the blacks. Mr Browning’s question seems to echo throughout the novel and is the author’s main reason in writing the novel. Vera’s novel becomes a clear recasting of history (Musvoto, 2010) and a justification of the African worldview. It is also meant to dispel the colonial stereotypes of the Shona people in general and, more specifically, the women as dirty, slothful, ignorant and conservative by highlighting their nurturing and inspirational role. Nehanda is radical and revolutionary and even the whites are surprised.

4.4 Representations of Nehanda in *Nehanda*

The character Nehanda is cast in mythical terms where her destiny is closely tied to that of her people and the nation. As mentioned earlier, Vera does not distinguish between the spirit and the medium. In the novel, the medium is named Nehanda at birth. *Handa* in Shona refers to lion cubs. Since her birth is predicted as one chosen by the ancestors, this could be an indication that she is chosen to be a medium of *mhondoro* spirits. In this sense the name then means one possessed by the lion spirits. The mother's foreboding dreams show that Nehanda's life is far from being what is expected of Shona women by a patriarchal society. As a child, Nehanda broods rather than play with other children. She chooses to be alone most of the time rather than participate in the communal activities. In her home, as a girl-child she does not help her mother often to ease the burden of labour, instead she sits in a trance while the mother pounds corn and performs the other domestic duties.

Nehanda, however has been sullen all day. She sits behind her father's hut, her back against the mud wall. When Mother returns from the river, she is surprised to find Nehanda still sitting there, her eyes focused blankly into the distance. "Are you going to sit there till the sun has gone into its mother?"

Nehanda sobs. Her hand soon spread tears down her neck and across her forehead. "Those birds in the air. Do you see them? They have come from beyond the edge of the earth.

"We ask you to arrive well among us." Nehanda pointed to the sky. (p30-31)

Nehanda sees visions no one else sees and seems perennially sad, carrying the burdens of the land. The mother tries to stop her journeying into the spiritual world lest she does not come back, but fails. On the occasion of the rain ceremony Nehanda is depicted as a seer who can separate body and spirit; a high level of spirituality;

The young men dance and capture the attention of the maidens, but Mother thinks of her child who sleeps alone in the hut. (...)

If Mother had the gift of sight, she would see her daughter in the clouds of the dust that the men raise around them. Nehanda has not missed the celebration though Mother thinks her in the hut. Nehanda sees all the activities, and dances on the shoulders of the best dancers among those gathered. The dancers stamp the ground valiantly. The spectators who stand in a circle cheer and sing, their feet covered in dust. (*Nehanda* p33)

Nehanda the medium (*svikiro/homwe*) seems merged with the spirits of the departed to the extent that in a ceremony for them, her spirit joins them in the celebration while her body is sleeping. Her experience of the spiritual journey then becomes more like a dream. Here, Nehanda's image transcends that of a mere mortal. She becomes a representative of the Shona women's sixth sense and a validation of other forms of knowing other than scientific rationalism. Throughout the novel, Nehanda is physically present but continuously traversing the spiritual world. The above quotation shows the importance of music in transporting people into the spiritual realm. Even her mother feels the water move over her shoulders though she lacks spiritual eyes. Water is believed to be the abode of spirits among the Shona, evident in the existence of sacred rivers, deep pools and wet lands (*dekete/matoro*). The Shona take the occasion seriously to the extent that only the best musicians are expected to lead.

Nehanda's behaviour deviates from the norm in several ways. Her excessive sadness that stops her from active participation in her society (fetching water, working in the fields) can be classified as clinical depression. She does not marry and there are no hints to her sexuality, which worries the women in the community (p47-48). They reckon she will be considered a perpetual minor if she does not marry or have children of her own. Mother silences her critics by pointing to her role as a medium;

“Is it not said that we cannot know how the sun shall appear to our eyes tomorrow because we have not seen it?” Mother interrupts the women in their speech, and they wait, the pestles held in mid-air. “We do not know what the future brings. Let us respect her silence. Let my daughter be. Perhaps that which wishes to be part of her will not allow her to marry. She is a woman, is she not? She is industrious, is she not? She has ancestors, a lineage, and totems that she respects, does she not? Is it not enough? What is our power against the seasons, against the wishes of the departed?” (p47)

It is this strangeness, deviation from the norm that is a pointer that some spirit wants her for a role that surpasses those ordinary identities ascribed to women. Girls her age have already been married and hence the cause for concern. However, contrary to the women's prediction, Nehanda is accorded a greater status than anyone in the land because she represents a reconnection of the link with the ancestors that had been severed for a long time. It is after this incident that Mother is prompted to act, she goes to her people who then assist in organising a diviner (*n'anga*) who assesses the spirit intending to use Nehanda as a medium. “He identifies it as a good spirit, and insists that the people should welcome it with a feast. The spirit will be a great help to the people, he says (p50).” If the spirit had been found to be evil, then the next step would have been to exorcise it. The welcoming feast becomes the installation of Nehanda

as a medium and also enables the spirit to speak directly to the people. Separating the medium and the spirit becomes difficult. The medium becomes the physical manifestation of the spirit.

At the feast Nehanda sees Shirichena, the bird of light that leads her to the beginning and the future so that she is able to narrate the past and predict the future. This is an allusion to the Hungwe bird, an emblem of Zimbabwe. Kamudzandu (2013) highlights its significance in Shona worship;

Notable artefacts that include huge soapstone birds have been discovered at Great Zimbabwe; these birds played a significant role in Shona religious culture. The bird, known in Shona as *Shiri yaMwari*, *Hungwe Shirichena*, or God's bird of white plumage was familiar in and around Great Zimbabwe. Religiously, the bird's function was to interpret the voice of God. Spirit mediums were able to understand and explain what God was saying through this bird, and, in most cases, the bird was rewarded with gifts of fruit and drink. If this was the case, one can safely say that great Zimbabwe was the epicenter of Shona religion and culture, and possibly the headquarters of the Shona ancestral cosmology.

In the context of the novel, the bird serves to authenticate Nehanda as the mouthpiece of the spirits, which then explains why mediums like Kaguvi defer to her. The journey motif is employed for her spiritual excursions. The authority with which she speaks is understood to be conferred by the ancestors. After every battle, “[t]hey return again to Nehanda from whom they seek inspiration and wisdom. (...) The loss of Nehanda would mean the loss of their link with the departed. It would mean death (p88).”

Nehanda is thus presented as the centre of the struggle and lifeline for the whole community. Her understanding of the spirits and their relationship to the land and the living is important because it is that assurance of her relationship with the higher spirits that makes her refuse to entertain talk about the Whiteman's God. Nehanda resists becoming a hybrid, borrowing cultural resources from God and ancestors evident in her laughing in Browning's face (p115). The laughter and the scream persuade Browning that Nehanda is irredeemably mad but it is her way of asserting her worldview and ensuring passage into the endless flow of the ancestors. In contrast, Kaguvi listens to the white man until he is persuaded to convert. However, his conversion is the first death before his actual hanging. We are told,

The spirit departs in regretful spasms that send Kaguvi crawling from one corner of the room to the next. The blood-feeding spirit roars as it leaves him. Kaguvi's forehead streams with water. His ears sing with deafening, pulsating blood. After the ceaseless pounding of his head, and the burning in his stomach, Kaguvi understands. No one can walk away from the departed, free and whole.

When Kaguvi opens his eyes, he sees a dim light on the horizon. The light begins to grow. Kaguvi weeps. The clouds darken. (*Nehanda* p108)

Death, in both instances, is separation from a life-giving force leaving the human vulnerable and hence a form of tragedy. On the other hand, Nehanda's physical death is celebrated as it is a journey into a higher form of existence. We are told,

“My people will not rest in bondage. The day has ceased too quickly.” Her telling awakens the dead part of the living, who are also divine because they are descendant from the departed dead. The living are listeners, the dead are powerful articulators. Only the dead make the living speak. She sees a calabash bearing a circle of black beads. It is covered with a layer of dead grey ash. The calabash is empty and sits abandoned in the centre of a clearing in the forest where a ritual has been interrupted. Black crows stare curiously from the branches of trees. (...)

She welcomes her departed, and the world of her ancestors. The whiteness around her eyes has turned to a redness that is also death. The chasm between the living and the dead is broken. A wave of nausea moves in circles within her, searching. The wind covers the earth with joyful celebration. (*Nehanda* p117-8)

Nehanda's transition into the spirit world is smooth because she has been a faithful medium unlike Kaguvi who has become an enemy (through conversion to the whiteman's God) with the Lion spirit he has carried over the years. This narration seems to account for the manifestation of the spirit of Nehanda in the latter years because her transition is given, without requiring further rituals and vetting in the spirit world on whether she should become an ancestor or influential *mhondoro*.

However, Nehanda's death is not the end because she has taught the people well on the expectations of the ancestors. Those who have heard will continue the struggle. Nehanda's ability to see the future also helps her to realise that the battle might have been lost but the war is far from over and hence the declaration that people will not rest in bondage.

She wants to get up and dance, but her shoulders are filled with sleep. She has heard the drums, and now will dance the histories of her people. She dances against Mr Browning and his God, against these strangers who have taken the land, she dances the faces of her people, the betrayal of time, the growth of wisdom, the glory of their survival - a shadow, moving on the wall. She dances in harmony with the departed who protect the soil from the feet of strangers. Thorns dig deep beneath her feet and she bursts into song.

Then she lets out a scream that sends Mr Browning across to the other side of the room. Mr Browning is convinced of her madness. He stands away from her, but there is no distance between them. If Mr Browning were to stretch out his

hand, he could touch her. But he has come to look, to mock, not to touch. This frail woman has eluded him for so long. Possession. Spirits. Ancestors. He would show her who was possessed.

She follows a meandering path that circles the earth, beyond the lake in the sky, into distances of her future. Nehanda waits while water falls from the sky, falls into song, falls into morning. She sees smoke, risen and old. The water spreads across the earth, in a promise of her relief. (*Nehanda* p116)

The physical setting of this scene is in a prison cell where Mr Browning has come to mock Nehanda. She defies him and even goes on her spiritual journey in his presence. On noting the outward manifestations of spiritual possession (screaming), he concludes that she is merely a mad woman. He thinks by killing Nehanda, he has won but it is Nehanda who has won. Death in itself is not tragic as it is a way of joining ancestors. Death becomes tragic when caused by witchcraft or a falling out with the ancestors (Kaguvi).

The representation of Nehanda in Vera's novel is meant to validate the phenomenon of spirit possession and its value in social transformation through the life of the protagonist. It therefore serves to challenge the counter narratives from other disciplines such as History, Psychology and ethnography (Ranger, 2002). Literature makes the character live and the audience journeys with her in her experiences, to be able to accept her reality as given. It is not merely reported. The fact that Nehanda unites the whole Black community settled in the land while speaking against desecration continues the Shona tradition of hospitality, welcoming strangers but fighting all who cause harm to the society, including kin.

Nehanda represents a different form of power from that of Mr Browning and the African men. Nehanda's spiritual connection gives her an understanding beyond her physical circumstances. Mr Browning's arrogance is premised on his access to guns which he first offers the natives to use against their enemies but later uses against them to show the superiority of European power. Nehanda has a frail appearance but with great oratory powers, the power of persuasion and influence that draws many followers. It is also this soft power that she warns her people against, the persuasive words of the white man represented by the priest. In the narrative, it is the source of Kaguvi's undoing. Vera therefore equates Shona myths to Biblical myths and elevates the Spirit mediums. Myths are both a way of interpreting reality as well as a way of constructing reality, they are made in the art of living and expressed in words. They, therefore, encompass the past, present and the future.

Discourses on Nehanda place her within the narrative of resistance against colonialism. They seem to suggest that she is no longer relevant in the post-independence era as black people

have regained their land. *Shards* shows that the *mhondoro* spirits are still concerned with the wellbeing of their people and speak to the psychological and spiritual malaise in the country.

4.5 *Shards*: Spirit Possession in the Post-2000 Era

Chavhunduka (2001) notes that Shona traditional religion has survived the onslaught of colonialism and Western influence right into its self-assertion in the period after independence. Marangwanda's novel, *Shards*, is set in a Zimbabwe characterised by an economic meltdown and cultural malaise. The people have seemingly forgotten Nehanda's injunction not to envy the whiteman's material wealth nor heed his persuasive voice. The land has been returned to the blacks as evident in the narrator's parents who are affluent business owners. However, they have adopted a European lifestyle and outlook. In *Shards*, this is represented as lynching of African spirituality represented by the narrator's grandmother. Philani Nyoni's (2015) analysis of *Shards* captures this more succinctly;

One of the strongest images in the text is that of the narrator's grandmother appearing in the middle of a lecture dangling from a rope, lynched on a tree with an antique rifle in one hand and a spear in the other. The image recalls that of Nehanda, the spirit medium who led the Northern phase of the First Umvukela/Chimurenga. Nehanda was a spirit medium who held much sway with the natives and even in *Shards* she is likened to a Jesus figure. The death of Nehanda signified the conquering of the spiritual element of the natives and as far as symbols go this one is very apt, particularly when she appears as such in the middle of a university lecture holding weapons. (urbanculture.com)

Nyoni's quotation above makes the connection between Nehanda and the image of grandmother being lynched in *Shards*. The image points to modernity continually posing a threat to Shona women. Marangwanda picks on the image popularised by Eurocentric history of the hanged medium representing defeat in order to subvert it. The narrator's grandmother is one such medium, and the narrator herself, the chosen one for her generation and evidence of the efficacy of Shona traditional religion in the 21st century. In Nyoni's words,

Shards is both terrific and terrifying. It delves into the grey area of African traditional belief and superstition. The horror begins on page 30, when the narrator has a drug induced encounter with her paternal grandmother's apparition while Pan is interacting with his dead father. Much of the text is an exploration of the relationship between the living and the living-dead. It questions colonial faith and is therefore a worthy commentary on the times, given Zimbabwe's over-saturation with Christianity, particularly the (*Pentecostal brand*). It also questions the nature of independence. Can we run from who we are, our spirituality by hiding behind material possessions,

modernisation and Christianity? The character of Lumumba also questions the inertia of the youth of the day, the generation which might go down in history as having done nothing significant. (urbanculxure.com)

The representation of Shona spirituality takes a radical stance as this is what the times demand, the people negate its existence and deliberately ignore the cultural rituals associated with honouring the ancestors. There is no one (in the novel) brewing millet beer and pouring libations to the ground or ceremonies to welcome ancestral spirits and install their mediums, the young generation gropes in its search for an authentic identity while experimenting with many “isms”. The truth only radically presents itself through a spiritual experience one cannot deny. Certified mentally ill by a clinical mental institution, the narrator is able to declare herself chosen and not mad only after accepting the call and therefore fortified by the spirit of her grandmother living within her. Keller’s (2002) observation that spirit possession in the Third World remains one of the phenomena highlighting resistance to western and global hegemony and therefore worthy studying in detail so as to generate theory rather than using theory to interpret phenomenon is pertinent.

4.6 Ancestral Spirit (*Mudzimu*) in *Shards*

The novel is about an unnamed narrator who finds herself at odds with her family’s middle class values in independent Zimbabwe. She is forced to attend tertiary education and while at school has a vision of her late grandmother being lynched as well as a crocodile trying to attack her. She faints and her parents have her committed in a mental institution for schizophrenia. She learns to suppress her experience and acts normal so that she is released from hospital. The narrator’s life is meaningless, characterised by ennui that she tries to banish through attending art (visual and poetry performance) events and civic demonstrations. She is imprisoned and released with others after an organisation pays their bail. From there she heeds the call to run to the mountain where she finds a cave with the paraphernalia of a medium and leaves convinced that she is not mad but chosen to carry the message of hope for her generation.

Six years after her death, grandmother begins to appear to the narrator in visions during her waking moments. Grandmother is introduced to the readers in the following words;

My grandmother died when I was 15 ... I had not known my paternal grandmother well enough to feel anything but a curious rocking motion inside my head when I heard she had passed on. The news destabilised me for, at most, a minute before my normal state of numbness resumed. What I knew of her was

that she was a Head Nurse at a rural district clinic, she possessed remarkably long and thick, ink-black natural hair, she was a *svikiro* (a spirit-medium) in her spare time and the one time we spoke for longer than the customary greetings, she swiftly launched into a lengthy explanation about the parallels between Shona spirituality and Christian theology as well as those between the sacrificial martyr deaths of the messianic figures of Nehanda Nyakasikana and Jesus Christ. Growing up I heard unsavoury rumours that she had deserted her children, my father included, when they were still infants only to reappear when they were fully-functional adults and such talk always caused me to survey her with a wary eye. Her marriage to my paternal grandfather had not lasted many years and she had never sought to remarry after that ill-fated union. I remember her as being a very inward, taciturn woman who seemed to have taken great pains to insulate herself from the emotional level of human contact. I think I am certainly her granddaughter in this regard. (*Shards* p31-32)

From the quotation it is clear that grandmother is a spirit medium but it is not clear of what kind of spirit. Later she appears in the black and white *svikiro* apparel. Her disappearance for a long time and reappearance seems to point to the *njuzu* (mermaid) spirit. Aschwanden (1989) gives account of various mediums (male and female) of *njuzu* spirits. One feature of their possession is that having accepted the spirit, they are taken into the water for apprenticeship which can last for a number of years. Aschwanden (1989:161-3) provides a testimony by one of the mediums,

"The most important and most powerful" spirits possessing her, however, are the pool-spirits "(*njuzu*) which [the shamaness] also took over from her aunt: two extraordinarily beautiful girls who possess her alternately. These *njuzu*-girls ... are in the first stage of puberty (*bunha* ...) and so are virgins. This is one of the reasons, (the shamaness) says, why sexual intercourse is forbidden to her ...

When (the shamaness) is possessed by *njuzu* she wears a cloth with covered black glass-beads, with a few white one here and there (the girls beneath the water wear the same ornaments) ... the black ones refer to *njuzu* (black symbolises the significance of the water), the white ones refer to the other alien spirits."

From the beginning, the *njuzu*-spirits forbade (the shamaness) any sexual contact – in contrast, she thinks Maizoda and Maindida would certainly permit her to remarry. This prohibition was imposed upon (her) at the official ceremony of accepting the *njuzu* ... however ... (the shamaness) was already being possessed by *njuzu* in her husband's lifetime, and they forbade her sexual intercourse even then. This led to her occasionally refusing her husband...

Grandmother represents a hybrid identity in that she is a Head Nurse, a product of Western education based on scientific rationalism as well as a spirit medium anchored in Shona worldview that the colonialists dismissed as superstition. She is evidence of Bhabha's (1994)

idea that the colonial subject chooses what to assimilate and what to resist. Her analogy of Christianity to Shona spirituality also shows that she has made effort to understand them both and make the comparison. Chavhunduka (1994) argues that the two systems are not necessarily mutually exclusive but depend on the ideology of the practitioner.

Shards shows Shona women as celibate contrary to the European stereotype of people who cannot control their sexual desire. If grandmother is possessed by *njuzu* spirits then that may explain her broken marriage as it would not work with sexual prohibition as well as the years of absence. Further evidence from the text is noticeable in the narrator's interaction with her grandmother. She says,

Grandmother loved water, she said it was her shrine. It was also her source of replenishment, the place where she stocked up on her mysterious supplies. Grandmother would bring me the river - its precious waters contained within her amorphous hands - and I would wade enthusiastically, ready to soak its secrets. I soon discovered the river was an anthropomorphic friend that housed amphibious entities. Some days Grandmother would come clothed in the electrifying neon-blue waters of the caves of Chinhoyi and I would not hesitate to delve into their haunted pools, mermaid like. (*Shards*, p39-40)

Such amphibious creatures include the crocodile, snake, turtles and mermaids. Mpepereki (2015) defines the spirit as follows;

Another very important and widely known '*shavi*' spirit is that called '*njuzu*' or '*nzuzu*' the water spirit. In English folklore they call this half-human half-fish animal a mermaid.

The '*njuzu*' spirit is that of people who lived close to the water. People of the Hungwe totem used to be buried in deep pools in African rivers. In some cases the body was cremated and the ashes scattered in the water. It is these water-dwelling ancestral spirits of the Hungwe people who come to possess their relatives as '*njuzu*' spirits. In some cases however, there may be '*njuzu*' spirits who may be from other totem groups. The '*njuzu*' spirit is known to 'capture' persons who may be near a water body and take them to the spirit world which is entered through the water. This however is not a common phenomenon. When a person has been taken by a '*njuzu*' spirit, the relatives are not supposed to cry. Certain rituals will be done at the pool where the person has disappeared. The person may re-appear within a relatively short period or they can be gone for a long time. When they return, they will be possessed by a '*njuzu*' spirit and will be great herbalists. It is said '*njuzu*' have some of the most potent herbal medicines found in Africa. The majority of persons possessed by the '*njuzu*' spirits are not those who at some point have been captured by the water spirit. They are people possessed by their '*vadzimu*' spirits who come as either the

'*njuzu*' itself or the '*mudzimu*' invites its '*njuzu*' '*mashavi*' to follow when it possesses a particular individual.

The above quotation suggests that the ancestral spirit may take the form of a *njuzu* spirit. In *Shards* grandmother is clearly an ancestor. Her disappearance may imply possession by *njuzu* as in the testimony from Aschwanden. In essence, this spirit does not come upon a medium without the permission of the ancestor. Mhaka (2015) notes that a medium of *njuzu* spirits is usually a host of other spirits;

Some Shona people maintain that *njuzu* were created by God just like any other creature. According to this belief God created *njuzu* together with other aquatic creatures (*zvisikwa zvemumvura*) and human beings on earth (*vanhu varipanyika*) and those beings below the earth (*varipasi*). Aschwanden (1989) records the same concept among the Karanga. The Shona thus regard *njuzu* creatures as part of the underworld beings, *varipasi*. Some Shona say *njuzu* is God's creature which can work closely with either ancestral spirits or alien spirits (*Chisikwa chaMwari chinoshanda nemidzimu nemashavi*). It is interesting to note that most of the mediums of the *njuzu* spirits will also play host to different types of spirits such as ancestral spirits (*midzimu*) and alien spirits (*mashavi*). According to Gumbo (1995), one *njuzu* spirit medium in Gutu district, Lydia Chabata, played host to three types of spirits: an ancestral spirit, a *jukwa* spirit called Hlatshwayo and a *njuzu* spirit named Seri. Thus, according to one Shona belief, *njuzu*'s origin can be said to be the result of God's creative act.

Mhaka adds the dimension that *njuzu* are thought to be spirits of those who die pure (babies and unmarried persons) and hence the directive to remain sexually pure. What is significant is that they work together with ancestral spirits and confer healing powers on the medium. Water, as a source of life is an integral part of Shona spiritual life, especially for the higher spirits responsible for fertility and rain, including the Mwari cult (Daneel 1970, Boudillon 1976).

Grandmother in *Shards* is a nurse therefore already in the medical field, however as a medium, she is also able to provide healing that is not available in Western medical science thereby providing a holistic approach to humanity as in the recommendations by Chavhunduka (1994). In the context of the novel, her reincarnation in the narrator brings healing to a troubled generation facing a cultural and psychological malaise.

The narrator lives in a permissible society where drugs and illicit sex seem to be the norm but she abstains from participating in sexual orgies. The only explanation seems to be that as the chosen host of inherited ancestral and *njuzu* spirit from her grandmother, the spirit preserves her. Her disinterest in sex leads Pan to call her a lesbian. This is interesting in that it shows that

Shona spirit possession has a great impact on sexual identities. The narrator faces the same stigma of those on the margins because she does not readily present herself as normal heterosexual (Butler, 1992; Mcfadden, 1999). However, the reasons presented are not couched in genetic explanations (scientific rationalism) nor social radicalism, but based on Shona traditional religion that links the dead and the living as well as the environment. Shona spirits are interested in the preservation of human life as well as the flora and fauna on land and water (Schoffeleers, 1978). They are also interested in morality; there are many taboos against sexual immorality (Crawford, 1967) and sexual abstinence is more evident in mediums of *njuzu* spirits and *mbonga* in service of the Mwari cult (Daneel, 1970). This is in contrast with the stereotype of Africans as promiscuous.

Njuzu spirit as ancestral spirit of the Hungwe clan points to the significance of totems in conservation and how a particular spirit is a guardian of the land. In this instance, the Hungwe is guarding the interests of marine community. It must also be remembered that the Hungwe is the Zimbabwe bird and therefore the symbol of the nation. In accepting the authenticity of the spirit, there is therefore a rejection of the national history of subjugation to foreigners and foreign ideologies by acknowledging the original inhabitants of the land before colonisation. In essence, Nehanda's spirit of resistance is reincarnated, with the spiritual experience aiding in reminding people who they really are. Since traditional institutions are unrecognised, the spirit mentors and installs the narrator as a medium without human assistance. The spiritual pull directs the narrator to the mountains, *mbira* music (not played by human hands) creates the atmosphere for possession and installation, and the fish eagle accompanies the narrator to the mouth of the cave then flies off. Inside she finds her tools of trade laid out for her (p82-88).

One can compare this with the depiction in Vera's *Nehanda* where procedure is followed: a diviner assesses the spirit and a welcoming ceremony takes place before Nehanda addresses the people. The spirit in *Shards* is very strong and shows that it can achieve its goals even without the cooperation of the majority of the people, which marks a shift in identification of the spirit. The concern is still national, but because of the entrenchment of individualism, its manifestation is no longer premised on the cooperation of the community - thereby marking a shift in identity of manifestation. This has an implication on the acceptance of the medium by the people. In *Shards*, the European world view has become the norm through education and the church. The narrator is labelled "mad" by her family and Shona community.

The literary representation of this spirit therefore encompasses many different forms (*mudzimu*, *mhondoro*, *gombwe*) so as to prove the efficacy of Shona spirituality. Kazembe (2011) says spirits that can act without human medium are *gombwe* (angels) rather than *mhondoro*. The author admits to collapsing the spirits into one but mainly concerned with the national issues;

Initially the spirit was *mudzimu* because it was in the form of her grandmother. *Mudzimu* spirits are family spirits, or spirits of relatives, that possess those of their blood-line or lineage. But as the story progresses the spirit seems to transform into a *mhondoro* because its concerns transcend the family and start to encompass the collective situation of the narrator's generation. (Marangwanda, Interview, July 2017)

The poetic narrative enables her to allude to as much of the authentic African worldview as possible. As noted in the analysis above, much of the conclusions are drawn from the inferred imagery, and hence the need to look into other sources to retrieve meaning. It is with this in mind that I turn to a point of conflict in the narrative and its problematics: madness.

4.7 Madness and Spirit Possession

The main thrust of the novel is to prove that the narrator is not mad as her society concludes, but a chosen medium for ancestral spirits to bring healing to the community. Both madness and spirit possession represent deviation from what is defined as normal. Veit-Wild (2006:1) notes that;

In his critique of Foucault's concept, Jacques Derrida (1978) posits that language (as logos), and madness (as silence) mutually exclude each other, and that madness can only be expressed in the language of fiction. Within the broadly developed psychoanalytic approach to the subject of madness is analysed as part of the unconscious, and since it speaks from outside reason, it is also seen as akin to literary imagination.

Shards can thus be classified as mad writing in the sense that it reflects the anguish, rage and fracture in the colonised subject, which is healed by a return to Shona spirituality. The narrator's conversations with a grandmother that only she can see is evidence of madness but validated by the healing she experiences regardless of unchanging social and physical situation.

That spirit possession is outside the norm has already been established. However, within traditional Shona society it was a venerated social phenomenon that elevated the status of the medium whether male or female. This was on the basis of the shared understanding that the spiritual world is superior to the physical world and those in the spirit world must lead the

living. With the institutionalisation of scientific rationalism, seeing in the spirit became clear evidence of mental instability and therefore frowned upon. However scholars of Shona religion have established that a spirit (*shave, mudzimu, mhondoro*) may announce its desire to possess a medium by making one ill. The illness takes different forms including mental illness. Aschwanden (1989) records a testimony of one male medium who became mad until he accepted the spirit.

Marangwanda admits to the same pattern for her narrator. In reference to the scene when the narrator has visions of an owl perched on the lecturer's shoulders, a crocodile standing by and a student sitting next to her has the head of a hyena, Marangwanda says;

In the story hyenas, owls and crocodiles are linked to the mental disturbance of the narrator that results from her ancestral calling. They are not images of witchcraft but rather show how the narrator's reluctance to fully accept her calling begins to haunt her in a dark and nightmarish way. In Shona culture mental illness/psychosis is often considered a sign of having an ancestral calling. (Interview July 2017)

Visitors to the narrator's home make suggestions to remedy the malady;

I would occasionally pick up snatches of talk between my parents and some other people who paid too many courtesy calls for it to still be courteous. Phrases such as "we should take her to this-and-that renowned faith healer or *n'anga*" and "no, what she needs is thorough medical treatment" would bubble down to me as I swam with Grandmother. (*Shards* p39)

The above suggestions point to the key agencies within the Shona society: the church, African traditional religion and the modern medical hospital. Each represents a different way of dealing with the problem. The church, representing a Christian identity, is likely to exorcise the spirit as it is considered evil, the *n'anga*, representing Shona identity, will check for the source of the spirit and whether it is good or evil then take appropriate action, either installation or exorcism. The family opts for the hospital, representing Euro-scientific identity, an option which is in tandem with their social standing as middle class business people and they can afford the medical bills. The narrator is considered insane because she continually talks to Grandmother but is the only one that sees her. In the quotation, she is physically locked in her bedroom so that visitors do not see her but she claims she is happily swimming with grandmother who has brought the waters of Chinhoyi cave with her. The knowledge she brings her is equated to plunging in the deep pools but also the water image seems surreal. It requires spiritual eyes to see.

Since in the physical people see the ground and do not feel wet, such pronouncements are madness, just as the narrator's claims. The narrator is taken to a mental hospital where she is sedated. She however declares the whole system ineffectual as it does not deal with the actual problem and she learns to pretend so that she can be released.

Life became an interaction of nerves. I vividly remember the tepid triple-meals-a-day that were an insult to swallow. The unsuccessful therapy sessions with artificially intelligent psychiatrists which always left one feeling more fractious than before. The cold deathly baths that left more grime than they cleansed. The regular bruising boxing matches with semi-skilled staff. (the outcome of these fights were almost always inconclusive.) The dreadful visits from edgy family members who spoke to you as if the world had ever been normal. The ghastly medication. The bloody, gruesome, mutilated isolation ... We were a lost and forgotten tribe, wandering aimlessly with no Moses to guide us. There were those who took lithium, there were others who tried to scream and scratch the affliction out and there were still others who were resigned to a deafening muteness. The diseases of our thoughts had us clamped by the throat. The battle to be considered sane was a deflating, degrading one. We tried never to look into one another's eyes, the shame cut too deep. We mumbled and rambled to ourselves and shared private laughs with our ghosts. (*Shards*, p48-49)

The narrator's stay in hospital is distressing, revealing the anguish of people with mental illness. The meals are tepid, pointing to the mechanical way everything is handled at the hospital which seeks to erase the inmates' individual identity. To be allowed to return to society, they must renounce their experiences and "act" normal, according to society's frames. This erasure of individual identity is a violent act that requires subversion through mad writing (Veit-Wild, 2006). The discrimination is captured in the words "lost and forgotten tribe" to describe the inmates of the mental hospital. Chemical sedation does not help to restore meaning and dignity to their lives, which is later achieved through Shona spirituality. The European civilising mission is thus unsuccessful as it aims at erasing the African nature rather than embracing it in hybridity.

Chavhunduka (1994:1) notes that traditional healers in precolonial times dealt not only with medical conditions but were largely concerned with social cohesion. The patient is treated in the presence of his/her family. Gelfand (1964:39) says that besides telling the family the type of spirit responsible for the illness, the "*nganga* will also tell them the kind of *shave* it is, what its requirements are and the type of dress it wishes its medium to wear at ceremonies held in its honour". The family then nurses the patient and ensures that the requirements are fulfilled. This contrasts with the picture painted in the quotation above. The narrator is isolated from family and friends because she is considered mad. She knows that she can only be reintegrated

with society once she is considered sane and that is why she calls it a battle. The stigma associated with madness makes the inmates of the mental hospital ashamed, which stops them from reaching out to each other. Madness as an identity marker pushes the narrator to the periphery and hence the need to fight to be integrated into society. The modern system therefore places the burden on the individual through isolation - removed from social support systems, which then feels like a form of punishment for deviating from the norm. The narrator feels abandoned especially because the food and amenities are far below the standard she is used to in her affluent home; cold bath as opposed to a warm one, tepid meals and physical handling by semi-skilled staff. The latter is a personal affront for someone used to respect from household help, even hostile ones. Her time in hospital becomes a form of exile, made worse by the estrangement from Grandmother.

In hospital the inmates imbibe the hostility against them evident in how the narrator and her friend nickname each other “Mupengo” and “Benzi”, which both mean mad person. They use the terms in mockery but unfortunately they also reflect a certain level of acceptance. Their friendship is based on their mutual love for art in words (literature) as opposed to the recommended visual art (drawing) which the hospital calls art therapy. Again the prescription of the hospital does not work as the narrator barely succeeds in drawing her environment in isolation. Her meeting with Benzi is accidental but they create their own therapy through friendship and pursuit of a common goal;

He became the nearest thing to a friend I had at that concentration-camp-for-the-mind. He nicknamed me Mupengo and I returned the favour by christening him Benzi. We would meet as often as was permissible and spend timeless hours discussing everything from the poetry of Dylan Thomas and Christopher Okigbo to the ongoing obliteration of indigenous culture by ravages of contemporary life ... We urged, pushed and goaded each other to write and this meant everytime we met there was always something new and terrifying to share. Our hunger for words - whether spoken, written or thought - was so ravenous it threatened to swallow us both whole. Uncannily the two of us shared a natural inclination for prose-poetry, it flowed out of our pens as easily as mucus falling from the nostrils of a toddler on a wintry dayThe idealism we infused each other in those pathetic days proved to be more medicinal than any of the therapies administered at that prison of an institution. The psychiatrists started noting what they called my ‘increasing reengagement with reality’ while Benzi’s bouts of frenzy and catatonia also appeared to stabilise drastically. (*Shards*, p53-54)

The narrator and Benzi find their own sense of community and validate each other’s skills which gives them a sense of purpose despite still being confined in the mental hospital. They

plan to publish their work once they leave and hence provide more reason for writing. In Butler's (1999:xv-xvi) conception, Benzi and the narrator are able to outwardly perform an identity that has interiorised in the psyche. It is interesting that the narrator who, more often than not, bored and lethargic should find excitement and purpose in a mental institution. Benzi becomes closer to her than her own family whose visits do not excite her as they are edgy and distant. The emotional and psychological connection replaces the connection with grandmother. Could it then be that, apart from possible spirit possession, the narrator's psychosis is caused by a dysfunctional family? She seems to have no emotional bonding with her parents and siblings. They also do not seem to understand her and thus she has always felt like an outsider which increases her subversive behaviour and declaring herself an anarchist. She drops out of college because she finds what is taught there boring. The clinical approach given in the novel does not try to understand the root cause of the narrator's behaviour and is, therefore, ineffective. Burton (2012) says;

“Mental disorder” is difficult to define. Generally speaking, mental disorders are conditions that involve either loss of contact with reality or distress and impairment. These experiences lie on a continuum of normal human experience, and so it is impossible to define the point at which they become pathological. Furthermore, concepts such as schizophrenia, depression, and personality disorder listed in classifications of mental disorders may not in fact map onto any real or distinct disease entities; even if they do, the symptoms and clinical manifestations that define them are open to subjective interpretation.

The narrator in *Shards* exhibits mood swings and signs of depression when she fails to get out of bed, feels lethargic and attempts suicide. She also seems to talk to herself, addressing imaginary people (schizophrenia) and hence certified clinically mad. Burton (2012) says that if patients are allowed to work through what triggers these behaviours in their social interaction they will be able to get over it. Madness is a temporary reaction to social stimuli alerting the patient to pay more attention and solve the issue. In that sense everyone is mad to some extent. Burton further notes that,

Whilst some mental disorders such as anxiety disorders, depression, and personality disorders may have arisen from our need to cope with being human and to make sense of the human experience, other mental disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder may have arisen from characteristics such as language and creativity that set us apart from other animals and define us as human beings. Schizophrenia may have arisen from the evolution of the human brain to accommodate a language centre in the dominant left brain hemisphere. This lateralisation of function leads to an anatomical asymmetry in the brain, subtle deviations in which predispose to psychotic symptoms. Language is not

necessary for communication, but it is able to give rise to symbolism and thereby to emotionalism and creative activity. These unique assets not only make us by far the most adaptable of all animals, but also enable us to engage in pursuits such as art, music, and religion, and so define us as human beings. Subtle deviations in the lateralization of function may in some cases lead to schizophrenia, but in many other cases it may lead to a greater capacity for creativity and spirituality, that is, to a greater capacity to make use of symbolic language.

The narrator and Benzi fit this description. Their level of creativity is very high but unfortunately they live in a society that does not fully value this skill and so it is out of the norm. Business and scientific knowledge is considered more useful. Burton argues that people with bipolar disorder can be successful in any field due to high creativity. The narrator's creativity is expressed in poetry, graffiti and heightened spirituality that makes her the chosen medium for her lost generation.

The narrator then might have got the genes from the parents since both of them are successful entrepreneurs, which requires a level of creativity. She is, however, more similar to her grandmother than her parents in the spiritual and ingenuity in the fashioning of words. The narrator is conversant with all forms of art - visual, music and literary - as evident in her allusions. She is also well travelled so has global awareness. That is why she can pick the shallowness of pretenders like her ex pan Africanist boyfriend. In Benzi she meets her equal and in a way proves that she is not mad, but simply in the wrong crowd.

This is not to say that psychosis cannot be dangerous. Burton (2012) warns that mental disorders may lead to self-neglect or self-harm. In *Shards*, the narrator and Sheba attempt suicide because they lack purpose for their lives. They see beyond the pretenses and emptiness of their lives. This is heightened by their parents' affluence which insulates them from the daily struggle for survival that characterises the poor. Shona culture accounts for those who are intelligent to see beyond the physical by accepting spirit possession. Similarly the spirits identify these geniuses and choose them for their purpose. Spirit possession is not the only cause of madness, sometimes it is due to witchcraft or sorcery (Chavhunduka, 1978; Crawford, 1967). Spirit mediums were venerated in traditional Shona society and not stigmatised. Victims of witchcraft were sympathised with and the community sought to help. Suicide among the Shona is associated with evil spirits which are thought to be sent by witches or avenging spirits. The former has to be exorcised and the latter appeased for the patient to be healed. This is why the diviner is crucial to Shona community.

The narrator undoubtedly exhibits forms of psychosis and faces stigma from the family and society. The spirit intervenes without human assistance by revealing herself and leading the narrator to a point of acceptance and finally receiving healing. *Shards* ends with a bold proclamation of identity;

A seismic shift has occurred deep within. I pick up the other objects and step outside. The night welcomes me as I begin the journey back to my past life. How I will be received there is unknown, uncertain. What comforts me are Grandmother's words repeating themselves in my mind, "You have been called, you have no choice but to answer. There are profound things one can learn from one's beginnings..." By embracing my genesis my interior landscape is altered and liberated. I cannot wait to share the sacred fruits now in my possession with those I left behind. They may think me insane again but that is not the case. I am not mad. No. I am chosen. (*Shards*, p87-88)

The narrator makes the transition from being an anarchist believing in nothing, to fear and rejection of Grandmother represented in the negative image of a drooling hyena and putrid gifts. When she opens her mind to learn from grandmother, society creates the barrier by confining her for mental illness. The final call to the mountain cleanses her of the shame and stigma, restores dignity and confidence to a point she is ready to teach others just as Nehanda in Vera's novel. The *mhondoro* spirit gives her adequate lessons in history to enable her to be confident in her past, a grounding that enables her to face the future boldly.

4.8 Conclusion

Vera's *Nehanda* and Marangwanda's *Shards* show that spirituality is at the heart of Shona existence. Shona women who are possessed take their role seriously regardless of negative repercussions on their personal lives. Shona women use possession to question colonialism and African men. In the process of doing so, identities of women are implanted at the centre of a cultural institution designed to serve male interests. This suggests that both the African men and the institutions are subverted and made to reveal that there are no values that are fixed. The stigma and contempt ascribed to Shona women is displaced. Once the mediums accept possession by the ancestral spirit it is difficult to differentiate the medium and the spirit as they work together unlike *shave* spirits that come and go. Shona women as spirit mediums have strict moral codes to follow to ensure the land is not desecrated and they, as the direct abode of the *mhondoro* spirit, are also ritually clean. Material wealth and colonial history do not change one's ancestors nor their past so one can still be anchored in their culture regardless of

environment. Nehanda is called to speak in the presence of the white man and the narrator in *Shards* is called to speak to black Zimbabweans in the global era.

Postcolonial hybridity does not negate an African (Shona) identity. Both texts also show that those outward manifestations of identity begin in the spiritual and psychological processes. What is then observed is the maturation and performance of an identity that has been dormant for a while. A medium can change identities depending on the purpose of the spirit they host. At times the identities merge and are therefore shifting, depending on specific circumstances. The novels reflect the growth of the mediums and the shift in their status as they take on practical duties to transform their societies. Traditions are not cast in stone as the spirits are eager to meet the contemporary needs of their people. The effects of spirit possession in Nehanda, an agrarian woman, are the same in a modern techno-savvy girl because they share the same ancestors and each one represents continuity at their point in history. As representatives of the ancestors they transcend gender boundaries. The power of the mediums is hinged on expressing the wisdom and guidance of the ancestors in words that can be understood by the people.

The next chapter analyses the representation of Shona women's identities in relation to economic and social forces that have a bearing on their esteem.

Chapter Five: Shona Women and Class Identities

5.0 Introduction: Class Identities and Shona Women

The previous chapter analysed how spirit possession impacts on the identities of Shona women. It was noted that spirit possession is determined by the spirit which chooses its medium according to the purpose to be fulfilled. The medium is called upon to sacrifice herself by, at times, missing out on normal female activities such as marriage and sexuality. An authentic pure African identity is impossible in the global context though a distinct Shona spirituality is needed in order to cope with the global challenges confidently as reflected in *Shards*. Shona spirituality is, therefore, used as a tool of resistance against Western hegemony. The cultural prism of spirit possession tended to use women to speak in the language of collective Shona women's identities. This chapter revises this perspective and depicts Shona women identities as also influenced by class distinctions. This chapter therefore focuses on how the shift from national to class identities reflects on the changes occurring within the Shona women's identities and how these shifts impact on the identities of Shona women.

Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Violet Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* and Harrison's *Jambanja* are used as primary texts.

5.1 Defining Class

The concept of class in contemporary times has become complex. It is no longer simply about economic position as envisaged by Karl Marx. Walby (Brooks, 1997:6) notes that;

Postmodernist arguments for the fragmentation of concepts used in "modernist" social theory have produced a tendency to shift the central theoretical concepts away from structure to "discourse". This is represented in the increasing significance of Foucault rather than Marx in social theorising. The consequences of this are to conceptualise power as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places or groups.

In this regard one person may possess various forms of power associated with different classes (places or groups). Some people may also fail to align with any of the existent known groups exhibiting an individual trait that cannot be classified. Spivak (2005:476) highlights these complexities in her concept of the subaltern and agency which she defines as follows:

Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class. Class is not a cultural origin, it is a sense of economic collectivity, of social relations of formation as the basis of action. Gender is not

lived sexual difference. It is a sense of the collective social negotiation of sexual differences as the basis of action. “Race” is not originary; it assumes racism. Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action.

The subaltern then refers to the disenfranchised in society though the basis of that disenfranchisement varies from gender, race, economics or sexuality.

Mcfadden (2005: 9), writing on Zimbabwe, argues that patriarchy relegated women to a lower status. However, the post-independence policy on education that included women raised their consciousness and fostered changes in women’s identity with the rise of a middle class;

Women began to enter the middle classes in their own right as bearers of various types of property, mainly in the form of intellectual property and skills. The emergence of a women's movement also provided a critical resource base for women's entry into the middle classes; and while this feature of the movement has severely undermined its political viability and effectiveness as a political movement, it has nonetheless created new sources of identity for women in the public, further destabilising the patriarchal relationships between the heteronormative genders. Social mobility based on educational expertise enabled women to enter the public as individuals who could engage with the market, albeit constrained by cultural and social taboos and value judgments that limited their ascendancy and relegated most women to lower-level professions and lower pay.

In the above passage, middle class women are at the forefront of the struggle against patriarchy unlike the peasant rural woman (Mcfadden, 2005:9). However, the reality is not as clear cut as people move across spaces and some middle class occupations are based in the rural areas such as teachers, nurses and agricultural demonstrators. Spivak (2005:482) insists that the singular experience is as important as the “politicised” plural and hence the specific dynamics of a particular situation must be fully comprehended;

The effort is to build infrastructure so that they can, when necessary, when the public sphere calls for it, synecdochise themselves without identitarian exploitation (sometimes well-meaning but equally destructive), from above. The solution, as I see it, is not to celebrate or deny difference, but find out what specific case of inequality brings about the use of difference and who can deny it on occasion. The solution is also not to create “a politics of recognition” where this problematic is altogether ignored. The solution cannot come to us from the international civil society, self-selected moral entrepreneurs who distribute philanthropy without democracy. I believe the existing debates about contingency and universality have not taken into account. (Spivak, 2005:482)

The quotation points out that at times collective action tends to sideline individual concerns and becomes patronising. According to Jakopovich (2014: 2), “In reality, class relations and class locations most often crucially determine both individual life chances and the functioning

of social institutions.” As noted earlier, taxonomy for class relations vary and refers to people’s patterns of association and the power dynamics within those relationships; employer and employee, landlord and tenant, client and service provider and many other economic relations. Social class can be defined as a status hierarchy in which individuals and groups are classified on the basis of esteem and prestige acquired mainly through economic success and accumulation of wealth.

However, as Mcfadden (2005) and Spivak (2005) correctly note, there are other markers of esteem and prestige that make women a special group regardless of economic status and geolocation. For Mcfadden, it is the women’s relationship to patriarchy and heteronormative systems while Spivak highlights the women’s consciousness and agency against whatever system impinges on their freedom and space to engage life meaningfully. In other words, esteem and prestige are key markers of class hierarchy and these vary from culture to culture. This means that markers of wealth and class also vary. In traditional Shona society, those who owned a lot of livestock and large families were considered to be rich. Wealth was perceived in the livestock and human resources. In an agrarian community, it followed that families with more people to work the land tended to harvest more and therefore wealth was measured in ability to have surplus grain through the year and therefore assist poor families. The communal approach to life ensured wealth was distributed in a way that no one was glaringly poor (lacking basic necessities) and no one was obscenely rich (having unutilised excess).

Michael West (2002) traces the rise of an African middle class in colonial Zimbabwe. He defines class in the following words,

This book, then, assumes a definition of class that is as much ideological (consciousness) as it is material (economic). Class, in the first instance, is determined by a person’s relationship to the means by which wealth is produced, distributed, and appropriated. Traditionally, the middle class is a social category consisting of those who stand between the owners and controllers of the major means of production — that is, the upper, ruling, or governing class — and those who are most directly involved in producing wealth — that is, the working class and other lower ranking social strata, including the peasantry. The members of the middle class are usually distinguished by their professional standing — which generally presupposes a level of educational attainment above the societal average — and the white-collar nature of their work.

Yet one’s relationship to the means of production and distribution is merely the starting point of class ranking; it is not the ending point or sole determinant. Ideology, or the consciousness of class, is no less important than the material reality of class. Far from being a static phenomenon, class is a social, which is to say a historical process.

Ultimately, class is determined by the overall experiences of individuals and groups — experiences that are cultural, social, and political as well as economic. (West, 2002: 2)

Nnaemeka (2004) suggests that there are other dimensions that define class besides the economy. The cultural, social and political are equally important in the well-being of women and their societies and hence the need for a holistic approach to development. The various classes are represented from peasants, farm labourers, maids, vendors, university students, farmers, medical doctors, entrepreneurs and civil servants.

Shohat (1992) highlights the ambiguities that characterise post-independence nations who inherit colonial baggage that influences their culture and economics. This results in hybrid identities that embody contradictory qualities. However, indigenous notions of identities of Shona characters appear as cultural hybrids because they “redefine and reconstruct notions of femininity and gender” (Attree in Chitando, 2012:73). Nnaemeka (2004) notes that the word culture evokes the negative in Western conception of the “other” and yet it is a source of positive transformation in the context of cross-fertilisation of ideas. However, this hybridity plays out differently in each character, accounting for the shifting identities of Shona women.

Postcolonial feminist ideas have also complicated the idea of class. In this regard, class is no longer a binary construct of the rich versus the poor but individuals exhibit multiple characteristics that at times intersect (class, gender, race, sexuality). Class as a category is, therefore, fraught with contradictions. Postcolonial feminism enables an analysis of changing dimensions of class. Shohat (2012:21) notes that;

There was a phase at the very beginning in which anything that was seen as anti-colonial, was all binaries, essentialism. It is more complicated. Yes, some were, some were not. The other element, that we were addressing today by talking about the Red Atlantic, is this notion that anything you go back to search in the past is kind of fetishistic nostalgia, or going back to origins and thus naively essentialist. So we were questioning the unproblematised celebration of hybridity and the dismissal of any search into the precolonial past as a naïve search for a prelapsarian origin.

The above quotation shows that human beings are hybrids of their experiences and each trait they choose to follow is as valid as the other. In the context of this study, a Shona woman may choose to uphold traditional values to determine her status in a modern context while simultaneously embracing other forms of identity. Acquiring education also enables characters to aspire for, and acquire new class consciousness though living in states of impoverishment. Bourdillon (1976:373-4) observes that;

In no area of change is there a strict uniformity common to all Shona society. A wealthy professional man may be conservative in his way of life, keep his family arrangements in accordance with traditional patterns and religiously maintain his respect to his spirit elders to the exclusion of newer religious practices. A poor couple in their traditional rural home, who have not the means to change much in their lives, may nevertheless place their marriage and nuclear family above all the traditionally kinship ties. Although we find patterns of life and patterns of change common to most, we cannot with any certainty predict how an individual will react to a new situation. Any stereotype of the black man in Rhodesia today is bound to be false, and there is no such person as the “typical Shona”.

The Shona peoples today are not the Shona peoples of pre-colonial times, not even the peoples of thirty years ago. The Shona are involved in a process of change from a culture without literature and with little technology and little centralisation to a culture which incorporates a growing knowledge derived from literature and dense population centres to meet the growth of industry. This change leads people in divergent directions, but all are caught up in it and all must adapt to it. Although some may hanker for the simplicity and surety of an idealised past, the Shona past was a response to an environment which both physically and socially, has been surpassed and can never return.

This passage above also highlights Butler’s (1990) point that women as a category is an illusion as the term encompasses diverse groups with diverse needs to be represented by one theory.

5.2. Plot of *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006)

The Uncertainty of Hope was published in 2006 but set in 2005 Mbare when Operation Murambatsvina took place and displaced many people in Harare. This event is the main backdrop of the story that reflects the experiences of women from various walks of life. The story is mainly about Onai Moyo, a vegetable vendor residing in Mbare, Harare’s oldest high density suburb. She has an abusive husband, Gari, and three children; Ruva, Rita and Fari. Her best friend is Katy Nguni who is married to a truck driver, John, and has one child, Faith who is a university student studying law. Katy always assists Onai whenever she is battered by Gari. The novel opens with one such incident and Katy having to beg John to take Onai to hospital. At the hospital, Onai meets a young female doctor, Emily, who tries to persuade her to get Gari arrested for beating her but she insists she walked into a door and is not in an abusive relationship. All the other characters think that Onai should leave Gari before he kills her but she insists on staying for the sake of her children. Faith’s boyfriend, Tom, tells her to warn her

mother about the impending destruction of shacks and the market. The recipients of the warning are incredulous, John crediting it to the mischief of university students.

5.2.1 Women and Livelihoods in Crisis: *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The Uncertainty of Hope's time setting is 2005, when inflation was very high and the shops failed to secure adequate stocks. People queued for everything (fuel, groceries, water) without any guarantee of getting the items required and it is mainly women and children who waited in the queues (p99-100). Sometimes the waiting only ended in violence, people being beaten by the police with baton sticks. Unemployment was also high and so most people resorted to vending to raise money for food and other amenities. Faith in *The uncertainty of Hope* notes that, "The food situation was getting worse every day. Their lives had become one big obsession with obtaining food, and making sure that meagre groceries stretched as far as possible (p27)." Apart from this, rentals and school fees still needed to be paid yet it was not easy to raise the money. Some people resort to illicit ways of raising money such as foreign currency dealing (Katy), smuggling goods and people acrossing the border (John) and taking bribes (Mr Boora and customs officials at the border). The main aim is to ensure survival and morality becomes a luxury.

This is the context in which Tagwira draws her characters, trying to survive regardless of challenges. Their relationship to men is important and Tagwira seems to be influenced by African versions of feminism (Nnaemeka 2004) which emphasise the need for men and women to work together. This formulation of feminism would be opposed to outright confrontation and separation of the sexes advocated by radical feminism. The women are active agents of their lives, either aided by loving partners (Katy and John, Hondo and his wife, Faith and Tom) or hindered by abusive spouses (Onai and Gari). Single women either get support from male relatives (Emily and Tom, Faith and her father) or are involved in transactional sexual relationships as objects of male sexual gratification (Melody and Chanda, Gloria and Gari). Transactional sexual relationships are depicted negatively in the text and associated with prostitution and immorality.

Chitando (2012) dismisses transactional sexual relationships as flawed agency although these identities can enable the Shona women a certain degree of security in acquiring basic necessities. In the novel Gloria manages to coax Gari into doing what she wants because she

provides sexual pleasure for him in contrast to Onai who is abused for insisting that he takes on his responsibilities as a father and head of the house. What is common in these relationships is that men provide a certain level of security for the women, even the abusive ones. Economic concerns influence these relationships to some extent and have an impact on perceived social class of the women. Success of both genders is premised on complementarity, which is not necessarily equality, as depicted by Tagwira. Her characters are round to enable the reader to understand why they act the way they do; why Onai stays in an abusive marriage regardless of others encouraging her to leave.

Despite Onai's poverty, she is generous and sympathetic to her lodger, Sheila, who is living with HIV and AIDS and cannot access antiretroviral drugs. Onai also gives out food to the beggar, Mawaya, whenever she can. After the market and the shacks have been razed down, Gari brings home his girlfriend, Gloria, with the intention of kicking Onai out. Onai attacks Gloria pulling her braids and attacks her with a knife that grazes her shoulders. Katy and Maya (neighbour and vendor) plead with Gari to forgive Onai and shield her from further attacks. Katy then encourages Onai to leave but Maya says she should fight for her marriage. Onai moves to Katy's home for safety and John tells her she is welcome to stay. That same night Gari falls sick, vomiting blood. Gloria is frightened and runs away. Onai takes Gari to hospital where he dies.

After the funeral Gari's brother, Toro, and his family move into the house displacing Onai and her children. Ruva moves in with Katy since she is writing her Ordinary Level examinations while Onai and the other children go to Chiundura, their maternal grandmother's home. Onai's mother encourages her that she can make it on her own as a widow and need not contest ownership of the house in a court of law for the sake of her children's cultural ties to their father's people. Onai goes back to the city to look for a job. Faith connects her to her fiancée's sister, Emily, who turns out to be the young doctor she met earlier in hospital. Onai registers for Operation Garikai so that she can have a house. A Mr Boora seeks sexual favours so that he ensures she gets a housing unit as soon as possible without paying the required deposit. He goes on to grope her body without her consent and she only escapes by kicking him in the groin. Emily helps her to get genuine assistance through Kushinga Women's Project and Mr

Boora is made accountable for his actions. Faith insists she wants Onai to sew her wedding dresses.

Meanwhile, Mawaya has completed his penitence and turns out to be Tom's friend, a wealthy businessman named Tapiwa Jongwe, who disappeared after his wife's death. He wants to resume his wife's business and seeks a talented dressmaker. Faith hears about it and recommends Onai. Onai is interviewed for the job and hired immediately to stay on the premises. The novel ends on a happy note with Onai, employed, sheltered and reunited with her family. All the women that come into contact with Onai are also fully explored in the novel, one gets to see their challenges and perceptions of their situation and in a way act as foils to Onai on the topical issues of employment, source of income, HIV and AIDS, corruption, morality, activism and generally what it means to be a woman in Zimbabwe.

5.2.2 Onai's Dilemma and the Social Ladder

Onai's husband, Gari, is a line manager at a beverage company. In traditional notions of class, that makes him middle class in terms of his earnings. His workmate in the same position owns a house in Belvedere, a low density suburb. However, due to his philandering and irresponsibility, Gari still resides in his late parents' house in Mbare. Onai struggles alone to take care of herself and the children through vegetable vending. In the Victorian notion transposed by colonisation on Zimbabwe, the class of the family is determined by the husband's position. However, there is a glaring disparity in this family as Onai has no access to Gari's money and the latter lacks a sense of responsibility to take care of his family. Consequently, two classes are represented within the same family.

Onai and her children are vulnerable as she can barely meet the basic needs through her vending. This situation is compounded by Gari's abuse as he deliberately thwarts Onai's efforts to improve her income. He smashes Onai's sewing machine and assaults her to the extent that she spends days in hospital, losing earnings as she is unable to trade. Onai's poverty is thus artificially created by Gari's sense of masculinity promoted by patriarchy. Mcfadden (2005) argues that patriarchy is pervasive and determines the position of women in society. Gari is uncensored in his behaviour because of male privilege; as a man he has the right to rule his household as he pleases. John and Katy express disgruntlement, and John even threatens to beat Gari but never does so. The onus is on Onai to change her circumstances by either perfecting violence so that she can instill fear in Gari as Maya does, or by leaving him as Katy

suggests. Emily suggests that she gets Gari arrested so that the law instills new values in him. Onai rejects all these options and her reasons have both economic and cultural bearing on her social status.

She does not want the stigma of being a divorced woman and the first in her family to acquire such status. In this regard she conforms to Gaidzanwa's (1985) findings that marriage gives women respectability.

Onai learns from her mother to endure her marriage and take care of her children so that they do not become destitute;

The knowledge that her mother did understand was a constant source of comfort. MaMusara's own marriage to Onai's late father had been very troubled. But she had stayed for the sake of her children and because marriage was not something one could just walk away from. "Once you get in, you stay. *Kugomera uripo chaiko mwanangu ... no matter how hard it gets. Always remember that a woman cannot raise a good family without a man by her side,*" MaMusara had declared, obviously keen to instil similar values in her daughter. (p7)

The irony of the above quotation is that Onai's father dies and her mother is not obliged to remarry, she assists Onai by paying for her dressmaking skills without the assistance of a man. MaMusara's views are inherited from colonial times when women were legal minors and she reinforces them in Onai though the environment has changed and the legal system will support her separation. However, her financial position makes her accept the advice.

Economic indices of wealth are usually income, shelter and lifestyle. Onai knows that she does not earn much and hence is afraid to leave Gari. Marriage to Gari accords her security in terms of shelter. The house they stay in is fully paid for and hence she does not have to worry about paying rent. The house also provides an extra income through lodgers. Sheilla pays rent to Onai because the shack in the yard belongs to her as Mrs Moyo. This accords her the status of being a land lady in a space where most women and their families are tenants. Onai's identity as a home owner enables her to practise philanthropy towards those below her in the social ranking (allowing Sheilla to stay despite her HIV status, allowing Shella to sleep indoors after the shack is destroyed, and being a source of food for the beggar Mawaya). Her conception of motherhood and generosity are therefore informed by her Shona culture as she comes from Chiundura, in Midlands province. Onai's mother sacrifices her cattle to send her to dressmaking school, she can only sacrifice what she has for her own children. Staying with Gari is the only option she sees as well as working hard, vending to buy food and pay school

fees for the children. She is frustrated that the shrunk economy makes it difficult to find employment. Staying with Gari does not mean that Onai is passive but is her way of utilising resources available to her.

In the face of Gari's unpredictable behaviour and the unpredictable inflationary Zimbabwean economy, the house is constant and a source of comfort. However, this illusion is challenged from the beginning of the story when thieves break in and steal the television set. Gari is not home to defend both the home and the family, which could be an indicator that Onai's confidence is misplaced. This is later validated in the text first when Onai is kicked out of the house to make way for Gloria as Gari's second wife, and secondly when Toro takes over the house after Gari's death. In this Tagwira shows that Shona women who premise their identity and social status of husbands are in danger of losing everything should circumstances change. That is why Mcfadden (1992) argues for the autonomy of women in their personal/political relationships and interaction with men who are privileged by patriarchy.

The house belongs to Gari's parents and he inherits it as the eldest son. It then follows that after Gari's death, the second son inherits it in turn according to Shona custom. However, this displaces Onai and her children. Maya suggests that Onai fights for the house in a court of law but Katy and her mother advise against it on cultural grounds. Maya is referring to the change in law in Zimbabwe effected after lobbying by women activists because many widows were displaced at the death of husbands. The Deceased Amendment Act Section 3 states that the surviving spouse inherits the house s/he was staying in as the matrimonial home. Shona customary law is still operative, therefore, Toro is also entitled to the house as an inheritance from his parents. In this instance, the law says they must negotiate and come to an agreement. Failure to do so, the house can be sold and the proceeds shared among the disputing parties. That is why Onai approaches Chipso (Gari's sister) so that she helps in the convening of the family council to discuss the matter. In doing so, Onai proves that she is a respectful wife and respectable mother who is concerned with the well-being of her family, both immediate and extended. While she is concerned about the economic well-being of her family, Onai is also concerned about preserving her personal dignity as ascribed in her Shona values.

Emmeshed within the dispute over the house are Shona cultural values, greed, economic greed, and post-independent legal frameworks drawn from modernity. Readers sympathise with Onai knowing that she has endured a terrible marriage in order to secure shelter for her children. At the death of the abusive husband, she is expected to get reprieve as she has literally run the

home by herself. This does not happen as Toro and his wife grab the chance to become urban home owners and abandon their rural home. They assume that urban life is better than rural life. Tagwirei's narrative challenges this representation in that Onai's mother and Chipu lead more stable agrarian lives in the rural areas as compared to urban life. Chipu refuses to take in her brother's children out of malice, not because she cannot afford it. Onai and her children then find reprieve in Onai's mother in Chiundura. The rural areas become a buffer zone for the displaced urbanites, reflecting again that the distinction is ephemeral (Bourdillon, 1976; West, 2002; Yoshikuno, 1991). Urban incomes are used to maintain rural homes, and rural produce is used to subsidise urban living and hence class distinction would then be in terms of the combined resources.

Toro and his wife only think of acquiring the status of urban home owners but do not think about the skills required to live in an urban environment. To mask their greed and ambition, they project a negative image of Onai. Toro's moving into the house is represented as an honourable action to prevent the desecration of the house through Onai bringing boyfriends to the family home. The assumption is that since Onai is young, beautiful, unemployed and widowed with three children, she is likely to turn to other men to provide for her in place of Gari. For them the equation is very simple - poor women resort to prostitution in order to survive. Marxist Feminist studies on prostitution have blamed patriarchy as the main cause in that it closes economic spaces for women and reserves the sexual industry (reproduction and domestic) for them. Shohat (2012) notes that the problem is not that this is not true, but that this is generalised to be the experience of all women. There are women who have been pushed into prostitution due to lack of alternative spaces.

In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, such women are represented by Gloria and Sheilla. Sheilla has to make a choice between dying of hunger or of HIV and AIDS. Her desperate situation leads her into prostitution and later her death from HIV and AIDS. Gloria also acquires the virus but capitalises on her good looks to get clients while spreading the disease as punishment for men using her as an object for their sexual gratification. The challenge is in making such women the prototype of all desperate women, in other words universalising their experience. Toro and Chipu use this image to victimise Onai, who is poor but never a prostitute. However, Onai chooses to appropriate a tool associated with prostitution by Gari in order to save her life. She chooses to use condoms so as to protect herself from HIV and AIDS to enable her to fend for her children. The depiction of desperate Shona women as prostitutes leads to unjust treatment

of widows within families that suspect them of immorality and wives who fail to negotiate for safe sex from philandering husbands.

Tagwira challenges this view that all desperate poor women necessarily turn to prostitution or transactional sex. Onai is offered the chance to do so by Mr Boora in the council offices but she chooses to uphold her dignity as a celibate Shona widow. Onai resists victimhood by kicking Boora in the groin thereby exhibiting positive agency. She refuses to give in to a system that dehumanises her and turns her into an object. Her actions are not premised on any hope that the system will help her; Onai does not report the matter to the police because she believes corruption is total and no action is likely to be taken against Boora. It is Onai's heightened sense of self that motivates her to defend herself physically, as well as ensuring that she is not degraded further by society. Onai draws strength from being a survivor of gender-based violence (physical, material and emotional) in her home from both Gari and his siblings. This is a validation of Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection in that the negative treatment that Onai receives forces her to depend on resources within her and in turn empower her to resist further abjection. She rises above the negative classification imposed on her by men in order to exploit her.

Clearly Onai wants to be an urban home owner again and signs up for Operation Garikai (Live well) housing units. She assumes that these are free as a government initiative, especially coming after Operation Murambatsvina (Clean out trash) where the same government had destroyed "illegal" housing and market stalls. Onai is thus shocked to discover that there is a deposit that needs to be paid. As an honest citizen, she pledges to pay later. Onai is confident of her business (vending) skills and knows that given time, she can raise the required deposit. Mr Boora sees a desperate woman whom he can take advantage of as a sexual object. The discrepancy between these two notions of identity is what leads to the conflict. Onai perceives herself as a capable, dignified Shona woman who follows the rules. Boora is corrupt and perceives women as sexual objects to be exploited. His arrogance is clearly demonstrated in that he assumes Onai has accepted his proposition and goes on to effect it. The assumption again is that all poor women are candidates for prostitution to acquire basic necessities. There is also the clash between the material view of life and the spiritual/cultural self. Onai values her self-esteem over material wealth unlike Gloria. Tagwira's narrative awards characters (both men and women) who sacrifice and persevere for moral worth at the expense of material gain. Such women are given a happy ending: Onai finds employment to use her dressmaking skills

and shelter that is far much better than what she had dreamed of. Gloria acquires HIV and AIDS and her scheme to marry Gari fails as he dies. Sheilla dies of AIDS untreated. Melody is redeemed when she decides to rely on her relatives than the comfort of transactional sex with married men.

Onai represents the lower class Shona woman in desperate circumstances whose hard work, resilience and morality results in improved social status. Onai is shaped by both her rural (peasant) and urban (vendor) experiences, which make her shrewd in handling resources and looking out for others as a married woman and widow. She acquires a professional course as a dressmaker and aspires to send her children to school so that they can get white collar jobs and improve their own social status. Despite desperation, she refuses to sink morally into the abjected class of prostitutes. Onai's class status is determined both by her economic condition and her cultural status which at times are contradictory which represents the position of Shona women in contemporary Zimbabwe. Each situation that Onai finds herself in calls for reflection and acting in ways she perceives to be appropriate which is what Butler (1990) means by gender performance.

Tagwira seems to suggest that Shona women must always be cognisant of Shona values of community and morality regardless of their economic pursuit. This makes the linear consideration of class as outlined by modernity inappropriate. Instead there is an enmeshing of values that calls for negotiation in order to achieve personal class mobility more in line with Nnaemeka's Neco Feminism.

5.2.3 Forex Dealers in Zimbabwe

The high inflation rate in Zimbabwe led to the rise of a new group of people - the money changers. Prior to this people converted their money, foreign to local currency and vice versa, in banks. The anomaly between the official (controlled) rate and the parallel rate calculated at the actual rate of inflation led many to change their money on the streets. In the novel, *The Uncertainty of Hope*, John and Katy adopt this lucrative business in order to raise university fees for their daughter Faith and save money to build their house in Mabelreign. The economic crisis creates new avenues of making money that are illicit. John tells Faith;

“My daughter, the legal limits are not important. How else do you think we can raise your university fees and set aside money to start building? The line between what's legal and what is not, has never been blurred as it is now. *Hakuchina*. Don't take this law business too seriously. You are not yet a lawyer. Neither are you a police officer, so let me be,” he teased her, then conceded

ambiguously, “But I suppose you are right, though who really cares? We are only trying to survive, like everyone else. I’ve a lot of friends working at the border post so there should be no problems. And I can always bribe those who are not my friends. You’d be surprised by what some grown men at the border post are prepared to ignore for as little as a packet of sugar or flour!” he laughed with enjoyment (p27).

The lines between what is legal and illegal are blurred due to corruption but the women in the novel seem to provide the moral boundaries drawn from their cultural heritage as Shona women. They also possess a sixth sense for sensing danger and acting to avert it. Katy packs condoms for her husband in order to protect herself from contracting HIV and AIDS.

Despite the risk factor in terms of HIV and AIDS, being a transnational truck driver accords John privileges he takes for granted, unlike the grown men at the border he alludes to. He has access to groceries that are scarce in the country and hence his family is well stocked and provided for. Katy’s vending is not the primary source of income but only augments what John makes and also keeps her occupied to avert the loneliness. Though they stay in Mbare, they do not struggle to survive like most of the people around them, showing that the degree of poverty or wealth varies among people of the same locale. As a couple, they are ambitious and aspire for more since their basic needs are met (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs). They desire to move from Mbare and have already bought a stand in Mabelreign which is alluded to in the quotation above. Faith’s education is part of the social mobility agenda as they expect her to work and help them build their house before getting married. John is a shrewd trader and realises he can make more money from foreign currency dealing and hence he prioritises this business and forges relations with the High Commissioner.

This represents social mobility as they move from the ghetto (Mbare) to a medium density suburb. John takes advantage of his employment as a transnational truck driver to smuggle goods and foreign currency into the country. His source of foreign currency is smuggling girls without passports into South Africa who end up in prostitution. Risk-taking is considered a male trait where women are associated with domesticity. However, Katy takes on the risk in the absence of her husband. Foreign currency transactions are carried out in the stinky public toilet in order to evade detection by the authorities. John exposes his family to danger through the transaction with Nzou, a high ranking police officer. John believes the transaction is his security as Nzou will cover for him. Katy has reservations about it but is silenced by virtue of being a woman subordinate to her husband. It must be noted that the greedier John gets in terms

of acquiring money, the more strained his relationship to Katy becomes. He does not disclose his human trafficking activities because he knows Kate would not approve. He also shuts out Katy's advice on dealing with Nzou, that there is no honour among thieves and he is likely to betray them as they belong to the lower class. Nzou's attitude towards women is also demeaning as he considers all women inferior and untrustworthy. The irony in this is that the story proves Katy to be a shrewd business woman who can sense danger where the men fail to do so. One gets the impression that the success in raising funds falls on Katy's shoulders as she is the actual trader while John does the procurement. However, Tagwira seems to be highlighting that economic success of families is dependent on husband and wife working together in harmony. This is also buttressed by Hondo and his wife.

The danger inherent in foreign currency dealing is that this phenomenon worsened inflation in post independent Zimbabwe. Many women went into the trade because of its higher returns compared to vegetable vending. However, women face sexual abuse (prodding of private parts and accusations of prostitution) when arrested. For Katy, the danger includes possible sexual assault in the absence of her husband to protect her should the customer have the same mindset as Boora from the council office. Nzou is corrupt and has potential to use his office to cover his tracks should he violate Katy or cheat her out of her foreign currency. Tagwira's narrative aims at proving the dangers of not listening to women on the basis of their gender rather than the merit of what they say. Nzou is investigated and in the process John is implicated facing arrest. He is only saved through Katy's shrewdness in keeping evidence and willingness to negotiate for John's safety. The investigating officer offers John immunity in exchange for testimony against Nzou.

Shona women are historically known as traders (Schmidt 1992) but objects of trade vary with contexts. Katy is exposed to foreign currency dealing which exposes her to danger but she courageously forges on for the sake of the well-being of her family. Her identity as a trader is therefore closely associated with her other identities as a wife and mother. As wife to a transnational truck driver, Katy also faces the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS as many such drivers engage in extra marital affairs away from home. Katy deals with this risk factor by packing condoms for her husband in case he is tempted. Katy's decision is informed by the statistics she receives from watching television. This enables her to act within a wider context unlike Onai whose focus is more on her immediate surroundings and survival of the moment. The difference between the two Shona women is directly linked to their material well-being.

Katy is provided for materially with a lot of time for leisure as her husband is on the road most of the time and Faith stays at the university.

However, Katy is despised by her in-laws for failing to bear many children. Her mother-in-law claims she is a man as she has a husky voice and would rather her son had married another woman. The teenage sister-in-law with more children is esteemed above Katy. Her mother-in-law is concerned with acquiring status through the number of grandchildren she has and hence the trading skills and accumulation of wealth are of no concern to her. Shona women are also classified according to child bearing ability. Katy fails in the private reproduction labour but succeeds in the public enterprise of trade. This shows that the gendered exclusion of women in public space is invalid and serves to diminish families and nations wealth.

5.2.4 Melody and Class Expediency

Melody is Faith's friend involved in a transactional relationship with a married man whose wife is in the United Kingdom for economic gain. Melody condemns the wife for choosing the pound over her family and marriage. Chanda's actions clearly show what Katy is afraid of. In the absence of his wife, he has his sexual and social needs met by Melody. The choice of the wife going instead of Chanda may have been based on qualifications since nurses and medical personnel were being recruited and assured of employment in the UK. Melody's reaction shows that the feminist concept of sisterhood is a sham as she is only interested in her personal gain. Melody stands to gain from Chanda's wife's loss. She does not wish to be Chanda's second wife and neither does she consider herself a prostitute. She considers the relationship a temporary measure to ensure her upkeep as she studies, and one day she will get herself a decent man and marry (p79). What is interesting is that we have a reversal of the common image of a young man leading a wild life and then later settling to find a decent woman to marry. However while the young men are usually simply looking for excitement, Melody is driven by economic need;

“Faith, this man paid my university fees for this semester, and he has pledged to do this until I graduate. Unlike you, I still have another year at university. He buys me clothes, groceries, and gives me money for food. Now tell me, which twenty-two-year-old single man can do all this for me? Besides, most of them have no experience and no manners.” (...) “Don't be so self-righteous, Faith,” her friend interrupted brusquely. “Do you think this is what I wanted for myself? This is what I have to do, not what I want. For the first time since I came to varsity, I haven't had to scrounge and get by on one meal a day ... or have you passing me your left-overs. For the first time, I haven't had to worry about which of my pompous relatives I should approach to beg for money only to

endure lectures about how they are struggling as well. For the first time in months, I haven't spent sleepless nights considering whether I should become a prostitute to finance my studies ..." (p79-80)

Sheilla has to choose between dying of hunger or HIV and reasons that the latter is long term so she will cross the bridge when she comes to it. Her level of desperation is driven by her lack of skills to make money and survive. Melody acquires skills through education that will make her employable and therefore be able to earn a considerable income and join the middle class. This opportunity is directly threatened by a lack of funds that she remedies by her relationship with Chanda. Faith chides her based on Shona moral teachings from her parents as well as her sense of right as a passionate woman activist. Melody blames the economy. However, when Chanda's wife confronts her and tells her that Chanda spent her hard-earned pounds on girls rather than building their house as planned, Melody regrets her actions. She seems more hurt by the fact that Chanda had other girlfriends besides her and that the money he used was what the wife sent rather than his own hard earned money. Melody's conception of marriage is therefore similar to Gari's that each spouse owns their money rather than Katy and John's model of a joint account that informs Faith's views of marriage.

Chitando (2012) and Naidoo (2016) point out that Melody exhibits Motsemme's flawed agency. She has also internalised the patriarchal ideology born out of the colonial structures that enabled men to own the means of production and regarded women as minors thereby making them dependent on men (Schmidt 1992). Melody reasons that rather than grovelling to the father figures (uncles) in her life, she would rather satisfy Chanda and have security of companionship, paid tuition and general financial support. Since this gives her a sense of independence, she considers herself liberated. In this regard, she considers the Shona cultural concerns moral baggage that weighs her down as much as the poverty, as highlighted in her retort to Faith. However, the encounter with Chanda's wife makes her feel cheap and she reforms. Melody then learns from experience the wisdom of Shona values, and that they are meant to protect the girl-child from predators like Chanda and Gari who do not value marriage and their wives.

5.2.5 Firebrand Faith

Faith is an intelligent young woman who grows up in Mbare. As Katy and John's daughter she is cushioned from the deprivation rampant in her community but she however witnesses it. Her family's association with Onai makes her privy to the gory details of domestic abuse and

deprivation. She is raised to be generous, like her parents, and therefore makes sure that she shares what she has with the less privileged (her cast off clothes for Ruva and Rita, food with Melody). Faith is hardworking and focused thereby achieving her dream of becoming a lawyer. In this, she becomes a role model for Ruva and other ghetto youths in general. She represents what one can achieve if they work hard in their studies. As a lawyer she moves a notch above her parents' class and enables them to benefit financially from that status. The Shona notion of "*chirere chigokurerawo*" is taken for granted. When Tom, her rich boyfriend, proposes marriage, Faith's immediate reaction is that she needs to work and help her parents build the Mabelreign house. This shows that she has been raised to think of her individual success within the context of her family, a Shona trait. This general sense of community is what motivates Faith in her activism against gender injustice (domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women) economic injustice (indignation against the demolition of markets and shacks during *Murambatsvina*) and racial injustice.

Faith echoes Tagwira's view that in any societal injustice, women and children are affected far worse than men. This is what attracts Tom, although he wishes she would be less passionate and vocal about her opinions. His reasons are simple, he does not want to be considered an enemy of the state and face economic blockage due to political machinations as he owns one of the most coveted farms in Darwendale. Faith's conception of femininity and masculinity is informed by Shona culture, she does not doubt the role of man as provider for his family and the role of the woman in the home. Her worry is simply that she is passionate about her need to work and make a difference in her nation. Her ambitions and concerns go beyond her mother and mainini Onai whose primary concern is to serve their families and neighbours. The ambition is made real due to her transition into the middle class as a lawyer, and also through her union to Tom. She has a choice whether to work or not unlike Onai who cannot afford not to work in order to feed, clothe and educate her children. She does not engage in transactional sex like Melody because her parents manage to pay her fees.

However, the fact that Faith does not engage in transactional sex does not mean that she is sexually innocent, a transgression of the Shona value that one must be a virgin till they get married. Faith feels the nagging guilt due to her mother's teachings but feels comfortable in Tom's love to sleep with him. This makes her vulnerable to HIV and AIDS just like all the other women in the novel. In her reflection over Melody's outburst quoted earlier, Faith also wonders if she is not attracted more to Tom due to the financial security that he offers her. Tom

himself bemoans the hypocrisy of his sister and girlfriend that they decry injustice but would want him to do the dirty work so that they continue to enjoy their comfort. The contradictions again, as in John's case, point to the changing modern world, made more complicated by the economic melt-down in the country that calls for underhand dealings to ensure survival. One has to be callous to the needs of the next person in order to achieve their own goal. Faith's complicity is seen in the procurement of fuel to ferry guests to the farm for her elaborate engagement party. Commuter service providers on government subsidy sell the fuel on the black market and park their vehicles to save them from wear and tear at the expense of the poor who rely on public transport. Katy and Onai have to walk from town to Mbare on numerous occasions because there is no transport. In the context of scarce commodities, the rich do not need to queue, they make a call for reservations and pick up the package at their convenience.

The irony that the novel underscores is that Faith and Tom's actions hurt the people they love as well due to class distinction with various expectations. Tom is willing to buy Faith's dresses in South Africa, spending the much needed forex that the government claims is being drained by forex dealers. The irony is John is arrested for bringing forex into the country but those who spend it outside are not castigated as long as they do so through the banks. The banking sector supports the middle class and the rich's livelihoods and its services are beyond the reach of many as highlighted by Onai who kept her money under the bed. The rich can easily retrieve their money through bank transfers and credit cards which makes their mobility easy. Faith's assurance that if she messes the dress it is no big deal as they can always buy in South Africa has the opposite effect. For Onai such an outcome represents a great waste of resources and hence she is motivated to prevent such a disaster. The excesses of the rich erode the little comfort of the poor.

The incident also reflects different attitudes towards money due to generational differences. The younger generation has no qualms in splurging money while the older generation perceives their role as women as that of generating and preserving wealth. Faith's interest in how Tom makes his money is more conversational than practical. Tom simply informs her about what he is doing and, in the future, she is expected to offer legal advice only, unlike Faith's parents who literally work together to create wealth. Naidoo (2016) notes that this becomes a source of potential abuse of women as they become perceived as part of the acquired property. A redeeming feature in Faith, however, is that whenever she can, she tries to make a difference in the lives of those she loves.

5.2.6 Emily the Medical Doctor

Valerie Tagwira, the author of *The Uncertainty of Hope* is a medical doctor. The character Emily enables her to assess the effects of the economic crisis on the health delivery system in Zimbabwe. Through her the reader is also able to see the erosion of the middle class as their struggles become similar to those of the poor class. Emily is Faith's senior in college, and Tom's sister. The first time Tom meets Faith is in Emily's room as they share a passion in community involvement. She is therefore a devoted doctor and volunteers her services at the Kushinga Women's Project. Various middle class professionals offer their services to help poor women who would normally not be able to afford the fees - medical, legal and counselling. Tom and Emily are raised in the leafy suburb of Harare and their father leaves a lot of money. Tom, as heir, takes it upon himself to take care of his sister and mother as the man of the house. He ensures that they are well provided for as evident in his sourcing fuel to enable Emily to continue driving to work. When Emily and Faith are arrested during a demonstration by the Kushinga women, Tom rushes to pay their fine and ensures they are safe. The siblings therefore have a healthy relationship without the resentment caused by parental discrimination based on gender. Emily and Tom enjoy equal opportunities because their parents do not have to make the painful decision on who should drop out of school, necessitated by a glaring lack of money and poverty. Unlike Chipo, Emily is not afraid to tell her brother where he is wrong and aims to protect Faith from any abuse by her brother. As sisters-in-law, Faith and Emily are supportive of each other with a strong friendship. They are therefore a foil to Onai and Chipo. Generally Emily seeks justice, even for strangers as evident in her concern for Onai when she examines her in hospital after Gari beats her. Her call for sisterhood is rejected at the time but later works for Onai when she sends him to Mr Ndlovu to put her on the waiting list for housing units for displaced people. She says, "Remember, you are not alone, Mrs Moyo. I'm a woman like you, *vasikana*; I'd be happy if you allowed me to help you" (p45).

Unlike Melody who does not care about the plight of another woman, Emily believes women should assist each other. Onai feels alienated from her because they belong to different economic classes. Her attitude is informed by experience of rich women who look down upon the poor as evident in the women in the fuel queue who accuse her of prostitution and the woman in Topics Departmental Store who assumes she wants to steal. Emily represents the possibility of women working together across the class divide by utilising their strengths. This is best expressed in the Kushinga Women's project where volunteers from different sectors

unite. In the end, Emily finds affirmation in being able to assist people who really need the help despite the deteriorating amenities in the hospital; lack of drugs, equipment and electricity. Her satisfaction expresses the Ubuntu tenet. Her flaw, as pointed out by Tom, is her passionate indignation against all men when faced with evidence of female abuse. This is a reminder that feminism, by excluding men, becomes self-defeating as noted by Nnaemeka (2004). Negotiating and working with progressive men is therefore important. By the end of the novel, Emily seems more relaxed and to have finally yielded to Ben's love, a fellow doctor, as she tries to convince him not to leave the country but make a difference from within. In Shona conception, she decides to serve the national family. Like Onai, she decides that abandoning her family is not the best option in the crisis. She confesses to feeling abused by the poverty in the hospital that makes her work difficult. Like Onai, she asks herself many times why she does not leave. Boehmer (2005) argues for a convergence of the domestic and national narrative enacted through the women's lives and this is reflected in Emily's life (medical doctor, activist, sister, and friend).

The characters in *The Uncertainty of Hope* also show that identities are performed depending on circumstances (Butler 1990, Appiah 1992). Emily the doctor attends to Onai's wounds in a clinical manner (professional identity), identifies with Onai as a woman (gender identity), and resorts to colloquial language to reinforce solidarity in the term *vasikana* (Shona identity). Each identity serves a particular goal and demands its accentuation as of necessity. In this particular case, all point to the main goal of assisting Onai and other disadvantaged women. However, this goal is not achieved without the consent of the one to be helped thereby highlighting the need for cooperation and mutual respect among all people regardless of race, sex or class. This idea is reinforced through the doctor who returns to Zimbabwe from the UK because she could not stand the racism despite the material benefits.

Ultimately Valerie Tagwira seems to advocate for humanism as everyone has a part to play to improve the Zimbabwean situation. As a confessed "mild feminist" she however highlights the lived experiences of women. Her narrative proves that women are not a homogeneous entity as their concerns and actions are governed by specific circumstances. They may come from the same ethnic group (all the characters seem Shona from the names and shared experiences), but are separated by class, educational and political experiences. Tagwira's characters value family and marriage but have different conceptions of how to negotiate their way within families and improve relationships. This is especially highlighted in different age groups. The young (Faith, Emily and Ruva) are more vocal and militant than the older women (Katy and Onai) though

the underlying norms and values that govern their behaviour are the same and can be traced to Shona culture. The changing spaces make the application of the values take different forms and at times require a modification of those values such that observed from a traditional point of view, they may not be easily recognised as Shona (Emily and Faith's advocacy is not totally premised on feminist discourse but the Shona community outlook). In essence, the classes are not disparate but enmeshed, intersecting with other taxonomies of identity to reflect the global culture and the postcolonial existence of Shona women.

5.3 Plot of *The African Tea Cosy* (2010)

The novel is a thriller focusing on the lives of four friends in their twenties; Joy, a sexually adventurous girl who is a second wife to Gari; Anne, an ambitious career woman and single mother who dates a married man who values her for her intellect; Catherine, a bar maid and secretary who runs away from home to prevent being raped by her father and dates a promiscuous man called Shingi; and Heather who cohabits with Steve, a Disc Jockey. The story begins with their meeting at a bar whose name is the title of the novel. The crisis is that Catherine has discovered that Shingi is married but they do not know who the wife is. Joy is tasked to find out from her ex-boyfriend, Solo, who is related to Shingi. Joy is frustrated as a second wife because Gari has not been visiting or calling. She therefore accepts Solo's invitation to come back for old memories' sake. Solo takes advantage of her and forces her to swallow his semen before revealing that he is HIV positive and punishing Joy for cheating on him while they were still dating.

Meanwhile, Heather had taken Catherine home as she is weepy. Steve comes home and attempts to rape Catherine. They fight him and unfortunately kill him. They call Anne and Joy. They decide to find ways of getting rid of the body rather than reporting. Joy decides she does not want to be part of this but on getting home she gets a prophecy from her tenant, MaSibanda, who promises to help them wash away the blood from their lives and move on but on condition Joy works with the other girls. She is given herbs to wash in. There is an American tourist who had requested dinner with Anne. They decide she should accept so that no one suspects them. They tell him that they are looking for information on embalming bodies to help Anne's daughter with her homework. The tourist invites a mortician to dinner so that they can ask him questions. After dinner, Joy goes with the mortician and steals embalming fluid after engaging with him and he falls asleep. They have planned for a holiday in Kariba. Catherine gets days

off from work and her Indian boss, sympathising with her situation of being jilted, gives her extra cash. Anne asks her lover permission to use the house boat and he also offers his car and personnel. While Heather is waiting for the others to come back from work, Steve's mother comes by the flat. While she is there, Steve's friend brings a package that the mother opens to find cocaine. She then narrates Steve's history of sodomy in the UK and declares she is leaving the country and will not be involved in Steve's affairs. Steve's friend is suspicious as he has not seen his friend in days nor talked to him on the phone. In the evening they meet up with Anne's lover to get the keys in an elite bar. Shingi walks in with a teenage girlfriend. Catherine attacks Shingi while Xavier holds him so that he does not return the punches.

Furthermore, Heather and Anne hold the girl to make sure she does not get involved. The men in the bar laugh at Shingi for getting what he deserves. Anne's lover misses dinner at the appointed time at home and spends most of the night with Anne in the car. Gari is told by the maid that Joy is cheating. When Gari goes to the flat he finds Joy with her friends preparing for their trip and decides to sexually abuse the maid for lying to him. On their way they are stopped at a roadblock and they share beers with the officers. Catherine retells her story of betrayal by Shingi and they exchange phone numbers with the policeman. When they get to Kariba, they are given special treatment by the crew who immediately take them onto the house boat and in the middle of the lake. They dispose of the body there and put drinks in the cooler box. They donate some of them to the boat crew. On getting back to land they find Steve's friend waiting and demanding his cocaine. They give it to him as well as the cooler box with drinks. They then alert the police and he is arrested. Both the officer and the girls share the reward money for blowing the whistle on drug peddlers. The officer notices an anomaly in the girls' story but is grateful for the retirement money they enable him to have. Catherine moves to Zambia to start a modelling career. Heather becomes a development worker. Joy becomes an HIV and AIDS activist. Anne decides she wants a more fulfilling relationship and dumps her lover. While the ending is happy for the women, it is negative for the men. Shingi is forced to marry the under-age girl and has a record of statutory rape. Gari fails to accept his HIV status and dies.

5.3.1 Youth and Sexualities in *The African Tea Cosy*

The African Tea Cosy by Violet Masilo is a novel set in a post-2000 "metropolitan city in Southern Africa" of Zimbabwe. The characters are from the affluent and middle class families

except for Shyleen, Joy's maid. The four main characters have had good educational opportunities as Joy reflects,

“Oh God,” Joy thought, “I will withdraw my silly thought. Money cannot buy class; can't he just keep his voice down?” Joy was the most unpolished of the four girls, and her education, unlike the other three, had not been at any prestigious private or Catholic school, but rather in normal government/public school, but even for her, Solo was just a little too unrefined. (p31-32)

Joy's idea that money cannot buy class means that there are other considerations for class rather than accumulation of money. Solo has a lot of money as he plays soccer for a European club but Joy defines him as being “too unrefined”. Solo grew up in the ghetto and still exhibits the crude language and desire to show off unnecessarily. This represents lack of decorum as prescribed by the middle and bourgeois classes. Foucault (1990), in *The History of Sexuality*, notes that these classes distanced themselves from associations with the body and public pronouncements of sex as a mark of power and distinction. Solo publicly shouts about sex and desire and goes on to grab Joy's behind. It is such behaviour that qualifies him as unrefined and lacking class regardless of his fat bank account. Appropriate class behaviour is also culture specific and hence determined by context and place. Sexuality is therefore a signifier of power and class.

Class is important to the characters in defining who to associate with and whom to exclude. The girl who tries to share Anne's make up in *The African Tea Cosy* is apparently from the ghetto and cannot express herself in English properly. Her engagement in prostitution is likely an escape from poverty, like Sheilla and Melody in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. As Joy points out, class is not just about having money but should include place of residence and personal etiquette. Private schools are known for an all-round grooming of students and not just academic excellence and that is why they are popular with the middle class and rich in Zimbabwe as they prepare children for the future. They fit in any economic environment regardless of academic passes. In the historical context of Zimbabwe, these were the schools reserved for whites while the schools reserved for blacks offered an inferior curriculum. After independence more black people enrolled into the private schools and they became truly multi-racial. Products of such schools seem acutely aware of class differences rather than ethnic and racial differences as the novel attests.

The patrons of The Tea Cosy (café of the titular title) are college students, FTs (Fucking Tourists) and young middle class workers. The age range is “twenty-something with a few in

their teens and even fewer in their late thirties. The few teens that patronised The Tea Cosy were labelled too forward and the patrons in their late thirties were the severe midlife crisis lot, though they were only a few strewn here and there within premises” (p4). The novel thus focuses on the behaviour of young women in the context of a country already facing inflation as they have “one thousand dollar notes (local currency!)” to buy a round of drinks for four people.

The novel falls within what Foucault (1990:6) refers to as the “speaker’s benefit. If sex is repressed, that condemned to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of deliberate transgression”. The author thus exhibits female sexual freedom and the act of writing about it breaks the tradition of euphemistic writing by women when referring to sexual matters (cf. Chirere, 2006). Naidoo (2016: 117) notes the central theme of the novel as follows;

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 the official and non-official wives in their diversity.

Naidoo’s research focuses on the physical and psychological abuse that women face in intimate relationships and how they cope with that. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the characters in the context of their Shona identity. Catherine’s surname is Malakwena, which makes it difficult to place her as Shona. However her first cousin is called Tapiwa so it is safe to presume a Shona outlook in her upbringing. Joy, Heather and Anne’s surnames are not given and the names do not reveal ethnicity.

Matsheza (2014) intimates that they allude to a middle class sensibility that aspires for foreign names that enable their bearers to join the global world uninhibited by an indigenous name most will find difficult to pronounce. The author seems careful not to give much detail on the characters unless it relates to their actions and the development of the plot. Ultimately, the narrative focuses on an episode in the young people’s lives as later they settle and lead “normal” lives. Vambe refers to the women in *The African Tea Cosy* as a decadent middle class. Sexuality is a topic not easily discussed in public among the Shona as highlighted by Katy in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. It is deemed a private affair. Its depiction in most works has been in terms of men seeking pleasure and the women castigated for providing the service as selfish, like Gari and Gloria in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Naidoo (2016:18) notes that;

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.

The novel is set in the context of the changing structure of the Zimbabwean family. The "small house" phenomenon has become prevalent especially among the wealthy, who can afford the expense of maintaining several households. The "small houses" are what Naidoo refers to as the un-official wives. They are unofficial in that they may never be registered if the husband is already married under the Roman-Dutch Law which forbids bigamy. Secondly, they may be unofficial because no recognised formalities (paying of bride price or introductions to family) have taken place. However, the couple lives like husband and wife regardless of this status.

Heather and Steve are cohabiting though not married and with no intention of doing so, as Steve highlights when he gets tired of Heather. In Shona culture cohabiting is highly frowned upon. A woman who does this is considered loose as one is expected to have sex and live only with a man who has married them. Heather voluntarily moves out of her parents' home to stay with Steve because she is intelligent but lazy. She realises that Steve is generous and can provide her needs as long as she keeps him sexually satisfied. However, she is not a subservient woman. She drinks and smokes as much as she wants and is not afraid to challenge Steve and fight back even in his own house. Heather seems to consider the pain she receives from Steve's weird sexual practices (kinky sex of rape style) as licence for staying in the house and financial support from Steve. Heather is surprised though to learn that Steve is a drug addict and homosexual with Farai as his partner in crime. Steve's death is an accident as Heather acts in self-defence given that he had just tried to strangle her to death. Her experiences show the wisdom of the Shona custom that one must marry someone they really know (literally means neighbours). This experience seems to cure Heather's aversion to work as she becomes a "Voluntary Aid worker in troubled spots around Africa" (p177).

Joy is twenty-four and a second wife. Gari pays bride price for her after she is chased away from home after a clandestine night out with him when she was supposed to be in her bedroom sleeping with her younger sisters. Joy is depicted as having a very high sexual appetite that after her parents chase her away no relative was prepared to take her in lest she sleeps with all the males in the household. Once married, Joy ditches her receptionist job and lives off Gari

and any other man willing to pay. In the novel, she reunites with an ex-boyfriend, Solo, now playing soccer for a club in Europe and receives a lot of United States dollars. She uses her escapades with other men as punishment for Gari's neglect. When Solo asks her to meet up with her in his hotel room, she says,

“No promises, but if my husband doesn't call, I'll be back.” Joy meant what she said. She was flattered by Solo's interest in her. With Garikai behaving badly at the moment, it was nice to have another man want her. Especially because the other man was richer, better dressed and more famous than her husband, sleeping with Solo would really be sticking it to Garikai, secretly of course. (p35)

Men usually accuse women of not playing their roles and hence the justification of extra marital affairs. Here Joy uses the same argument against Gari, showing that women are as much sexual beings as men. The difference here is that while men spend money on women, Joy gains both sexual pleasure and material wealth. Joy is supported in this behaviour by her tenant Mrs Sibanda/MaSibanda. She says,

“That's the spirit. When Sibanda was getting it elsewhere, so would I. If he was heading north, I'd head south.” Mrs Sibanda cackled at the memory of being laid, “Oh those good old days when all you had to worry about was an STD, not this AIDS and herpes and what not. One week of injections and you would be ready to open them up again!” (p20).

Embedded in the quotation is the idea that men and women are equal in marriage and can exert power equally. The women crave for sexual attention as they do not lack materially. It then follows that they remedy their lack in their own way. The urban space they occupy accords them private space where they are not accountable to the community as in rural or high density space. What they do with their bodies is their own business.

The author seems to lack understanding of the Zimbabwean totem system. The woman was married to Sibanda who is now late and hence the “Ma” seems to be an honorific title for mother/elderly woman rather than the normal meaning of a woman of the Sibanda totem, therefore daughter of Sibanda. However, Joy and Mrs Sibanda prove that women enjoy sex as much as men and challenge the image of married women as good and single women as potential prostitutes (Gaidzanwa, 1985). The Shona notion of “*Mukadzi wemunhu ndiambuya*” (a married woman must receive same respect as a mother-in-law) is no longer valid. For modern philanderers married women are the best catch because should they get pregnant, the responsibility lies with the husband to take care of the baby while they only enjoy the sexual adventures. It also feeds their egos in competing with other men.

Expressed in Joy and MaSibanda is the “notion that two can play the game” which is in opposition to Onai’s position of hoping that someday her husband will reform and come back to her. Joy hides her actions from her husband and actually makes him feel guilty and apologise. Joy seems to have mastered male tricks and uses them against the men themselves. Solo’s revenge on her by deliberately aiming to infect her through unprotected sex becomes a wake-up call on the danger of her behaviour. Her character reflects that radical feminists who advocate for women being allowed to engage in risky behaviour as men without judgment are not doing women justice. Again society must aspire for values that promote well-being in society regardless of gender. In Shona, both males and females must exhibit “*unhu*” and sexual immorality is castigated in both as it has repercussions on family health and the fertility of the land (Crawford, 1967:100-101).

In *The African Tea Cosy*, Joy then becomes “a renowned AIDS activist and she did have a baby. The baby is HIV negative. She receives a lot of maternal love and support from Ma Sibanda” (p176). She is transformed from being a selfish young woman seeking sexual pleasure and money for luxuries to one serving her community. As a mother she also conforms to the Shona belief that one must not die without a child. She therefore escapes the fate of being buried with a rat representing the baby one never had. Joy, therefore, maintains her middle class status through working as an activist, earning her own living in the absence of Gari. She also secures respect within the Shona community as a mother, which is preceded by marriage which results in widowhood.

Catherine Malakwena is daughter to a rich, polygamous man. Her mother is the first wife and their home for them is a “middle class suburb house” (p11). The father has a “reputation for dabbling in voodoo and witchcraft, which people believed gave him great wealth but always at someone else’s expense” (p10). When the novel opens, Catherine is in tears because she has discovered that her boyfriend, Shingi, is married. The story is then centred on how her friends try to get more information on Shingi’s marriage and make further plans on how to assist her. It is in this context that Joy meets up with her ex-boyfriend Solo, as his sister is married to Shingi’s brother. The author gives Catherine’s background as follows;

Catherine had met Shingi a year ago, approximately. She was a young woman at the time that she was forced to work two jobs to help support her young siblings. Had her father not been the “asshole” that he was, the definition of asshole referred to in this context was: *A successful entrepreneur who in the midst of his mid life crisis decided that his wife and children were such great assets, he nurtures such a great and irresistible urge to now acquire more wives*

and more children. Well, if her dad had not been such an asshole, Catherine would never have taken the job as the bar lady in order to subsidise her salary as a Personal Assistant to a Managing Director. However, fate being fate, her father literally acquired more wives and more children on a bi-annual basis and he in turn ignored the responsibility to maintain his first wife and children and maintain the lifestyle they had known during the years of his rise to the top (p9).

Catherine experiences the challenges of a polygamous family and highlights that it is not as rosy as advocates for it claim. The “small house” phenomenon has often been justified by men claiming that polygamy is part of African culture, Shona culture to be specific, and this is a modern version of it.

In the novel, Mr Malakwena fails in that he abandons *vahosi* (first wife) and his motive is that she does not possess the sexual prowess of his younger wives. So his motivation for polygamy is not culture at all, but selfish reasons. The financial deprivation degrades Catherine and her siblings in terms of class affiliation and hence the need to take up a job as a bar lady. This job is usually done by people from low income families and some double up as prostitutes to supplement their earnings. Catherine falls in love with Shingi, who asks her to stop working in the bar as he will provide the money needed and she does so. However her acquired love for beer and cigarettes disqualifies her as marriage material and that is why Shingi does not marry her. The irony is that he marries Mildred, his secretary, who is well known for multiple partners in the city. Catherine is forced out of home because her father attempts to rape her as a witchcraft ritual to increase his wealth. The description of the scene is graphic and he does not relent in the presence of his wife and two sons. He orders them to leave so that he continues his unorthodox act,

Her father continued to address the family in his naked and erect state: “Now if my n’anga (witchdoctor), tells me that to keep business alive I must sleep with my first born daughter, then so be it.” He threw up his hands, “and so I repeat get OUT!” He approached her mother menacingly. In a series of fast, dramatic and incoherent events, Catherine remembered her two brothers throwing themselves against her father, who in an erect state fell and began to struggle to get them off him (p13).

Catherine is lucky to escape the intended rape unlike Pecola in *Bluest Eye* and Vera’s Zhizha in *Under the Tongue*. Incest is taboo in Shona culture and this is evidence that Malakwena does dabble in witchcraft, which is evil magic.

Chavhunduka (1994) and Biri (2013) define witchcraft and show that it is harmful to society and therefore not encouraged. Chavhunduka says that the treatment of witchcraft is the hallmark of distinguishing genuine traditional healers versus charlatans. Catherine’s father is

therefore a witch, thereby subverting the general image of witches as women only. His motivation to become one is, however, economic, to make money and gain high class status. It also debunks that only the poor and uneducated resort to traditional Shona systems. Catherine's mother revolts against her father's command in order to save her daughter. The reason being this is a life threatening situation. She rises to the expected role of a mother protecting her children, like a mother hen who shields her chicks from the eagle.

African feminists like Ogunidipe Leslie (1994) and Acholuno (1995) highlight the significance of motherhood among Africans. Onai sticks it out in a bad marriage for the sake of her children, Katy deals in foreign currency in order to educate her daughter. Catherine's mother decides to face her husband's wrath and ensure her daughter is not sexually violated. She also tells Catherine's friends (Heather and Anne) the secret so that they understand and aid her daughter in her absence. Catherine seems to manipulate her situation and ability to cry easily to make money, especially from her boss Mr Gonzales. However, it is her charm that enables the girls do go past the roadblock and enlist the help of Sergeant Marowa in getting rid of Farai. Catherine's fight with Shingi shows that anyone pushed to the limit can become violent, male or female. She confronts Shingi verbally but he insults her and drives her to pummel him. Heather and Anne assist, showing sisterly solidarity and proving Catherine's mother's hunch correct. Shingi as a philanderer without any moral qualms is a disgrace even to men and hence the men support the women. Xavier holds him up while the girls pummel him. His under-age date tries to defend him and is beaten up by Heather who tells her to stay out of it. This scene shows that men and women can work together in corrective action.

Anne is the epitome of class among the girls. Her friends tease her "about her near perfect and very refined English. 'Speak English as it should be spoken!' was always her response" (p41). She is confident and not easily cowed down. She works as a Senior Public Relations Executive at Public Relations and International Marketing Executives (PRIME). Her ambition is to become a partner in the company and continues to study in order to upgrade herself. She is the most focused of the friends, and also seems to be the glue to the friendship as she is fair and principled.

Anne led a simple and quiet life at home. She was the only one in her group of friends who had a child. She had a 5-year-old daughter whom her father faithfully picked up from nursery school and took home. Home for Jenny (her daughter) was with Anne's parents. Jenny's grandparents' home in the most expensive suburb in town provided both comfort and stability for the young girl. Anne on her part fled the nest when Jenny was only three, to set up home for

herself in a small but comfortable and secure garden flat just outside the city centre. She had wanted her own space and time to herself after her disastrous and melodramatic relationship with Jenny's father. Their break-up was amicable because soon after Jenny was born, they had realised that she was all they had in common. Their break-up had been as amicable as can be expected in the given scenario, but Jenny's father had turned his back on not only her but also their daughter. Such is life and life is such. (p40)

Single parenthood and divorce are many women's worst fears as seen through Onai in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Such women face stigma as they are considered failures and it is better to be widowed since no one can control death. Poverty fuels the undesirability of such a status especially when one significantly depends on the husband for financial support. Anne is freed from such challenges because her parents are wealthy (they are not afraid of returning *lobola*) and she has skills that make her employable. Her job is fairly good and hence does not rely on Charles as much as her friends rely on their male partners. She also rarely asks for favours. In the plot of the story, this works in their favour because when she finally asks, Charles goes out of his way to prove that he can provide for his mistress. He gives her access to the house boat in Kariba, the car to drive there and money to spend. The friends however make equal contributions for the holiday and allow her to keep the money for her daughter.

In the novel, while Anne loves her daughter, she does not sacrifice herself. Instead she pursues her career. This is also made possible because of her parents' affluence. If they did not exist she would have to stay with her own daughter and endure constrained finances as the father does not pay anything for the upkeep of his daughter. Anne's exposure to a good education makes her realise that there are always options and choices to be made. She never seems to go into panic mode. Even as she drinks, she also does not seem to get sloshed to the point of failing to think rationally. When they are called to Heather's flat after Steve's death, Anne is the only one who maps out the plan to act normally and go to work. Her skimpy red outfit is out of place in the office but takes it all in her stride. She refers to company policy in response to Mr Sibalo's derogatory comments. The author seems to suggest that women are likely to achieve much when they act rationally and improve their knowledge and skills. They gain men's admiration that goes beyond sexuality (Charles hardly sleeps with her and parades her as his trophy).

However, for Anne, as for Victorian women, the pedestal is as equally painful as the other girls' physical and sexual abuse. She seeks a meaningful relationship that is mutual. This desire for a relationship that transcends material wealth may be facilitated by the fact that she has already lived a life of wealth in her parents' home (rich class) and has also had a failed marriage (experience is the best teacher). Anne's father is supportive and therefore not part of the

oppressive patriarchy. It also means that she has grown up with a good model of manhood and therefore picks her men with that model in mind. Anne's experience points to the importance of fathers and brothers in the choices of husbands and partners by girls in the family. Onai attests that her father was abusive and she picks an abusive husband. Faith who has a good father also picks a good and loving husband. Catherine, whose father is a womaniser inadvertently picks Shingi, an equally reckless womaniser.

Apart from direct economic and gender issues, the novel highlights African spirituality through Ma Sibanda who is a medium to a male *Shave* spirit. She declares that the girls are followed by a bad spirit. It must be noted that each one of them occupies an undesirable status according to Shona culture. Anne is a divorcee. Joy is married but has no child and her excessive sexual libido has no explanation as she comes from a good home with exemplary parents. Catherine's father dabbles with witchcraft and twice she escapes being raped. Heather does not say much of her background but her mother's advice to stand her ground with men may suggest an abused woman who has learnt to fight for herself like Sophia in *The Color Purple*.

Biri (2013:126) notes that "a divorced woman has no dignity, just like the one who has never married (*tsikombi ine chitsinha*). Every married woman at least has to bear children for her husband." Biri notes that dignity for a woman is associated with marriage and girls who remain unmarried after a certain age are considered to be under influence of evil spirits. The happy ending for the girls in *The African Tea Cosy* seems predicated on MaSibanda's herbs that she gives them to wash in and oil their bodies with oil from a lion to ward off evil spirits. As they do so in Heather's flat, "Back at Joy's place Mrs Sibanda smiled. The bad spirit that had been overshadowing the girls' lives seemed to be releasing them" (p150). The author in this instance reaffirms Shona spirituality. While Catherine's father uses harmful spirituality, Ma Sibanda uses it for good. It improves the girls' lives and forges their unity.

Naidoo (2016) argues that patriarchy is divided. Morality is governed by spirituality and certain transgressions may be caused by spirits. This means modernity does not deal with these issues and economic wealth does not exonerate people from their spiritual identity. In essence, the freedom from social norms that the girls consider oppressive, eludes them. They come full circle and learn to comply. Also note that Ma Sibanda's herbs work regardless of the girls' incredulity. Anne convinces the girls to use them because she rationalises that they are not drinking anything, meaning if they are poisonous it will not harm them.

The African Tea Cosy therefore presents middle class women who have skills that make them employable using men for economic advancement through their sexuality. They are not driven by poverty so they are more selective of the men they engage with and the terms of that association. They therefore do not think of themselves as prostitutes/dartboards. They spent most of their time at The Tea Cosy, drinking alcohol and smoking as an expression of their freedom. By the end of the story, they appreciate the communal values and close the deviant chapter of their lives with the aid of the spirit medium, Ma Sibanda.

The girls fit De Beauvoir's paradigm of feminine role-playing as the prostitute, the narcissist and the mystic (Tong, 1997:208). These roles are clear because the novel is a thriller which depends on stock characters and sensational subject matter (sex and crime). However, the main characters are female and used to invert the male narrative that projects men as the subjects and women as the objects to be acted upon. The female characters have agency and refuse to be mere objects for male gratification. In other words, they refuse to conform to the patriarchal script and continuously engage with their experiences to find out what they really want. This is also a departure from the norm as the characters grow in awareness rather than simply fulfilling a trope of a thriller.

5.4 Good Native Gone Bad: Lilian in *Jambanja* (2006)

Jambanja is an autobiographical novel by Eric Harrison, a displaced farmer from Mkwesine. It traces his childhood and education, his conscription in the Rhodesian army and how he acquired the farm, Maioio Estate, in Mkwesine and developed it through hard work and bank loans. The occupation of his farm by war veterans and the disruption of operations is clearly outlined. Harrison resists occupation and appeals to the courts but in the end he is forced to leave and concede to the new owners. The farm workers have to go back to their rural homes or seek employment elsewhere. Despite having worked for 20 years, Harry's former maid, Lilian, is denied a reference letter as punishment for joining the invaders and hoping to acquire land in her own right. The novel ends with Harry and his wife moving to a Harare home while their sons go abroad. Harry's language re-inscribes colonial images of black women lacking voice and agency without the direction of the white man.

Harrison's *Jambanja* focuses on the fast-track land reform of 2000 and its effects on the author's life as his farm was taken. He resists the occupation to no avail. His depiction of the

African workers is that they are used by politicians to displace him and he feels pity for them. It is this patronising attitude that Magosvongwe (2013) highlights, especially in relation to Lilian, Harrison's Shona maid. Scholars like Muzondondidya (2005), have highlighted that the land reform excluded coloureds and black people of Malawian and Mozambican descent in Zimbabwe as they were considered alien. It follows then that Harrison's other maid would not be excited about the land reform as she is not eligible to benefit being of Malawian origin. Lilian is excited because this event provides the opportunity to recover the land of her ancestors. As a land owner it also represents upward mobility on the social ladder. The twenty years that she works for Harrison do not enable her to save enough to buy land for herself. This is therefore a great opportunity. Harrison reacts by reinforcing the stereotypes created by colonialism to assuage their conscience in the colonial project. Lilian is used to prove that Shona women are unreliable as workers unlike other ethnic groups.

Yoshikuno (1991) provides the historical background on why this is so; the other ethnic groups being miles away from home had no other source of livelihood except to work for the white men. The Shona worked seasonally as they depended on farming on their land until they became exhausted and restricted by legislation such as the Land Tenure Act. Lilian's participation with the men in the *jambanja* is not new as women are known to have participated in both the First and Second Chimurenga. The land reform has been dubbed The Third Chimurenga. The depiction of Lilian as an ignorant woman represents white man silencing a Third World woman, to make her a silent subaltern (Spivak, 1995).

In the novel, Harrison seems to sympathise with blacks who have consistently been on his side and not joined the invaders. These are said to be good people with no evil thoughts. He is also suspicious of the Shona as they are all supposedly ZANU PF. The land reform is therefore represented as a form of ethnic cleansing aimed at ridding the country of whites, Ndebeles and all aliens. Harrison considers himself to be Ndebele because he was born in Bulawayo. Of all the Shona women on the farm only Lilian is called by name because she worked in the house. Women working in the sorting shed are simply called that showing that the women are only important in the labour they provide, the only identity that matters to the farmer. He is hurt by Lilian's disloyalty because he feels he has done so much for her and she is ungrateful. Harrison punishes her for this betrayal by refusing to give her a referral letter so that she can look for another job. He tells her to go to the new farmer, Mukanya;

“Right Go to him and say to him, you must pay me now. You must pay me my medical bills, my school bills for my three children, and I want my weekly rations. Tell him ...

Chiendai!”

By denying Lillian a CV, Harry had just condemned her to a very bleak future. There was no way that she would find a job with her own kind, certainly not without his reference. Her day of judgment had come. (p242)

Harry actually gloats at the power he has to keep people in poverty. Lillian is made to suffer due to the intersection of racism and classism. Harry objectifies her as his black maid to assert his superiority over her. Magosvongwe (2013:134) notes that Harry’s insensitivity promotes the rider and horse relationship between him and his employees while denying the blacks’ humanity. Lillian is condemned to suffer for failing to wholly serve Harry’s interests. Ironically, his attitude is similar to that of Joy and Gari towards Shyleen in *The African Tea Cosy*. Joy considers her stupid and that “Her only job was to make sure Joy was happy but this simple task seemed beyond this girl’s comprehension” (p17). Gari pretends to be on her side because he intends to use her as an informer against his wife. He buys her a cellphone and gives her hope that she may replace Joy as the lady of the house. Shyleen in turn believes Gari is a good rich man with an ungrateful wife so she dutifully informs him. When the tables turn, he plans to sexually use Shyleen “playing masters and servants with Shyleen, whilst waiting for Joy to come back ... that would teach her, for telling lies about his beautiful and innocent Joy” (p165).

Maids are therefore perceived as owned by their masters and expected to do nothing but the master’s bidding. Their poverty makes them open to abuse. Most maids have poor educational backgrounds and hence their understanding of economic and social dynamics is at times limited. Shyleen hopes to raise her social status through marriage to a rich man and does not seem to mind polygamy, so she could become a third wife if she does not oust Joy. This is what the masters take advantage of, they then use the maids’ aspirations to their advantage to massage their egos as Harry, Joy and Gari do. Since both men and women do so, it becomes a class issue, echoing bell hooks’s (1998) idea that liberation for women of colour must be from the triple bondage of race, classism and sexism. The privileged are not willing to relinquish their position of power, nor to understand the poor; instead they make the poor to pay for whatever little assistance they offer them.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that class distinctions among Shona women are premised on a number of considerations apart from material possessions. These include morality and maternity within specific social contexts. The economically impoverished feel desperate and hence are forced to conform to patriarchal identities carved for them by society in order to survive. By relying on men, their identities are those of wives, mothers, prostitutes, and mystics. The post-independent Zimbabwean environment calls for new ways of expressing these roles while adding economic roles as vendors, lawyers, nurses, doctors and secretaries. Negotiation of cultural norms is influenced by educational level and economic opportunities. The middle class women seem to assert their personal identities more freely unlike the lower classes who are bound by cultural expectations. Flawed agency is seen in the use of sexuality to gain material wealth at the risk of contracting HIV and AIDS and being victims of domestic violence. This shows that the power the women purported to have is ephemeral. Shona morality and spirituality influence the women's choices to the extent that poverty does not necessarily lead to prostitution as it provides boundaries of what can or cannot be done for material gain.

The individual's consciousness and material existence therefore determines their class and various classes may be represented within one family. That is why postcolonial feminism best applies to the analysis of class in Zimbabwe as it caters for the contradictions within individuals and their relationships with people around them and the environment. Universal applications become problematic and oppressive. The Shona women depicted in *The Uncertainty of Hope* and *The African Tea Cosy* are distinctly aware of being Zimbabwean and the influence of spirituality on their lives. Regardless of class they are aware of a certain degree of spirituality that affects their experiences. This is a valorisation of new ways of manifesting their identities beyond the limiting concept of scientific rationalism in determining class. In essence one may work hard but their success is hindered by spiritual considerations as highlighted in *The African Tea Cosy*. In such instances there is need to apply Shona theoretical frameworks in order to fully understand the phenomenon as proposed by Nnaemeka (2004). The girls in *The African Tea Cosy* have their fortune changed when the bad spirit hovering over their life is lifted by a spirit medium. Hybridity is exhibited in the characters due to the changing environment and binary frameworks can no longer be relevant.

The next chapter explores diasporic identities of Shona women to see how their interactions in foreign spaces affect their sense of self.

Chapter Six: Shona Women and the Diaspora

6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the depiction of Shona women in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Masilo's *The African Tea Cosy* and Harrison's *Jambanja* in economic and social contexts that shape the characters' struggles and class affiliation. The chapter argued that class distinctions are based on what gives the characters esteem and prestige which includes accumulation of wealth, level of education, social status based of Shona cultural values and expression of sexual freedom. The lived expression of these values can be embodied in one person producing hybrid identities. They can also represent specific episodes in the character's lives and reflect a reconfiguration of Shona women's identities in post-2000 Zimbabwe, at the height of economic crisis.

This chapter explores the depiction of Shona women in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, which is a sequel to the much acclaimed *Nervous Conditions*, Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* in that order. Reference to *Nervous Conditions* is made so as to illuminate events in *The Book of Not*. The binding theme is that the characters are removed from their usual Shona environment and have to negotiate identities and new living spaces. Internal or external immigration from original homes qualifies the signifier of diaspora on their experiences. The characters also live in times where modernity is accepted as a given. Modernity as defined by Giddens (1991: 14-15) refers to industrialisation which promotes the "widespread use of material power and machinery in the production process". The efficiency of machines is thus celebrated over human achievements.

Modernity is also equated to capitalism as "a system of commodity production involving both competitive product markets and commodification of labour power". Giddens also equates modernity to surveillance, the use of information to coordinate social activities. The three forms are linked in that they are expressions of power that is normally used to distinguish the West from the "Other", also known as the developed world usually depicted in opposition to third world. Industrialisation in Europe necessitated the colonisation of non-European continents. At the fall of the empire due to anti-colonial movements, focus was placed on markets and labour enabling former colonies to export labour to the metropole. Empires kept their control over former colonies through information which is what Giddens refers to as surveillance. This information takes the form of best practices in social and political arenas that

are spread through donor/recipient relationships. Such relations have an impact on identity formation and performance for people at the receiving end of the power relations. Postcolonial feminists critique this relationship.

Spivak (2005) argues that there is need to carefully examine how information and social transformation is effected in poor nations so as not to impose an identity and continue the injustices created during colonialism. Information is therefore not necessarily neutral. Nnaemeka (2004) follows the same trajectory and notes that developmental paradigms can be detrimental to the communities they are applied in that they negate the people's sense of identity. Giddens (2001:14) also highlights what constitutes self-identity in the modern world;

Self-identity for us forms a *trajectory* across the different institutional settings of modernity over the *durée* of what used to be called the "life cycle", a term which applies much more accurately to non-modern contexts than to modern ones. Each of us not only "has", but lives a biography reflexively organised in terms of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, "How shall I live?" has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat - and many other things - as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity.

The social and psychological information is derived from the institutions one belongs to as well as personal experience. People do not react to the same stimulus in the same way. Butler (1990:184) argues that the concept of gender performance marks a shift in discourses of identity from binary opposition to a reformulation of "the question of agency as a question of how signification and resignification work". This highlights a refusal to accept constructed images of identity without understanding how they came into being, and what power dynamics they represent. These power dynamics are not static and hence identities are likely to change as contexts change. An individual is therefore forced to play an appropriate part, accounting for the fluidity of identity.

Mbembe (1992) states that the postcolonial "subject" has to continually bargain and improvise, resulting in "not a single 'identity' but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly 'revised' in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required" (Webner and Ranger, 1996:1). In other words, identities change in relation to contexts and Mbembe (1992) adds that the change is instrumental, to achieve a purpose which is then determined by the power dynamics referred to by Butler (1990).

6.1 Conceptualising the Diaspora

According to Boehmer;

The late twentieth century witnessed demographic shifts on an unprecedented scale, impelled by many different forces: anti-imperialist conflict, the claims of rival nationalism, economic hardship, famine, state repression, the search for new opportunities. Uprooted masses of people streamed across and away from Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Sierra Leone, Burma – and, more recently, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Iraq. According to the United Nations, some 100 million people in the world today qualify as migrants – that is, live as minorities, in states of *unbelonging* (stress mine) (Boehmer, 2005: 226).

Diaspora experience involves physical and spiritual dispersal. The movement may be within a country or across borders. Reasons for migrating involve push and pull factors. These include running away from war and famine, unemployment and other social circumstances. The pull factors then include educational and employment opportunities, better living conditions and peace. Diaspora is also defined as a common community of people who do not live in their country of origin but maintain their heritage in their new land. This means that diverse people from diverse backgrounds meet in the metropole and tend to influence each other as a multicultural society. The inter-cultural interaction is bound to forge new identities. Cross cultural exchanges took place leading to what postcolonial scholars identify as hybridity (Griffiths, 1992, 1994) or multiculturalism (Gilroy, 1987) that suggests mosaic plurality.

The term, hybrid in postcolonial theories speaks to the complexity of identities in contemporary world relations. Rita Abrahamsen (2003: 195) notes that continuity and discontinuity in identities are the mainstay of postcolonial discourse because;

While the “post” in postcolonialism signifies the end of colonial-ism and imperialism as direct domination, it does not imply after imperial-ism as a global system of hegemonic power. Thus, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak maintains that “we live in a post-colonial neo-colonised world”, while Homi Bhabha regards postcoloniality as “a salutary reminder of the persistent ‘neo-colonial’ relations within the ‘new’ world order and the multi-national division of labour”. In short, colonialism, as conventionally defined in terms of formal settlement and control of other people's land and goods, is in the main over, but many of its structures and relations of power are still in place. The post in postcolonialism is not therefore to be understood as a clearly dividing temporal post, but rather as an indication of continuity. Postcolonialism, in the words of Gyan Prakash, “sidesteps the language of beginnings and ends”. It seeks to capture the continuities and complexities of any historical period, and attempts to transcend strict chronological and dichotomous thinking where history is clearly delineated and the social world neatly categorised into separate boxes.

Diaspora existence is made possible by colonial history as most people move to the countries of their former colonisers. Many Zimbabweans relocated to Britain as professional recruits in the medical field, participating in what Bhabha (1997) describes as the new world order and the multi-national division of labour. Some Shona women sought political asylum, speaking to the influence of former colonisers on the disordering events in the former colonies. The diaspora experience is not necessarily similar to the colonial influence but largely influenced by it in the shaping of attitudes and identity. This results in hybrid identities that can no longer be distinctly separated as Western or African due to the globalised nature of the world. The mosaic of pluralities is what may then be described a multicultural.

Gilroy (2005) distinguishes the terms multicultural and multiculturalism in his study of contemporary Britain. He says that one cannot deny that multiple cultures exist in Britain and hence the adjective multicultural society. However multiculturalism implies a policy that accommodates all cultures on equal terms, which is negated by the racism and hostility towards foreigners. In that regard, multiculturalism is a myth meant to promote the international image of the country but difficult to implement due to the contradictions arising from colonial history. These contradictions are also noted in the depiction of diaspora experiences in literary works. The aim of the section below is to find out how these contradictions impact on identity formation of women in general and Shona women in the diaspora.

6.2 Plot of *The Book of Not*

The Book of Not is largely set in the colonial period, and more significantly, on a multiracial school that is predominantly white. One dormitory is reserved for African girls. Located in Umtali (now Mutare), the girls are Shona, drawn from communities around the town. They constitute a Shona Diaspora at Sacred Heart and are constantly reminded that their presence at the school is due to the generosity of the nuns. The pull factor for them is a search for a good quality education as opposed to the inferior education offered to Africans by the colonial government of Rhodesia. The girls are torn between retaining Shona values and assimilating white knowledge and values as evidence of being educated. At times the expected behaviour of the black girls in a multiracial school contradicts Shona cultural norms, leading to decision making challenges. One actively makes a choice from both cultures depending on what needs to be achieved immediately. Exposure to both cultures therefore gives Shona girls agency depending on personality. In other instances acculturation leads to identity crisis as one sacrifices themselves to suit the new environment. Tambu, Netsai and Ntombi represent hybrid

identities of Shona women negotiated through their experiences which are diverse. This chapter seeks to explore how the diaspora situation affects identity of Shona women.

6.3 Shona Women, Colonial Education and the Liberation Struggle in *The Book of Not*

Tambu in *The Book of Not* is part of the assimilation programme by the colonial regime that prescribed black people's behaviour and interaction on the basis of assumptions of backwardness and hence the need to be groomed to be fully human, the white superiority remaining unquestioned. Tambu's mother continually warns her against Englishness in order to retain an authentic Shona identity. The conflict between these expectations is a site of continuous struggle as Tambu tries to map out her own identity. Tambu represents a new identity of a Shona woman who is a product of both the European (Sacred Heart) and the Shona (rural home) cultural worlds. Tambu latches on the idea that to consolidate her identity as a Shona girl, she must exhibit *unhu*. She, therefore, constantly measures her actions against this ideal. Unfortunately for her, her interpretations of what the concept entails clash with the views of dominant groups, the whites and fellow Shona girls in the dormitory.

Below is Tambu's definition of *unhu*,

You said, I am well if you are too. *Unhu* required a minimum amount of interaction in order to establish the mandatory reciprocation. Apparently, now the first former's radio exhibited more *unhu* than I did. It went "click", girls leapt up joyfully and started dancing. I became concerned with the existential question, and felt very superior to be so occupied, as the French existentialists had pondered similar matters, according to the information Bourganvillea gave us. So my question demanded: what about radios and other things that returned people's happiness, the things purchased with money, which you obtained after getting a good job as a result of your studying? Did they constitute *unhu*? Undeniably, for example, Babamukuru, who had a good home and many fine possessions, possessed a great deal more *unhu* than my father. Did that mean Cynthia, who had a fatter envelope of pocket money and a radio that made sad young women stand up and move to the roaring measure of music, possessed more *unhu* than I did? Was it the *unhu* you possessed that earned you your possessions, or did you acquire *unhu* once you possessed them? If you did not have *unhu* in the first place, then were you doomed, for how could you reciprocate with people? At this point I approached clarity. The white girls had fatter manila envelopes than we did residing in Miss Plato's cash box. The whole world wanted to reciprocate with them, so surely they possessed more *unhu*! Thus I wondered until it became apparent one path to *unhu* was the way of material preponderance. I spent more and more time memorising every word of every text, every strange scientific sign and symbol, the succession of British monarchs. (*The Book of Not* p145)

Tambu's interrogations lead to the logical fallacy that acquiring material wealth and money makes one acquire *unhu* and hence acceptability in society. She fails to realise that well-being includes all facets of life and is not limited to the accumulation of money. Within the colonial set up, the affluence she aspires for is gained by those who have received colonial education to the highest level. Consequently, she does not question the education she receives, she memorises everything, sucking it up like a sponge. The effect is that she continues to drift away from her people into the white world. She also makes the error of assuming everyone is attracted to white people and their affluence in the same way she is.

For Tambu, the white people are the standards of being human, *munhu* in Shona which reflects her acceptance of inferiority and non-being as a black girl. It amounts to a negation of her Shona heritage where she was better off cultivating a hybrid identity. The essence of being human is therefore exhibiting *unhu*. Her flawed logic naturally leads her to aspire to be like white people in all behaviour and principles unquestioningly. Consequently she disassociates herself from the other Shona girls in her dormitory because they represent the antithesis of white behaviour and expectations. She detests the Shona girls' loud laughter accompanied with palm slapping which she considers to be barbaric. It is worth quoting the incident she declined Ntombi and Patience's invitation to join them;

Ntombi banged the door to her room and closed it after her, the two girls' voices climbed to that sort of raucous chatter reminiscent with forests. The hall cracked with the slapping of palms. Then there were shrieks of laughter, as though St Sophie's was besieged by an army of inebriated banshees. All this with only two young women! What would happen if we were three was something that did not bear thinking of! "I'm doing quotations," I informed the two seniors after they issued their invitation. They were now waiting to enter the room, smiling pleasantly to make me join them. "*Julius Caesar*." I gestured down the corridor to my door, delivering the wave so that it was at the same time both self-deprecating and superior. (*The Book of Not* p168)

Tambu regards herself superior to the other girls and justifies her refusal to join them in the description of their laughter. The passage above evokes animal imagery of chattering like monkeys, shrieking and howling like wolves or hyenas, which alludes to the European myth of blacks as savages in need of civilisation. There is also an allusion to immorality in the suggestion of drunkenness in the word "inebriated". Reference to banshees shows how far Tambu has imbibed foreign values and mythology. A banshee is a female spirit who cries loudly to warn that someone is going to die. The irony is that, in that sense, it heralds Tambu's

own spiritual death. In the context of the story, it forebodes the death of Ntombi's family at the hands of the liberation fighters.

However, despite feeling superior, Tambu has her moments of doubt. She wonders if she is making the right decision or there is something missing in her formal education that is unique to the other Shona girls. She is haunted by the fact that she does not belong with the white girls and neither is she with her own. In this particular instance, Tambu fails to concentrate on memorising quotations from *Julius Caesar*.

“He-he-de!” Twa! Laughter bounced down the corridor, followed by the crack of palms slapped together. “Hu-uri!” Even after thirty minutes, the two girls’ hilarity split the drone of the common room music. There was no concentrating on *Julius Caesar*, for I was puzzled. What did Ntombi and Patience have, that I did not, that they laughed over? What made Ntombi and Patience descend for sessions in the last dormitory on St Ignatius’ corridor, which we so longed to escape? I was vindicated when, one morning at assembly, Sister Emmanuel asked the girls to damp the number of decibels that emanated from that dormitory. (p169).

The onomatopoeic representation of Shona laughter reflects that Tambu has relented in her negative judgment earlier that made her describe the laughter in animal terms. Alone in her room, Tambu is alienated from the white girls enjoying music in the common room and her fellow Shona girls enjoying a chat in Ntombi's room down the corridor. From the former she is excluded by skin colour, but she excludes herself from the latter group as quoted earlier. In her loneliness, Tambu lacks Shona sufficient cultural socialisation since she spends most of her time at school. In the end she has no idea what makes her fellow Shona students happy and neither can she copy their coping strategies. Tambu's conception of having acquired European civilisation (manner of speaking and tastes) makes her think that she must be distinguished as superior to the other Shona students in the school. She, therefore, fails to understand why senior girls continue to interact with the lower forms. In her mind Tambu has erased racial solidarity as an option because she believes the multicultural myth.

Shohat (1992) notes that it is a myth that the world has become multicultural as Western hegemony still pervades race relations with the effect that the other is cosmetically accepted. The Tambu we meet here is a sixth former and her current attitude can be traced to Babamukuru's teaching. When Tambu, then a second former, rebels against the rule of separate bathrooms and toilets for white and African girls, Sister Emmanuel writes a negative comment

on her report. Babamukuru does not try to find out what actually happened but forces her to write a letter of apology because he fears she will be expelled from school, and would not be able to graduate and take over the reins of looking after the family from him (p89-91). From this encounter, Tambu learns to adhere to the authority of the nuns without questioning. She studies hard in the hope of passing all her exams and getting an award to make Babamukuru proud of her and have her name engraved on the trophy. The challenge is that this becomes her sole obsession at the expense of other identities such that she fails to acquire other social skills necessary for survival. This ambition alienates her further from her dorm mates until she is out of touch with their behaviour and aspirations. She holds them in contempt and suspicion lest they lead her to fail in her ambition. Cynthia's radio played *smanje manje* music from South Africa that enabled the Shona girls to temporarily forget their misery and dance.

Dance, among the Shona people, is a form of expression that enables one to relieve stress. Tambu interprets it as wasting time. She then credits Cynthia's radio, and not the music the girls are dancing to, as the uniting force. Tambu thinks that *unhu* is represented by a superior person granting favours to the less privileged like Babamukuru does for her family, and the nuns' acceptance of African girls into the school. Since *unhu* is about reciprocity, the favoured must oblige by fulfilling the wishes of their benefactor. What Tambu fails to realise is that reciprocity is about sharing the joy and the pain together as a close ethnic group regardless of social or economic status. Her moment of doubt is erased by sister Emmanuel's comment of disapproval on the Shona girls' loud music and chatter as reflected in the quotation above. Consequently, Tambu is book learned without any social and cultural skills which makes her a misfit in society. In other words, she is thoroughly miseducated.

Ntombi acts as a foil to Tambu. She comes from Gaza in Chipinge, which means ethnically they are both Ndaus. She is also in the same form as Tambu and competes with her in class. Part of Tambu's ambition is to beat Ntombi and Tracey. Ntombi belongs to the lower class as her father is a caretaker at Umtali Boys School. They keep close ties with their rural home. While accepting the education at Sacred Heart, Ntombi maintains her cultural education and reproaches Tambu when she errs. Tambu hates her more for this, for instance, when she tells of how Tambu took the desert bowl from the Shona helper in the dining without talking to her or at least thanking her. Ntombi is distressed when Tambu joins the white girls on the bus to town to knit warm clothes for the Rhodesian army because her actions pose danger on the other girls as they are identified as a group rather than individuals in their minority status at the school - referred to as the African dormitory. It is worthwhile to give the full quotation

“Of course they would! Be that stupid, of course they would!” Ntombi snarled. *Unhu*’s decorum required she keep quiet, but she was so exasperated she simply could not do it. “Haven’t we seen how stupid they are, going there in the first place, for that knitting! Getting into the bus, there under the jacarandas, haven’t we seen them! And haven’t we heard them singing that song, there with all the Europeans!” With this Ntombizethu turned to face Patience, her arms full of clothes. “This is my land! This is your land! From the Vumba Highlands to the Sabi Valley!” That was the song bawled in the burgundy school bus as we drove through the suburbs to the town hall. Tight and high, Ntombi’s voice strangled her words. “Now, girls, what do you think? The driver’s in there at the steering, right! What if the driver is a *mujiba*, or knows someone who is? When he’s finished the driving and he goes back to say what he saw, what is he going to tell people?” The girl’s nostrils flared. Her breath was loud as though she could not draw enough air through them. Her exasperation was bringing her very far past *unhu*, to a place where the dangers of speaking vanish. Next the girl flung her armful of clothes onto the floor to lunge with outrage into my part of the cupboard. “See! See what I mean about this one! What if *vana sisi* who clean this room see this kind of thing in this room in this cupboard?” She waved my ball of wool and knitting needles at me as though they were monstrous weapons direct from a brutal dictator’s arsenal. “Then who will remain! Tell me, who will stay here and remain behind! Will your mouths be able to say anything about anything to help us? Which one of us will be speaking if the elder siblings decide some people here must stop being sell-outs! Oh do you think any one of us will be excluded from it! By saying ‘it isn’t me’! Tell me, *mhani*, do you think just saying that to someone is going to exclude you!” Everyone was quiet, knowing how the pain that pushed Ntombi beyond what it was appropriate to voice ached in a more deadly way than the mere smart of school-girl rivalry. (P137-138)

Ntombi draws attention to the fact that the girls cannot forget their racial identity as it affects their lives, both at school and in the country, especially in the context of the liberation struggle. Their presence in a predominantly white school already makes them suspects to the ordinary masses. They should then be careful in their conduct at the school as any other members of the black community can act as informers of the liberation fighters which is another new identity stemming from the liberation struggle.

Since retaliation will not be discriminatory, the girls in the African dormitory have to act as each other’s keepers and in the best interest of the group. Tambu jeopardises their safety by knitting for the Rhodesian forces as she associates *unhu* with acting in the best interest of those in authority. The nuns asked them to knit and she therefore obliges. Tambu represents a new breed of Shona women that identifies with the whites rather than fellow Africans. It is ironic that her action is a form of betrayal to Babamukuru who was beaten and accused of selling out simply by sending her to Sacred Heart. However it is Babamukuru’s injunction that Tambu

listens to all Sister Catherine says leads her to believe the white nuns do not err. It destroys her fighting spirit because whenever their views are in contrast, she believes she is the one in error. Her decision to knit for the soldiers is also influenced by compassion for the white people as they are supposedly more human than the blacks. In response to Ntombi's outburst, Tambu says she intended to comfort the Swanepoel twins whose parents were killed by the freedom fighters.

To the other girls it becomes clear that Tambu is no longer one of them in outlook and hence Ntombi's suggestion,

“Oh, you, Tambu! What's making you do this! As if you don't know some things are cursed! Oh, just jump into a pot of hot oil! Or just water, go on, water will do it too if it's boiling! Just jump in, *usvuuke! Usvuuke!* Then you will be what you want. It will make you look like them, all pink like a European!” It was very horrible, what she was saying, and as she did so, Miss Plato burst in. (p141)

Tambu is now a different young woman and Ntombi fails to understand the change. Ntombi surmises that Tambu admires white people and abhors being black and hence the suggestion that she peels off the black skin so as to pass for white. Unfortunately, this binary view of Tambu is inadequate in explaining her identity. As Appiah (1992) notes, race is an inadequate taxonomy of determining identity as it distorts the other realities. To an observer it may seem so because Tambu sides with the whites any time she has to make a choice. In the instance quoted above, Tambu decides to ignore the Shona girls' distress over her behaviour. Instead she sympathises with Miss Plato's distress that the girls are not ready for inspection and Ntombi's clothes are strewn all over the floor. She also seems to gloat that Ntombi gets a black dot against her name for being untidy. This incident motivates Tambu to isolate herself further from her peers. She fails to acknowledge her peers' genuine distress at her behaviour that endangers all of them. Tambu therefore exhibits lack of *unhu* from the point of view of her dorm mates though she believes she has it. Tambu is also motivated by fear of disappointing Babamukuru and hence acts in ways that would appease Sister Emmanuel so that she does not write another nasty comment about her. Her actions are therefore a form of self-preservation in the context of a multiracial school environment.

Later at university, Ntombi decides to ditch the Shona group and joins the Ndebeles. The Ndebeles do not seem to have a problem with the fact that she speaks English. They do not use that as a basis of discrimination against her. Ntombi primarily identifies herself as black. She has no problem joining another group to maintain her racial solidarity. Her Nguni background

also gives her more solidarity with the Ndebeles in a predominantly Karanga-Zezuru environment of University of Zimbabwe. This poses a question whether an essentially Shona identity exists. Ntombi's choice critiques Doke's classification and in the process challenges the Rhodesian creation of the Shona identity. Those that have appropriated this identity discriminate against others. The irony is that they claim authenticity while in actual fact colluding with a colonial project that distorted a people's history and identity. Tambu narrates,

Ntombi was in the second year of her Master of Philosophy in the French language when I went up. She was still in residence, but looked ahead, as though there was no one coming, when I met her in the corridor. In the dining room, she sat with the Ndebele girls. "That one, she's a MuNdevere," the other Shona speaking girls explained when I asked. "Those ones, let them stick together! It's just that she grew up somewhere else, I think, over with those MaChangana. That's why they just speak English. That Chindau they speak that side!" my informant, who was also in Sociology continued, exhibiting great ignorance of other Zimbabweans' ethnicities. "Ha, that language of theirs! They call it ChiShona, but have you ever understood a word of it? I don't think anyone at all, in all this world, understands it!" I did not, at that time, experience shock at this student's view of group belonging. I merely nodded, considering what, if anything at all, was to be gained by revealing my ex-classmate was in fact a MuChangana. In the end, nothing was. I realised I would merely end up feeling inferior, being a newcomer while Ntombizethu was a post-graduate student. I overcame my anxieties by becoming once more aggressively studious. (p197).

Tambu is appalled at her informant's ignorance of other Zimbabwean ethnicities but seems to accept that such identities are arbitrary. Ntombi proves that identity is fluid and can be merely a question of choice within contexts.

In a predominantly white environment at Sacred Heart, Ntombi identifies with fellow girls in the African dormitory. After independence when they are allowed to join their form mates in the respective corridors, she still frequents the "African dormitory" which is a rendezvous for the African girls, displaying racial solidarity. At university, in an environment that is hostile to non-Shona speakers, Ntombi aligns herself with Ndebele girls to ensure she has company while pursuing her studies in French. In this she contrasts with Tambu who isolates herself and in the end creates enemies out of possible allies. In the quotation above, Ntombi seems to snub Tambu but this is because Tambu snubbed her in school when she offered solidarity to fight for Tambu's rights. Tambu gets the best O'level results for her stream but the trophy is given to Tracey Stevenson. The nuns do this because they know she will not protest and neither does she have family backing due to the second form experience. In trying so hard to please the whites, Tambu loses her stamina and ability to stand out as an individual. Instead of confronting

situations she hides behind working hard in studies. In the end she loses everything. One can assume that it is Tracey who comes up with the idea of stealing Tambu's advert and giving it to a white copy editor because she knew from experience, that she would not protest. As predicted, instead of demanding her dues, Tambu decides to resign. However, ultimately years of erasing herself lead to total loss of what matters to her - job, accommodation and family. The novel ends with Tambu wondering what her future will be,

I thanked Mrs May as warmly as I could, then made a great show of picking the slip of newsprint up and stowing it carefully in my bag, to have the matter concluded. Miserably I sidled off down the hall. What was I going to do now? Was there any way to go back to the agency? Now that I was not wanted here, what would I do for accommodation? There was no longer a place for me with my relatives at the mission. I could not go back to the homestead where Netsai hopped unspeakably on a single limb, and where Mai would laugh at me daily. I had forgotten all the promises made to myself and providence while I was young concerning carrying forward with the good and human, the *unhu* of my life. As it was, I had not considered unhu at all, only my calamities, since the contested days at the convent. So this evening I walked emptily to the room I would soon vacate, wondering what future there was for me, a new Zimbabwean. (p246)

The context of the quotation is that Tambu snaps at Mrs May for continually calling her Isabel. In a moment of rage she insists that she be called by her real name. Mrs May retaliates by suggesting she leaves her hostel as she is no longer happy there and offers details of a friend that can offer Tambu accommodation in Borrowdale. In the end, Tambu's rebellion leads her nowhere. The normal tropes of identity remain blank for Tambu; she is of no fixed abode, unemployed and without close associates. The signifier Tambu therefore lacks concrete descriptors as her choices have led to her unmaking, hence the title of the book, *The Book of Not*. Ultimately, Tambu's insistence on the existential philosophy that focuses on the individual passions and choices leads to her undoing as she does not take cognisance of context.

6.4 Tambu as a Shona woman

There is need to go back to *Nervous Conditions* in order to understand who Tambu is and how her identity is moulded by her experiences in *The Book of Not*. The unmaking of Tambu cannot be fully blamed on colonialism as she actively chooses what to assimilate and what to discard. She is therefore active in the creation of her identity. Tambu turns thirteen in 1968, which means she was born in 1955 in the communal lands close to Umtali. The community is agrarian with their daily activities revolving around planting, weeding and harvesting as well as taking

care of livestock. The Tambu we meet at the beginning of *Nervous Conditions* is not only content with this lifestyle but actually enjoys it. She is therefore surprised at Nhamo's transformation when he moves to the mission, he no longer enjoys the scenic view from the bus stop and neither does he want to engage in farming, preferring to read his books while sipping tea. These represent being engrossed in consuming European ideologies and goodies, the Englishness that their mother scoffs at. By this time the subordination of women had been fully legislated and hence women barely made decisions though most of the work was left to them. Shona women continued to be expected to be industrious and take on roles discarded by the men as they worked in the city or simply decided to rest like Nhamo in *Nervous Conditions*. Tambu explains how the men in the family behaved when Babamukuru came to visit, the only times that Nhamo would expend any energy to help around the homestead were the times when babamukuru sent word that he was coming to visit. Tambu's attitudes are shaped in part by her resentment towards her brother's arrogant behaviour. Thus, the Tambu one reads about in *The Book of Not* seeks to make the most of the opportunity to be in school.

Babamukuru represents power and civilisation to Tambu and that is why she would rather he never wears shorts and join them. Everyone panders to him, including Nhamo and Jeremiah who act as tyrants in the absence of Babamukuru. Tambu then logically aspires to be like Babamukuru. Babamukuru's presence upsets the general order in the home in the same way that the presence of whites disrupted the general upkeep of the blacks. The men return to the homestead for a formal meeting on the running of the home while the women do the actual work. The women are silenced as evidenced by MaShingayi's silent protest. Tambu and Netsai remain under her influence because they can read her body language, and as girls, they are still under her authority. Nhamo is her biological child, but the colonial legislation that made women perpetual minors gives him privilege over his mother and sisters. At this time Nhamo had just completed Standard Six, meaning he was now employable and could run the affairs of his home. After Standard Six blacks could either go into teacher training or nurse training, so this makes him closer to Babamukuru in hierarchy than anyone else in the family. At this time Tambu is like her mother in that she takes all work in her stride regardless of her resentment towards the work. She does not like killing chickens and plucking them but accepts that is part of her role as a woman and eldest daughter in the family. She also takes over herding cattle because she knows there is no one else to do it. She actually sympathises with her mother and tries to help as much as possible. Tambu also shares her mother's resilience and determination as markers of Shona women's identity.

Nhamo is sent to school while Tambu remains at home because there is insufficient money to send them both to school. Tambu's desire to learn is not quenched. It is whetted by seeing Maiguru as a role model. Tambu knows that she need not wallow in poverty, confined to the communal lands, if only she can acquire Western education. Her father's mockery that she cannot feed books to her husband actually increases her determination.

His intention was to soothe me with comforting, sensible words, but I could not see the sense. (*Nervous Conditions*, p16)

The quotation above shows that Tambu had already begun grading people according to education and affluence and considers her mother to be inferior. She therefore aspires to gain the same superiority. She then plants her maize in order to raise her school fees. Ironically, she is able to achieve her dream by utilising her grandmother and mother's agricultural teachings which she considers to be inferior to Western education. The difference between Tambu and her mother is that she decides to fight the system that thwarts her dreams, while her mother has become fatalistic as evident in the quotation on accepting the burden of womahood. Tambu's admiration of Babamukuru and the desire to learn is planted by her grandmother at a tender age. She is told of how the whites disrupted her grandparents' life, enslaved them to work on farms and mines, and left women and children destitute. It is her grandmother's ingenuity in surrendering Babamukuru to the missionaries that saved the family and led to his current glory. Tambu narrates,

The white wizard had no use for women and children. He threw my grandmother and her children off his farm. Destitute, they travelled back to the homestead, where my great-grandfather, although he had not regained his former standard of living, had managed to keep his family together. And then my great-grandfather died and the family broke up, and it turned out my grandfather had not been a good man, for he was killed in the mines, and my grandmother was left with six children to support. And then she heard that beings similar in appearance to the wizards but not of them, for these were holy, had set up a mission not too far from the homestead. She walked with my uncle, with Babamukuru, who was nine years old and wearing a loin cloth, to the mission, where the holy wizards took him in. They set him to work in their farm by day. By night he was educated in their wizardry. For my grandmother, being sagacious and having foresight, had begged them to prepare him for the life in their world. (*Nervous Conditions*, p18-19)

The quotation reveals that at this time, there was no resistance to the white man as the blacks had accepted their defeat. Grandmother differentiates between white missionaries (which she classifies as good) and white farmers/traders/miners who exploit the people. Tambu's mother

accepts the hierarchy instituted by colonialism by complying with whatever comes her way. Tambu decides to pursue Western education so that she too, like Babamukuru, will be equipped to succeed in the world created by the whites. She is eager to be assimilated so that she can gain the material wealth and shed off poverty. At this juncture Tambu accepts the definition of a Shona woman as hardworking and making things happen, but rejects the European domestication of Shona women that sought to confine them to communal areas without access to the city or jobs reserved for men.

With such determination it is not surprising that Tambu works hard enough to get a scholarship into Sacred Heart, a school run by nuns for young ladies. By the end of *Nervous Conditions* Tambu is aware that joining the world of whites is fraught with tensions, and not the romance story she imagined as a child listening to her grandmother. In the quotation below, it is clear that she is caught between two worlds, and is aware of the need to carefully negotiate her identity;

Mother knew a lot of things and I had regard for her knowledge. Be careful, she had said, and I thought about Nyasha and Chido and Nhamo, who had succumbed, and of my own creeping feelings of doom. Was I being careful enough? I wondered. For I was beginning to have a suspicion, no more than the seed of suspicion, that I had been too eager to leave the homestead and embrace the “Englishness” of the mission; and after that the more concentrated “Englishness” of Sacred Heart. The suspicion remained for a few days, during which time it transformed itself into guilt, and then I had nightmares about Nhamo, and Chido and Nyasha two nights in a row. That should tell you how much my mother’s words disturbed me: I had not had a nightmare since the first time I went to the mission. But term-time was fast approaching and the thought of returning to Sacred Heart filled me with pleasure. The books, the games, the films, the debates - all these things were things that I wanted. I told myself I was a much more sensible person than Nyasha, because I knew what could or couldn’t be done. In this way, I banished the suspicion, buried it in the depths of my subconscious, and happily went back to Sacred Heart. (*Nervous Conditions*, p203)

At this juncture Tambu embraces her hybrid identity: valuing her mother’s knowledge on how Shona society works and what is appropriate behaviour coupled with embracing Western knowledge found in books, games and films at Sacred Heart. She considers herself superior to Nyasha who went to England and forgot Shona culture. She also imagines herself as respectful to elders and therefore would never commit the error of disrespect like Nhamo, Nyasha and Chido. In her own words, she says,

Beside Nyasha I was a paragon of feminine decorum, principally because I hardly ever talked unless spoken to, and then only to answer with the utmost respect whatever question had been asked. Above all, I did not question things. It did not matter to me why things should be done this way rather than that way. I simply accepted that this was so. I did not think that my reading was more important than washing the dishes, and I understood that panties should not be hung to dry in the bathroom where everybody could see them. I did not discuss Anna's leave conditions with Maiguru. I was not concerned that freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists, did not demand proof of God's existence nor did I think that the missionaries, along with all the other Whites in Rhodesia, ought to have stayed at home. As a result of all these things I did not think or do, Babamukuru thought I was the sort of young woman a daughter ought to be and lost no opportunity to impress this point of view upon Nyasha. Far from being upset by these comparisons, she would agree that, apart from being spineless (which she thought could be corrected), yes, I was an exemplary young lady. (*Nervous Conditions*, p155)

Tambu then considers herself equipped to counter the "Englishness" of her diaspora experience away from the homestead. This belief is made concrete in *The Book of Not* by her insistence that she has *unhu*, the essence of being human in Shona culture. However, the spinelessness continues uncorrected and contributes immensely to her downfall.

The crisis to Tambu's identity takes place when she is in Form Two. Her relationship to Babamukuru and her mother plays a crucial role in this crisis of being. The end of *Nervous Conditions* reveals that the two are her role models and she hopes that by learning from both of them, she would be able to achieve the balance that lacks in Nyasha, Chido and Nhamo. From the earlier quotation on what happens when Babamukuru visits, one notes that MaShingayi resents Babamukuru's intrusion in her affairs. However, she still values him as benefactor to her family. The resentment increases with the way Babamukuru handled the dispute over Lucia's (her young sister) relationship with Takesure. He sidelines the women and convenes a *dare* with his brothers and sister, thereby privileging the Sigaukes. The discrimination is based on totem as a marker of identity, a point Maiguru later harps on in *The Book of Not*. Babamukuru then prescribes a church wedding for Jeremiah and MaShingayi insinuating that they have been living in sin, and hence, are not blessed. This decision further alienates MaShingayi from Babamukuru even though she complies. When Lucia gives her the choice to leave and escape the mockery with her, Tambu notes,

Since most of her life my mother's mind, belonging first to her father and then to her husband, had not been hers to make up, she was finding it difficult to come to a decision.

“Lucia,” she sighed, “why do you keep bothering me with this question? Does it matter what I want? Since when has it mattered what I want? So why should it start mattering now? Do you think I wanted to travel all this way across this country of our forefathers only to live in dirt and poverty? Do you really think I wanted the child for whom I made the journey to die only five years after it left the womb? Or my son to be taken from me? So what difference does it make whether I have a wedding or whether I go? It is all the same. What I have done for nineteen years I can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be. Now leave me! Leave me to rest.” (*Nervous Conditions*, p153)

Above is a list of decisions made on behalf of MaShingayi that she is not happy about but feels helpless and therefore accepts. Lucia comes to the homestead to take care of her sister after she goes into depression. Depression is considered inverted anger, the anger is turned inward at herself rather than dealing with the actual problems. In this regard, Lucia acts as a foil to her. It also shows that there is no single Shona woman identity as people vary in personalities and also pick their wars differently. However it is this inverted anger that slowly transforms MaShingayi into a malicious woman and serves to alienate her from her daughter, Tambu. The more this happens, the more she resents Babamukuru for stealing her daughter from her in the same way that he took Nhamo away from her. It is in this context that when opportunity presents itself in the form of the liberation struggle, she decided to avenge by telling the guerilla fighters that Babamukuru is a sellout. The memory of the meeting they were excluded from lingers on and hence she gloats to Tambu that in the village they also have their own meetings and are well known by the Big Brothers (*The Book of Not*, p8).

The violence on Babamukuru and Netsai’s accident breaks something in Tambu and she decides to sever connections with the homestead. She totally loses respect for her mother and therefore loses her anchor to retain Shona cultural identity. She actively chooses to dissociate herself from her mother’s definition of an authentic Shona woman, as well as nationalist definition of patriotism. Babamukuru is labelled a sellout for sending Tambu to Sacred Heart. The irony is that he is punished for aiding Tambu’s dream by another woman despite the sacrifice he makes. This proves the fallacy of homogeneity in feminism (Butler, 1990), instead people are motivated by power struggles (Boehmer, 2004). The power structures enable them to perform identities depending on the power position they occupy. Tambu’s mother is passive and fatalistic when she sees no way out of her predicament. When she has the power of agency, she is as much an oppressor as Babamukuru as she enacts her power through violence. Women, are therefore not perennial victims but can also be brutal. From this, Tambu realises that group aspirations are not always the same and becomes convinced on the primary need to preserve

self. This shows Tambu's shift from the communal outlook to a very individualistic stance based on existentialism.

The song at the *pungwe* alienates her from the cause because it shows her how her people have no qualms in destroying human lives. While for the masses *mabhunu* (white people) are homogeneous oppressors, they are individuals who need to be appreciated as such for Tambu who has close interactions with them. For instance, Sister Catherine is kind and makes the effort to pronounce Shona names correctly. Tambu values her name and considers it a strong marker of her identity despite voluntary assimilation into other aspects of European culture. The song advocates that white people must be hit on the head so that they run from the land. The bashing of Babamukuru then becomes ironic because where is he to run to when this is also his home? The song expresses affinity with the land, delineating who, and who does not, belong. It is meant to mobilise many to join the struggle and the beating of sellouts is to discourage defectors. Musiyiwa (Moolla, 2016:50-51) notes that;

Many Shona popular songs, both recorded and unrecorded *chimurenga* songs and folk songs, construct, and at the same time embody and express the Shona land mythology. ... Furthermore, as music, they have a much more powerful mobilisation effect. Songs deliver the mythology in a more memorable way than any other communicative modes. Many scholars, including Sadomba (2011), Pfukwa (2008), Kriger (1992) and Pongweni (1982), have noted the critical role of *chimurenga* songs in the mobilisation, recruitment and politicisation of peasants and guerillas during Zimbabwe's liberation war (*Chimurenga*) of the 1960s and 1970s ... The rise of modern Zimbabwean nationalism in the 1950s, and the subsequent armed struggle, and, later, the land seizures at the turn of the millennium owe their success to the mobilisation of this land mythology and its associated traditional beliefs.

However, Tambu reacts differently to this exposure. Like her grandmother, she has accepted whites as part of the new environment and intends to excel in the modern world by acquiring their knowledge. In other words she intends to climb the class ladder and become part of the middle class elite created by colonialism. The balance she intended to maintain is offset by realising that her mother is motivated by envy but is not willing to improve herself. Her foil, Lucia, enrolls for Grade 1 as an adult. Tambu longs to talk about books with her mother, but all she does is mock her for her "Englishness". When Netsai's leg is blown off, Tambu realises the terrible destructive power of weapons. The fact that Babamukuru is enlisted to help carry her to hospital, convinces Tambu that the world created by the whites is a better one than the world of blacks represented by her homestead and the guerillas, each representing poverty and violence respectively. She then makes the choice to absorb Western education and forget the

experiences of the *pungwe* night. Her alienation is, therefore, caused by what was intended to draw her back in the fold. Tambu's fear of the violence pushes her closer to the whites.

The choice to disengage from her family in the rural homestead seems to make Tambu forget the colour of her skin as she identifies herself with, the seemingly more humane, whites. Consequently she resents sharing the dormitory with the inferior African girls who do not know how to use modern ablutions. Tambu uses the forbidden toilet because she is confident she has the skills to use it. The psychological trauma of the *pungwe* also leads her to be absent-minded in class, resulting in the subconscious scuffle with Sister Catherine. This leads to the negative comment on her report from Sister Emmanuel and consequently Babamukuru forcing her to write a letter of apology. Babamukuru is afraid that if Tambu is expelled from Sacred Heart, then his sacrifices and beating are in vain. He is motivated by his ego and not what is in Tambu's best interest. Tambu's psychological trauma is therefore not addressed.

Tambu then adopts her mother's attitude of accepting whatever comes her way without fighting. Like her mother, she also feels superior to those around her. While MaShingayi is contemptuous of Babamukuru and others for their Englishness, Tambu's superiority is based on judging the other girls as backward and uncivilised. However, just like the colonial regime, they have imbibed "othering" as the main way of asserting identity. In this case, Tambu and her mother discriminate against people of the same race basing the discrimination on the level of assimilation of white culture. This proves Appiah's (1992) point that race is an inadequate taxonomy of identity. In instances where Tambu clearly understands the issues, she is self-effacing in order to protect privileges gained by pleasing those in power. Binary categories are therefore inadequate in explaining identity.

Despite all her actions and choices, Tambu is very clear that she is Shona and loves her name. She belongs to the Sigauke family of the Chihwa/Bonga totem. Above all she is supposed to uphold the philosophy of *unhu* in her choices. Her only challenge is that she does not know what *Unhu* entails and hence interprets it in her own way. She also remains spineless and fails to stand up for herself when she needs to. This makes her an educated version of her mother as she maliciously destroys Pedzi's confidence rather than being her mentor. Tambu actively chooses to belong to universal humanity rather than racial or clan solidarity. That is why at the end of *The Book of Not* she insists that she is Zimbabwean even though she is uncertain what the future holds in store for her. This seems to be the message that Dangarembga seeks to

hammer home, that people must be accepted as Zimbabweans regardless of race, ethnicity, creed or class.

6.5 Shona Women and the Liberation Struggle

Netsai, Tambudzai's sister joins the liberation struggle as a combatant. The image that traumatises Tambu the most is of Netsai's lost leg and how she is then incapacitated in her movements. The incident on how Netsai loses her leg forms the opening of *The Book of Not* as evidence of how it is central to events in the novel. It marks the beginning of Tambu's decline;

So all changed after the meeting I went to, the one I was brought to, both to be exhibited at Babamukuru's trial for treason to the soul of the people and to be instructed. It all was different after this *morari* where fear paralysed the heart. Indeed, having returned to school, I renewed my contract with myself to overtake Tracey Stevenson, or at the very least obtain the honour roll in all the school's gradings. Now, being there on the copper plate was even more necessary: it was as if that name so perfectly inscribed couldn't be blown off so jaggedly, just like that, not in the middle of the night, nor in the middle of anything. But now, after a leg was blown off, she came walking backwards over those stones of learning and concentration, hopping, going hop-hop-hopla because she had only one leg. I could see her clearly as I sat in class, my mind opening to the teacher. It was a woman. It was my sister. Would the honour roll hold its promise? I could not concentrate. Whenever I focused, the woman stepped back, groaning too many questions. Besides, I suffered secretly a sense of inferiority that came from having been at the primitive scene. Being a student at the Young Ladies' College of the Sacred Heart, I possessed images from the school's films and library: cavemen dragging their women where they wanted them by the hair or bludgeoning their prey. And in the final analysis there was everyone, sitting mesmerised and agreeing about the appropriateness of this behaviour. What about the one who wasn't a woman, who was my sister, holding the means of someone else's death strapped on her back, rolling her hips towards a man in a gesture of life, so she was after all not a girl but already a woman? Sometimes a tear trickled towards my nose and I had to rub, pretending something had fallen in my eye to prevent a drip on my text book. I had trouble, in fact started to dread, attending. It was as if a vital part had been exploded away and in the absence that was left I was cracked and defective, as though indispensable parts leaked, and I could not gather energy. (*The Book of Not*, p27-28)

The first part of the quotation shows the coercive nature of the nationalist narrative of resistance that demanded all people to act in the same way and punished deviance by violence. Babamukuru is a sellout for sending Tambu to school with whites and Tambu is a sellout for adopting white accent and mannerisms defined as Englishness by her mother. Secondly, the

quotation raises questions on Netsai's identity as a combatant carrying guns and grenades to deliberately kill. Tambu also notes Netsai's transition from being a girl to a woman and these changes disturb her. The memory of Netsai's blown off leg haunts Tambu the most. It shows that much as Tambu considers herself an individual responsible for her destiny, she cannot sever her identity from her family and the events in her country. Netsai is as much a part of Tambu's identity as she also influences her family's identity as poor and Shona. Tambu cannot wish them away and this is the true meaning of *unhu*. Since Netsai is no longer well, Tambu becomes cracked and defective as well. She is obliged to help her sister but Tambu chooses to ignore her sister. Tambu has many questions that Netsai could have answered had she engaged her but she decides to make her own conclusions based on observations. Netsai represents the subaltern that Tambu silences and purports to speak for, moved by the violence she endures. Tambu is thus doomed to failure unless she reintegrates into her family and seeks to fully understand circumstances rather than act on assumptions.

While the black women in *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* help their men fight by acquiring ammunition for the First Chimurenga, in the second Chimurenga women participated as combatants. Testimonies of combat are found in *Women of Resilience Mothers of the Revolution*. Female combatants were trained in Zambia and Mozambique. ZANLA, the army wing of ZANU was based in Mozambique and was largely dominated by Shona people. In both instances, Shona women had to take up roles that were different from what they had done at home. They learned how to assemble and dismantle weapons as well as how to use them. They became the antithesis of the submissive women they were expected to be. They wore trousers like men, behaviour that was condemned as wayward among the Shona. The armed struggle caused a shift in identities of Shona women.

Tambu assumes that Netsai joins the liberation struggle in order to follow a boyfriend since in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu predicts that someday she would make a "sweet sad wife". Most of the people that joined the liberation struggle were those who understood the value of land and knew they had more to gain than lose with the removal of the white men. They did not share in the privileges acquired through association with the whites. It is safe to assume that Netsai is not educated as Tambu confesses that she only got the opportunity as she was replacing her late brother, Nhamo. Netsai seems to be content with household chores and does not resent serving men the way Tambu does. Rather than seeing the men as the enemy in feminist fashion, she seems to glory in her capacity to serve her home, exhibiting a different version of a Shona woman from Tambu. It then follows that the increased hardships in the

home due to various legislation impacted on her directly and she saw the need to join the liberation struggle.

One of the major grievances of the liberation struggle was that the soil was exhausted but the blacks were confined to the communal lands due to the Land Apportionment Act. Since Netsai's family was largely dependent on agriculture, they would have been affected by this rule. There is no guarantee that Babamukuru would have been able to provide adequate fertiliser and hence the effects of soil exhaustion would have been felt. In any war, the outcomes are unpredictable. Joining the war shows that one is brave and committed to the cause. In holding the gun, Netsai was aware that she could either kill or be killed. Tambu battles with this image of Netsai because she is thinking of her as simply an instrument of White men's death. The logic of Tambu's argument is that violence is savage; the freedom fighters are using violence and they are exhibiting their savagery as primitive people. The acculturation at Sacred Heart, through films and History from a European perspective, makes Tambu blind to the violence against black people by the colonial regime. She also fails to recognise that the missionaries collude with the colonial government as evident in the discriminatory practices at the school.

Most of the young women who joined the liberation struggle were in their teens. This is because they worked with their mothers and older women and were therefore clear on the issues affecting their people in the communal areas. Schmidt (1992) notes that legislation to curb African agriculture and trade affected women more as it took away their ability to acquire personal wealth and made them dependent on male wages that were inadequate. The exclusion of women in areas that had formerly operated in also acted as a grievance and motivated them to personally join the war as equals with men. The women did not doubt their abilities because they had singlehandedly taken care of homes in the absence of men. Tambu wonders if her sister is a girl or a woman. Her conclusion seems to be she is now a woman because she has hips and rolls them towards a man. This is inadequate because among the Shona growing up is not about numerical age nor physical growth but understanding the values of one's people and ability to carry out duties appropriate to age. Jeremiah and Takesure are irresponsible and treated as children by Babamukuru. Tambu's lack of cultural knowledge makes her mother call her "a child" despite being over twenty-five. Netsai is therefore a mentally mature young woman who decides to fight for her country.

Dangarembga does not give Netsai voice on why she joins the liberation struggle. Instead we are given Tambu's views and her mother's gloating on the power it gives her. This is only a small part of the liberation story. The fact that Netsai loses her leg before independence also adds to the anti-hero style of *The Book of Not*. Her journey as a liberation fighter ends with her injury. Even after independence, Netsai does not gain anything. Dangarembga focuses on the love triangle of Netsai, the commander and the other girl. This trivialises the fighters as simply sexually immoral and hence living up to the stereotypes about black people created by the whites. It is the arrival of Netsai and the commander that stops Babamukuru's beating. The author seems to suggest the root of corruption as one wonders if he would have stopped the beating were he not in love with Netsai and this was his potential father-in-law.

Dangarembga portrays the liberation struggle as having diverse effects on various women. Women combatants joined the struggle and were as active as the men. Dangarembga, however seems to suggest that their motivation was to fulfil traditional roles of being wives to the male combatants. Such complaints have been raised in scholarly works such as Simbanegavi-Nhongo (2000) and Lyons (2004). For those who had acquired privileges in the white system, it became a source of disorientation and confusion as exemplified by Tambu and the fight between Nyasha and her father on whether the fighters are terrorists or freedom fighters. The war was also used to settle old scores by those moved by jealous and malice as in the case of MaShingayi and Ntombi's relatives. Sellouts were invariably those who had acquired wealth and/or education in the colonial system. Tambu's fractured memory does not change who she is; a daughter to the Sigauke family with obligations to it. It does however affect her behaviour towards her family as she neglects her parents and siblings in pursuit of what is comfortable for her in her acquired tastes which is identity performance.

6.6 The Shona Woman in Matabeleland: *Running with Mother*

Running with Mother is a story of a Shona woman married by an Ndebele man. Mother, as she is referred in the novel, lives in Matabeleland with her husband and her daughter, Rudo. The novel is set in the early 1980s during the political unrest normally referred to as *Gukurahundi*. This was after independence and the operation was the government's response to supposed ZIPRA dissidents that were suspected of plotting to overthrow the predominantly ZANU government. Mlalazi depicts this war as an anti-Ndebele war by the Shonas. This draws attention on the depiction of the Shona woman among Ndebele people. Having stayed in Matabeleland for fourteen years (Rudo's age) she has obviously assimilated Ndebele culture

to some degree and also influenced her community, resulting in some form of hybrid identity. This hybrid identity is best represented in her daughter who is bilingual, speaks both Shona and Ndebele. This text is interesting in that the pull factor in joining the Ndebele community is social, based on love, rather than political or economic coercion. It is of interest to find out if there is a difference between voluntary assimilation and one coerced by other forces.

Running with Mother is set in Saphela area of Kezi District in Matabeleland South Province of Zimbabwe. The time setting is early 1980s during what is now referred to as Gukurahundi 1982-1987, the operation by soldiers in Matabeleland to put down dissidents. The story is told from the perspective of a child narrator who has a Shona mother and Ndebele father. The story raises the question of what it means to be Shona among Ndebeles in a time of conflict. In this time of emergency and unrest, the story reflects Mamvura's (Rudo's mother) strengths and her national outlook. She braves the discrimination and builds her family until she earns her sister in law's loyalty and love. Mlalazi in Machirori (2013) says that he deliberately chose a child narrator so as to avoid pre-judgement but let questions unfold.

Mlalazi seems to concur with this view as Rudo and her mother are spared on the basis of being Shona. However, he captures the various perspectives surrounding the experience through the teachers. Mr Mkandla who is bent on avenging the death of his people (Ndebele) and threatens Rudo's mother, Mr Ndlovu, the headmaster who says the atrocities are carried out by the soldiers and not the Shona, Mother and aunt who are hopeful the Government will intervene. In this, key stakeholders to the conflict are highlighted. Rudo describes uncle Genesis's encounter with the dissidents. Rudo, as a child narrator gives us all the perspectives as a way of urging the reader to seek the truth. However, Mlalazi shows both the Shona and Ndebele suffering through the Jamela family which can be a representation of Zimbabwe as a nation that comprises both the Shona and the Ndebele. All violence and injustice cause pain to the citizens of Zimbabwe who must look out for each other and fight for justice in the same way that aunt MaJamela and Mamvura do.

Mlalazi seems to point out that real civilisation begins with individual's outlook, in this case the Shona woman, Mamvura, embodies civil behaviour that should be emulated if society is to thrive as opposed to the tribalism of the soldiers and Mr Mkandla. She wins MaJamela's love and respect because she does not avenge the discrimination she faces from her, but embraces her with love and understanding. Identities of Shona women are made richer by their interaction

with other cultures. Mamvura's behaviour is exemplary to the extent that ultimately it negates negative images of Shona women stemming from prejudice.

Mlalazi (2017) himself concurs with this view as he talks about his book. His vision is national as opposed to an ethnic identity. He says,

The village names are fictional, except for Kezi. Yes I tried to collapse the Gukurahundi experience into my story - especially the emotions of the innocent victims who were suddenly faced with a situation that was far too big for them to comprehend, especially in the beginning moments of the incident. I also tried to concentrate on a minuscule moment by concentrating on the experiences of that one family who are my main cast, and make the reader experience the story through the also innocent perspective of Rudo. It also brings the reader even more closer to the surface and texture of the story. Why did I choose a Shona person and her daughter? It's simple, my driving premise in the story is that Gukurahundi was not a tribal incident, but was just initiated by a thuggish political organisation which wanted to take advantage of latent historic tribal tensions - some sort of national divide and rule tactic which is a tried and tested political tool. Shona people also suffered too during Gukurahundi, some as victims, and some as perpetrators who found themselves being forced by the system to commit heinous acts which later on left psychological scars on them. Why women? I also wanted to portray that in such chaotic situations, women, because of their natural gender vulnerabilities, usually tend to suffer the most. The bottom line is that we as a nation should not be divided by the whole incident, but carefully analyse the why's and how's so that we can recognize that Gukurahundi was a political incident initiated by cunning politicians who think they represent ethnic groups while they actually do not. ZANU PF does not represent Shona people, and so too ZAPU, it does not represent Ndebele people - these two organisations can be easily replaced. (Interview, 3/07/2017)

Zimbabwe needs to revisit Gukurahundi and accept the multiple perspectives if national healing is to take place. As Adichie (2009) notes, the danger of the single story is not that it is not true, but it represents only one facet of the truth. Mlalazi's novel is only one way of depicting the experiences of the time, even then, the novel raises more questions than it answers them as it is based on Rudo's speculation and experiences, a child who does not fully understand her world.

6.7 Representations of a Hybrid Shona Woman in *Running with Mother*

Running with Mother focuses on women caught up in a conflict they do not understand but making the best of it. MaJamela and Mamvura do not understand English and have to rely on Rudo. Most women did not go to school before independence. Those who did it was to acquire

basic literacy in indigenous languages which were the medium of instruction for Sub A and Sub B. MaJamela's writing is terrible but she can write letters in Ndebele. The few women that were allowed basic education was to ensure that they could read and write letters to their husbands in employment in the city or in the mines. Mamvura is from Chisara village, in Mashonaland East. Narrating the incident in which it seems the soldiers would shoot her father, Rudo says,

Mother gasped in shock. "*Mwari wangu!*"

I froze, my eyes on the slumped figure. It was father, and he was naked, the lights of the truck illuminating his body. Slowly, he sat up. I recognised the soldier with the reading glasses. He was pointing something at father's head. I knew it was a pistol.

Suddenly mother took my head and buried it in her bosom. I did not struggle. I waited for the shot. In my heart I said goodbye to father. Images tumbled through my mind. He'd been a father who liked to laugh with his family, a man who was kind to other people, who had gone all the way to Chisara in Mashonaland East to pay lobola for his Shona bride and bring her back to Matabeleland in triumph. A hardworking man who'd left the village to work in the city in the factories so that he could take care of us. I could not imagine a better man than that, or a life without him. (*Running with Mother*, p43).

The women are forced to watch the man who is supposed to protect them being abused by the soldiers knowing that they may lose him forever if he is shot dead. Mamvura is particularly in Matabeleland because of this man and once he is gone, her world will crumble. The love that unites her to him is fully expressed in their daughter's name, Rudo. This contrasts with the ethnic hatred preached by Comrade Finish. In his rhetoric he considers Ndebeles and dissidents to be one.

Rudo paints a picture of a gentle, loving, hardworking and law abiding citizen as an apt image of her father. This image contrasts with Comrade Finish's claim that Ndebeles contaminate Shona women. Mamvura tells him that the baby's name is Anovona and he says,

"What a good name," Comrade Finish said. "The one who sees all. It's good he has seen what we do to dissidents. Maybe, one day, he will become one of our brave soldiers who will help to keep our country clean of weeds and trash. It was lucky we saw those naked men climbing up the mountain, otherwise we wouldn't have freed you from their infection." (*Running with Mother*, p138)

The soldiers are concerned with cleansing the world of dissidents but forget to take care of the vulnerable citizens represented by Mamvura and her family, rendering the identity Shona ambiguous. She is warned not to come back, if she does she would be killed with others. The

warning seems to imply that Mamvura erred by marrying a Ndebele man. This reminds one of the Shona folktale of girls who married men who turned into lions but were saved by their little brother in a flying appliance. Comrade Finish seems to equate himself with this boy with the army helicopters that spot and shoot the enemy. The irony, however, is that Mamvura (representing girl in the story) does not need rescuing, in fact they are ruining her life. In this crisis situation she is forced to think and act quickly in order to safeguard her family.

Mamvura survives the situation precisely because of her upbringing. She is generally precocious and does not easily panic. Rudo realises that there is something terribly wrong when she sees her mother crying. She is level-headed and practical in the crisis as narrated by Rudo,

Mother sniffled. "That was your father." She fell silent again. I could see that she was preparing to say something else, something too heavy for her heart. She sniffled again and went on, "The soldiers locked both your two uncles and their families in their homes and then burned down all the huts before the bus came." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "And then they came to our home but when they heard me speak in Shona, they told me to run away. But I hid in the bushes, waiting for your father because I knew he would come in the bus ..." her voice seemed to fade away. "And then the bus came and when he got off it, the soldiers reappeared out of the bushes and captured him - only God knows if he's still alive now." She started weeping.

"Did father commit a crime?"

"No. The soldiers said they're just killing all the Ndebele people, *maiwee zvangu!* What are people like us, who are married to Ndebele husbands going to do?"

Tears started trickling down my cheeks. "What are we going to do, mother?" All I could do was echo her words.

"I don't know, Rudo. I just don't know. But for now I have to make sure you are safe. As soon as the soldiers drove away with your father, I walked up the road, hoping I would meet you coming from school, and I'm glad I found you unharmed. But why are you alone?" (*Running with Mother*, p17)

Mamvura's identity as a wife to a Ndebele husband is threatened by the soldiers' actions. Language is used as a signifier of identity and helps Mamvura to escape being burnt in her house. However, she is not selfish. Her first idea is to wait for her husband and ensure his safety. When she realises she cannot do anything to help him, she seeks her daughter. In essence, her priority is the safety of her family though she endangers herself by disobeying Captain Finish's command. Despite her grief and fear she takes practical steps; she hides in bushes and seeks her daughter on the pathway, she also immediately notes the anomaly that

Rudo is alone, without her cousins and friends. It is her keen observation and sensitivity to environment that leads to the rescuing of Gift and the success of their escape into the Phezulu Mountains.

The image of motherhood is central to the novel, a celebration of mothers which is a common motif in literature (Gaidzanwa, 1985; Mguni et al., 2006). However, Mlalazi's Mamvura is not idealised. The author captures Mamvura's fears, weaknesses and strengths. At times she leads but at times she is vulnerable and led by MaJamela. The women blend well and take turns to lead and protect the children, Rudo and Gift. The author suggests that a running motif in the novel is that of rebirth. Mamvura loses her own baby but her milk serves to nourish Gift, the only male Jamela who survives the attack. Despite the suffering, Mamvura does not lose hope, instead of wallowing in self-pity she seeks the way forward in any situation. Mlalazi (2017) says,

If you read closely, there is also a motif of rebirth through the book, the baby discovered hidden in the hole in the hut, the hole is a womb. Later in the forest during the rain he is placed in the protection of a hollow in a tree, another womb. Then the baby nearly drowns. Another river womb. And then the cave where the story climaxes, another womb. (Interview July 2017)

While the author refers to the physical setting for the image of the womb, without Mamvura (the mother of the title) and her positive outlook, that rebirth would not have taken place. She resists the negative pronouncements of Comrade Finish and the village named Saphela (we are finished/wiped out). The soldier is bent on wiping everyone out in the prophetically named village, the dead bodies are dumped in the Saphela mines. Mamvura believes life can be salvaged and she does so whenever she can. Her belief in God also seems to be her source of strength as evident in the constant exclamation "*Mwari wedu*", "*Mwari wangu*," (Our God, My God). Mamvura's prayer after they find Gift summarises her beliefs,

"Mwari wangu," mother said, inspecting the baby. "He seems not to be burnt. His clothes are wet but not burnt. Surely, if he was hurt, he would not stop crying, but he has."

Mother removed her breast from her blouse and Gift immediately started suckling hungrily.

"Whoever put the child inside that hole made the right decision," mother said, "Now it's our duty to see that this baby lives, Auntie, and also Rudo here."

(...) with the baby still suckling, mother went down on her knees, and asked us to do the same. ...

"*Mwari wedu*," mother started praying. "We thank you *Mwari wedu* for keeping your little baby alive in the middle of a fire, and without your kindness this would never have happened. We thank you *Mwari wedu* for being our father when we are in need, and we ask that you show us the way to safety so that our

children can live and grow up to be adults also. we also pray to you *Mwari wedu* to look after all the dead and raise your hand against those who have sinned against you today. We ask for protection in this dangerous time, *Mwari wedu*, in the name of the son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” (*Running with Mother* p28).

Mamvura is very clear on what it is that has gone wrong and her vulnerability in the situation so she appeals to a higher being for protection. Her adoption of Christianity makes her a religious hybrid.

The setting being the 1980s, most people had converted to Christianity and being a member of a Christian denomination almost becoming the norm. This is a representation of new religious identities in that the traditional Shona woman followed African traditional religion but the modern Shona woman has more options; Christianity, African Traditional Religion or to be non-religious. Mamvura sees the hand of providence in that Gift survives and she has the milk to feed him albeit she lost her own baby. This reflects Derrida’s theory (1995) of life as a real gift that does not engender feelings of superiority in the giver or inferiority in the receiver. Christianity expands Mamvura’s creative canvas to accommodate multiple identities as they are presented to her by circumstances. In the chaos unleashed by the soldiers’ violence Mamvura still sees the benevolence of God and her sense of being goes beyond ethnic identities as ascribed by the soldiers. The God she embraces is also universal to encompass nations and the world beyond her Shona identity. Knowing that they are the only survivors of the Jamela family, she sees it her duty to ensure the remnant survives. In Shona relationships, a brother’s wife is a mother figure to the girls in the family, especially when they stay in that household. Though auntie is an adult, she is therefore under Mamvura’s authority and guidance.

However, it must be remembered that Shona relationships are not cast in stone and authority is shared depending on situations. Mamvura’s prayer expresses confidence that God belongs to collective, sees all and is in control. She, therefore, thanks Him for keeping them alive, asks for guidance through the crisis and asks God to deal with the perpetrators of the evil. Having surrendered her concerns to God, she is then free to concentrate on what she can actually do as an individual in the crisis. Mamvura seems to believe that vengeance belongs to God. Her surrender helps her to be free of anger and bitterness and hence her decision making is not inhibited. She remains calm and calculates their moves. It is Mamvura who ensures that they eat to regain strength, quickly packs the clothes, food and water they need. She deliberately chooses the direction of their escape ensuring they move away from villages so that they do

not come into contact with the soldiers. She avoids the Botswana border because she knows many people will try that and the soldiers will follow. The teachers testify to this as they end up going to Phezulu Mountains as well.

Mamvura also chooses Phezulu Mountains because she knows there is a cave that guerillas used during the war of liberation. She gets the knowledge from conversation with her husband which is evidence of their close relationship. This again contrasts with the teachers who only remember the cave when they realise the inadequacy of their hiding place. Mamvura then is shown as an intelligent woman, she retains useful information and is able to appropriately apply it. She also thinks fast in a crisis situation. When it begins to rain and they need to keep Gift dry, she looks for a hollow in a tree and checks for dangerous animals before placing the baby there. She does the same when they first reach the cave. She is living in nervous conditions but does not crack like the characters in *Nervous Conditions* and *The Book of Not*. Mamvura is therefore, a very strong woman, morally, emotionally, and physically.

The depiction of Mamvura contrasts with the image of Shona women highlighted by Schmidt (1992) as lazy, immoral and dirty women. Regardless of the war situation, the women actually take time to bath and the cave is run like the kitchen hut in the village. Mamvura also proves to be superior to both Auntie and the teachers putting Mkandla's arrogance to shame. Muponde (2015:153) observes that;

In *Running with Mother*, Mr Mkandla, a philandering Ndebele history teacher (57) performs his entrapment in ethnicity when first, he organises traditional Ndebele war dances at school; second, he peddles stereotypes and harmful prejudices about the Shona whom he calls mice-eating people (128); and third, in spite of the kindness he has enjoyed from a Shona woman whose dress he is wearing (because soldiers had stripped him naked) whilst they are hiding in the cave, he vows; "I do not want a Shona person anywhere near me ever again!" (133). Auntie, his Ndebele ex-girlfriend, who is also hiding in the same cave, tries to punish Mr Mkandla for his tribalist sentiments (134) but falls off the mountainside and is practically and symbolically injured. Like Uncle Ngoro who survived an attack on his bus by the soldiers and lost his mind, Auntie cannot negotiate the rapid transitions of postcolonial contradictions, nor can she unlock the logjam of ethnic politics. "She was staring blankly at nothing" (139). Madness is an implement of representing the culture of a nation at war with itself.

The quotation shows that rigid ethnic identities are misplaced in the new nation state as they lead to loss of lives or mental damage. Mamvura survives because of her accommodative attitude as she embraces other ethnic groups unlike Mkandla and desists from violence.

In contrast to Auntie, who wants to fight Mkandla, Mamvura opts to leave the cave for the men. This action also saves them as those who remain in the cave are bombed inside. Her sixth sense is therefore active. It is this sixth sense that makes her refuse to follow the teachers as Auntie urges them to do. In telling Comrade Finish that the baby's name is Anovona (He sees), she warns him that God sees all they have done and His judgement will catch up with them. Rudo simply recognises that it is a Shona name and assumes it is a clever way of making Comrade Finish think that he is Shona. This is because she is not familiar with this common way of communicating among the Shona. People express their joy, sorrow or anger in the names they give to children, dogs and cattle. Comrade Finish is also convinced that he is doing the right thing and confirms that God indeed sees and must approve of what they have done to dissidents.

The challenge, as highlighted by the text, is that Comrade Finish and his crew have not done their homework to find out who exactly is the dissident. Instead they kill innocent people as well, people like Uncle Genesis, Uncle Francis and Innocent Jamela (Rudo's father). Intermarriages between Shona and Ndebele are approved as evident in the fact that Mamvura's family accepted lobola for her. Uncle Ngoro (a representative of people from Chisara, and Shona people in general) calls Rudo's father *tsano* (in-law) and relates with him amicably. The jokes about eating rats had never been vitriolic and Mamvura had always quietly corrected that it is mice and they taste nice. This contrasts with the ethnic hatred expressed by Mkandla and Comrade Finish. Rudo's name is therefore an appeal that all humans treat each other with love to avoid wars and all unnecessary bloodshed. The love expressed also seems to be linked to Mamvura's belief in the Christian God who is equated with love and compassion as expressed in the prayer quoted earlier. Mamvura is confident in her Shona identities and is not moved by the expression of superiority by those around her. Mamvura is at her best unlike Tambu in *The Book of Not* who believes her inferiority and ends up ingratiating and assimilating everything white. Mamvura assimilates enough Ndebele to allow for smooth interaction with her family but does not deny her Shona identity even when it causes her discomfort.

Mlalazi's representation of the Shona woman serves to show the futility of ethnic discrimination to both the Ndebele and the nation as a whole. The story shows that Gukurahundi hurt mostly the Ndebele people, but some Shona people as well. While Mamvura and her children survive, there are many who died as well. Ethnic policies are bound to destroy even those they are meant to serve. Finish claims to be rescuing Mamvura but actually causing more pain as she is made a widow, loses the bread winner in the family, and above that has to care for the incapacitated Auntie without any resources. Since Mamvura is barely educated,

this task will be tough for her especially in the city where everything is dependent on having money unlike in the rural areas where she grows her own food.

As noted by CCJP report, access to pension funds by widows was difficult as there were no death certificates for missing persons. Mamvura is lucky that her husband owns a house in the city, for many who ran away from Gukurahundi had to stay with relatives or look for alternative accommodation including squatter camps. Mamvura represents hybrid identities through her marriage which fuses Shona and Ndebele identities. Rudo fully represents this fusion through her Shona name and Ndebele surname as well as being bilingual. Rudo's education makes her competent in English and also acquires a consciousness beyond her physical borders. The civil war threatens to negate this hybridity as the Shona identity is highlighted. The significance of this Shona identity remains ambiguous depending on the observer's purpose; it is both a source of danger and a lifeline out of danger. The same can be said of the characters in *Harare North* where Shona women's identities shift within the immigrant community but also highlights their status as foreigners in a British society.

6.8 Representations of Shona Women in *Harare North*

Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* has an unnamed main character who migrates to London in order to run away from a pending criminal conviction for acts carried under orders from a superior in the post-2000 era. The narrator wants to raise money for a bribe to ensure his docket disappears. He also has a social reason as he wants to raise money for his mother's *umbuyiso* ceremony. The narrator is picked from the airport by his cousin's wife who is a nurse. She is contemptuous of the narrator because he belongs to the lower class and has not received much Western education. Realising that he is unwanted in Paul and Sekai's house, the narrator moves in with a childhood friend who stays with other Zimbabweans as housemates. The nameless narrator meets, Tsitsi an unemployed teenage mother with a happy disposition. It is through Tsitsi that the narrator meets MaiMusindo, a spirit medium and hair dresser who owns a house in Peckham. She acts as Tsitsi's mentor. Most scholars commenting on assimilation and acculturation have focused their analysis on the highly educated elite, or those already mesmerised by European culture. This text is interesting in that it focuses on the lower class people who find themselves in London as political and economic refugees but to some extent grounded in their identity as Shona. Of interest in this thesis is how the women negotiate their identities as Shona women in Britain.

Recent academic and public debates on the Zimbabwean diaspora and the crisis that engendered it have, on one side, focused on the contribution of the “crisis” to the physical and spiritual dispersal of Shona women. These movements are depicted as characterised by acute economic downturn and political turmoil that began in the late 1990s to the unprecedented levels of migration (Raftopoulos, 2008). Other scholars have focused on the lives of Zimbabweans outside Zimbabwe and the transnational nature of their existence (McGregor and Primorac, 2010; Crush and Tevera, 2010; Pasura, 2010). These studies have followed contemporary trajectories in the study of migration in a globalised, de-territorialised world. Bhabha (1994) speaks about the inadequacy of nationalism and national identity for a transnational existence characterised by hybridity of identities, multiculturalism.

Mbembe (2001) states that there can be no single identity but a continuous bargaining and negotiation of identities as the situation demands. This is what Butler (1990) refers to as signification and re-signification of cultural identities. However, Spivak (2008) expresses wariness at the power dynamics in generation and exchange of information in the global system that seems to privilege developed countries over the Third World, thereby reascribing the colonial imbalances of power as well as the negative markers of identity. These theories challenge race, language, physical boundaries, and gender paradigms. These visions are caught up within statist politics and Third World militancy against real or perceived global and racial inequalities in multiplicities of location and temporality. In trying to transcend this, post-coloniality comes close to dismissing all essentialist discourses as fetishised abstractions. However, the revitalisation of pre-modern modes of belonging is demonstration of the need to contextualise post-coloniality within multiplicities of location and temporality. The question then would not be focused on whether the essentialist discourse is authentic or not. Rather, the question is: who is mobilising what in the articulation of the past, deploying what identities, identifications and representations, and in the name of what political vision and goals?

Harare North (2009) is set in the post-2000 era in London, the Harare North of the novel because it hosts many Zimbabweans running away from the challenges in the home country. The narrator in *Harare North* seeks asylum in the United Kingdoms because he is running away from the police due to his participation in a murder as a member of the Green Bombers, a ZANU- PF youth militia trained in Chimurenga revolutionary rhetoric. The unnamed narrator aims to raise USD\$5,000 to enable him to bribe the police to drop the charges. The narrator is semi-literate and is meant to represent the lowest man on the social ladder. In London, he can only find manual labour because he has no professional skills. When employed in a restaurant,

he actually uses spit to polish the tables and sees nothing wrong with his actions. What is interesting is the narrator's assessment of the Shona women he meets in London. These are; Sekai, his cousin Paul's wife; Tsitsi, a housemate when he moves in with his friend Shingi and MaiMusindo, the woman who takes it upon herself to watch over Tsitsi. Their survival strategies (nursing, hairdressing and hiring out baby) are interesting as well as their choices vis-a-vis Shona cultural expectations.

Chikwava (2009) notes that the setting of the novel allows for multiple opportunities and possibly multiple identities for various people. In his own words;

Yes, the novel is very much a result of living in Brixton. What I find interesting about the place is that it is one of those places where anyone from any cultural background can easily blend in. In that sense it is very multicultural and offers endless possibilities for any imagination. (www.afican-writing.com)

The novel has been classified as belonging to the genre of immigrant novel and it is interesting to explore the possibilities for the Shona women in the novel in relation to how it is informed or affected by their Shona identity.

6.8.1 Sekai - Middle Class Shona Woman in England

Sekai is a nurse and has proper papers that allow her to stay in England and actually own a house. This then suggests that not everybody in the diaspora was running from ZANU PF as suggested by Muponde (2015). Some people moved in search of better opportunities whose definition vary from one person to the other. In a global world it is not only violence or war that pushes or pulls people into new environments. The push or pull factors, in turn, determine the nature of identities that people assume in new contexts even when the people are coming from the same country. It is safe to assume that Sekai was part of Britain's massive recruitment drive for medical staff to fill in positions not wanted by British natives. Snow and Jones (2011) note that;

Despite attempts to improve recruitment within the UK, the shortage of qualified nursing staff continued, and was approximating 8,000 a year by 1998. The subsequent expansion of the NHS under New Labour created a need to rapidly increase the nursing workforce but while the number of British training places was increased, this did not solve the immediate demand for workforce growth. International recruitment became one of the government's key strategies in tackling the chronic shortage of qualified nurses, this time with a focus on recruiting already trained nurses and midwives from overseas, rather than

training them in the UK. In 2002-03 more than half of the nurses newly registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council had trained outside Britain. Unlike for overseas nurses, the tightening of immigration controls in the 1970s and 1980s had not significantly reduced the numbers of overseas doctors coming to Britain, while the output of UK medical schools continued to fall short of the NHS' manpower needs.

The shortage of nursing staff gives Sekai the opportunity to immigrate to the UK and in turn acquire new identities. While the manpower needs are clear, Snow and Jones highlight the contradictions on the attitudes towards black and minority ethnic medical personnel. They highlight that;

The move towards recruiting overseas-trained nurses has not prevented discrimination and exploitation. Overseas-trained nurses are required to complete a programme of supervised practice placement and adaptation, but as the Researching Equal Opportunities for Overseas-trained nurses and other Healthcare Professionals (REOH) Study found, the skills and experiences of these highly trained individuals are not given adequate recognition within the inflexible formal assessment and accreditation system in the UK, leading to under-grading, deskilling, and skills waste. Like nurses, BME doctors have been disadvantaged by the medical profession's internal hierarchies which left them working on the geographical and institutional margins of medicine. As migrants, they experienced difficulties in getting shortlisted for jobs and were more likely to gain posts away from prestigious teaching hospitals and medical schools. Some even had to accept lower remuneration in order to support themselves and their families. Nor were BME doctors trained in the UK exempt from barriers, particularly around selection processes where those responsible for shortlisting candidates frequently excluded individuals on the basis of a foreign surname.

This massive recruitment coincided with the economic melt-down in Zimbabwe that had begun in the 1990s. Having the nursing professional course gives Sekai the privilege of being legally accepted in Britain, which gives her a Shona/peri-English identity. However, her marriage to Paul is strained. It is not clear whether they do not have a child by choice or fate. The narrator arrives into this strained space and seems to make it worse as he is a dependent in an already harsh environment. He is surprised at this treatment because he expects the hospitality from home, especially since he had given notice of his arrival. Sekai is introduced in the following words,

I am expecting my cousin Paul to come pick me up from detention centre, but his wife, Sekai, come instead.

I say goodbye to them officers at the reception as I pick my suitcase. Sekai stand some few metres from me. She back straight like that of a soldier on parade, and

she waist narrower than that of a wasp. Dressed neat, hands in she coat's pockets, she keep some distance that is good enough to suggest to them detention people that she really have nothing to do with me but have been forced into a situation. She not even bother to shake my hand and only greet me from safe distance and look at my suitcase in funny way. It is one of them old-style cardboard suitcases that Mother have use before I was born and have carry roosters in the past, but it's my suitcase. It still have smell of Mother inside. (p4-5)

Sekai exhibits new behaviour opposed to that expected of a wife among her husband's kin. By greeting the narrator from a safe distance she represents new cultural distance in the diaspora, marking the change from a communal to an individual outlook. The extended family becomes a burden rather than an asset in the new space marked by scarcity of resources.

Sekai's dressing reflects her newly acquired status as a professional woman in England who transcends the domestic sphere associated with Shona rural women. Her waistline is thinner than a wasp, maybe suggesting dieting and appropriating English notions of beauty as opposed to the full figure valorised by the Shona marked by child bearing and essentialised maternity. Sekai, therefore, represents new shifts in sensibilities of a Shona woman as a result of a shift in physical location in the diaspora.

Sekai's dressing and posture shows that she considers herself superior to the narrator. She clearly shows him that he is not welcome. At the train station, she expects him to pay his own fare and forces him to admit that he has no money. She finally pays but "snort[s] in a mocking way, roll she eyes and look at me" (p6). Sekai throws away the groundnuts parcel because she thinks it harbours diseases, adopting the Western view of Africa as diseased (p7). Later she mocks the narrator on the phone with her friends in his presence;

And when the phone ring she pick it up, mute the TV and sit on the couch stroking she dog and chatting to friends for hours. They have wireless phone; she can have go into another room and leave us watch TV properly, but she don't do that Sekai. She just want me to hear she conversations, especially when she start talking about them Green Bombers, the youth movement boys back home; the boys of the jackal breed. Sekai go on and on about how they is just bunchies of uneducated thugs that like hitting people with sticks. (*Harare North*,p8)

As a wife, Sekai has no respect for her husband nor his male relative evident in muting the TV rather than moving out. She has also adopted European mannerisms like her love for the dog that she treats like a baby, reflecting hybridity through assimilation. The narrator concludes that this action shows that Paul must give her a baby as he interprets it as evidence of unfulfilled

maternity. For Sekai, this behaviour is most likely an expression of her belonging to the English middle class with a fixation on pets; it is her way of asserting her new identity as British-Shona citizen. Her description of the Green Bombers is to ensure the narrator knows exactly what she thinks of him, “an uneducated thug that hits people with sticks”. Sekai only starts to treat the unnamed narrator well after he catches her cheating with the Russian doctor. Paul’s cousin bribes her with 500 pounds to keep the secret and reminds her,

“Next time you should also remind the Russian doctor that he is the one that should be dropping them pound notes and not you because you is my cousin’s wife,” I tell she as we part. “We have to hit this white man’s pocket together until he cry for forgiveness.” (*Harare North*, p105)

The narrator’s interpretation is a distortion of Shona culture because it is Paul who is supposed to get the compensation. Sekai plays along until after her brother’s funeral when she reveals that her affair with the Russian doctor is her way of dealing with the pain of a husband cheating on her. The pretentiousness and class consciousness is a way of keeping up appearances, an identity performance to help one cope with stressful circumstances. The callousness exhibited towards the narrator and her brother is, therefore, simply an indication of her own pain buried inside. The dog substitutes the attention and loyalty she misses from Paul and later substituted by the Russian doctor. The death of Sekai’s brother shocks her into facing reality, and ironically, frees her from the narrator’s black mail. The use of vernacular terms for private parts shows that she is done with any forms of decorum, but is more concerned with coming to terms with her experiences and their meaning to her life. Sekai therefore grows from a passive observation of life, to cheating, to fear of exposure, to aggression and finally to being composed and rational. When the narrator calls, demanding payment she adopts her original superior stance,

“Now stop childish games. I know things about you but I am not blackmailing you and threatening to climb St Paul’s dome to shout it to the world.” (p177)

Sekai can dispose of her sexuality to someone other than Paul as a way of asserting command over the self and body. This assertion marks a transition in that she discards the notion of her sexuality belonging to a husband’s family and reclaims her body as an individual. This bold assertion of sexuality as a source of power is made possible by Sekai’s diaspora identity which frees her from the moral policing of sexuality in national discourse that McFadden (2005) discusses at length.

The changes in Sekai are influenced by her perception of her position on the power plane. The above quotation shows that she realises everyone has something to hide but life must go on. She also realises that her fear was unfounded, the narrator is simply taking advantage of it to make money. The different phases of Sekai's shifts or transformations in identities reflect the fluidity of identity; the spiteful host and wife, the middle class woman throwing parties and safeguarding image, the cheating wife, the fearful bribing wife, the grieving sister, and finally the liberated woman confident in her experience. In recognising the dystopia in everyone's life, she seems to live up to her name; life is a mockery that must be laughed at if one is to survive. Sekai's professional and middle class status enable her to tap into British culture as she is exposed to it in her daily interaction with other people as a nurse. She does not have to hide from authorities. Her education makes her fluent in the language of her new place of residence. Assimilation becomes easy as compared to fellow Shonas who seek asylum in England with very little education and no skills to offer the British labour market. Consequently, they cannot be formally absorbed into the system and have to rely on their wits for survival. This is the case with Tsitsi, the teenage mother.

6.8.2 Tsitsi, the Child-Mother

Tsitsi is a young teenage girl who was taken to London by her aunt probably as a maid (the exact circumstances are not stated in the novel). House help in the UK is very expensive and middle class Zimbabweans who are used to having maids usually prefer to sponsor their house help into the diaspora with them. Tsitsi is then impregnated by Aleck who claims to be a shop assistant while in actual fact he does BBC (British Bottom Cleaners). Aleck is house sitting for a couple that migrated to India, which enables him to take in lodgers and earn more money through rentals. He tells his tenants that he is simply looking after Tsitsi who was thrown out by the aunt. They live in separate rooms so this story becomes plausible. Tsitsi is mentored by MaiMusindo who works in a salon and also as a spirit medium. Her association with the diaspora is also a new identity necessitated by the economic crisis in Zimbabwe as spirit mediums are usually territorial. MaiMusindo keeps coming to the house and telling Aleck to take Tsitsi back to her aunt but he does not listen. Aleck becomes physically abusive to Tsitsi and finally abandons her in the house. Shingi, the narrator's friend, is interested in Tsitsi but does not know how to woo girls. The advice he gets from the narrator is poisoned because he wants to get rid of Tsitsi in order to save money. The narrator brings a Polish prostitute for Shingi and creates stories that he has potential to sexually abuse Tsitsi and she must run away.

He also tells her that Shingi is HIV positive. She finally runs away and Shingi falls into depression and drug abuse.

Tsitsi has a rural background, which makes the narrator feel superior to her. The unnamed narrator dismisses her as just “a rural mother” and “one small child”. She is introduced in the following words;

Tsitsi fling the door open when I knock. She is a small girl with sharp look in she eye, nose as small as chicken poo dropping and face drawn tight over small skull. She have the fizzy behavior of Coca-Cola drink but maybe it's she own kind of rural behavior because she come from small village in Mashonaland East Province.

She have just turn seventeen she say without me asking.

She wear red-on-white polka-dot dress, one side slipping off she shoulder so the dress hang on she like scarecrow's drapes. She is also wearing a yellow-flower headscarf on she head; tied twice over around her head, knotted first at the back and then at the front. She bite bottom lip like she is shy. She have one dimple on one cheek.

Across she left cheek, the tail of one long thin scar maybe caused by snapping barbed wire, break in two as it jumps over her left eye and start again above eyebrow before fading out on forehead. She eye have survive. (*Harare North*, p29)

From the quotation, Tsitsi's village of origin is in Mashonaland East Province, an area predominantly occupied by Shona people of the Zezuru dialect. It is safe to presume that her identity is Shona and this is buttressed throughout the narrative in the Shona songs she sings (p33, 56, 57) which are mainly nursery rhymes. That means her upbringing and socialisation are within Shona culture. The scar on her cheek adds to the mystery of who Tsitsi is and suggests that she might have fled Zimbabwe due to political violence and hence the need to seek asylum in London. That would place her identity as one of the asylum seekers and equate her status to that of the nameless narrator. The scar could also be evidence of domestic violence with Aleck since he does not want the baby. Tsitsi is small in stature and therefore eager to prove that she is older than she looks. Ironically, her speech simply proves that she is a child, rather playful and immature. It is not surprising that she latches on to MaiMusindo as a mother-figure in her life. The way Tsitsi confides in MaiMusindo on their first meeting on the basis that she speaks deep Shona (p45) is evidence of Tsitsi's naivety and immaturity. The headscarf is an insignia of a married woman as she elopes with Aleck.

One of the beliefs in Shona customs is that once a girl gets pregnant, she must go to the man who impregnates her. The man must then take the necessary steps; either acknowledging that he is living with the girl then pay the dowry later or acknowledging the pregnancy is his but refusing to marry the girl. Damages are then paid and the girl is free to return to her family. Tsitsi seems eager to be reunited with her aunt but waiting for this procedure to take place. Her aunt's husband is a doctor, which might mean that they are legally settled in the UK and in a position to take care of Tsitsi and her baby. The term "aunt" presents challenges as we cannot tell whether this is her mother's sister or father's sister because the dynamics of those relationships are different. If it is mother's sister then the insistence on following protocol makes sense. There must be formal introduction of a son-in-law (*mukuwasha*) before interaction between parents and daughter is restored. In a village set up parents can resort to the chief's court if the man is not taking any action of acknowledging elopement to make it a formal marriage. In the Diaspora this becomes difficult as there is no chief to hold the culprit accountable. MaiMusindo tries to push Aleck to do the right thing but to no avail. Consequently Tsitsi remains estranged from her family.

Tsitsi's motherhood is influenced by her social and economic situation, which is that of a poor illegal immigrant. She mainly feeds the baby powdered milk because that is what she can afford. Later she resorts to renting the baby to people who want to register for Social Welfare. This act is in itself ambiguous. It is both a selfish act for survival in that the baby is used to earn an income. It is also a communal act in that Tsitsi is helping the African community to beat the system and survive in London. Two identities are thus enacted; an unskilled mother using resources on hand to earn a living, and a black African woman acting in solidarity with members of her community. She exhibits the feminist sisterhood by helping other black women in distress. However, her need to survive necessitates that the help is not rendered free of charge. Her charge is nominal vis-à-vis the benefits gained from being registered (financial, housing). Shona culture notes that babies are vulnerable and therefore must be protected. They are not to be held by anyone, especially strangers. The Diaspora environment changes this norm. Racism in London necessitates that the African community considers itself related and therefore replaces the local community in the homeland. Since Tsitsi spends most of her time at the saloon, these are no longer strangers but her family away from home.

After Aleck abandons Tsitsi in the house, her confidence also grows without fear of abuse and she becomes assertive, marking a transition from a child into a woman. She cooks and cleans

the house and also exerts her power on the 'boys', waking them up in the morning and shouting at them when they are out of line.

The songs she sings change from the lullabies to traditional Shona songs,

All by she own self, she was now singing pure animal sound from the hills, doing that hair-raising yodeling thing called *gule* except there is no *mbira* instrument to accompany she. Something had wake up inside she, me I can tell. She don't even hear us creep inside the house and we find she in the room sitting careless on she bed – one leg pointing to the mountains and another to the river; no worry or fear on she face. But she is happy to see us. She come back to the house this morning. (p141)

The song marks a spiritual reconnection for Tsitsi and seems to give her strength to face the world calmly. She has no worry or fear despite being abandoned by Aleck. After the domestic abuse by Aleck, Tsitsi comes out stronger and liberated. She seems to realise that she does not really need him and can make it on her own. However, the author makes a mistake, yodelling (music made through throaty voice shifting pitch usually without words) in Shona is called *magure* not *gule* (spirit carnival dancer of Malawian origin).

The song is called *Dangu rangu* and is a funeral song sung at the burial of a chief or spirit medium commercialised and popularised by Thomas Mapfumo. The people accompanying the body will be holding spears and ritual axes. It is therefore a Chimurenga song and in this instance it shows Tsitsi gearing herself for the challenges in her life. The sense of the song is that life goes on regardless of challenges as reflected in the lines "*Vane mudzimu havarove/ Vanofa kuchizvarwa vamwe*" (The Spirit does not die, new mediums are born as old ones die). The narrator attests to the change and says,

"Why Aleck never make that call to the police to fix us?" I ask Tsitsi and she shrug and pick baby from my chest. I ask the question for the whole week but Tsitsi don't want to let fear stalk she so she don't want to talk about it. She is running the place like it's she place now, like real mother she is busy making quick and hard decision on everything - food, cooking and the time for eating - and me and Shingi chill. (p142)

Here we note the transformation of Tsitsi from being a fearful child into a decisive woman. She decides not to focus on the possibility of a police raid but make practical decisions that enable them to live one day at a time. The philosophy behind is not to waste energy on what one has no control over and skills in Tsitsi become apparent once the source of her fear and intimidation is removed. Her experience with Aleck shows the futility of eloping in London without the family support systems of Shona culture. She also realises that marriage is not

always possible. Tsitsi also learns from her mistake with Aleck as she is not easily won over by Shingi.

6.8.3 MaiMusindo, the Hairdresser and Spirit Medium

MaiMusindo is an elderly, big, Shona, Zimbabwean woman who has been in England for twenty years. “She work at the African hair salon with them Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Kenyan women who is specialists in all styles” (p44). She exhibits new entrepreneurial skills in a foreign, sometimes hostile context by providing a specialist service (catering for distinct African hair that is not accommodated in British salons) that is essential to the African immigrant community. This is significant in that it asserts African femininity and acknowledges it requires a different way of grooming from European femininity. By establishing the salon, the immigrants assert their identity as a part of British society and hence hybrids. MaiMusindo is confident in her identity as an African and does not seem to bother herself with being assimilated into the system. She speaks Shona in public without affectations unlike Sekai, “When MaiMusindo’s mobile go off and she let rip in old and deep Shona, Tsitsi nearly jump on the old woman with big rural happiness” (p45). She owns a house in Peckham, meaning her papers are in order unlike immigrants who skip borders. Her generosity is seen in her adoption of Tsitsi after meeting her at the market. This contrasts with the individualist attitude where each person minds their own business. Maybe her attitude is largely influenced by the fact that she is a spirit medium and hence a custodian of Shona customs and values, *chivanhu*. She retains the dignity of elders and considers the young people her children, “*vana vangu*” therefore in need of her guidance. That is why she is persistent on the Tsitsi-Aleck case.

The narrator notes a contradiction in MaiMusindo’s identities as hairdresser and spirit medium and muses,

Mai Musindo used to be spirit medium; she still do rituals and is in touch with them *mudzimu*, the spirits. She don’t look like anything that work in hair salon. When she talk, she speak slow, you can’t hurry she; she can even wave death away like it is some nuisance fly. But Tsitsi say she is the fastest weaver in the salon. She carry the spirit world with she and wear this old funny air that force you to pay attention to every word that she say because it come out and drop like some stone falling on concrete floor. (*Harare North*, p44-45)

MaiMusindo embodies both the Shona traditional and modern sensibilities. As a spirit medium she connects with ancestral spirits and is connected to her past, present and the future as the

spirit world collapses temporal space and time. She commands the spirit world and it enables her to control the people around her. However, this is not an affectation or performance but real power facilitated by her Shona spirituality that the nameless narrator, who is unrepentantly patriarchal, acknowledges. MaiMusindo is also competent as a weaver and acknowledged as the fastest. Weaving is a traditional skill but for a hairdresser to remain relevant there is need to learn new patterns fast and put them into practice. This dispels the image of Africans as tardy and lazy. Mai Musindo is an efficient business woman who gives her customers what they want and a staunch follower of Shona traditional beliefs.

Women who work in salons frequently change styles as they advertise what they offer. MaiMusindo is not pressured to do the same though she clearly has the skills. Being a spirit medium gives her power and authority albeit in a foreign space. The respect she receives seems not to be just among the Shona speakers but in the African community. She seems to be a representation of a positive hybrid mentality. Despite having stayed in London for many years, her language is unadulterated, neither are her mannerisms unlike Sekai though she actively engages with her environment. Bhabha (1997) notes that hybridity entails one choosing what to adopt and adapt to while retaining traditional elements and these become part and parcel of the person's identity which is not necessarily double consciousness of the binary conception.

Abrahamsen (2003:196) notes that;

The colonial encounter is thus seen to mark a crucial reordering of the world, and many postcolonial writers argue that the return to a pristine, unspoilt precolonial culture is impossible and have warned against such "nostalgia for lost origins".Crucially, however, this does not mean that the precolonial came to an abrupt end, but rather the present is regarded as a complex mix and continuation of different cultures and temporalities.

This is what MaiMusindo exhibits as she passes effortlessly between tradition and the modern, reflecting the postcolonial concept of continuity. MaiMusindo shows that African spirituality is relevant even in the diaspora. Tsitsi's instant attraction may then be explained in terms of MaiMusindo's charisma rather than simply being homesick as attributed by the narrator. MaiMusindo is comfortable in her identities and performs them according to space and time, therefore there is no contradiction.

However, at times the space she occupies does not allow her to fully perform her identity to her satisfaction as in the incident that leads to her arrest.

Old spirit MaiMusindo live in Peckham ... Now she have been arrest. Tsitsi say she get vex and throw one brick into window of neighbour's son's window

because he play music too loud and disturb MaiMusindo when she is trying to concentrate on ritual for people who have come to see she. (p87)

The challenge of living in Peckham, London, is that though it is occupied by diverse ethnic groups and people are comfortable expressing themselves in their diverse ways, the space is crowded and that can encroach on the other's expression. In this case, MaiMusindo requires quiet and specific music to make the rituals meaningful. The loud music of a neighbour's son is likely to be contemporary music such as hip hop or rock music that does not go well with Shona rituals that are mainly accompanied by soft mbira music. MaiMusindo's frustration is enacted out in the throwing of the brick. This is evidence that her authority conferred by the spirits is constricted in the infrastructure and legal system of Britain. She has to conform to these as a superstructure that does not support her identity as a spirit medium. Back home, she would have been able to control the environment to suit her purpose for the duration of the ritual. The Diaspora space takes away that power and infringes on this identity especially as modernity considers this to be superstition and unfounded. Throwing a brick is rowdy behaviour and she is therefore fined 150 pounds. It also reflects her level of frustration as she is normally composed and acts slowly and deliberately. Shona spiritual identities are therefore subordinated by the British system, highlighting Gilroy's idea of the myth of multiculturalism.

Mai Musindo exhibits hybrid identity in the Diaspora. As a Shona woman she commands power as a spirit medium that makes the other Shona inhabitants in London listen when she speaks. She is also an ordinary woman outside spiritual identity, capable of frustration and subject to the laws of Britain. Her admiration in the African community stems from her ability as a hairdresser and community role in assisting other women, which is an expression of sisterhood stemming from recognition that women face the same challenges regardless of ethnic origins especially as immigrants in Britain. She is thus represented as a traditional Shona woman, successful hairdresser and active African immigrant who performs the roles depending on context.

6.9 Conclusion

The Shona women in this chapter have been discussed in relation to their "interconnectedness, fluidity and constitutive relationships" (Abrahamsen 2003:198) within diasporic contexts. The focus was on how the women related to power structures in their life in order to carve out alternative identities for themselves.

Continuity is important because identities are formed with one's encounter with various experiences every day. Some of the experiences have no antecedent, therefore one has no model to follow. Tambu is the only one in her family to attend a multiracial school during the colonial era; Mamvura is faced with a civil war with ethnic inclinations while far away from her people and maiden home; Sekai, Tsitsi and MaiMusindo are in London, miles away from their country and Shona community. The adaptations they make to suit the situations they find themselves in makes it impossible to talk of a pure Shona identity.

Hybridity is evident in the adoption of language, eating habits, food and dress and mannerisms of the women discussed in this chapter. However, the most stable characters are those that are confident in their Shona identity and therefore simply adopt what is necessary to their survival without feeling inferior to anyone. Mamvura and MaiMusindo exemplify this. For Sekai, it takes a revisit to Zimbabwe attending a brother's funeral to remind her what is fundamental in life and lose her pretentiousness. Tsitsi grows from being dependent on others to an individual who makes own choices when she reconnects with her Shona spirituality. Shona women who ignore their families and Shona identities completely in pursuit of assimilation into European standards do so at their own peril as they lack anchoring. The various characters also show that there is no single identity that can be ascribed to Shona women. Identities vary with people's personalities, and according to how these identities are performed in different social and economic circumstances. The characters in this chapter are discussed in relation to how circumstances reconfigure their choices through identity performances that exhibit ideological shifts in the representations of those identities. Movement from the place of origin into the diaspora enables some characters to shed norms and customs and adopt individualistic values. The newly acquired identities do not have to be positive in the estimation of African patriarchy.

The following chapter is the conclusion to the study. It provides a summary of the study and findings and recommends areas that could be pursued in future research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion to the Study

7.0 Introduction

The study was premised on the idea that Shona identity is a social construct and not a biological descriptor. The signifier “Shona” was applied to the people of the Zambezi plateau by foreigners and re-ascribed by colonial policy through Doke’s (1931) research on the unification of Shona dialects. In the same way that the colonial powers claimed space to name, the colonial officials also constructed and reconstructed identities of Shona women to fulfil the objective of excluding them from cities and work places. In colonial and African patriarchal discourses, Shona women were described as immoral and incompetent, therefore, unemployable as compared to the men. There is no single distinct Shona identity but plural identities informed by specific socio-economic and political experiences. This accounts for the shifting identities of Shona women explored in this study.

The study employed an eclectic application of relevant theory but privileged postcolonial theories in order to highlight the ambiguities of Shona women’s identities as represented in the Zimbabwean fiction. Narrative theorists were engaged in as far as they argue that all narratives “entail ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implication” (White, 1987: ix). It was also argued in this study that there is no neutral narrative as each one represents ways of perceiving reality and ways of knowing reality. Creative writers certainly have preferred meanings that they popularise through metaphors and images. However, this study revealed that readers do bring their cultural experiences in thinking about Shona women’s identities. The consequence of interpretation of fiction is that narratives deploy symbolical language which overflows with several meanings. This point was emphasised in Chapter Three in which Shona women were depicted in the works by two white authors. Neither of these authors could totally secure the meanings of Shona women’s identities that they had in their minds. Their characters revealed split personalities in their characterisation of Shona women’s identities.

The theoretical lens by Lang (2000) were used to critically analyse representations of Shona women’s identities. It was revealed that representations are shadows of the object represented but add valuable knowledge on how to know the represented object. This has helped in understanding the ideological shifts in the representations of Shona women’s identities. As a result multiple identities have been gleaned in individual characters in many novels.

Postcolonial theories provided tools of reading texts as they reject essentialism and acknowledge hybridity within the same person. Identities are neither neutral nor static as they reflect power dynamics in society. Parashar (2016) noted that postcolonial theoretical approaches have the capacity to embrace the diversity and unpredictability of global political and social life. The critics support subversion and change in the political, cultural and social landscape by ensuring dialogue between the centre and the margin. The multiplicity of centres of power enables a critique of multiple identities in their intersectionality. Hooks (2001) noted that market forces and cultural function influence artistic representation though they can be at variance. Literature sponsored by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau had a ready market for authors to gain but churned negative images of Shona women as loose, dirty and unreliable in order to prove the superiority of white people. Stereotypes are gradually built by consistent images that focus on one aspect of a people while denying other forms of representation.

However, as Bhabha (1997) notes, stereotypes can be subverted to generate new meanings and represent new identities. The selected novels have shown that authors can appropriate stereotypes in order to prove them false. Mcfadden (1992, 2005) noted that representations of Zimbabwean womanhood and activism are premised on heteronormative notions at the exclusion of other sexual orientations (Lesbians, Gays, Transgender and Bisexual). This poses a challenge on the definition of a Shona woman which can no longer be accepted to correspond with biological female. In *The African Tea Cosy* men and women exchanged roles. What was performed in this novel is that a biological man can assume the role of a Shona woman as wife to another man. In other words, how someone chooses to express his/her sexuality becomes a choice of identity (Butler, 1990).

Christiansen (2013) shows that even within heteronormative relationships there are further divisions of women based on respectability in marriage in the cultural nationalist narrative. Morality is a trope of identity alongside class and gender. The main forms of sexuality represented in Zimbabwean fiction in English are largely to do with transgressing cultural moral boundaries. Where this happened, colonial discourse and African patriarchical values were deployed and labelled unconforming women as prostitutes and extra-marital. These negative identities ascribed to Shona women who wanted to explore their multiple identities did not deter the women to experiment with alternative identities. Foucault (1984) notes the history of sexual repression and notes that sexuality is an expression of power and freedom. The representation of Shona women's sexual identity is ambivalent as it represents both

oppression (as sexual objects) and freedom (agency in choosing sexual partners and conditions).

Shona women's identities are diverse and subject to many forces making it impossible to assume a monolithic authentic 'Shona female identity.' Postcolonial feminism, narrative and representational theories help in deciphering the power dynamics within a specific text and outlines the identities that are constructed within those interactions.

7.1 Representation of Shona Women in White Authored Zimbabwean Texts

The white authored Zimbabwean fictional texts analysed in this thesis are Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and Harrison's *Jambanja* (2006). It was observed that the depiction of Shona women's identities in white authored texts is largely influenced by the author's intention and the narrative mode they choose. Schreiner and Lessing's stories take the form of moral indictments of the colonial governments for the ill-treatment of black people, worst represented in the treatment of Shona women. The authors make their main characters repeat the stereotypes of Shona women as lazy, dirty with flies, thieves and immoral, in order to subvert these stereotypes and to prove them false. Halket lives on the Shona woman's market gardening for six months, selling food to neighbours, but insists Shona women are lazy. White men sexually abuse Shona women by forcefully removing them from their husbands and family but still insist that Shona women are immoral. The incongruity between what is said and the experience of the Shona women shows that the satire is on the colonial stereotypes of Shona women.

Schreiner and Lessing are liberal authors who sympathise with black women but their shortcomings emerge in that the Shona characters are not given names, which privileges the white narrators' power to control knowledge creation and dissemination about Shona women. This point does not imply that to be nameless means to live without an opinion or convictions about the evil of colonial and African patriarchal values that seek to control the sexualities of Shona women. This irony is a subtle tool and may be lost on the reader depending on their level of sophistication. The effect then would be to reinforce the negative stereotypes.

Harrison's *Jambanja* is set in post independent Zimbabwe but exhibits the colonial attitude in the main character. He perceives Shona women as labourers (maid) who must obey and side with him for rewards. Lilian joins the people who invade Maioioi estate in the hope to acquire land in her own right. Harry depicts Lilian as an ingrate who forgets all the good things he has

done for her as a maid in twenty years. The ambivalence of Lilian's position is that she is close to the white man by virtue of working in the house but largely subordinate as she receives minimum wage. For her betrayal, Lilian is denied recommendation letters which amounts to negating her twenty years' experience and condemning her to non-employment. Modern society values recommendation letters and Harry reinforces the negative idea that Shona women are unemployable.

The study dispels the notion that all Rhodesian white authors depict Shona women negatively. Their inclusion in this study as Zimbabwean authors reveals that there are as many subjectivities within white authors as there are in the characters that the authors create. White authors' works serve to chronicle the experiences of Shona women at specific historical epochs which helps in detecting the shifts in identities as a result of the shift in the power dynamics affecting the women. Stereotypes of Shona women are veneers to hide the white community's insecurities projected as superiority over blacks. The figure of a silenced Shona woman in the public sphere is carnivalised and mocked by the reader's knowledge that for the first early years of colonialism in Rhodesia, throughout the colonial period, the armed struggle and into post-independence, Shona women are at the core of reproducing and producing for the African nation and colonial masters included. Shona women's agency thus, though not always acknowledged positively, is a force to reckon with in Zimbabwean fiction as they are in real life. In fact, the study argued, in different ways, that understating Shona women's identities is illustrative of the fears that dominant powers manifest unwittingly.

7.2 The Impact of Shona Spirituality on Identity Formations

Veit-Wild (2006:4) argues that spirit possession is a form of borderline experience, like creative madness that African authors use to “mock, contort and subvert figurations of colonial or postcolonial violence”. Spirit possession represents resilience of the traditional Shona belief system despite the onslaught of European Modernity and Christianity. Vera uses spirit possession as a rhetoric device to re-narrate colonial values, revising these values through the African discourse of resistance embodied in the First Chimurenga. The ancestors are found in the past, present and future and hence inform their medium on the past and future which is prophecy. Spirit mediums are therefore represented as prophets whose role is to guide their communities by providing vital knowledge from the ancestors. The basis of spirit possession is acknowledgement that the spirit world exists and it constitutes another pathway to knowledge. However, when performed by Shona women, possession cannot remain as a purveyor of African male-centred thought. Spirit possession also fractures the certainty installed within African worldview, indicating that there as many African worldviews as there are different men and women. Selected novels highlight the significance of national spirits concerned with Zimbabwean identities that resist colonial (*Nehanda*) and postcolonial (*Shards*, *Harare North*) violence orchestrated by men. It can be accepted that the very act of writing novels is an act of repossessing various worlds through the characters who are made to prepossess different futures for Shona women.

7.3 Representation of Hybrid Identities of Shona Women

The intersection of various power dynamics creates hybrid identities. This study sought to find out how Shona women contest ascribed identities and also create new ones within the spaces they find themselves, which represent different social and political contexts. Mbembe (1992) noted that the postcolonial subject mobilises not just a single identity but several fluid identities, which must be constantly revised in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required. Zimbabwean fiction in English reveals that Shona women's identities are shaped by practical choices they have to make in their daily interactions. At times they are informed by economic expediency and at times by social considerations. The post-2000 economic crisis in Zimbabwe gave rise to new forms of identity such as forex dealers. The destruction of illegal shelters and market stalls reduced family incomes and turned some people into destitutes. The women suffered the most because they are poor and political decisions that affect them were made elsewhere. Nnaemeka (2003) argues in favour of a constant interrogation of one's positionality and intersectionality (race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, culture, national origin) in the moment of action to avoid essentialism as identity is always "evolutionary". For instance, Onai is dispossessed because of her class (poor resident of Mbare), gender, ethnicity and culture (a widowed Shona woman) sexuality (as a heterosexual it is assumed she will get boyfriends since she is widowed). The constant interrogation and negotiation of identities is best reflected in the representations of Shona women in the diaspora who embody both belonging and unbelonging in the new spaces. The women also faced challenges of having to decide how much to assimilate of the new cultures, how much to retain of their original identity and how much to discard of the past traditional values. A delicate balance has to be achieved in order to create functional hybrid identities. The global environment encourages hybrid identities for Shona women, both at home and in the Diaspora. The complexity in the narrative forms used in Zimbabwean fiction captures the complexities of Shona women's identities. The study showed that for Shona women, to be wives, "husbands", peasant, middle class, gay, and writers only expands Shona women's identities threatened by colonial, post-colonial and African patriarchal values. The complexity of how Shona women's identities are formed also acknowledged the contradictions inherent in that process of *being* something other than what is ascribed by men. Shona women also seek freedom from the clutches of matrilineal cultures in which women are supposed to conform to traditional roles.

In short, the study argued that identity markers are not cast in stone and since they are expressed in language, these signifiers are open to multiple interpretations depending on social context. The meaning of Shona has changed over time from contested position to being generally accepted to mean an ethnic group in Zimbabwe. However, what actually constitutes Shonanness is still contested with some advocating essentialist authentic identities while some advocate hybridity fashioned out of global experiences. Literary texts are narratives whose effectiveness is affected by form and language power politics. The metaphoric use of language allows for subversion of stereotypes and forging of new identities. Postcolonial readings of texts allow for reading Zimbabwean novels from alternative angles and these, in turn, reveal multiple identities of Shona women and the specific power dynamics that forge them.

7.4 Recommendation for Future Studies

In view of the findings of the study, it is recommended that in interrogating how human identities shift

- There is need to use eclectic theories which question the assumptions of each other and the ways in which these theories explain how identities are forged, circulated through art and consumed by readers;
- Future research could also critically explore the shifting identities of African men;
- Future research should also reveal the consequences of interpreting identities as static or as shifting;
- At an ideological level, critics need to interrogate what is shifting, and question the terms by which identities of Shona women are changing, and finally;
- Future researches could also explore the ways in which white women's identities are constructed by the discursive contexts in which these white women exist and compare with how black women's identities are constructed.

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